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To Vermont by Train: Slow, But Relaxing and Weatherproof: Cameron on Transportation

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Like many, I love Vermont. But I'm not crazy about getting there.

It's about 300 miles from my home to Burlington, Vt. By car, that's at least five hours and about \$50 in gas each way. Flying may seem quicker, but with the airport drive it's not much better and about \$160. But there's another alternative: Amtrak.

There are three trains a day that will take you to (or close to) Vermont.

The Vermonter

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This is your best choice. The train runs daily from Washington to St Albans, Vt., (next to Burlington), coming through Stamford at about noontime each day.

It also stops in Bridgeport and New Haven before heading up the Connecticut River Valley to Vermont with stops in Brattleboro, Windsor, Montpelier, Waterbury (Stowe) and Essex Junction (Burlington), among others.

It's not the fastest run (Stamford to Essex Junction is eight hours), but it's certainly beautiful and relaxing. A frustrating reverse move at Palmer, Mass. has been eliminated with new tracks, shaving an hour off the run.

The Amfleet seats in coach are comfy. There's also business class seating (for a premium). The AmFood is tasty. The crew is great and there's even free Wi-Fi. Despite numerous stops, the train hits 80 mph in many stretches on smooth, welded rails. And the views of fall foliage can't be beat.

The Ethan Allen Express

This is your train if you're heading to Rutland, Vt., on the western side of the state. The train originates at New York's Penn State in the mid-afternoon, bypasses Connecticut and shoots up the Hudson Valley, arriving in Rutland just before 9 p.m. with New York stops Saratoga Springs and Glens Falls, and then in Castleton, Vt.

For Connecticut residents, the best strategy is to catch this train at Croton-Harmon in Westchester County, where there's plenty of paid parking available. In coming years, the Ethan Allen may get extended from Rutland north to Burlington and then maybe even to Montreal.

The train offers the same kind of Amfleet cars, coach and business, AmCafé and free Wi-Fi.

The Adirondack

This daily train from New York's Penn Station to Montreal doesn't go through Vermont, but it gets you close — if you don't mind taking a ferry ride.

The train leaves Penn Station at 8:15 a.m. and arrives in Port Kent, N.Y., on the western shore of Lake Champlain, about 2:40 p.m. You can then walk about 100 yards to the dock and catch the ferry to downtown Burlington.

This train offers the same kind of seating and Wi-Fi availability as the others. But on this train, you are traveling with a much more international crowd of Quebecois. Poutine anyone? In the fall, they even run a special dome car several days a week for the gorgeous scenery north of Albany.

Affordable, Weatherproof

Thanks to state subsidies and increasing ridership, fares on all of these Amtrak trips are very affordable. On the Vermonter, Stamford to Burlington (booked in advance) is just \$50 one-way and kids are half-price.

Remember: Amtrak runs in any kind of weather, so if you're thinking of skiing this winter when there's a blizzard and its 20-below zero, the train will get you there when airports and highways are closed.

So if you're planning a vacation in the Green Mountain State, getting there can be half the fun if you leave the driving to Amtrak — the “green” way to travel.

Jim Cameron on Trains

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Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com

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