

The Maine attraction

It's a common inclusion on fall foliage tours, but New England's northernmost state deserves a longer look, discovers **Nick Savage**



W

ith my back on the forward hatch, I watched the jib sheet catch the air, inflate, then swiftly shift to the starboard side of the 35-foot Hinckley pilot boat, clearing my face by just six inches.

Right at that moment, a snuffling, puffing sound cut over the flapping of the sail. Peering over the gunwale, I was delighted to discover a pod of harbour porpoises cavorting in the bow wave. Miniature dorsal fins marked out two infants in the cold, navy waters between Mount Desert Island and Little Cranberry Island, on the coast of Downeast Maine.

Maine in general, and Mount Desert Island in particular, was one of the first destinations in the US to receive tourists in the mid-19th century, when 'rusticators' – artists and free spirits unafraid of rugged living – would board with local farmers and fishermen, inspired by the beautiful scenery and pastoral lifestyle.

Wealth soon followed, and by the 1880s, tycoon families such as the Carnegies, Fords and Rockefellers all owned summer estates. Nicknamed Vacationland, Maine was one of the most popular states to visit ➤

Bass Harbor Head
Lighthouse, Acadia
National Park

PICTURE: Veer/Visit Maine

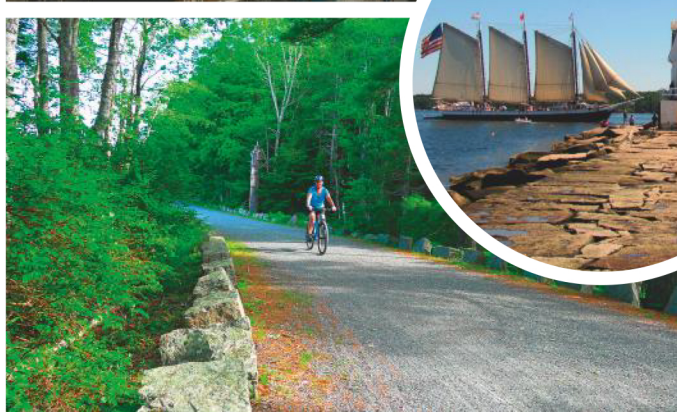
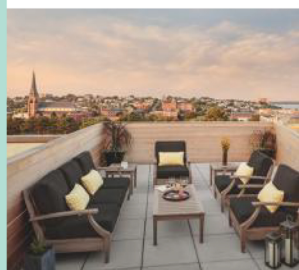
WHERE TO stay



Camden Harbour Inn: This property is one of the most luxurious places to stay in Mid-Coast Maine. A member of Relais & Chateaux, Camden Harbour Inn (pictured, above) has won accolades both for its exceptional resort and its restaurant, Natalie's at Camden Harbour. Rooms from \$203. camdenharbourinn.com

Asticou Inn: Situated among the pines on a rolling hill overlooking Northeast Harbor, the Asticou offers a taste of the gilded 19th century and is one of the oldest hotels on Mount Desert Island. Rates from \$214. asticou.com

The Press Hotel: Set in the centre of the Old Port in downtown Portland, the Press Hotel (pictured, below) is inspired by 1920s writers' offices and is the perfect place from which to foray into the city's vibrant arts and dining district. Rates from \$229. thepresshotel.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Portland; popovers at Jordan Pond House; Acadia National Park; Rockland; cycling in Acadia National Park
FACING PAGE: Boothbay Harbor
PICTURES: Visit Maine/Nick Cote; Relais & Chateaux; Irvin Serrano



prior to the pandemic, generating over \$6 billion a year through tourism. The majority of visitors flock to its craggy and atmospheric coastline, and with open spaces set to flourish when travel restarts, the quiet country roads and outdoor playgrounds of Maine are bound to be among the beneficiaries.

