



The living room at The Old Fort Inn has clubby, antique décor. KENNEBUNKPORT RESORT COLLECTION

Kennebunkport offers loonie-friendly deals

Canadians get discounts on visits to luxurious resorts and hotels

ROCHELLE LASH
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The Kennebunkport Resort Collection (KRC) of inns and hotels in Southern Maine is offering a 20-per-cent discount for Canadians to ease the sting of the lacklustre loonie.

Canadian travellers can call 855-346-5700 or go online to kennebunkportresortcollection.com and use the promotion code OHCANADA to get the discount, which is valid Sundays through Thursdays, Aug. 2-Sept. 3.

The participating hotels are:

Hidden Pond Resort: A laid-back luxury resort, Hidden Pond is a unique cluster of 16 designer-decorated cottages and 20 luxurious one-bedroom bungalows on an estate in the woods, two kilometres from the Atlantic Ocean at Goose Rocks Beach.

Hidden Pond is a nature-oriented domain with a car-free, summer

camp vibe for children and sophisticated features for grown-ups, including the Tree Spa, perched above ground in a forest of birches; an organic farm that supplies flowers, herbs and vegetables; and the restaurant Earth, a tour de force with striking rustic decor and country-gourmet cuisine.

The resort is casual, but super-stylish, with summer life centred around two swimming pools (one reserved for adults), lunches of lobsters rolls and BBQ hotdogs and s'mores by the fireside at night.

The Tides Beach Club: Located on a splendid stretch of ocean and sand, this seaside-chic boutique hotel has totally modernized a rambling, three-storey Victorian manor house.

The Tides blends colourful decor, a calm bay of the Atlantic Ocean at Goose Rocks Beach, and a hip bistro and bar. There are 21 pretty, inn-style rooms including two suites done in furnishings by

celebrity designer Jonathan Adler, with flat-screen TVs and posh l'Occitane toiletries from France.

The Lodge on the Cove: A family-centric motor lodge, The Lodge is a cheery getaway with a swimming pool, The Dory, an open-air retro lounge and bistro serving burgers and BLTs, and 30 spacious guest rooms that all have semi-private decks. Life is relatively tranquil on this hilltop, two kilometres from Dock Square, Kennebunkport, but there are movie nights and bingo at a clubhouse, plus daily happy hour and live music on Fridays and Saturday nights.

The Old Fort Estate at Cape Arundel Inn & Resort (two distinct, neighbouring locations, managed as one): The sedate and charming Old Fort Estate is one of Kennebunkport's secrets, high up in a residential neighbourhood.

At the Old Fort venue, the heated swimming pool is surrounded by mature trees and the guest rooms and public spaces are filled with vintage leather sofas and fine antiques.

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Want the feel of a beach town without the sand?

STEPHEN SINGER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADISON, CONNECTICUT Downtown Madison, Connecticut, has the feel of a beach town, though the beach itself is nearly three kilometres away. In addition to shops and restaurants, the town has one of the best independent bookstores in the state and a century-old independent movie theatre.

For sand and shore, head to Madison's Hammonasset Beach State Park, often called the crown jewel of Connecticut's state parks.

Hammonasset, located on Long Island Sound, offers more than a day at the beach. Visitors to Connecticut's largest shoreline park can explore its wetlands and woodlands and get up close to the dunes from a boardwalk. You can also bike, hike, kayak, camp, study nature or just watch birds.

CLASSIC ATTRACTIONS

The Madison Art Cinemas, which opened more than 100 years ago, screens first-run independent art and foreign and domestic films. Once used as a gym with a basketball court beneath its floor, it also serves as a community centre.

Make sure to visit R.J. Julia Booksellers in downtown Madison. You can spend hours browsing and if you visit at the right time, you can attend a book meeting with authors. The store has drawn Caroline Kennedy, Julie Andrews and Gene Wilder — not bad for a town 160 kilometres from Manhattan with a population of 18,000.

At Hammonasset, Meigs Point Nature Center is home to turtles, snakes, amphibians, crabs and fish.

The state is building a new nature centre that can accommodate large school groups and provide interpretive and educational program work spaces and exhibits. It's due to open next year.

TIPS

To avoid a parking fee at Hammonasset, bring your bicycle. Park your car at any parking lot at

shopping areas in Madison and ride the three-kilometre trip along Route 1, known locally as the Boston Post Road, to the Hammonasset park. Free bike racks are available.

For non-residents driving to the park, weekend parking is \$23.40, weekdays \$15.95.

The eastern trailhead of the Shoreline Greenway Trail is at Hammonasset.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The Madison Beach Hotel is on the beach overlooking Long Island Sound. In addition to beachfront rooms, the hotel offers a spa and wedding space and dogs can stay for an extra \$50 a day.

The Scranton Seahorse Inn is in downtown Madison. Owner Michael Hafford, who's also a pastry chef, advises potential customers to leave plenty of time for reservations. A month ahead of time will reserve a room for weekends, which range from \$185 to \$235, including breakfast, he said. A room costs \$150 to \$200 during mid-week.

Hammonasset Beach Campground, open through Oct. 12, offers more than 550 campsites.



R.J. Julia Booksellers in Madison, Conn. The shop is considered one of the best indie bookstores in the state. ROBERT GREGSON/CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tourists can now go where Napoleon didn't

FRANCES D'EMILIO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME Popes and royals resided there in glorious splendour. An emperor dreamed in vain of doing so, too. Nowadays presidents live there.

The Quirinal Palace, crowning one of Rome's ancient hills, is a storied gem whose architectural marvels, elegant gardens and fascinating history — four conclaves to elect pontiffs were held there in the 19th century — have been much ignored by tourists. It's not their fault. Until recently, only a small portion was open to the public, and not very frequently.

But President Sergio Mattarella, a constitutional law expert from Sicily who was elected as Italy's head of state this year and is the Quirinal's current resident, thinks the palace should also be the "home" of all Italians.

Starting in late June, tourists have been able to do what eluded Napoleon: step foot inside and stroll through sumptuous salons where popes sought to dazzle ambassadors and, later, where kings and queens entertained royalty.

The longer of two tours takes in the impressive royal housewares collection, thousands of exquisitely crafted porcelain and other tableware, including a set for a train trip taken on a royal honeymoon. The Grand Ballroom's chandeliers are so dazzling they could qualify for a tour in themselves.

Sometimes, visitors run into the president.

Standing ramrod straight as visitors pass through palace portals are the Corazzieri, the Quirinal's rough equivalent of the Swiss Guards. These towering guards with plumed helmets are more than ceremonial. Members of the paramilitary Carabinieri force, Corazzieri are an elite corps whose job is to protect the president.

The Quirinal Hill gives a straight-line view of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica across town. The palace was built, starting in the late 16th



Visitors wander in the Great Hall of the Cuirassiers inside the Quirinale Palace in Rome. DOMENICO STINELLIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

century, on the grounds of what had been the villa and vineyards of a cardinal.

Popes commissioned architects and artists to construct and adorn the palace, and by the end of the 16th century, it had become the summer residence of popes. No severe or silent retreat was this: In the gardens, Pope Clement VIII had constructed the monumental and musical Fountain of the Organ.

One of these papal commissions was the Pauline Chapel, whose gilded stucco decorated ceiling is sublime. But it was tough finding artists to decorate a chapel seen as a rival to the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, whose ceiling was frescoed by Michelangelo.

Artists "didn't want to accept what amounted to a challenge of Michelangelo," says Quirinal Palace staff art historian Louis Godart.

Montreal's U.S. Airport

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