Discover Central Massachusetts

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Explore the regions of Central Massachusetts
Worcester | 395 Corridor | Blackstone Valley | Sturbridge Townships | Wachusett

Jump to the activities found across Central Massachusetts
Dining Destination | Arts & Culture | Fun Experiences & Outdoor Adventure | Craft Beverage, Meetings, Event & Convention Destination

Regions

A seamless balance among historic treasures, peaceful scenery, urban and country landscapes and trendy establishments await in Central Massachusetts. Located in the heart of New England, Central Massachusetts encompasses Worcester and the surrounding 34 communities that fall into five main regions, each with its own vibrant personality.

WORCESTER

The heart of the Commonwealth, Worcester is located 45 minutes west of Boston and north of Providence, Rhode Island, and home to the Worcester Regional Airport. With a strong entrepreneurial culture, Worcester is packed with chic small businesses, unique experiences and ground-breaking discoveries. Its expansive food scene ranges from historic diners to inventive eateries. Museums, theaters and galleries are found throughout the city, and street art complements the historic cityscapes.
Must-See Stops:

The city of Worcester is the second largest city in New England, combining the historic charm of a small town with the conveniences and attractions of a thriving metropolis. Over 70 cultural venues await, including world-class museums, premier concert halls and sport complexes. Walk around the Canal District for one-of-a-kind shops and tasty treats or dine along Restaurant Row on Shrewsbury Street where you will find over 50 unique options. An entertainment hub in the city, the DCU Center's 14,400-seat arena is the host to a variety of shows and performances including Disney on Ice, national touring concerts and home games for the Worcester Railers Hockey Club and Massachusetts Pirates professional indoor football team.

Shrewsbury is bordered by Lake Quinsigamond, one of the country's premier rowing venues which has played host to the U.S. Masters Rowing Championships. Ski Ward Ski Area is open all year and offers skiing, snowboarding and tubing for all ages and levels.

Just minutes from the airport, Leicester is a rural historical town with one of the few remaining drive-ins, which has changed very little since 1967. Dine at The Castle, a replica of a 16th century castle with turrets, towers and moat that serves delicious French cuisine. Or play a round of disc golf at Maple Hill, home to the esteemed MVP open.

395 Corridor

There is plenty to do and see in the area around Route 395, just south of Worcester and just north of the Massachusetts border with Connecticut and Rhode Island. You'll find rich history and small-town charm, complete with maple shacks, festivals, concerts, shopping and restaurants.

Must-See Stops:

Pay a visit to Oxford, a small town that was settled by French Huguenots in 1686. Learn about its history at the Huguenot Fort site and monument before venturing over to the birthplace of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross.

Dudley Hill is a treasure trove of architectural styles, where the historic buildings include examples of Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival and Victorian Eclectic styles. Be sure to visit the William Carter House, Grange Hall and the Black Tavern, which are all listed on the National Register. On the third Thursday of June, the Dudley Grange Strawberry Festival serves up strawberry shortcakes and features a frog jumping contest!

The town of Webster lies on the Connecticut border with a population of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Stay at Indian Ranch summer resort, an outdoor concert venue and campground. During your visit, take a cruise on the Indian Princess, a modern replica of the Mississippi riverboats on Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg (aka Webster Lake).

Blackstone Valley

This region is revered for magnificent fall foliage, quaint New England villages, farm stands and fruit groves for the picking, vibrant outdoor recreation and a spectacular display of American architecture through the ages. Once playing a major role in the American Industrial Revolution, the Blackstone Valley is a showcase
to the historical impact. The corridor stretches across 24 cities and towns and features over 400,000 acres of panoramic views and landscapes.

**Must-See Stops:**

Spend the day in **Blackstone**, hiking through the 100-acre state park and stop for a picnic at the dramatic falls of the Blackstone Gorge. Blackstone truly shines in the fall season, when its many farms and orchards come to life; and the river provides a perfect backdrop for magnificent foliage views.

