AMERICA

Foodie hotspots and hip hotels in New England

From an arty bolt hole in Boston to a vegan food hall in Rhode Island, Amanda Linfoot discovers the area’s cool new destinations

Amanda Linfoot

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The lounge in The Tourists, North Adams, near the border with Vermont and New York

NICOLE FRANZEN
“Welcome to the Revolution,” an inscription says at, funnily enough, the Revolution, a new hotel in Boston's South End that aims to celebrate the city's spirit and innovators. Hence the vast street-art mural in the double-storey foyer and the tall white Innovation Tower installation dedicated to local inventions, from basketball to flamingo lawn decorations. The hotel has been crafted out of a 1950s YWCA-type building, but its best rooms are actually across the road: 14 airy lofts with beds you don’t want to get out of, blackout blinds that do the job, superfast wifi, good robes and huge photographic prints of old Boston.

The Revolution is emblematic of a sea change in New England hospitality, which has long traded on tradition and colonial charm. This all too often, in my experience, translates to stuffy country clubs, stuffy rooms with too much lace and ageing carpets, 1980s bathroom suites and, in one dire example, a whiff of damp that clung to my clothes. That last inn put me off the region for 15 years.
In the past 18 months, though, a raft of hip, stylish places to stay has opened for business. Better still, it's easy to tour them, as I did, in a neat circular road trip through Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island — it will take a week, or allow three nights in the Berkshires and two to three in Rhode Island for a more relaxed ten days. These hotels share an understated DNA, but range from the pared-back, millennial-pleasing Revolution to the sort of outright sumptuousness you find at the Inn at Kenmore Hall, a beautifully restored, 1792 Georgian mansion with five rooms and a one-bedroom carriage house, 140 miles from Boston in western Massachusetts.

At the latter, it was not only having the former owner Melanie living next door that made its new proprietors, Frank Muytjens and Scott Edward Cole, take such care over its renovations; Muytjens is the former head of menswear at J Crew, and the results are artfully smart. The whole place is flooded with light, so they have been able to run with a masculine palette of blues and greens, mostly set against heritage greys and off-whites. The tour de force is Room 3, which has a dramatic black bathroom with a working fireplace and an inviting-looking tub.
staying in the carriage house in the 1940s — and that spirit of informal hospitality still pervades. Scott, a chef, rustles up breakfast, you’ll be greeted by Dutch, the couple’s vizsla, and there’s a complimentary bar. There are also lots of attractions within striking distance — I spent a fascinating few hours at the Shaker village in Hancock three miles away — but you could just find yourself sitting on the terrace, admiring the inn’s 20 acres and magnificent views of the rolling hills of the Berkshires. Heavenly.

I am spending the night up the road in the most effortlessly cool place I have stayed. On the road into the faded mill town of North Adams, Tourists doesn’t exactly have kerb appeal. But this is a motel that hides its light behind a long windowless façade of oak planking — the clever design means that all the rooms face the woodland at the back of the building. Inside, the 48 bedrooms are spacious, quiet and restful. The decor is all white, with built-in furniture and feature walls made of plywood (don’t knock it until you’ve seen it), and my room has a deck fringed with sumac trees and an outdoor shower. It also has the best bed I sleep in all trip and a fab range of natural toiletries called Ursa Major, which are made in Vermont.

Tourists opened last summer, created by a collective of hipster investors who rebuilt an existing hotel and bought the land beyond it to create a 60-acre estate, through which the Hoosic River runs. They’ve built a bridge over it for ease of access to the Appalachian Trail, the 2,200-mile path from Georgia to Maine that passes through the grounds. The owners include John Stirratt of the band Wilco, who puts together the soundtrack
The lodge houses a chilled-out bar cum dining room, which has a deck with tables overlooking the pool and a short, Yotam Ottolenghi-ish menu — I had an enormous plate of homemade hummus sprinkled with seeds and veg, served with warm flatbread, which hit the spot perfectly, but I would have been just as happy with the charcuterie and cheese plate or crispy quinoa and freekeh bowl. Then there's a shabby-chic bar called the Airport Rooms, where the drinks include $10 (£8) cocktails (my favourite was the Cape Codder, a trinity of vodka, vermouth and cranberry).

The beauty of Tourists is its friendliness and inclusivity — even while the radio blasted out in the Airport Rooms, a retired couple happily sat eating dinner. There's an activity co-ordinator who leads hikes and puts on yoga classes in the woods — the focus is all about putting you back in touch with nature. Guests are either there for the big outdoors or in North Adams to visit Mass Moca, one of America's largest contemporary art
fans), and the exhibits populist (hurrah), although I could have done without *Now I Let You Go* . . ., a huge mound of earth in which Annie Lennox had scattered sundry possessions, from dolls to a disturbing collection of skull ephemera. Still, it saved her a trip to the charity shop.

A three-hour drive south of North Adams my next stop is New Haven, Connecticut, where a grown-up hotel called the Blake opened in January. It has all the mod cons of a new-build, but a timeless style — think deep, squishy velvet sofas in jewel colours, wooden floors, oversized upholstered headboards and mid-century influences. The 108 rooms include kitchenettes with Nespresso machines — the only bit of kit I used in mine — and the bathrooms have a vintage feel and lovely Malin+Goetz toiletries. The Blake has a rooftop bar called High George, plus a buzzy restaurant, Hamilton Park, which has an open kitchen that produces “coastal New England cuisine”. It does a cracking bit of lamb loin with aubergine, cashews and sumac.

