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Visiting Vermont

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Introduction

Welcome to the Green Mountain State, Vermont, a place where the pace of life slows, the air is crisp and clean, and the scenery is straight out of a postcard. This state's nickname, "The Green Mountain State," pays homage to the stunning mountain ranges that sweep across it, providing an ever-changing backdrop depending on the time of year you choose to visit. Vermont has captivated tourists for generations, thanks to its reputation for outdoor recreational opportunities, cultural and historical attractions, and a unique farm-to-table culinary scene that is as robust as it is diverse.

Nestled comfortably in New England, Vermont is bordered by Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and the Canadian province of Quebec, making it an accessible destination for visitors from both the United States and Canada. The state's charm lies in its quintessential small towns—think charming boutiques, galleries, and artisanal shops offering everything from local crafts to gourmet foods—combined with its strong sense of independence and community.

Each of the state's seasons presents its own set of attractions and activities, inviting visitors to return again and again. Whether you're drawn to the pristine snow-covered slopes for skiing, the vivid tapestry of colors during fall foliage, or the peacefulness of a springtime hike through budding flora, Vermont offers a distinct experience for every traveler. Summers, meanwhile, are filled with festivals, farmers' markets, and recreational activities on lakes and rivers, beckoning in both locals and tourists alike.

Vermont's cultural landscape is enriched by its history and the people who call it home. The state is dotted with museums and landmarks that tell stories of its past, from its role in the American Revolutionary War to its evolution as a leader in the country's craft beer movement. More than just maple syrup and cheddar cheese, Vermont's culinary scene now includes renowned breweries, cideries, and farms that produce a delightful array of local flavors and gourmet dining experiences.

Travelers to Vermont can anticipate encountering warm hospitality and engaging in transformative experiences, whether it's a quiet retreat in a rustic B&B, a lively night in a bustling town, or a day spent exploring the untamed beauty of Vermont's National Parks. This guide not only serves as your roadmap to traversing all Vermont has to offer but as an invitation to venture into the heart of New England, to breathe in its air, savor its tastes, and revel in its sights.

As you embark on your journey to Vermont, remember that the state's magic lies in its attention to detail: a snowflake, an autumn leaf, a maple leaf, a hike's view, a community event. Each is a small part of the whole, creating memories you will

cherish long after you leave. Welcome to Vermont—a place that promises adventure, relaxation, and wonder for all who visit.

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CHAPTER ONE: Getting to Vermont: Your Entry Points

Deciding to visit Vermont is the easy part; the allure of its mountains, villages, and vibrant seasons makes a compelling case. The next step involves figuring out the best way to actually get there. Situated comfortably within New England, yet retaining a distinct sense of separateness, Vermont is readily accessible from major northeastern US cities and eastern Canada, though its rural character means arrival logistics warrant some thought. Your choice of transport will likely depend on where you're coming from, your budget, how much time you have, and, crucially, what you plan to do once you arrive in the Green Mountain State. While a car offers unparalleled freedom for exploring Vermont's nooks and crannies, options by air, train, and bus also serve as gateways, each with its own advantages and considerations. Planning your entry point is the first step in crafting your Vermont adventure.

Flying into Vermont typically means landing at Burlington International Airport (BTV), the state's largest and busiest airport. Conveniently located in South Burlington, just a few miles east of downtown Burlington and Lake Champlain, BTV serves as the primary aerial gateway for most visitors. The airport is serviced by several major and regional airlines, including American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, Sun Country, and United. These carriers offer direct flights primarily from hubs along the East Coast and in the Midwest, such as New York City (JFK, LGA, EWR), Washington D.C. (DCA, IAD), Chicago (ORD), Philadelphia (PHL), Charlotte (CLT), and Detroit (DTW). Connections through these hubs make Vermont accessible by air from virtually anywhere in the United States and internationally, although direct international flights into BTV do not exist. Travelers coming from overseas will need to clear customs at their first US port of entry before continuing on a domestic flight to Burlington.

The experience of flying into BTV can often be quite scenic, particularly on clear days. Depending on the approach pattern, passengers might be treated to expansive views of Lake Champlain stretching towards the Adirondack Mountains in New York, or glimpses of the rolling Green Mountains themselves. The airport terminal is modern, relatively compact, and easy to navigate. Amenities include standard offerings like dining options ranging from quick snacks to sit-down meals, gift shops featuring Vermont products (a first taste of maple candy, perhaps?), and free Wi-Fi. Perhaps most importantly for tourists, all major car rental companies maintain desks and vehicle lots at BTV. Given Vermont's geography and the dispersed nature of its attractions, renting a car upon arrival is almost essential for maximizing your visit, providing the freedom to explore beyond the Burlington area at your own pace. While taxis, ride-sharing services (like Uber and Lyft, though availability can fluctuate), and

some hotel shuttles are available for transport from the airport into Burlington, venturing further afield without your own vehicle becomes significantly more challenging.