The quaint and quirky small town of **Grafton** is still home to members of the Nipmuc Indian tribe. It has a town common with farmer’s market, performance theater, charming country story, eclectic Post Office Pub (post office memorabilia-meets-tiki bar), antique shops and a European-style artisanal cheese and wine shop.

Enjoy the clear, pristine waters at Lake Nipmuc Park in **Mendon**, also known as “Nature’s Beauty Spot.” Dine lakeside at the old Imperial ballroom, where Aerosmith played their very first concert, meet the animals at Southwick's Zoo - the largest zoo in New England or browse antiques at small shops. Don’t miss a flick at the Mendon Twin Drive-Through, one of only three drive-in theaters left in the state.

**Millbury** has a long history as a New England Mill town and is where S&D Spinning Mill has set up shop. One of the oldest continually operating mills in the country, S&D is known for making the red stitching for major league baseballs. Another icon of the town is the Asa Waters Mansion, a Federal-style mansion built by a resident who made his fortune manufacturing firearms during the Civil War. Catch current films, comedy shows and sports games at Elm Draught house, an old-fashioned theater that also serves beer and wine during shows.

Vaillancourt Folk Art, located in **Sutton**, is a destination for collectors and Christmas enthusiasts looking to shop the famous Chalkware line of Victorian-style figurines. Take a tour and admire the team hand painting each piece right before your eyes. The store’s display is always magical but transforms into a winter wonderland before the winter holidays. Nearby, Purgatory Chasm State Reservation is popular among picnickers, families and adventure enthusiasts. The quarter-mile chasm is lined by granite walls that rise as high as 70 feet, creating a challenging hike or fun rock-climbing experience.

**STURBRIDGE TOWNSHIPS**

Take the scenic back-country roads to The Sturbridge Townships, made up of eleven towns, where you will be met with character, storybook charm and unspoiled four-season beauty. Wonderful discoveries await, from historical exploration and great shopping to fine dining, awarded breweries and agricultural experiences. Sturbridge’s friendly hospitality is just as refreshing as the surrounding rivers, lakes, hills, and forests.

**Must-See Stops:**

As a quintessential New England town with colonial roots, **Sturbridge** comes with distinctive antique shops and boutiques, miles of wooded trails and Old Sturbridge Village, a living history museum, depicts life of a rural New England town of the 1830s. Its trendy and evolving dining scene
showcases restaurants run by award-winning chefs, such as Baba Sushi, The Duck and Avellino, and the craft beer scene is thriving with breweries like Altruist, Homefield, Rapscallion and Hyland Orchards.

At one point, almost everyone in Hardwick was a farmer, so it's no surprise that here you will find artisan organic cheese, maple syrup, grass-fed meat and authentic French bread, to name a few. Hardwick Winery, located in the 200-year-old Giles E. Warner mansion, uses many locally grown ingredients to produce its wine. In addition to hosting the annual community fair - the oldest continuously running fair in the county, Hardwick has one of three remaining native covered bridges in Massachusetts, claiming a spot on the National Register of Historic Places.

Charlton boasts a rural landscape with rolling hills and orchards. A go-to spot for locals is the Clam Box – a small seafood and ice cream joint on “Dresser Hill” with romantic sunset views. Buffumville Lake and Dam has 500-acres dedicated to disc golf, hiking, swimming, picnicking, hunting, boating and fishing and 508 International hosts offroad motorsports, cycling, boarding, acrobatics and adventure races on its 22-acres. Treehouse Brewing Co. is internationally recognized for its rotating offering of artisan ales.

Nestled among the Quaboag hills is West Brookfield, whose picturesque Towner Common is lined with stately colonial homes and plays host to many annual events such as The Asparagus & Flower Heritage Festival. Spend time outdoors at Rock House Reservation, a 196-acre open space with wildflowers, hardwood forests and a wide variety of woodland animals, or dig-in at Salem Cross Inn, an 18th century restored farmhouse that serves delicious seasonal menus and boasts stunning landscapes.

