

Land of MILK & HONEY

The lush, charming New England state of Vermont is bursting with delicious produce; **Laura Millar** tries to eat her way through it

This morning I'm woken up at the crack of dawn by a bunch of cows – something which, as a city dweller, doesn't happen to me very often. The sun has only just risen over Liberty Hill Farm, the homestay I arrived at late last night, and peering, bleary-eyed, through my window, I can see dozens of little calves in a field, each in their own individual pen. What has roused me is the somewhat ungodly noise they're making; they're keen for breakfast and, before I can have mine, I'm going to help feed them. Asha, the friendly daughter-in-law of the farm's owners, Beth and Bob Kennett, runs on-site experiences to let visitors experience how life on a Vermont farm works; she equips me with what looks like a giant

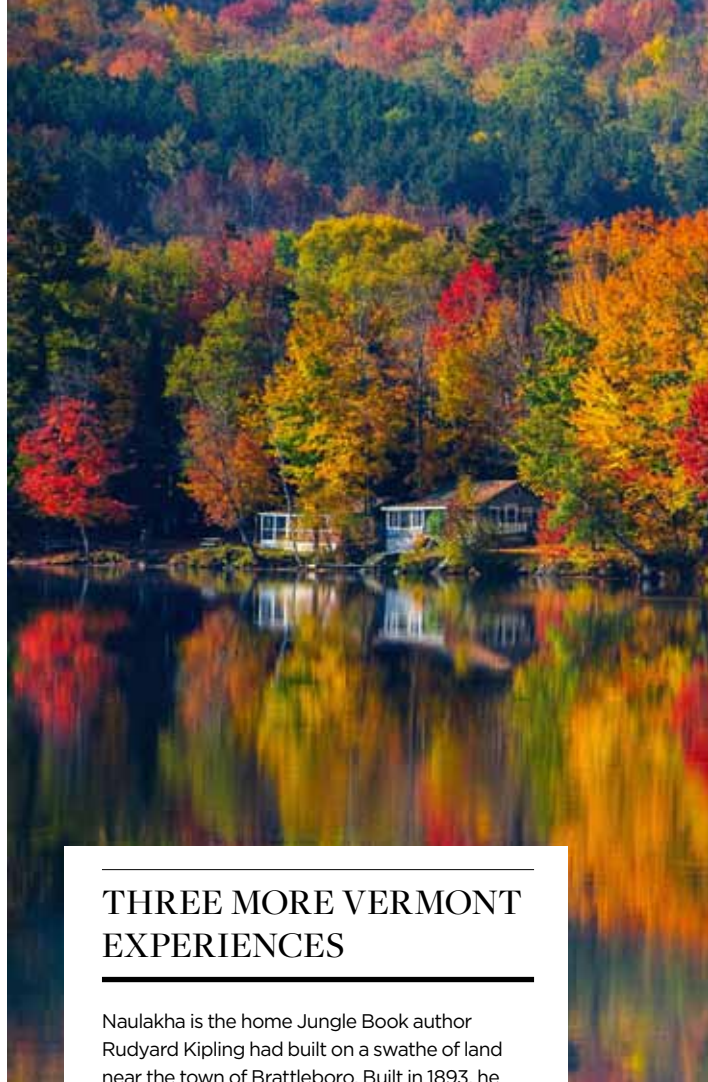


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baby bottle (mainly because that's what it is), as calves here are bottle- and bucket-fed for the first eight weeks of their life.

It's a surreal experience as I grapple both with the heavy bottle, and a gangly-legged two-week old who doesn't seem to realise the milk comes out of the teat on top. Asha and the rest of the farm workers have to feed around 25 of them, twice a day, as well as see to the milking machines for their 300-strong adult herd. Asha's wearing a t-shirt printed with an image of the farm's distinctive red barn; the design is by local artist Woody Jackson, best known for his pictures on the tubs of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, whose headquarters are just an hour away. She tells me, poignantly, that Vermont farming is a diminishing way of life; there used to be thousands of dairy farms in the state – now there are only a few hundred.

