

The Green Mountain State of Vermont

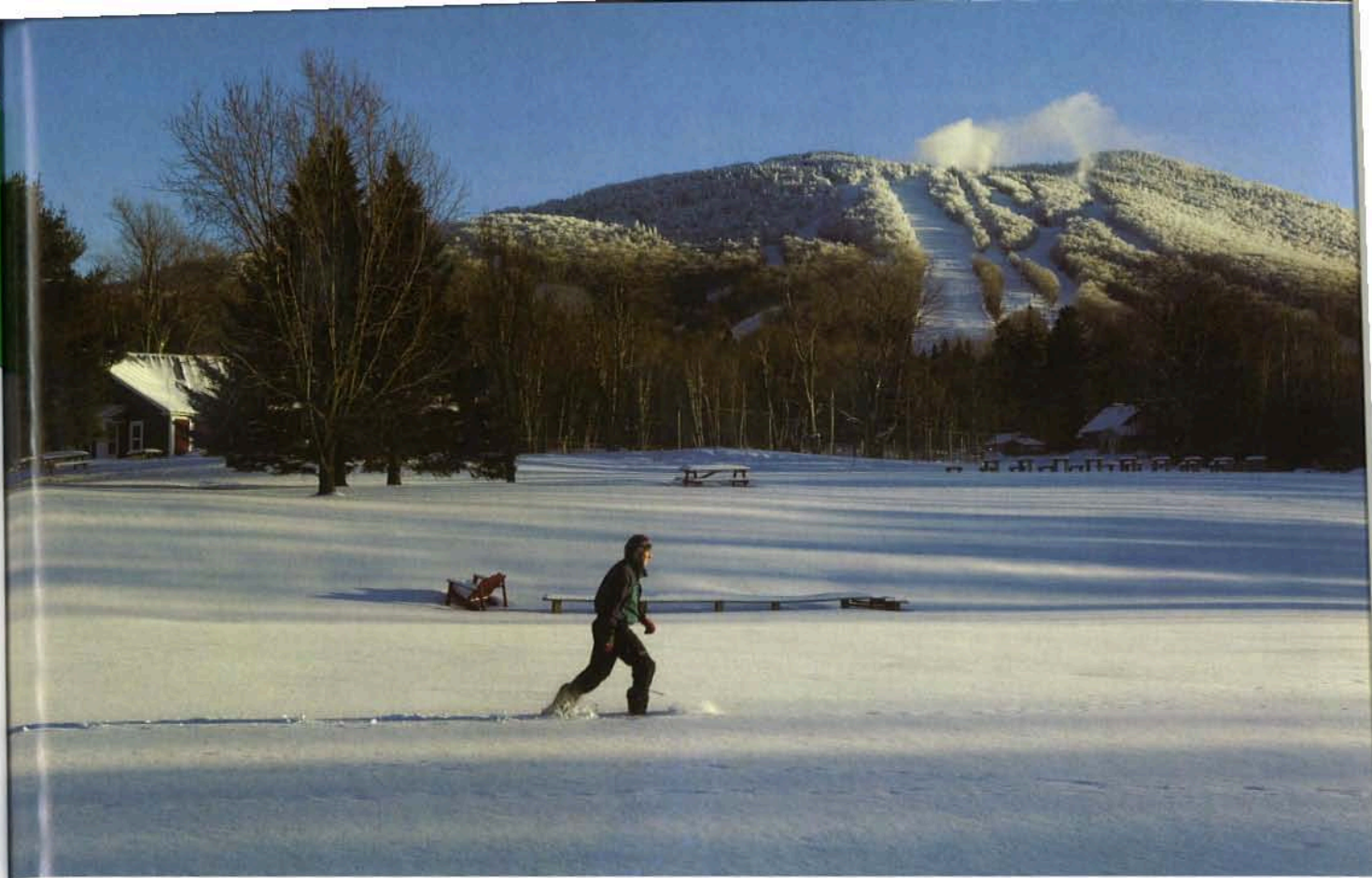
by: MK Bateman



Every March, Vermonters crowd into their town halls to make decisions about their communities. Without concern for race, creed, religion, education level or sexual orientation, each person is given the opportunity to stand up and have his or her voice heard. Live and let live, this is the philosophy here and it pervades every level of life. And, with some of the most progressive laws on the books protecting the LGBT community, Vermont is the place to come, be yourself and experience the charm, acceptance and beauty of this magnificent place.

