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New York: Today, ample sunshine, milder, high 75. Tonight, partly cloudy and mild, low 56. Tomorrow, sun, then clouds, a late shower, high 76. Weather map, Page B8.

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National Report

Can M-U-D Really Spell M-O-N-E-Y?

By KATIE ZEZIMA

LOWER WATERFORD, Vt. — In Vermont, mud season is the limbo between winter and spring, when the snow melts, the crocuses start peeking through and rubber boots and low gears are needed to navigate the mess that takes over many roads and fields.

For some, it is the perfect time to hop a flight to Florida or, for the more adventurous, go off-roading. But for the state's hospitality industry, it is painfully quiet.

"People come for summer, they come for foliage, they come for winter skiing, and we tend to get overlooked in the spring," said Sara Berthiaume of the Three Stallion Inn in Randolph, Vt.

For the last few years, the Three Stallion and 13 other inns have been trying to make muddy

northern New England a destination, offering free car washes, complimentary mudslides (the drink) and spa mud wraps for travelers looking for an off-season getaway.

"Your boots might get muddy, but it's a wonderful time of year," said Ms. Berthiaume, whose inn offers reduced rates for mud season. Some inns dreamed up the packages on their own, while others did so at the suggestion of New England Inns and Resorts, a regional trade group.

Karen Wilson of the Wildflower Inn in Lyndonville, Vt., said it was offering a \$300-per-person midweek mud season package that includes a complimentary mudslide upon arrival, a slice of Mississippi Mud pie, two mud wraps or maple sugar polishes at the inn's spa, a guide to muddy

bogs where visitors can spot a moose, and free soap.

Ms. Wilson said the inn tried to be unique with its package, but so far had found no takers.

For some innkeepers, promoting mud season is a way to show guests one of the region's more distinctive times of year.

"We come from Rhode Island, where we never heard of mud season," said Leslie Mulcahy, who owns the Rabbit Hill Inn here in Lower Waterford, a hamlet on the Connecticut River near St. Johnsbury. "For Vermonters and New Hampshire folks, this is just part of their lifestyle. They go out with ATVs and go mud-bogging. It's part of the local culture and another way to have fun."

Guests at her inn are urged to visit a maple sugaring house (the



DANIEL BARRY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

syrup is made in March and April), or get a good pair of boots and hike along the river. The inn also offers adventure packages, including ziplining and a truck safari, where a military vehicle chugs up the side of a muddy

mountain.

For some innkeepers, the challenges posed by mud season are mundane.

"I actually can't drive to my house right now because the mud is so bad. I park on the side of the

Doug and Janet Lacy of Scarborough, Ontario, had muddy trails largely to themselves last month in northern Vermont.

road and walk the 200 yards up my driveway," said Neil Van Dyke, general manager of the Golden Eagle Resort in Stowe, Vt., which, for \$99 a night, gives guests a room, a car wash and a muddy breakfast, which incorporates a lot of chocolate.

"It's almost like poking fun at ourselves," Mr. Van Dyke said.

Doug and Janet Lacy of Scarborough, Ontario, came to the Rabbit Hill Inn last week, their first time during mud season. The couple liked the fact that few tourists were around, and took a hike on the mucky banks of the Connecticut River.

"It was quite nice," Ms. Lacy said. "The mud didn't really bother me. As long as you have boots, it doesn't matter."