While BTV dominates air travel to Vermont, a couple of smaller regional airports offer limited commercial service, potentially serving as alternatives depending on your specific destination and originating location. The Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport (RUT), located near North Clarendon, offers connections primarily through Boston Logan International Airport (BOS) via Cape Air. These smaller commuter planes can be convenient if your final destination is in the Rutland area or southern Vermont resorts like Killington or Okemo, potentially saving some driving time compared to arriving in Burlington. However, flight schedules are limited, ticket prices can sometimes be higher, and car rental options at RUT are less extensive than at BTV. Another consideration for those heading to southern or central Vermont is Lebanon Municipal Airport (LEB) in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, just across the Connecticut River from White River Junction, Vermont. Served primarily by Cape Air flights connecting through Boston, LEB provides reasonable access to Vermont towns along the I-89 and I-91 corridors in that area. Again, flight options are limited, and onward ground transportation, especially car rental, needs to be confirmed in advance.

An option occasionally considered by travelers, particularly those seeking potentially lower airfares or different flight schedules, is Plattsburgh International Airport (PBG) in Plattsburgh, New York. Located directly across Lake Champlain from northwestern Vermont, PBG is served by budget carriers like Allegiant Air and Spirit Airlines, sometimes offering attractive fares from specific destinations. Reaching Vermont from PBG requires crossing Lake Champlain. The most direct way is via the Lake Champlain Ferries, which operate year-round between Grand Isle, Vermont, and Plattsburgh, New York (a crossing of about 15 minutes), or seasonally between Charlotte, Vermont, and Essex, New York (about an hour crossing). While this adds a scenic ferry ride to your arrival, it also introduces extra time, cost, and logistical planning, including coordinating ferry schedules with flight times and ensuring rental car arrangements accommodate the state crossing. Weigh the potential cost savings on airfare against the added complexity of the ground (and water) transportation needed to reach your Vermont destination. For most tourists seeking convenience and direct access, BTV remains the most practical choice, but being aware of these alternatives can occasionally be beneficial for specific itineraries or budget constraints. Private pilots, of course, have access to a wider network of smaller general aviation airports scattered throughout the state.

For many visitors, particularly those originating from neighbouring states or within a day's drive, arriving by car is the most popular and practical method. The freedom and flexibility offered by having your own vehicle are invaluable for exploring Vermont's winding scenic routes, accessing trailheads, visiting dispersed attractions, and hopping between charming towns. Vermont is well-connected to the regional highway system,

making the drive relatively straightforward, though often quite scenic. The two major arteries are Interstate 89 and Interstate 91. Interstate 89 enters Vermont from New Hampshire just west of Lebanon, near White River Junction, and travels northwest through the state capital, Montpelier, past Waterbury (home of Ben & Jerry's), and onwards to Burlington and the Canadian border crossing at Highgate Springs. This route cuts diagonally across the heart of the state, providing access to central and northern regions.

Interstate 91 runs north-south along Vermont's eastern border, closely following the Connecticut River valley. It enters from Massachusetts near Brattleboro and continues north through towns like Bellows Falls, Windsor, White River Junction (where it intersects with I-89), St. Johnsbury in the Northeast Kingdom, and eventually reaches the Canadian border at Derby Line. I-91 provides excellent access to southern Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom. Both I-89 and I-91 are well-maintained, multi-lane highways typical of the US Interstate system, allowing for efficient travel. However, they can experience increased traffic, especially during peak foliage season weekends or holiday travel periods. Be mindful that services like gas stations and restaurants can sometimes be spaced further apart than on interstates in more densely populated areas, so it's wise to keep an eye on your fuel gauge.

Beyond the interstates, several key US and Vermont state highways serve as entry points and offer a more intimate introduction to the state's landscape, albeit at a slower pace. US Route 7 is a major north-south highway west of the Green Mountains, entering Vermont from Massachusetts south of Bennington and continuing north through Rutland and Middlebury towards Burlington. It provides access to many charming towns and attractions in the southwestern part of the state. US Route 4 enters from New York near Whitehall and travels east across the state through Rutland and Killington towards White River Junction, offering a scenic cross-state route. US Route 2 traverses the northern tier of Vermont, entering from New York across the islands of Lake Champlain near Alburgh and continuing east through St. Johnsbury into New Hampshire near Lancaster. Further south, Vermont Route 9, known as the Molly Stark Trail, winds its way across southern Vermont, connecting Bennington in the west with Brattleboro in the east, offering beautiful mountain views. Choosing these routes over the interstates often adds travel time but rewards drivers with closer views of the countryside, passage through smaller villages, and a feel for Vermont's rural character right from the start.