The best way to describe the Green Mountain State may be this way: cosmopolitan rural. While the phrase seems like a contradiction, it's actually a perfect description. Vermont has one of the highest percentages of college degree earners, yet with only around 626,000 residents, it has one of the lowest population densities in the nation. As stewards of their land, few places have better caretakers than Vermonters - they don't even allow billboards on their highways. What you'll find then, is a land basically untouched by the development boom of the last 30 years: pristine, bucolic, charming, and with a unique sophistication all its own. No matter what time of year you visit, Vermont's natural beauty will not disappoint.

The LGBT community is deeply engrained in the culture of Vermont, yet the state is different from other popular gay tourist destinations in its reserved nature. To its core, this is hard working, buckle-down,



and pragmatic New England. You would do yourself a disservice, however if you confuse reserved with conservative. After all this is the left coast of New England in every sense of the word. While people may be caught off guard by public displays of affection, it's not a gay thing - they'd have a similar response to any couple.

One thing that Vermont does better than most places in the US is branding itself. Whether you've visited here or not, if someone were to ask you to list some quintessential Vermont symbols, you'd probably come up with pretty consistent answers. How about skiing, maple syrup, farms with grazing livestock on rolling pastures, covered bridges, and fall foliage? True, the Green Mountain State has these things in abundance, but to dig no deeper is to miss all the things that make modern Vermont so vibrant.

For one, the localvore movement - eating food grown or produced in local communities - is a cornerstone of life in the Green Mountains. For visitors this means truly amazing, fresh cuisine at Farm to Table restaurants, like Hen Of The Wood. You can't get fresher than a hamburger from a local farm that's ground to

order, a salad collected from the organic farm up the road or a dessert with blueberries picked at the peak of flavor.

The food movement isn't just about amazing restaurants. Cheese makers like Vermont Creamery, Grafton Village Cheese, and Jasper Hill Farm have created internationally awarded cheeses without equal. Vermont's locally crafted beers are becoming such a craze that beers like the Alchemist's Hedy Topper have developed a near cult following. Artisanal bakeries such as Red Hen Bakery and King Arthur Flour produce delicious breads and pastries, many times using local or heirloom wheat. And lest we forget ice cream - there isn't a person reading this who doesn't have a favorite Ben and Jerry's flavor!

Modern Vermont's style isn't just found in its food, however. While the iconic general store sells all manner of product in most communities, don't miss the chance to visit the treasure trove of artisans, handcrafting everything from pottery, to woven goods, to glass and wood.

Whether you have a specific time of the year you'd like to visit, or you'd rather concentrate on a region - there is ample opportunity to

design the perfect getaway. The question becomes what type of vacation would you like? How about a quintessential New England White Christmas with world class skiing? Would you like a week of sailing and swimming on Lake Champlain? Are you looking for hikes on the Long Trail and scenic vistas? Perhaps you seek quaint towns with great outlet shopping? Or are you looking for a destination wedding like nowhere else? All of these and more are available.

It is much the same for your lodging. If you're seeking the pampered relaxation of a 4-Diamond resort there's the Essex Culinary Resort and Spa. If your sensibilities lean towards urban chic, then try the Hotel Vermont, a boutique hotel recently opened in Burlington. Of course, you would be remiss if you didn't spend some time in one of the beautiful Bed and Breakfasts that dot the landscape. A warm fire, a cozy bed, and a hot cup of morning coffee will make for an essential Vermont experience. Keep in mind, many B&B's are gay-owned and

