



Over the River & Through the Woods

Seeing Vermont
by Horse-Drawn Sleigh

Sleigh rides like this one are a popular outdoor activity during the winter months. Deb Hodis, who owns Horses for Hire in Rawsonville, says the sleigh-riding season begins in November and can last until early April (weather permitting, of course). Her clients range from local people to second homeowners and out-of-towners from all over the world.

Young or old, it seems everyone enjoys an old-fashioned sleigh ride through the woods, and Hodis aims to please right down to the last detail. "It's very important to me for everything to look the way it used to years ago," she says. Her sleigh is adorned with 100 bells—hand cast by the Vermont Bell Company. And Hodis' team of horses wears a handmade leather harness dotted in brass.

The team itself is equally steeped in nostalgia. The breed, known as the Suffolk Punch, is rare (there are less than 1200 in all of North America).

She's fond of the horses for their reliability and willingness to work, as well as for their gentle demeanor.

Hodis' amiable team treats patrons to an unforgettable ride through the woods to the Winhall River. At this point in the journey, the horses will stop to rest while riders warm up by the campfire.

The picturesque spot is a popular choice for wedding proposals. Hodis will set up kerosene lamps, chairs and plenty of tissues near the fire. Then she'll step away to allow couples their privacy. "I tell them I have to go down and fix the trail, and wait until I hear tears of joy. It's one of my favorite parts of the job."

And whether you're a seasoned rider or are considering going for the first time, remember to call early. Not surprisingly, the holidays are busiest for most farms. All recommend calling at least four weeks in advance to book your trip. You'll be glad you did—there's no better experience of winter than gliding across the snow with family and friends along for the ride. ♦

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Jennifer Hazard frequently contributes to STRATTON MAGAZINE.