**WACHUSETT**

Admire mother nature’s handiwork among the peaceful scenery, abundant wildlife, lush greenways and cascading waterfalls found across the Wachusett region. Pack your gear with plenty of outdoor recreation options such as hiking, golfing, skiing and snowboarding. Follow the scenic byway of Route 122, a 40-mile rural route from Paxton to Orange, for some of the best views of fall foliage in the region.

**Must-See Stops:**

**Wachusett Mountain** is New England’s most accessible ski resort with a 2,006-foot summit and 1,000-foot vertical drop. With 26 trails and eight ski lifts over 110 acres, there’s enough variety of terrain for skiers of all abilities.

Head over to Boylston, a small town with big attractions. Start with Tower Hill Botanic Garden’s expansive collection of native and exotic plants, flowers and trees across 132 acres of land with breathtaking views of Wachusett Mountain. Hit the links at Cyprian Keyes, an award-winning 18-hole championship golf course.

In Paxton, Moore State Park is a 737-acre public recreation area with historical building foundations, a restored sawmill, waterfalls and mill chutes in addition to its remarkable landscaping. Portions of the land were once the home of at least five 18th- and 19th-century watermills.
Rutland State Park in Rutland is a 300-acre recreation area with developed facilities for freshwater swimming, picnicking and boating. Spend part of the day enjoying the outdoors with hiking and walking trails, mountain biking, canoeing and fishing accessibility.

In its 275 years, Holden has transitioned from its rural farming and textile mill roots into a family-friendly community with great shopping and dining opportunities. The Local Tavern, a gastro-style pub utilizes ingredients from local farms to bring seasonal dishes and handcrafted cocktails to its menu.

**Activities**

*From its legendary history at the center of the American Revolution to the world’s first liquid-fueled rocket, Central Massachusetts has been home to many progressive thinkers and doers. That desire for innovation and creativity lives on today with diverse and dynamic experiences across the region. Here you will find inventive cuisine, hands-on activities, cool and trendy museums, eclectic art galleries, world-class theater and admiration for the historically significant.*

**DINING DESTINATION**

Sink your teeth into Central Massachusetts, where we believe no meal should be ordinary. Here, you’ll find a hub of culinary talent where many cutting-edge chefs have made a name. Such as executive chef of the acclaimed deadhorse hill restaurant, Jared Forman, who brought his experience as a chef at renowned New York restaurants such as Gramercy Tavern, Momofuku and Per Se to Worcester.

A region full of locavores, visitors can enjoy farm-to-table, artisanal restaurants that use the best of local ingredients and local harvests – many of which list the nearby farms these ingredients have come from. Dig in to the unique concepts from Main Street in Sturbridge to over 50 establishments along Restaurant Row on Shrewsbury Street in Worcester, where you can choose any ethnic cuisine to please your palate including authentic Chinese, Afghani, Cuban and Mexican flavors. Homemade Italian meals can be enjoyed at multiple restaurants around Worcester but Russo’s is the place to go on Sundays for dinner served family-style.

As the birthplace of the diner or “lunch car”, it’s no surprise that Worcester is known for its mom-and-pop diners of yesteryear. The aluminum Miss Worcester Diner has been in the same spot since 1948 and is famous for its French toast, with at least a dozen options to decide from. There are many decadent dessert bars and bakeries to satisfy a sweet tooth, although a stop at Table Talk Pies is a must. For almost 100 years, Table Talk has been serving the highest quality, “old fashioned” pie recipes where 4″ snack pies are only 50-cents apiece.

**ARTS & CULTURE**

Central Massachusetts is known for its excellence in art, theatre and music. The renowned Worcester Art Museum is the pillar of the region’s arts community, housing thousands of unique collections from around the world and the largest collection of Monet. Visitors can explore the region’s niche galleries such as The Cantor Gallery at The College of the Holy Cross or ArtsWorcester, regularly showcasing new work.