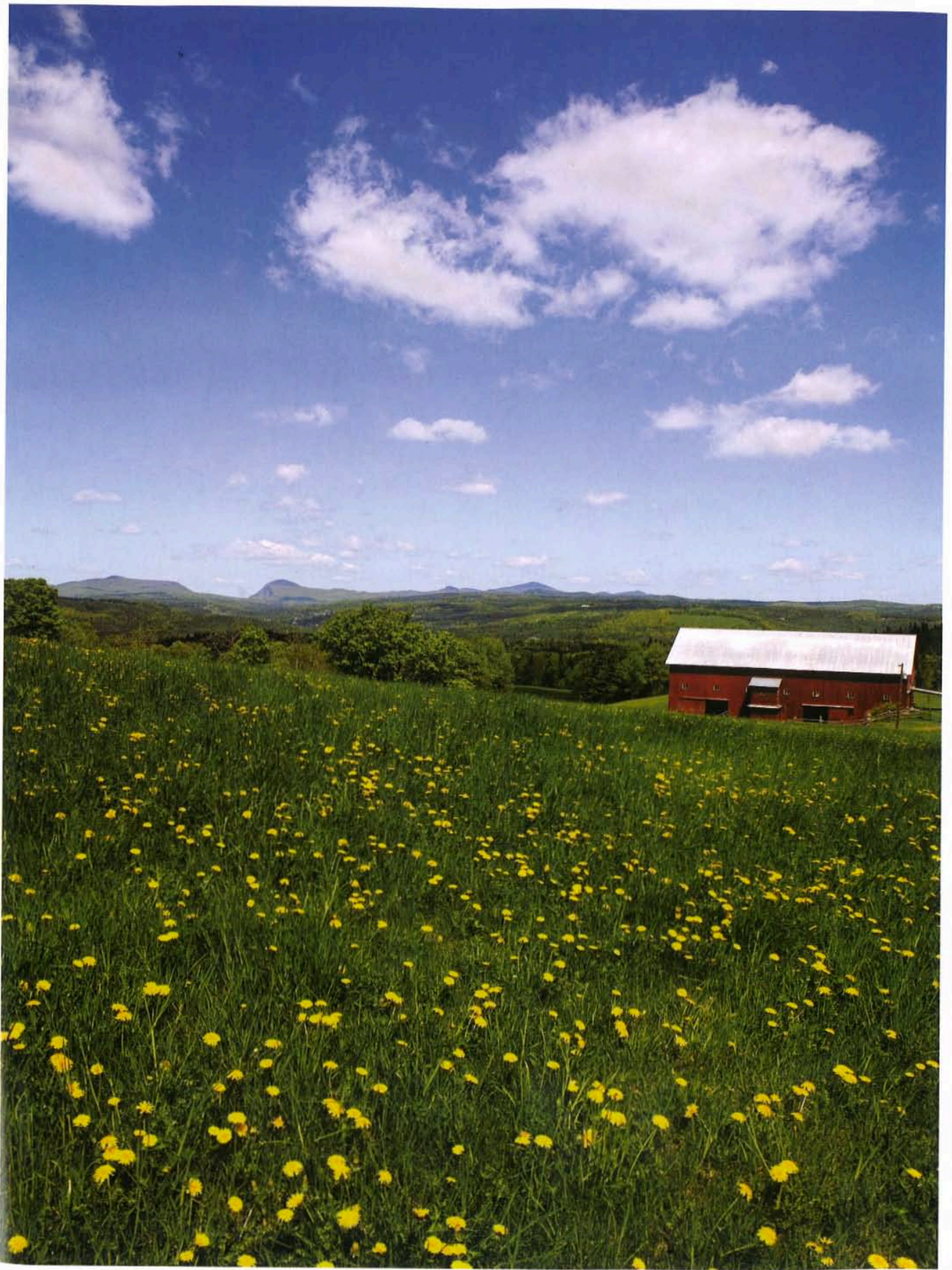
operated, allowing you to find just the right fit and support your community.

