

Looking for New England

With Fred Holidays in its corner, American Cruise Lines has been making waves in the UK. **Jane Archer** samples a new cruise-and-stay package from Boston

I could have sworn I'd spent yesterday flying over the Atlantic, but we've just passed Exeter Street. Over there is Dartmouth Street. And hang on, where's that? Ah, Newbury Street.

Boston, I'm discovering, is like a mini-Britain. Even the US city's name was chosen by puritans from Lincolnshire who fled to the New World in 1630 to escape religious persecution but couldn't bear to sever all ties with England.

PARTY POLITICS

Fast forward to 1773 and their descendants were not so sentimental. At the Boston Tea Party, 342 chests were dumped in the harbour in protest at the taxes paid to Britain and revolution soon followed. Boston's 2.5-mile Freedom Trail takes in 16 museums, churches, ships and parks involved in the uprising.

How fitting, then, that I am in town for a cruise around the coast of New England on a ship named after the charter signed in 1787 by the newly independent US. With room for just 170 passengers, *American Constitution* is small enough to nip into the multitude of tiny ports we're visiting that promise history and scenery in spades. Plus lobsters, some 98 million pounds of which are caught each year in Maine.

Until recently American Cruise Lines' (ACL) New England Explorer cruise was just that – a cruise. Now it's offered as a cruise-and-stay, starting with a night in Boston and a tour of the city that ends at the ship. Judging by the numbers at breakfast, I'd say most passengers took up the option to make sure they didn't miss the ship.

As the only Brit in a sea of Americans, many of them ACL regulars, it is a welcome

Portland Head Light, Maine
PICTURE: American Cruise Lines

DESTINATIONS

THE US | NEW ENGLAND CRUISE



PICTURES: American Cruise Lines

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: American Constitution; The Breakers mansion, Newport; lobster bake; Camden harbour

ASK THE operator



Andy Hawke,
river product and sales manager, Fred Holidays

"The New England Explorer is a fantastic way to see the region, and great value as it's all-inclusive.

It will appeal to older couples who like small ships, as well as non-cruisers as there's plenty of land time. We can tailor-make packages, adding more time in Boston or a few nights in New York or Washington DC, with train travel between the cities."

chance to shrug off the jet lag and see some of the city before setting sail.

ACL launched 50 years ago and has 17 ships – increasing to 19 this year – but remains something of a mystery in the UK (unless you are talking Mississippi). That's not by choice, so Fred Holidays has been busy raising agents' awareness of the huge portfolio of river and coastal cruises the line offers.

RANGE OF ITINERARIES

The line offers more than half-a-dozen itineraries in New England, as well as voyages on the Chesapeake, Hudson, Columbia and Snake rivers, in the San Juan Islands, to Alaska and more.

"ACL's Mississippi river cruises account for 95% of what we sell, but once we get a '.co.uk' website [for ACL] with sterling prices, we'll be able to showcase its portfolio better," says Andy Hawke, Fred Holidays' river product and sales manager.

True to its name, the company is very American. Its ships are

“In Camden, being caught stealing someone else's lobster traps is a shooting offence

built, flagged and sail in the US, and all crew have to be American. Said crew were great: courteous, helpful and amused by my British accent. I spent many a fun evening discussing our language differences with Nathan, the guest services coordinator-cum-barman. Why do we have taps and they have faucets? We never did get to the bottom of it.

Nowhere is far on this cruise, so a few hours after leaving Boston, we tie up in Portland, Maine, and the next morning head off on various excursions. While imbibing craft beers on a 'walk, talk and taste tour' with guide Tom, I learn that the city was a stop on the underground

railroad that smuggled slaves to freedom in the north and used to be big on rum, which led to the Great Molasses Flood in 1919 – and a literal sticky end for 21 people. No wonder they prefer beer these days.

Lobsters turn out to be equally lethal. "We lose about six lobster fishermen a year," guide Sam tells me on a tour of the cute town of Camden. The fishermen are allowed 800 traps each, which they can attend to from Monday to Saturday. Sunday is a day of rest. What if you are caught stealing someone's traps? "It's a shooting offence."

PLENTY TO DO

The days in New England whizz by. In Maine, there's a maritime museum in Bath, while Massachusetts has an eerie Gothic castle in Gloucester, a peek into Newport's famed mansion houses and a ride on the Chappaquiddick (Chappy) ferry in Martha's Vineyard.

Each afternoon, I hurry back to hear guest speaker Tim Phillips' lively talks that cover everything

from New England's history to its gangsters and revolutionary heroes.

On the last day, I take to a 4x4 with driver Chase to speed up and down sand dunes outside Provincetown, Massachusetts, before braving the crowds in town for the July 4 weekend. Here, America's iconic national holiday looks like the scene from *Jaws* when the beaches open for the summer vacation, except (thank goodness) it's only the lobsters that are getting eaten. **TW**

BOOK IT

Fred Holidays' 12-night New England Explorer cruise-and-stay holiday pairs a night's B&B at the Four Seasons Hotel in Boston with a 10-night *American Constitution* voyage that calls at ports including Portland, Bar Harbor, Martha's Vineyard and Provincetown. Prices start at £7,995 based on a September 5 departure, including flights, transfers, meals, selected tours, drinks and tips. fredholidays.co.uk