New Hampshire Drives Tourism with 100-Year-Old Diner

J.M. HIRSCH, AP Food Editor

This June 11, 2014 photo shows a plate of American Chop Suey at the Red Arrow Diner in Manchester, N.H. It may not be spelled out in the Constitution, but the simple fact of the matter is, you really canâ□t run for president without grabbing some grub at the Red Arrow Diner. Every four years during New Hampshireâ□s first-in-the-nation presidential primary, pretty much every White House wannabe makes a pilgrimage to this tiny almost 100-year-old diner tucked onto a side street of the stateâ□s largest city. **(AP Photo/Elise Amendola)**

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — It may not be spelled out in the Constitution, but the simple fact of the matter is, you really can't run for president without grabbing some grub at the Red Arrow Diner.

Every four years during New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation presidential primary, pretty much every White House wannabe makes a pilgrimage to this tiny almost 100-year-old diner tucked onto a side street of the state's largest city. They shake hands, babble talking points, kiss babies, sometimes they even take a bite of the over-the-top delicious menu offerings.

But your political aspirations need not be nearly so lofty to pay a visit to this diner, considered one of the best in the nation. In fact, a meal at the Red Arrow is a fine excuse for a family day out in this former mill city that is well into a downtown revival that has filled the streets with great eateries and good entertainment.

Start your day at the Red Arrow, an official historic city landmark. There are booths, but it is way more fun to sit at the old-school counter. That ensures you'll get sassed by the ladies dishing up the food. Plus, you have a better view of the case of pies piled mile-high with whipped cream and the towering layer cakes under glass domes waiting to be sliced.

The menu is everything you would hope for in a 24/7 diner —□□ monster stacks of pancakes and waffles, omelets of every design, oodles of eggs Benedict, and of

course ample burgers and classic diner sandwiches. And everything is served up big. How big? Big enough and delicious enough that the Red Arrow merited a visit by Guy Fieri for his "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives."

During my recent visit, a tuna melt on rye with a side of hash browns was everything it should be — mayo-rich, toasted just right, tangy and just a touch sweet, and too big to pick up easily. It required great restraint to resist the feverishly tempting "Mug o' Bacon", 20 slices of maple-cured bacon served standing upright in a mug for just $13.99 ($19.99 if you want to keep the mug).

No matter what you order, you'll likely overeat. So waddle out and head for some culture. A few blocks away is a hidden gem — the Currier Museum of Art. Not only does this beautifully designed museum boast a robust collection of significant paintings and sculpture â□□ including works by Pablo Picasso, Georgia O'Keeffe and Henri Matisse â□□ it is particularly well-suited for a family art immersion.

Which is to say, it has just the right mix of classic paintings and funky sculptures to keep kids' attention, and is just the right size so that by the time the kids get antsy you're done. And bonus â□□ the second Saturday of every month is "Creative Studio Saturday" (formerly called "Family Saturday," but apparently that was too clear and helpful a name) when the museum runs special tours and projects aimed at kids.

When you've had your fill of culture, head down a few blocks to Elm Street — the main drag through town — and head into Republic, a wine and tapas-style cafe with a farm-to-table vibe and a great cocktail list. Particularly if you come early, the kids won't feel out of place and you can enjoy a drink and a few sustaining nibbles. Get the hand-cut frites (fries) and whipped fresh spicy feta and everyone will be happy.

If the kids have lasted this long, they probably deserve a treat. Head south on Elm Street and you'll stumble across any number of sweet treats from candy stores, ice cream shops, a French bakery, and a cupcake shop.

If You Go...

RED ARROW DINER [1]: 61 Lowell St., Manchester, New Hampshire, 603-626-1118

CURRIER MUSEUM OF ART [2]: 150 Ash St., Manchester, New Hampshire, 603-669-6144

REPUBLIC [3]: 1069 Elm St., Manchester, New Hampshire, 603-666-3723

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[1] http://redarrowdiner.com/

[2] http://www.currier.org/
[3] http://republiccafe.com/