The Inn at Hastings Park in Lexington

MICHAEL J LEE
Flaubert's letters on love, happiness and art. An explanation can be found in the Blake's name, which derives from Alice Blake, the first female law graduate from Yale. The hotel says that its clientele is almost exclusively connected to the university, which is a few blocks away — even if they're only there to go on a tour of Yale, as I am.

My guide is the very personable Cameron, a second-year sociology student who over the course of an hour shows me the central green and several libraries (there are 29), of which the most impressive is the largest, the gothic Sterling Memorial Library. We also pop into the Beinecke rare-book collection, where I'm most taken by the building — it has beautiful sheets of 32mm-thick marble through which soft sunlight filters, instead of glazed windows.

Cameron drops me off at the Yale Center for British Art, which has the largest collection of UK art outside the country. It was donated by the late Paul Mellon and includes masterpieces by Reynolds, Stubbs, Sickert, Gainsborough, Hogarth, Turner and Constable, as well as works completed in Britain by James Whistler, Canaletto, Rubens, Monet, Manet, Cézanne, Degas and Renoir. And the best bit? It's free, yet practically deserted.

Two hours up the coast is Providence, the capital of Rhode Island, another city that is home to an Ivy League university — Brown is in the city centre, and very pretty — and also a foodie haven. I have two excellent meals there: the first at Plant City, a vegan food hall that opened in June — on the top floor you'll find Double Zero, which serves superb pizzas and pasta (and you really, really won't miss the meat); and then dinner at North, where it's all about pan-Asian deliciousness — there isn't a dud on the menu, but my go-to would be the "tiny ham biscuits", moreish mouthfuls of buttery biscuits, ham and homemade mustard. Spectacularly good.
for five years and has a quirky vibe, perhaps because it used to be a brothel (the corridors are lit pink and very bordello-like). The decor of my room was the epitome of tastefulness, though: chalky-white walls and tongue-and-groove panelling, wooden floors, a monochrome scheme in the bathroom, brass fittings and crisp, white bed linen.

![A double room at The Revolution in Boston](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/foodie-hotspots-and-hip-hotels-in-new-england-rq2fm5w2j?shareToken=887b5a8921e1514096bf54f5a7d88)

While in Providence make time for at least a day trip to Block Island, which had been described to me as “Nantucket without the crowds” and “Nantucket without the snobbishness” — I’d call that a win-win. From Providence it’s a one-hour drive to the ferry at Point Judith, and then the fastest crossing is a 30-minute hop.

This sandy speck, nine miles off Rhode Island’s coast, is indeed a beauty, even on a gusty, sodden day. Measuring six by three and a half miles, it’s a fraction of the size of Nantucket, which makes it ideal for exploring by bike. I picked up a sturdy model from one of the handful of hire shops over the road from the ferry, but was defeated by the hideous weather (the assistant
picturesque cliffs at Mohegan Bluffs and 17 miles of beaches to explore.

If you’re tempted to stay, the 31-room Block Island Beach House is the new kid on Block. A revamp of the old Surf Hotel, it now has a 1950s aesthetic — the current owners found 50 vintage surfboards around the place, so there’s one in every room, and they really don’t look out of place among the monochrome scheme, tongue-and-groove panelling (a bit of a Rhode Island theme) and bold wallpaper. It’s right on the beach and there’s a rocking bar/restaurant that serves American classics such as chowder, mac and cheese and lobster rolls (I can vouch for the chicken caesar). It’s summer only, though — it’s shut from October 15 until May 2020.

It seems only fitting that I finish this tour where the American Revolution started: the town of Lexington, 15 miles from Boston. It’s home not only to the British computer scientist Sir Tim Berners-Lee, but the Inn at Hastings Park, which has the panache of a Ralph Lauren interiors advert. The 22 individually styled rooms are spread across three 19th-century buildings, with statement wallpaper in all of them; in reception I was greeted by Osborne & Little 18th-century silhouettes in lime-green flock. My room had a green-sprigged wallcovering, as well as an enormous bed and a deep upholstered headboard. Add a Smeg minibar and a marble bathroom with Molton Brown products and you have a recipe for lounging.

The inn has two restaurants, Artistry on the Green, which has a fine-dining tasting menu, and the more relaxed Town Meeting brasserie, a handsome wood-panelled room that has padding on the ceiling to keep the hubbub bearable. I was there for Sunday brunch — an unexpected, but enjoyable mixed starter from a buffet (salads, soup, oysters, prawns, charcuterie and cheese) followed by eggs and bacon cooked to order, and then a buffet
bass, among others) and lots of locally grown veg — this place is big on provenance.

The Inn at Kenmore Hall in Richmond

It is just a few minutes’ walk from the inn to Lexington Common, where the first shots of the war were fired. In fact, Paul Revere galloped past the site of the inn on his way to alerting the colonial militia to the approach of British forces, I discover on an excellent tour. We’re shepherded on to a trolley bus to follow the first 24 hours of action from Lexington to Concord, the next town along, and into the Minute Man national park, a properly bucolic corner of countryside that’s packed with historic sites (the Old Manse and its parkland are gorgeous).

The park’s 967 acres of woodland are being returned to their 18th-century state, so the land would be familiar to the redcoats and militia who did battle on April 19, 1775. I’m not sure they would recognise the local inn these days, though.