Estimating driving times provides a helpful baseline for planning. From Boston, expect approximately a 2-hour drive to Brattleboro in southeastern Vermont, or about 3 hours to White River Junction in central Vermont. Reaching Burlington from Boston typically takes around 3.5 to 4 hours via I-89. From New York City, the drive to southern Vermont towns like Bennington or Manchester might take around 3.5 to 4.5 hours. Driving to Rutland takes about 4.5 to 5 hours, while reaching Burlington from NYC is usually a 5.5 to 6.5-hour journey, often utilizing the New York State Thruway (I-87)

north to Albany, then connecting to routes heading east into Vermont. From Montreal, Canada, the drive south to Burlington via I-89 is relatively quick, often under 2 hours, depending heavily on border crossing times. These are just estimates, of course; traffic, particularly around major cities or during peak travel periods, construction delays, and weather conditions (especially in winter) can significantly impact actual travel times. It's always advisable to check real-time traffic conditions before and during your drive.

For travelers driving from Canada, understanding the border crossing process is essential. Quebec shares a lengthy border with Vermont, dotted with several official ports of entry. The busiest crossings are typically Highgate Springs on I-89 (connecting to Quebec Autoroute 35 via Route 133) and Derby Line on I-91 (connecting directly to Quebec Autoroute 55). Smaller crossings exist on state highways, such as Alburgh/Noyan (Route 2/QC-225) or Richford/Abercorn (Route 139/QC-139). Ensure all vehicle occupants have the required documentation, which usually means a valid passport or an Enhanced Driver's License (EDL) for US and Canadian citizens. Be prepared to declare any goods you are bringing across the border and be aware of restrictions on items like certain foods, alcohol, and tobacco. Wait times at major crossings can vary significantly, increasing during holidays, weekends, and peak commuting hours. Resources like the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) websites or apps can provide estimated wait times. Plan some buffer time into your schedule if crossing the border is part of your arrival journey.

A specific note for those planning to drive to Vermont during the winter months (roughly November through March, sometimes extending into April): ensure your vehicle is adequately prepared *before* you begin your trip. While Chapter 23 will delve into detailed winter driving tips *within* Vermont, the journey *to* the state also requires caution. Having snow tires (not just all-season tires) is highly recommended and provides significantly better traction and handling on snowy or icy roads. All-wheel drive (AWD) or four-wheel drive (4WD) vehicles offer an advantage, but good snow tires are arguably more critical. Pack an emergency kit including essentials like blankets, a flashlight, jumper cables, a shovel, sand or cat litter for traction, snacks, and water. Check weather forecasts and road conditions along your entire route before setting out, and be prepared for potentially slower travel speeds and unexpected delays. Arriving safely is the priority.

If you choose to arrive in Vermont via airplane, train, or bus, renting a car upon arrival remains the most practical way to explore. Rental agencies are readily available at Burlington International Airport (BTV). Limited rental options may be available in other larger towns or sometimes near Amtrak stations (like Essex Junction or Rutland), but availability is much less guaranteed and requires advance booking and confirmation. Reserving your rental car well in advance is crucial, especially during peak seasons like fall foliage or ski season, when demand can significantly outstrip supply, leading

to higher prices or no availability at all. Confirm your reservation details, including pickup location and hours, before embarking on your trip.

For a more relaxed and scenic journey, arriving by train is a wonderful option, offering views often hidden from the highway. Amtrak operates two main passenger rail lines serving Vermont. The *Vermont* travels daily between Washington D.C. and St. Albans in northern Vermont. Its northbound journey takes it through major cities like Philadelphia, New York City, and Hartford before entering Vermont at Brattleboro. From there, it winds its way north along the Connecticut River valley, stopping at Bellows Falls, Windsor-Mt. Ascutney, and White River Junction. After White River Junction, it heads northwest, making stops at Montpelier-Barre (station located in nearby Berlin), Waterbury-Stowe (station near Waterbury village), and Essex Junction (the stop serving the Burlington area), before terminating in St. Albans. The journey aboard the *Vermont* is renowned for its scenery, particularly the stretches through rural Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont where the tracks often hug riverbanks and pass through woodlands and small towns.

The second Amtrak service is the *Ethan Allen Express*, which connects New York City's Penn Station with Rutland and, more recently, extended its service all the way to Burlington. This route travels north through the Hudson Valley in New York before crossing into Vermont. Its primary Vermont stops are Castleton, Rutland, Middlebury, Vergennes, and finally, Burlington's Union Station, conveniently located downtown near the waterfront. The *Ethan Allen Express* provides excellent access to the western side of Vermont, including ski areas near Rutland and the cultural attractions of the Champlain Valley. Both the *Vermont* and the *Ethan Allen Express* offer coach seating, sometimes business class, and typically have a café car for purchasing snacks and beverages. While Wi-Fi is often advertised, connectivity can be very spotty, especially in the more rural and mountainous sections of Vermont.

