

{ Maine }

Dean's Sweets

475 Fore Street, Portland
(207) 899-3664; deanssweets.com



RICK AND MIMI STEADMAN (4)

What could possibly be better than a chocolate and cocktail pairing? At Dean's Sweets, I discovered the two literally rolled into one: truffles made with a smidge of alcohol. Heady choices include champagne, tequila, dark rum, stout, brandy, sake, bourbon, and single-malt scotch. Co-owner Dean Bingham (left) offers many other varieties, too, such as cayenne, maple, lemon-apricot-chèvre, and Maine blueberry. And did I mention the bacon-buttercrunch English toffee truffles? They may be the most intoxicating of all. Bingham makes his truffles in batches of just 250 and shares his secrets in private classes.

Learn



*Two-hour class
for three to six
people, \$75 per
person; includes
12 truffles each.*



Tour



Tour

{ Vermont }

Lake Champlain Chocolates

750 Pine Street, Burlington
(800) 465-5909; lakechamplainchocolates.com

Try to snag a window seat for this 30-minute presentation. It's called a tour, but it's held in a theater-like space with chairs positioned 90 degrees to windows into the factory, making it difficult for most to see activities being described. Our "tour ambassador" detailed the origins of chocolate and noted that the company enriches many of its products with local cream, maple syrup, honey, and butter. In addition to truffle slices, she gave us coupons for chocolate-chip cookies redeemable next door at South End Kitchen, Lake Champlain's casual eatery. Diners have a view into the adjacent facility where company founder/owner Jim Lampman's son, Eric, works as a chocolate maker as well as a chocolatier, buying beans directly from growers and transforming them into chocolate bars under the Blue Bandana label.

Free tours Monday through Friday, every hour, 11 a.m.–2 p.m.



Learn

{ Vermont }

Laughing Moon Chocolates

78 S. Main Street, Stowe
(802) 253-9591;
laughingmoonchocolates.com

Chocolatier Amelia Fotheringham (above) reached into the tempering pan and let a shiny ribbon of chocolate cascade from her gloved hand. Spreading some onto a tray, she pushed mini chocolate waves over basil-black-pepper truffle centers, forming a perfect curlicue atop each with a twirl of her index finger. I tasted a Vermont blue cheese-chocolate truffle (deliciously funky) as we watched, mesmerized by Fotheringham's speed and dexterity. Truffle dipping is demonstrated every afternoon, and candy is handmade all day long in the open-view kitchen. Edgy varieties include chipotle-cinnamon, red wine, chèvre-lavender-chamomile tea, and—be still my heart—dark chocolate-Sriracha. 🌿

Dipping demo with samples, 2 p.m. daily. Private, one-hour workshops (take home everything you make), \$125 for two people; \$150 for three or four people; \$25 each additional person.

{ New Hampshire }

Van Otis Chocolates

341 Elm Street, Manchester
(603) 627-1611; vanotischocolates.com

Larry LaChance led us past the store's antique glass cases filled with old-fashioned chocolates and upstairs to the factory. Stopping beside a low-sided box filled with extra-fine cornstarch (called molding starch), he picked up a narrow board and pressed its strip of bonbon-sized forms into the white powder. Each depression, the master chocolatier explained, is then ready to be filled with a dollop of creamy center. After air-drying, the centers go to the conveyor belt, where we watched women shepherd a bright-green, mint-flavored batch through a chocolate curtain. "The centers soften once they're covered in chocolate," LaChance revealed. *Aha!* I thought. *So that's how they put creamy fillings inside chocolates!* We topped off our tour by dipping Rice Krispies pops into a bowl of milk chocolate. They were intended as take-home goodies, but none made it out the door.

Tours may be booked Monday through Friday for five to 25 people; \$5 per person (individuals may sign up to join groups).

{ New Hampshire }

Dancing Lion Chocolate

917 Elm Street, Manchester
(603) 625-4043; dancinglionchocolate.com

Owner Richard Tango-Lowy (right) handed us squares of dark chocolate and guided us through a tasting: Sniff. Take a small bite and hold it inside the lips to identify the notes (berry? citrus?). Feel the silkiness. As the chocolate reaches the back of the mouth, notice how the flavors change. The class also used a mortar and pestle to grind chocolate nibs into a paste that tasted intense, but not at all bitter like most unsweetened chocolate. "That's because this is some of the world's finest chocolate," explained Tango-Lowy, who sources from small plantations in Madagascar, Ecuador, Ghana, and Guatemala. When each batch of chocolate arrives, he tastes it to determine what flavors will best complement its particular characteristics, and he never makes the same bonbon or truffle recipe twice. Gesturing to a case of jewel-like candies hand-painted with edible gold luster and tinted cocoa butter, he said, "We aren't an artisan chocolatier. We're an artist chocolatier."

Evening classes include "Introduction to Chocolate" and "Tasting Rare and Exotic Chocolate"



Learn

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RICK AND MIMI STEADMAN (3); KRISTEN BOUDREAU (2)

RICK AND MIMI STEADMAN (4)

