

Chebeague Island Inn offers unplugged simplicity

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JUNE 14, 2012



Arrive by ferry and settle down on this porch with antique wicker chairs and a wonderful view of Maine's Casco Bay.

Photograph by: Jeffrey Stevensen, The Chebeague Island Inn

If you are obliged to be a castaway during your next summer vacation, I recommend that you get stranded at the darling Chebeague Island Inn outside of Portland, Maine. (It's pronounced "shuh-beeg.") It offers a beautiful slice of New England life, complete with a tranquil and picturesque setting overlooking Casco Bay, country-elegant decor and good food.

Your first stop after arriving by ferry should be the Chebeague Inn's fabulous front porch, a 30-metre stretch of vacation bliss with a panoramic view of calm water and leafy islands.

By the time the ferry turns around and heads back to the mainland, you'll be checked in and settled into an antique wicker chair, cooled by a gentle bay breeze and lulled into a Maine state of mind.

Unexpectedly, the fog rolls in, creating drama.

The Chebeague Island Inn, nearly 100 years old, is run by Casey Prentice and his mother, Gerri Prentice. I was amazed that Casey thought of buying this historic property when he was only 23 years

old, and that he made it into a family business within a few years. He had a strong start, because the inn's previous owner had invested nearly \$5 million in new electrical and mechanical systems and interior decor. The inn isn't luxurious, but it is pure and simple, with handsome public rooms and pretty, white bedrooms. Here, it is all about peacefulness and soothing scenery. There are no televisions or radios on the property, so there is lots of time for romance and reading.

"Our clients are looking for a Maine experience where they can unplug," said Casey. It's the simplicity people love, so we avoided electronics, but we're considering iPads."

The living room is a spacious, inviting lounge, panelled in age-darkened wood and filled with deep, comfy sofas and traditional club chairs in soft pastel chintz. French doors open to the outside, flanking a huge stone fireplace that warms the chilly night air. For lunch and dinner, guests can choose the dining room or the charming screened porch, all with relaxed woven leather chairs and tables properly set with white linens. Other than a snack bar or two, the inn is the only dining game on Chebeague Island, and the Prentices have made it an attractive draw for overnight guests and also patrons who come by water taxi from Portland. I recommend that you arrive in time for a lunch of lobster rolls, mussels and fries, oyster sandwiches with aioli or the house burger. Then, it's only a few hours until the afternoon menu of such tapas-style bites as deep-fried lobster corn dogs, dates with goat cheese or devilled eggs with pancetta. The Monday Night Nostalgia evenings draw locals for well-priced comfort food such as meat loaf, chicken pot pie and apple cobbler ("but not your grand-mother's comfort food," Casey assured me). At dinner, the signature dishes are the Maine fiddlehead salad, foie gras custard, butter-poached lobster, halibut chowder and beef carpaccio.

The Chebeague has 21 guest rooms, each with

artisan-crafted furniture and queen beds dressed in heavenly white-cotton sheets by Matouk of Italy, and walls, floors and wood trim in various shades of eggshell, cream and vanilla. Each room has a splash of colour – red, yellow, blue or green – in the blankets, decorative pillows or artwork. The white porcelain bathrooms are stocked with toiletries by C.O. Bigelow in cute retro bottles with fragrances of lavender and mint. The inn is pricey, but garden-view rooms cost about \$40 U.S. less than those with water views, and rooms with shared bathrooms cost \$75-190 less than those with private bathrooms, depending on the date.

Chebeague Island is so quiet, it's easy to think there is nothing to do. But Casco Bay is considered a paradise for boaters because of its quiet waters, and the inn works with the Chebeague Island Sailing School, the Portland Schooner Co. for cruises on "tall ships" and Lincoln Kayaks, which organizes excursions and lessons. Guests can use the island's tennis courts and nine-hole Great Chebeague Golf Course and the inn provides free bicycles for tours of the island – the road from end to end is about eight kilometres.

The down-home annual jamboree, the Chebeague Chebang, June 30, will be a rollicking Fourth of July celebration with a live band, kids' games, a lobster bake and fireworks.

rochelle@rochellelash.com

IF YOU GO

Portland, Maine, is a five-and-a-half-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 and Route 55 south through Coaticook to Routes 141 and 147 toward Vermont border, continuing on Vermont 114, U.S. Route 3 in New Hampshire and Route 26 to Maine. From Yarmouth, Maine (a 10-minute drive north of Portland), take a 15-minute ferry to Chebeague Island.

Chebeague Island Inn: 207- 846-5155, chebeagueislandinn.com; 61 South Road, Chebeague Island, Maine. Open May-Oct. 22. Lunch and dinner served daily for guests and the public. Welcomes children 12 and over, \$50-95 U.S. per child.

Price: including breakfast, afternoon tea, ferry pickup, evening turndown, use of bicycles, tennis rackets, basic fishing gear, lawn games; depending on availability and date, \$199-275 U.S. for rooms with shared bathroom; \$275-464 with private bathroom. A two-room suite with a day bed, \$335-455 per night, for two adults, or \$475-685 for four adults.

Ferry from Yarmouth: 207-846-3700, ChebeagueTrans.com, \$15 U.S. for parking and \$15 p.p. round trip. Portland water taxi: 207- 415-8493, portlandexpresswatertaxi.com, \$65 one way for up to six people (booked through the inn).

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

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