

Unpretentious luxury on the Maine coast



**ROCHELLE LASH
COUNTRY ROADS**

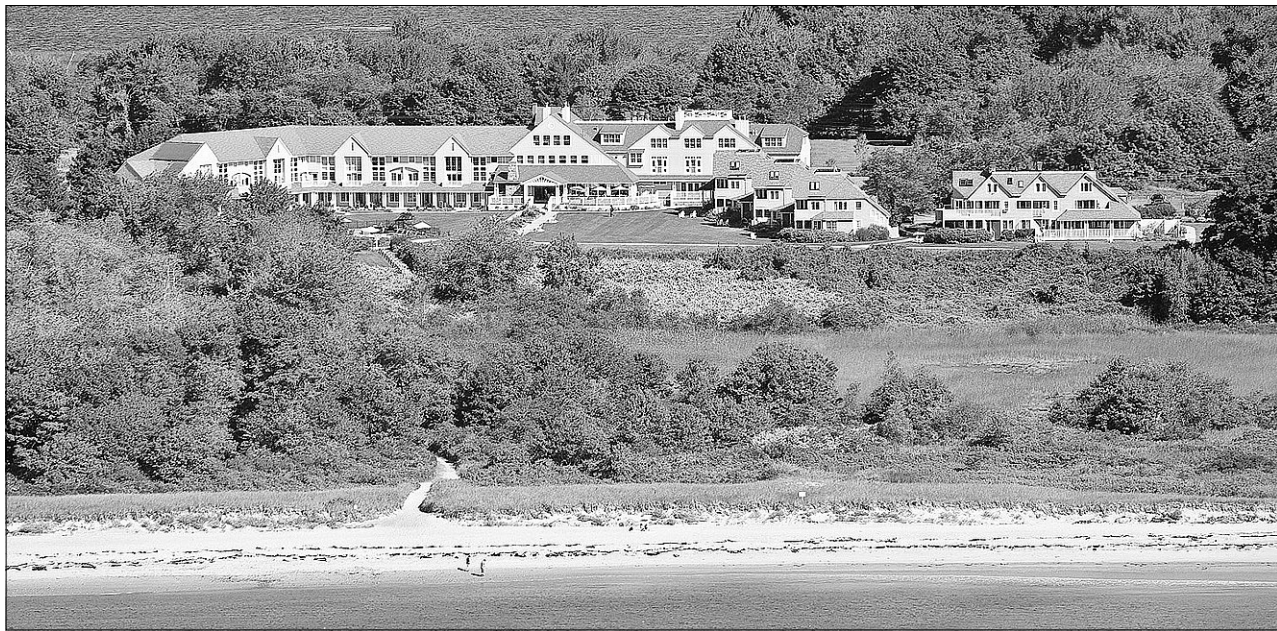
The soignée Inn by the Sea on the Atlantic Ocean outside of Portland, Maine, has two personalities. It has the soul of a simple seaside hotel and the elements of a sophisticated boutique resort.

This 57-room establishment always has been blessed with the coast's most valuable commodities: an oceanfront location and direct access to a sweeping sand beach. After a total overhaul, the Inn by the Sea has emerged luxurious and refined, with striking contemporary decor, award-winning gourmet cuisine, a fine spa and a bird sanctuary flourishing in gardens of flora, all native to Maine.

Although very upscale, the Inn by the Sea is unpretentious and understated, qualities that are typically Maine.

The fancy features go beyond the usual trappings. The hotel's admirable eco-conscious policy includes recycled water systems, solar panels, bio-fuel, eco-education for kids and a spa that has a gold-standard "green" certification. The hotel practices waste management, large and small. Here's a good one. The housekeeper provides little bags so that you can take home your bar of soap. It's worth it. The Inn's toiletries are from l'Occitane of France.

The guest rooms and suites come in a variety of



The Inn by the Sea is upscale but unpretentious, stretching its 57 guestrooms above a beautiful sandy beach.