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

Play: Established in 1919 as Lafayette Park before being renamed in 1929, Acadia – which makes up about half of Mount Desert Island – is the oldest national park east of the Mississippi. Its hiking is world-renowned, with 158 miles of trails catering to trekkers of all levels.

Thrill-seekers abound on routes like Precipice and Beehive on the eastern side, which offer mind-bending views and vertiginous cliffside ladder climbs. Those who enjoy solitude will find it on western trails up Bernard and Mansell mountains, where the woods are thick and quiet. Plus there are plenty of gentler trails on the island.

It's a local tradition to finish a hike with fresh cloudy lemonade and popovers (similar to Yorkshire pudding but sweet rather than savoury) at Jordan Pond House.

If rock climbing appeals, Otter Cliffs is a great place to learn the basics and Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School has a long-standing presence in the area. Exploring the coastline by kayak is another great way to see birds and marine life, and local outfit National Park Sea Kayak Tours runs trips from Bar Harbor, the island's largest town.

John D Rockefeller Jr personally oversaw the

construction of 47 miles of carriage roads through the park. Closed to automobiles, guests can still explore these winding wooded lanes by horse-drawn carriage at Wildwood Stables, but the more popular option is by mountain bike, which can be hired at Acadia Bike Rentals. During winter, cross-country skis can be rented from Cadillac Mountain Sports and used on the same roads.

Pause: During the summer months, the national park draws photographers in search of the perfect landscape or wildlife-in-action shot. Stock up for adventures at the area's independent cafes and restaurants. Milk & Honey in Northeast Harbor sells the best sandwiches, but if you're looking for something more substantial, you can't go wrong with lobster on a jetty right by the water. Thurston's offers some of the freshest, drawing daily from the lobstermen's co-op.

PORTLAND

Play: Portland is Maine's largest city and, culturally, its beating heart. Explore the Casco Bay Islands on a boat cruise with Calendar Islands Sailing Cruises, or try stand-up paddleboarding or kayak tours with Portland Paddle.

Pause: Widely considered to be one of the best small cities in the US for dining, Portland has become a beacon for chefs looking to cook with exceptional local produce and has one of America's most-established farm-to-table movements. A walk through the Old Port will reward diners with a bevy of choices, running from classic restaurants like Fore Street to high-end Japanese at Miyake and modern oyster bars such as Eventide.

top tip

Learn more about the wide open spaces of the US on a Visit USA webinar, in association with *Travel Weekly* sister title *Aspire*. Head to Facebook at: bit.ly/VisitUSAwebinar

The craft-brewing scene is similarly creative. Board the brilliant green Maine Brew Bus to be whisked through the area on a whistle-stop tour, tasting at breweries old and new including Geary's, Bissell Brothers, Rising Tide and Maine Beer Co.

MID-COAST MAINE

Play: Quieter and more laid-back than either Portland or Acadia, the Mid-Coast runs from Boothbay Harbor to Blue Hill and sees Maine at its most unassuming,

where working waterfronts coalesce with open-minded communities. There is an abundance of state parks along the coast where you can drink in fresh air and stunning scenery, usually with a lighthouse to boot.

Pause: Many restaurateurs are staking out new ground along Maine's coast, with Belfast, Camden and Rockland offering some of the state's best eateries. Alternatively, you can tour the waterside in search of Maine's best lobster roll, with perennial favourites including Red's Eats and McLoons. **TW**

DESTINATIONS

MAINE | THE US

BOOK IT

Globus has a 10-day Classic Fall Foliage tour departing Boston and taking in Portland, Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park, among other New England highlights. Activities in Maine include a lobster bake, a drive through the park and a visit to the Asticou Inn. Prices start at £1,925, excluding flights. cosmos.co.uk

Vacations to America has a 10-day self-drive holiday, New England Coast to Mountains, which includes two nights in Bar Harbor to explore Acadia National Park, plus stays in Boston, Kennebunkport and New Hampshire. Priced from £2,023, the itinerary includes nine nights' accommodation, car hire and flights. vacationstoamerica.com

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