Be amazed and entertained as you move through downtown Worcester, where Pow! Wow! Worcester has curated over 130 pieces of public art – 106 of which are murals, with many painted on public schools.
Popular pieces include the interactive, neon “Spidertag” mural found in Allen Court Alley and the mural outside The Hanover Theatre depicting a male and female created by an overlay of blue and red paint that transforms when you look through 3-D glasses.

Built in 1905, The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts attracts audiences from near and far to enjoy world-class, off-Broadway theatre performances. It’s also home to the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ, the largest theatre pipe organ in New England. Those with the extraordinary opportunity to step backstage will be amazed at the wall of signatures – one from every performer that has ever graced the Hanover stage.

Renowned for its elegance and sound qualities, Mechanics Hall is the premier concert hall and event venue in Central Massachusetts. Its Great Hall has been stamped an acoustical masterpiece, making it sought after by musicians and recording artists worldwide, and as the finest pre-Civil War performance hall in America, it has earned a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Another historic concert venue is The Palladium, located in the heart of Worcester, has hosted famous acts such as All-American Rejects, 50 Cent, Dropkick Murphys, Foo Fighters and more.

**FUN EXPERIENCES & OUTDOOR ADVENTURE**

Calling all sports fans, get ready to cheer for Worcester’s home teams - the Worcester Railers Hockey Club, Worcester Bravehearts baseball club and Massachusetts Pirates professional indoor football team. Coming spring 2021, the Worcester Red Sox (formerly the Pawtucket Red Sox) will be moving into a brand new 10,000-seat baseball stadium in Worcester’s Canal District. This evolving neighborhood is the perfect place to spend an afternoon, with many restaurants, bakeries and boutique shops to browse.

The EcoTarium combines science and nature among three floors of interactive exhibits and a digital planetarium. Outdoors, follow paths and trails that invite you to be creative, artistic and musical with mother earth. Visit live animal habitats to meet otters, mountain lions, a red fox, porcupine and more – many who are native to New England. Learn about Worcester’s fascinating past at the Worcester Historical Museum, where you can cook up a play meal in a replica diner car or see the original specifications of the smiley face, invented in 1963 in Worcester by Harvey Ball. Step back in time at Old Sturbridge Village, the largest living history museum in New England, depicting a rural New England town of the 1830s. Open year-round, explore 40 antique buildings, learn from costumed historians, watch Heritage Breed animals work the farm or attend plenty of fun events and workshops.

If you love the outdoors, there is plenty to discover. Start with Wachusett Mountain, open year-round, for hiking in the fall and skiing in the winter. Purgatory Chasm State Reservation is an adventurous, natural playground with a quarter-mile trail running between granite walls rising as high as 70 feet. Explore rock formations with intriguing names such as The Corn Crib, Lovers’ Leap and Fat Man’s Misery. Connect with nature at Tower Hill Botanic Garden, a four-season display of planned gardens and collections of ornamental, edible and native plants that fill the 171-acre property. Hit the links at Cyprian Keyes Golf Club or try your hand at disc golf with a visit to Maple Hill Disc Golf, consistently rated as a top 10 course in the world.

But the adventure doesn’t have to end on the ground. Boundless Adventures in West Berlin is an aerial adventure with 9 total courses that invite you to swing, climb, balance, traverse and zip-line through the treetops. Or soar through the sky with Hang Glide New England for a bird’s-eye view of scenic Massachusetts.
CRAFT BEVERAGE

Sip your way along the Central Mass Craft Beer Trail. The region is a hot spot for craft beverages. Discover up-and-coming and nationally awarded craft breweries, plus bars and beer gardens that serve up pints of the best pours around. Notable names include the Tree House Brewing Company, the artisan brewery whose can releases are known for drawing in large crowds. Their vast array of ales vary by the season, their moods and discovered innovations, meaning that their offerings are constantly rotating. Located on Restaurant Row, Wormtown Brewery is Worcester’s first micro-brewery where you can expect “a piece of Mass in every glass.” Cozy up to their tap room counter, located within their 50,000 square-foot space or sit outside on their popular outdoor patio. Purgatory Beer Company has found its home in a beautifully restored, historic mill. Both dog-friendly and family-friendly, Purgatory serves a diverse and delicious selection of beer brewed to meet just about every taste.

