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HAVENS | NEW LONDON, N.H.

Outdoor Living, Clean Lakes and Sophistication

By KATIE BACON

NEW LONDON, N.H., first became a vacation hot spot in the late 1800s, when summer guests arrived there by train from points south, then traveled by steamboat to be deposited at one of the more than a dozen hotels that once fringed the banks of Lake Sunapee. The passenger trains and the hotels are long gone, though — not to mention whalebone corsets and ice-cream socials — and most visitors today arrive via Interstate 89, which runs sleek and smooth through the southwest edge of town.

Even so, New London's outdoor living and clean lakes — Pleasant Lake, Little Sunapee and its very own corner of Lake Sunapee — still whisper to tourists, second-home owners and retirees; about 30 percent of the town's residents are second-homers, local real estate agents say.

The town and region serve up the usual [New Hampshire](#) tourist smorgasbord: beguiling views, especially in fall; a bounty of [hiking](#) trails; swimming, boating and [fishing](#); and downhill [skiing](#) at the recently rejuvenated Mount Sunapee Resort. But in New London all of that is complemented by a range of cultural events — concerts and antiques fairs, for example — amid an air of quiet sophistication.

“I think it's probably the nicest town in the world,” said Brad Cook, a lawyer who lives in Manchester, N.H., about an hour away. “It's got an infrastructure: a hospital, a vibrant Main Street, a wonderful library. It's not just some place where you go and say, ‘Where the heck am I?’ ”

He and his family bought land and built a four-bedroom modified Cape across from Little Lake Sunapee in 1985 for \$120,000; it is now valued at about \$350,000. The 10 houses on his road share a beach and a dock; a few years ago, a house across the road from him, right on the lake, sold for \$825,000.

Midge and Tim Eliassen, who split their time between Carlisle, Mass., and New Hampshire, met as teenagers in 1960 while sailing on Lake Sunapee. In summer, they live in an unheated A-frame that Mr. Eliassen built in 1961 on a shoreline lot on Lake Sunapee that was given to him by his parents. (The Eliassens plan to retire to the region and own a winterized house in nearby Sunapee.)

“The lake, the mountain, snow in the wintertime,” Ms. Eliassen said. “It's what New Hampshire offers, that incredible outdoors.”

The Scene

When Ms. Eliassen first came to New London, about the only store in town was a “creaky, wooden-floored small family market.” These days Main Street bustles, with its mix of casual clothing boutiques, restaurants and a surprising number of capital advisers — there are a lot of retirees in town. The [architecture](#) is a pleasing jumble of Colonial, Victorian, Arts and Crafts and what might be called “renovated New England

barn.”

Residents depend on the good selection at Morgan Hill Bookstore and the good coffee at Jack’s, a breakfast and lunch cafe that sits in a renovated Greek Revival building. It’s where people thaw out in winter or savor the comfortable porch in summer — gabbing all the while.

In warm weather, business owners seem engaged in an informal war of the roses, seeing who can plant the most striking [gardens](#) or window boxes. In a spirited field, the greenest thumb probably goes to Spring Ledge Farm, an expanded farm stand where residents hurry in to buy up the summer’s first peas, strawberries, baby lettuce or corn, then stay to chat about local goings-on. Come fall, Spring Ledge is all about cornstalks, gourds and pumpkins.

New London is also home to summer-stock theater at the Barn Playhouse — “Godspell” and “Fiddler on the Roof” were among the musical chestnuts roasted this past summer — which dates back to 1933.

Each fall, the town is given a cultural jolt by Colby-Sawyer College, which in the last 10 years has added new buildings and created an Adventures in Learning program for older adults.

A lively community is part of what drew Mark and Marilyn Wendling to New London. The couple live outside Nashville, and say they spent seven years scouring New England for a place with the right feel. “Just like when you walk into someone’s home, you get a sense,” Mr. Wendling said. “People here embrace New London as their home. They’re proud of it.”

The Wendlings bought a two-bedroom house on 1.5 wooded acres in 2000 for about \$115,000. They make the trip north about every six weeks. “We have a view of a pick-your-own-strawberries field,” Mr. Wendling said, “and can go cross-country skiing right out our door.”

One side effect of the town’s popularity is that, especially around the lakes, buyers are tearing down old, simple cottages and building large, year-round houses. “We’ve seen four or five teardowns occur on Pleasant Lake in the past few years,” said Joe Coleburn, a retiree from West Grove, Pa., who spends most of the summer in a 1940s two-bedroom cottage that sits about 10 yards from the water.

He and his wife, Susan, bought the cottage in 2002 for \$405,000, then spent another \$100,000 on renovations. Mr. Coleburn is especially taken with fishing on the lake — “one of the few that holds landlocked salmon,” he said.

Pros

Even if buying a lake house is out of reach, residents have two nice town [beaches](#) to choose from — one on Pleasant Lake, the other on Little Lake Sunapee. Many second-homers also cite New London’s hospital, undergoing a \$20 million expansion, as a selling point.

Cons

Because New Hampshire has no sales or income tax, property taxes are high. Being near Interstate 89 is convenient, but highway roar can be heard in some parts of town.

The Real Estate Market

The housing market peaked in 2005, but real estate agents say lakefront homes haven't been as affected by the slide, ranging in price from \$600,000 to millions of dollars.

Marilyn Kidder, who owns Coldwell Banker Milestone Real Estate, said: "Initially, second-home buyers will often say, 'We'd like a house on a lake.' But if they're not in the \$600,000-plus price range, they'll start looking at smaller bodies of water, then back up into seeing water, or having views."

A sought-after alternative is the 60 or so houses at Slope and Shore, a 1970s woodland development that has private access to a large beach on Pleasant Lake. "When they go on the market, they sell like hot cakes," said Doug Peel, an agent at the New London Agency. When available, they range in price from \$300,000 to \$700,000.

The housing stock is mixed, from a few Colonials on Main Street to rustic 1920s cottages to a scattering of new homes that push 10,000 square feet. "For a decent three-bedroom vacation house you'll maybe pay in the high twos or low threes," said Dan O'Halloran, an agent with Colby Real Estate.

To protect the lakes, the town has put checks on development. One prohibits owners from increasing the footprint of houses within 50 feet of the water.

LAY OF THE LAND

POPULATION 4,455, according to a 2006 [Census Bureau](#) estimate.

SIZE 25.4 square miles.

WHERE New London is in southwestern [New Hampshire](#), about a hundred miles from Boston.

WHO'S BUYING Lawyers from Concord and Manchester, N.H., and doctors and bankers from Boston.

WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING The New London Inn (353 Main Street, 603-526-2791; www.newlondoninn.us), a stagecoach inn that dates from 1792, has 23 rooms, a tavern and a restaurant. Rooms start at \$129 a night.

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