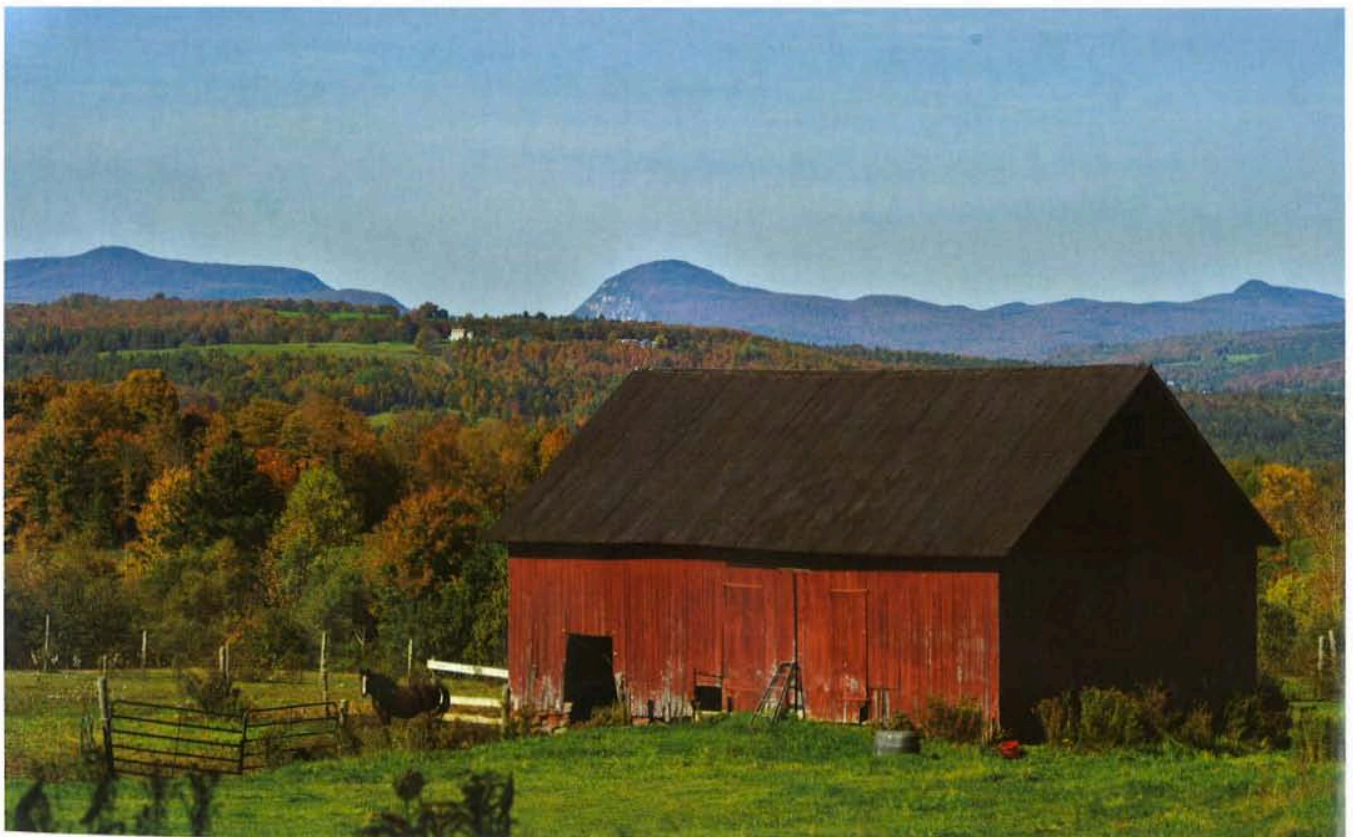
Most of you have certainly experienced your fair share of seasonal weather. However, if you've never enjoyed the four seasons in Vermont, then you are in for a magical experience. Not many places change so dramatically throughout the year.

In the winter, you'll find crystal blue skies, a white cover of snow, and the green of ever-present pines, set against the hills and mountains: stark and pristinely beautiful. It's the perfect backdrop for outdoor activities like skiing and snowshoeing or for more relaxing pursuits like a good book and a picture window.

After the winter thaw, there's a moment in the early spring when the tiny buds on trees are so vibrant they almost seem to glow. Then, suddenly the trees bloom and what had just been a dormant landscape is suddenly alive with sights, sounds and smells. This is the time of year to try Sugar on Snow, a local tradition







where warm maple syrup is poured over snow. When it reacts to the cold it turns to a taffy-like treat that's a favorite for locals and visitors, alike.

Summer in Vermont is like no other. The tree-lined mountains are so dense they seem as billowy as cotton. The rivers come alive with swimming holes, lakes teem with kayaks and canoes, hiking and nature trails abound, and Farmers Markets re packed with local goods. The hidden secret however, is the mild temperatures and low humidity (rarely raising above the mid 80° mark). While sweltering temperature force others inside for the relief of air conditioning, Vermonters are sleeping with their windows open and fresh mountain air blowing.

It's autumn, however, that Vermont is at its most impressive. The birch, maples, oaks, and elms come together to form the most beautiful mosaics of fall colors to be seen anywhere in the U.S. Travel the scenic byways of the Mad River Valley or the Northeast Kingdom to

experience this for yourself. Go apple picking, get lost in a corn maze, or sip some hot cider by the fireplace at the Trapp Family Lodge. You will be happy you did.

Vermont is a state of mind and particularly appealing for gay and lesbian travelers for its live and let live philosophy. Come experience the beauty and charm of the Green Mountains, safe in the knowledge that we are all members of its community.



MK Bateman is a writer and recovering urbanite, based in Central Vermont. After more than ten years in the Entertainment Industry, he shifted gears to complete an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of San Francisco. Relocating to New York City, he worked as a Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager before journeying into the world of freelance writing. He has written and blogged about an assortment of subjects, including travel, food, cinema, health, and web content. He is currently working on his first novel.

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