Traveling by train evokes a sense of nostalgia and allows passengers to unwind, read, or simply gaze out the window as the landscape unfolds. However, prospective train travelers must carefully consider the logistics upon arrival. Vermont's Amtrak stations vary greatly in size and amenities. Some, like White River Junction or Essex Junction, are more substantial, while others might be small buildings or even just sheltered platforms. Crucially, the station location is not always central to the town it serves. For instance, the Essex Junction station is several miles outside of downtown Burlington, requiring a taxi, ride-share, or local bus connection (Green Mountain Transit serves the station) to reach the city proper. Similarly, the Montpelier-Barre station is located in Berlin, necessitating a short taxi or shuttle ride to reach the capital city. The Waterbury-Stowe station is in Waterbury village; reaching the resort town of Stowe requires additional transportation, often arranged through lodging or taxi services.

Therefore, the primary challenge of arriving by train is arranging onward transportation from the station. Car rental facilities are usually not located directly at

most Vermont train stations (though some agencies might offer pickup services with advance arrangement at busier stations like Essex Junction or Rutland). Pre-booking taxis or coordinating shuttles with your accommodation is essential. If your final destination is within walking distance of a station in a town like Brattleboro, White River Junction, or downtown Burlington (via the *Ethan Allen Express*), train travel can be quite convenient. For exploring further afield, however, you will almost certainly need to transition to a rental car or rely on pre-arranged transport. Despite these logistical considerations, the train offers a uniquely relaxing and often beautiful way to enter the Green Mountain State, perfect for travelers prioritizing the journey itself or heading to specific towns well-served by the stations. Booking tickets in advance through Amtrak's website or app is recommended, especially during popular travel times, as fares can vary, and seats can sell out.

For the budget-conscious traveler, arriving by intercity bus presents the most economical option. Major carriers like Greyhound and, to a lesser extent, bus lines like Peter Pan or occasionally Megabus (often requiring connections in hubs like Boston or Albany) provide service to several key Vermont towns. The most frequently served destinations include Burlington, Montpelier, White River Junction, Brattleboro, Rutland, and Bennington. Routes typically connect these Vermont locations with major metropolitan centers throughout the Northeast, including Boston, New York City, Albany, Hartford, and sometimes Montreal. Bus travel is significantly cheaper than flying or often even taking the train, making it an attractive option for students, backpackers, or those prioritizing cost savings.

The experience of traveling by bus is functional, though perhaps less glamorous than the train. Modern buses usually offer reclining seats, onboard restrooms, and sometimes amenities like Wi-Fi and power outlets, although the reliability and availability of these perks can vary. Journeys can be longer than driving due to multiple stops along the route. Buses generally stick to major highways but pull into downtown bus stations or designated stops, offering relatively central arrival points in the towns they serve. However, подобно train travel, the reach of intercity bus service is limited primarily to these larger towns. Reaching Vermont's myriad smaller villages, rural B&Bs, ski resorts (unless a specific shuttle connection exists), state parks, or trailheads via bus is generally not feasible.

Therefore, arriving by bus necessitates a clear plan for onward travel. If your final destination is within the arrival town itself, you might rely on local taxis, limited ride-sharing services (mainly in Burlington), or local public transit where available (like Green Mountain Transit in the Burlington, Montpelier, and Stowe areas). However, for broader exploration, renting a car after arriving by bus would be necessary, requiring transport from the bus station to a rental agency. Some regional Vermont bus routes do connect towns, but the schedules can be infrequent and may not align well with tourist itineraries (these intra-state options are discussed more in Chapter 22). Booking bus tickets is straightforward, typically done online through the carrier's

website, and purchasing in advance usually yields the best fares.

Ultimately, the best way to get to Vermont hinges on your individual circumstances and travel style. Flying into Burlington (BTV) offers speed and convenience, especially from distant origins, but necessitates renting a car. Driving provides maximum flexibility for exploration both en route and within the state, making it the preferred choice for many. The train offers a scenic and relaxed journey to specific points along its routes but requires careful planning for transportation beyond the station. Buses provide a budget-friendly alternative for reaching major towns but have limited geographic reach. Whichever path you choose, the journey itself can be part of the Vermont experience, offering glimpses of the landscapes and hints of the adventures that await in the Green Mountain State. The key is to match your arrival method with your plans, ensuring that once you're here, you have the means to discover all that Vermont has to offer.

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