For vino lovers, Hardwick Vineyard and Winery is a welcoming wine destination with award-winning options. Down a quiet country road in Hardwick, Massachusetts, Hardwick Vineyard and Winery is located within the Giles E. Warner mansion, a house over two-hundred-years old that was built while George Washington was president of the United States. After the Samek family purchased the home and 150 acres of land in 1997, they began authentically restoring it to its original grandeur, which you see today. The wines are a representation of Central Massachusetts – from names like Yankee Boy White and Quabbin Native to using locally grown ingredients, such as local cranberries in their Massetts Cranberry.

An urban winery, Sail to Trail WineWorks presents unique, limited edition wines that have been selected by their talented team members. Visitors can enjoy a free wine tasting of curated wines from around the globe at their casual tasting room in the Higgins Armory Building.

For those interested in more than sipping craft beverages, Deja Brew invites visitors to craft their own beer and wine. These hands-on sessions include the ingredients, a variety of recipes to choose from and an instructor to walk you through the process. At the end of the process, everyone goes home with their own bottles of the final product.

MEETINGS, EVENT & CONVENTION DESTINATION

As the heart of the Commonwealth, Central Massachusetts combines historic New England charm with the conveniences and lively attractions of a bustling metropolis, making it the ultimate event destination for meetings, events and conventions with a host of support services at your fingertips.

An hour away from major hubs like Providence, Boston and Hartford, the region is easily accessible by train, plane, commuter rail and automobile. It boasts a variety of venues from eclectic meeting spots to historic event spaces that are both memorable and functional. Whether looking to host a large group in the heart of Worcester or a smaller and more rustic venue in one of the rural communities, the perfect function facility can be found in Central Massachusetts.

One the largest locations is the DCU Center with over 100,000 square feet of exhibition and display space, over 23,000 square feet of meeting space among 11 different rooms and a 12,000 square foot ballroom, the largest in Central Massachusetts. As a multi-purpose venue comprised of a 14,000-seat arena and attached Convention Center, the DCU Center is suited to handle any size group from 10 to 15,000 for trade shows, private banquets, meetings and competition space.
Consider restored landmarks like Salem Cross Inn or the “Yankee hospitality” of the Publick House for traditional vibes or stray off the beaten path by hosting a special event on a rooftop or in a rustic barn. For conference services and sports facilities, the region's 12 colleges have plenty to offer. No matter the location, you are guaranteed an impeccable level of service that will make the event unforgettable. In fact, Discover Central Massachusetts provides customer service training to front-line staff in the hospitality industry, making sure every guest is served with a smile.

For attendees looking to stay the night, over 30 different accommodation options are available in the area, including boutique and branded hotel properties, inns and lodging, historic B&Bs, and campgrounds. Some of these locations offer smaller spaces for corporate meetings, conferences, and weddings. From June to August, Worcester State University can accommodate 800 overnights.

When it comes to entertainment, there are over 70 cultural venues to choose from, including world-class museums, art galleries and delicious eateries. Visitors can easily explore popular neighborhoods – such as Worcester’s Restaurant Row on Shrewsbury Street or Main Street in Sturbridge for farm-to-table, artisanal restaurants. The Canal District in Worcester is packed with boutique shops, bakeries and bookstores that hold surprising treasures and finds.

Images
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Events
A list of events happening in Central Massachusetts is available here:
https://www.discovercentralma.org/see-do/events/