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Shipyard Brewery, Portland, Maine; the Four Columns Inn, New England (below). Pictures / Supplied

An appetite for New England

Restaurant claims to be ‘farm-to-table’ pioneer and shows exactly how it’s done, writes **Audrey Young**

The fame of Newfane as a culinary oasis may be known in southern Vermont but it has not travelled throughout New England.

When I told a couple of well-travelled women in Portland, Maine, I would be staying at the Four Columns Inn in Newfane, neither had heard of Newfane and thought it must be a spelling mistake.

If there was one mistake I made, it was to arrive at the Four Columns Inn just before sunset and to leave just after dawn. Next time, I would linger longer in this cutest of American villages, if only to sample more of what the Inn and its Artisan Restaurant had to offer.

Dinner was chilled local tomato gazpacho; hanger steak with sweet-sour shallot sauce, petite watercress, horseradish cream and truffle country fries; Vermont maple syrup creme brulee and raspberries; accompanied by a Marlborough sauvignon blanc. Breakfast — as if it were needed — was toasted granola, fresh local berries and creamy yoghurt.

The inn and restaurant opened in 1965 and it claims to be the founder of the farm-to-table movement, sourcing everything it could at the outset from local producers.

It established a top-notch reputation under the same chef for 30 years. The economist, J.K. Galbraith, who had a farm in the area, was a regular and Mick Jagger retreated for a time to the garden cottage on the 138-acre property.

Then it changed hands a few times and closed for a couple of years but reopened last year with 16 refurbished rooms — and long may it stay that way. Portland is the place to get seafood, especially freshly

landed lobster and done almost any way: in a bisque, a salad, steamed, baked or stuffed. At Boone’s on the wharf is a dish called lobster poutine, which is lobster meat in lobster gravy with French fries and cashew cheese — a local version of a Quebec classic of chips smothered in cheese curds and light brown gravy.

Also worth a visit is the Shipyard Brewing Company in central Portland, a large microbrewing company that has a tasting room and tours on a Tuesday night. It makes about 20 beers with 14 on tap at any one time. Leo, a New Zealand fan, and Hannah run the tasting room and don’t mind teaching the basics, such as the difference between ale and lager.

A flight of beer — four selections of 4oz glasses — costs \$4. Of my choices: pumpkin head; little horror of hops; seadog blueberry and root beer, the best was seadog blueberry.

Boston, with its strong Irish heritage, has plenty of pubs. The one closest to my hotel on Beacon Hill was Emmet’s, and a fine sanctuary it turned out to be on a late Saturday afternoon.

It’s only a few hundred metres from Boston Common and the Massachusetts State House.

It had a long menu of food and drink, seafood and Irish (Guinness onion soup, crab and smoked haddock fishcakes) and offers a sampling of four brews at a time.

The nook at the front of the pub was occupied by a group of musicians. They didn’t have a name. “They’re just friends,” an onlooker said.

For a formal dining experience in Boston, Erbaluce (air-baa-loo-chay) is a highly rated modern Italian restaurant close to Boston’s theatre district. The menu changes daily but if the melon soup or rabbit is on the menu, choose it. You’ll never forget it.



Checklist

NEW ENGLAND

GETTING THERE

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