When people think of Vermont, it's usually the state's stunning fall colours they visualise; for several weeks every autumn, bright oranges, reds and yellows blaze through the densely packed forests which carpet 75 per cent of the state. But what many people don't realise is that it's home to hundreds of local producers, who use the best of the land's bounty – apples, milk, maple trees, vegetables such as squash, tomatoes and corn – to make products like award-winning ice cream, cider, beer, honey, and maple syrup. And a trip through the state sampling as



THREE MORE VERMONT EXPERIENCES

Naulakha is the home Jungle Book author Rudyard Kipling had built on a swathe of land near the town of Brattleboro. Built in 1893, he lived here with his wife and family for only three years before returning to the UK. Today you can rent the whole property, which has largely been restored to its period style;

landmarktrustusa.org

If you're into arts and crafts, don't miss the Shackleton-Thomas Arts Centre. Founded by three Brits who met at art school in Farnham, Surrey, it combines a workshop with a store where you can purchase their ceramics, furniture and fabrics;

shackletonthomas.com

Sail Lake Champlain, in the pretty town of Burlington, aboard Red, a fully restored ocean sailing yacht. It's the sixth largest freshwater lake in the US and perfect to swim in when the weather is warm;

sailbtv.com



In spring when the trees are tapped at Sterling Ridge over 4,000 gallons of maple syrup are produced per day



Photo: Kent Shaw

NEED TO KNOW

How to get there: Flights from London Heathrow to Boston cost from £246 one way, britishairways.com

Where to stay: Nightly rates at Liberty Hill Farm start from \$142/£110, libertyhillfarm.com; nightly rates at Sterling Ridge start from \$155/£120, sterlingridgeresort.com.

children, and his son Sam, help run the Von Trapp Lodge, a year-round resort where you can bike, hike, and ski. They started the brewery, dedicated to Bavarian-style lager, in 2010. Over lunch at the Bierhall – pretzels and wiener schnitzel, of which Maria would surely approve – Sam informs me that he sadly didn't inherit the family's singing genes, and reveals that Maria was a terrible driver.

After our fascinating chat, I head to Sterling Ridge, near Jeffersonville, a charming resort consisting of several cosy wooden cabins. Owners Barb and George Salg have another business, which they've been running for the past 13 years: a sugar shack, called Snow Shoe Pond (rockmaplemountain.com) where they produce maple syrup. George takes me there the next morning; it's deep within a forest, and their 'patch' consists of around 25,000 trees. When the sap is tapped in spring, the trees can produce over 4,000 gallons of maple syrup a day.

My last stop is in Perkinsville, where I'm going to put most of Vermont's produce to good use, during a cooking class. The Inn at Weathersfield (weathersfieldinn.com) has 12 rooms, and they run two or three classes a month. They're part of the Vermont Fresh Network which guarantees that 75 per cent of everything they sell comes from no further than 50 miles away. Today, we're making butternut squash soup, pork schnitzel with apple sauce, and an apple tarte tatin. As a series of enticing smells wafts through the kitchen, from melting butter and frying onions to simmering cider and roasting squash, I take a deep breath in. And I feel as if I've really, truly, tasted Vermont. ♦

much as possible is a fine way to spend your time.

Cows rear their furry heads again at my next stop, Billings Farm and Museum (billingsfarm.org). A working farm established in 1871, they use imported Jersey cows from the UK and still produce and sell milk. A stroll around some of its 250 acres involves getting lost in a sunflower maze, admiring a pumpkin patch, and marveling at their honey-producing beehives. Then, it's time for some harder stuff. Vermont has been named the craft beer capital of the US, and there are around 56 independent breweries here. Setting off on a tasting mission, I start in Waitsfield, at Lawson's Finest Liquids (lawsonsfine.com). Husband-and-wife team, Sean and Karen Lawson, started off small, selling their homebrew at farmers' markets and festivals. They must have been doing something right, as now their top quality IPAs and ales are distributed in nine nearby states, produced from their shiny new brewery and taproom. Their best-seller is A Sip of Sunshine, a light,

citrusy IPA, but they do seasonal specials, too, like the cheekily-named Maple Nipple.

Slightly further north is a brewery with more famous connections; the von Trapp Brewing Bierhall in Stowe (vontrappbrewing.com) is, yes, owned by the descendants of singing nun Maria and her husband, Baron Georg Von Trapp. Johannes, one of their three

ABOVE: Reflections of Vermont's fall colour on Lake Elmore

BELOW: Miranda Thomas, who moved to Vermont after studying art in Farnham



Photo: Corey Hendrickson