IF YOU GO

Getting there: Cape Elizabeth, Maine, is eight kilometres south of Portland and a five-hour, 15-minute drive from Montreal. Cross into the U.S. at Stanstead and take Highways 91 and 93 south to Bethlehem, N.H., and Route 302 east.

Inn by the Sea: 800-888-4287, www.innbythesea.com Dog-friendly.

Prices: Including use of spa, steam room, fitness room, outdoor swimming pool, beach with chairs and umbrellas, rates (in U.S. dollars) start at \$229 per night, for a deluxe hotel room. One-bedroom suites, \$239-249; two-bedroom suites, cottages and townhouses, \$279-449, per night, for four people; \$20 for each extra adult.

Rates will increase May 27 and again June 20. No fees for dogs and dog amenities. No charge for children 14 and under. Breakfast, lunch, bar menu & dinner served daily. Until May 19, a three-course evening menu costs \$30 (Sun.-Thurs).

Portland information: 207-772-5800, www.visitportland.com.

shapes and sizes, from a deluxe hotel room ranging up to a two-storey suite with a butler's kitchen and patio overlooking the ocean. They all have sleek, contemporary lines, handsome furniture, warm textures and colours.

If you visit the Inn by the Sea in springtime, you will experience serenity, attractive prices and a clubby ambience. The lounge and dining room, intimate spaces with

ocean views, are popular with the residents of nearby Prouts Neck, an exclusive gated community. Signature drinks include the blueberry martini and the S'moretini for kids, but the cherry on top is that you can bring your dog with you to this bar.

"Non-dog people don't object," said the Inn's general manager Sarah Masterson. "Rather, the dogs are a social force, bringing people

together."

During summer, the Inn will be in high family gear. If your gang of youngsters has seen-it-all and done-it-all, they can test some of the Inn's inventive programs: exploring the beach with a naturalist, making munchies with the chef, seaside yoga, visiting a butterfly colony and art classes.

Almost everything at the Inn by the Sea is inspired by

the sea, including the hotel's spa. Signature treatments include the sea wave massage with aromatic oils, the sea breeze facial, the deepsea soothing massage and the marine body polish with sea salts and hydrating creams.

The Inn's Sea Glass restaurant is more like a stylish bistro than a staid hotel dining room, and the cuisine matches. Seafood rules with creative dishes like seared scallops with fennel salad, pan-roasted cod, paella or roasted mussels. The chef's Garden Dinners, served on farm tables on the lawn on summertime Wednesdays, are a big reason to hope for good, hot weather. These are limited-edition feasts featuring local delicacies. Or you can go all-lobster; all the time, starting with a lobster omelette for breakfast, a lobster roll for lunch, and for dinner, butter-poached lobster with citrus and leek risotto.

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Dogs are made to feel welcome, even in the bar

Wow! Bow-wow! Pooches have major privileges at Inn by the Sea, which organizes leisurely Dog Days with spa services and doggie daycare.

Among the free perks for every canine guest are porcelain bowls, beach towels, treats and fluffy dog blankets by L.L. Bean, the famous outfitter based in Maine.

Perhaps the biggest concession to dogs at the Inn by the Sea is that they are welcome in the hotel's lounge and on the terrace while their owners are having drinks or supper. Dogs are so prized here that they have their own bar menu with nibbles like Angus beef tips, homemade biscuits and meat "roaff."

Dog Days features in-room massages and Happy Hour on the lawn on Tuesdays during summer.

Doggie guests can lap up K-9 ice cream – at no charge – and when owners buy a signature cocktail, the Inn donates \$1 for an animal rescue organization.

In autumn, the Inn's swimming pool goes to the dogs – literally. During the last two weeks of October the pool is closed to people and open for pets to enjoy after a hot and sandy romp on the beach.

Dog guests also have their own books with titles like 101 Salvations and Bitchin' Beaches.

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COUNTRY ROADS

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