

MAINE'S ALLURE

FAVOURITE GETAWAYS

BY ROCHELLE LASH

MAINE'S CHARMS ARE TIMELESS.

Mysterious, powerful tides wash over miles of white sand. The tempestuous Atlantic Ocean crashes against the rocky coast. The jagged shore is a land of lighthouses and lobster, weather-beaten cottages and unspoiled secret coves.

Canadians are great fans of Maine and the state welcomes more than four million vacationers a year from across the border, loyal visitors who spend upwards of \$1.2 billion on lodging, dining and shopping. Many go to the southern corner of the state for sun and sea, shopping and seafood. Maine's best beach towns and hotels capture all this—and more.

SEASIDE INNS AND BISTROS

The aristocratic White Barn Inn & Spa in Kennebunkport is the *ne plus ultra* of Maine lodging. It is a genteel getaway in an 1800s farmhouse with European-inspired gastronomy, classic New England decor and solicitous old-world service.

You can get spoiled quickly at the White Barn Inn. Imagine a morning in the bracing salty sea air aboard a schooner sailing along inlets of the Atlantic, followed by a picnic lunch of lobster and a languid afternoon soak in a bath perfumed with water lilies. Then it's on to a proper afternoon tea and a quick, restorative nap. You'll sleep well. White Barn's guest rooms are filled with country antiques and the beds



left: Portland's historic harbourfront features plenty of ships and shops. Greater Portland Convention & Visitors Bureau

top: Oceanfront seats await visitors in Kennebunkport, Maine. Maine Office of Tourism



are topped with the same Hypnos mattresses used by the British Royal family.

It's time for dinner, and it will be a very special one. The White Barn's Jonathan Cartwright, a Grand Chef of Relais & Châteaux, is a master of fine dishes such as quail with foie gras, lamb tenderloin or his signature steamed lobster with fettucine in cognac butter sauce. And yes, the dining room really is in a white barn, complete with bales of hay and vintage pitchforks.

A few kilometres north on pristine Goose Rocks Beach, The Tides is a *petit bijou*. A 100-year-old Victorian manor, it is having a dazzling second debut as the hip Tides Beach Club, a vision of informal chic. The Tides seduces with seaside simplicity—cabana-striped curtains and colour pops of ocean blue and coral against whitewashed furniture. It has an oceanfront bistro with the backdrop of the sunset and an all-Maine menu of clam chowder, steamed mussels and lobster rolls.

Lobsters thrive in Maine's cold, clean Atlantic waters. Maine's annual catch of this divine delicacy is nearly 100 million pounds, a livelihood for about 5,700 lobster harvesters. There are lobster pounds in every town throughout coastal Maine and although the market price fluctuates, you can usually feast on a one-pounder fresh from the tank for about \$10, with an outdoor seat at a picnic table. My favourites are Port Lobster in Kennebunkport and Beach Plum Lobster Farm in Ogunquit, both authentic.

COASTAL GEMS

Ogunquit is Maine's most famous beach town. Scores of T-shirt and souvenir shops have grown up around a glorious stretch of fine sand that sometimes gets crazy-crowded with sun worshippers. You can travel light—just a swimsuit and lotion—or tote your own colourful blanket, folding chairs, umbrellas and cooler for lunch.

The Beachmere Inn is an oceanfront oasis a 10-minute



walk from the fray and fracas of downtown Ogunquit. The resort manages to please all comers with a huge variety of rooms built around a lawn. Guests can play Frisbee or grill supper on the outdoor barbecues. Outfitted with kitchenettes, trundle beds and cribs, The Beachmere is wonderful for families, especially for its cookouts that feature lobster salad, sweet corn and burgers.

An hour further north along the Maine coast, the lively, trendy town of Portland is home to delightful attractions. Portland's centrepiece is its historic waterfront where you can visit fishmongers, a caviar boutique and LeRoux Kitchen, the shop with everything. Portland is a foodie destination, and within two blocks of the harbour area are creative contemporary eateries such as Hugo's, Fore Street and Walter's. There is culture, too. The Portland Museum of Art is exhibiting *The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism*, until September 8, with treasures from the

Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Still the ocean beckons. The soignée Inn by the Sea, a contemporary seaside hotel on the outskirts of Portland, is as fresh and sleek as if an Atlantic breeze had swooshed through, leaving only pure lines and strong colours. There is a spa, a superior dining room and 61 inviting rooms, suites and cottages. Inn by the Sea is as pet-friendly as they come. Doggie divas receive bitchin' beach towels and treats. In The Lounge, while owners are sipping blueberry martinis, canine cocktailers can have "meat roaff" and K-9 ice cream.

Freeport is an outlet town a 15-minute drive from Portland. Here, shopping is taken so seriously that the 100-year-old L.L. Bean sporting company stays open 24 hours a day. L.L. Bean also organizes clinics and try-outs of canoes, kayaks and fishing gear, all perfect testing grounds for novice outdoorspeople and their children. ■



travel planner

For more information, visit or call:

Maine Office of Tourism:

visitmaine.com; 1-888-624-6345

Portland Convention & Visitors Bureau:

visitportland.com

L.L. Bean: lbean.com; 1-877-755-2326

The White Barn Inn: whitebarninn.com

The Tides Beach Club:

tidesbeachclubmaine.com

Inn by the Sea: innbythesea.com;

1-800-888-4287

The Beachmere Inn: beachmereinn.com;

1-800-336-3983

opposite, top left: The wide, wonderful sand beach and Atlantic Ocean are main attractions in Ogunquit, Maine. Maine Office of Tourism

opposite, bottom left: The White Barn Inn's gourmet dining room really is in an old barn. Philippe Schaff

opposite, bottom right: The Tides, a seaside inn in a 100-year-old Victorian manor house in Kennebunkport, Maine, has stunning contemporary seaside decor. The Tides, Kennebunkport Resort Collection

right: The eco-luxury resort, Inn by the Sea, is located near Portland, Maine. Inn by the Sea




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