

Midcoast Maine

THE INSIDERS' GUIDE TO THE HOTTEST VACATION DESTINATIONS



OUR WOODEN KETCH RISES and falls with the waves, tossing salt spray against my cheeks. Grey clouds muffle the sun and a breeze beats against the sails with a steady cadence. It's the rhythm of Midcoast Maine, a rugged stretch of coastline where nature's forces have frayed the fabric of land. Its moist and moody climate, verdant peninsulas and sweeping water vistas are the antithesis of Colorado—the antidote for altitude, the yin for the mountain state's yang.

My exploration of the Midcoast stretched 60 miles as the crow flies on Highway 1 from Brunswick to Camden. However, it's the roads that hang like a

tassel from the main thoroughfare that are the most intriguing. These meandering byways lead to hidden fishing villages, lighthouses and narrow points of land surrounded by sparkling water. Because it is less compact and offers fewer tourist trappings than its southern neighbor, Kennebunkport, the region isn't as crowded. And therein lies its charm. The mystique of the sea is more palpable when the economy is based on seafaring, when small villages thrive year-round and exude a uniquely independent culture.

VISIT THE FANTASY

FEATURED IN THE

FAMOUS PAINTING

'CHRISTINA'S WORLD'

PLUS PICTURESQUE

TOWNS THAT

OFFER EVERYTHING

FROM KAYAKING

TO ANTIQUE

SHOPPING





CITIES, SHORES AND BEACHES The sea has been the Midcoast's source of commerce from its beginnings. More than a century ago, laborers hewed "Tall ships" out of local lumber. Today, Bath Iron Works, under the General Dynamics umbrella, builds vessels from battleships to yachts and is one of the largest employers in Maine. The city of Bath manages to be industrial and charming at the same time. Huge cranes dominate the Kennebec riverfront near the factory while historical architecture and wonderful restaurants fill the city center.



The town, which also offers a fascinating maritime museum, is a gateway to two of the region's nine peninsulas.

Beautiful sandy shores wait near the tip of Phippsburg Peninsula at Popham Beach State Park. The beach is near Fort Popham State Historic Site, a crumbling edifice built in 1865 that endured three conflicts—the American Civil War, the Spanish-American War and World War I. On the Georgetown Peninsula, Reid State Park also features beaches as well as marshlands and tide pools.

Boothbay Harbor, tucked into a peninsula of the same name, is a launching point for whale watching, sport fishing and kayaking. This picturesque town is also the perfect destination for couples in which one craves adventure and the other enjoys more sedate activities.

I could have shopped for antiques all day in Wiscasset, dubbed "The Prettiest Village in Maine," but I took time to stand in a 45-minute line at Red's Eats. This take-out shack at the corner of Main and Water streets cooks up lobster rolls—piled with a pound of fresh meat—that have even Martha Stewart salivating.

THE DETAILS

GETTING THERE: UNITED HAS ROUTES TO PORTLAND, WHICH IS APPROXIMATELY 28 MILES SOUTH OF BRUNSWICK, FROM BOTH CHICAGO O'HARE AND WASHINGTON DULLES. CAPE AIR OPERATES COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS FROM BOSTON TO THE KNOX COUNTY REGIONAL AIRPORT, 10 MILES SOUTH OF ROCKLAND. PRIVATE AIRPLANES CAN ALSO FLY INTO THE REGIONAL AIRPORT. BOTH PORTLAND AND KNOX COUNTY HAVE ON-SITE CAR RENTALS.

WHERE TO STAY: THE BED-AND-BREAKFASTS THAT MAKE UP THE HISTORIC INNS OF ROCKLAND EACH HAVE THEIR OWN PERSONALITY AND AMBIENCE. CONSIDER THE BERRY MANOR INN, THE LIMEROCK INN, THE CAPTAIN LINDSEY HOUSE OR THE SAMOSET RESORT. CALL 877-762-4667 OR VISIT WWW.HISTORICINNSOFROCKLAND.COM. FOR LUXURY VACATION RENTALS, VISIT WWW.CAMDENAC.COM

WHERE TO EAT: BACK STREET BISTRO, 11 TOWN HALL PLAZA, BRUNSWICK; SOLO BISTRO, 128 FRONT STREET, BATH; CAFÉ MIRANDA, 15 OAK STREET, ROCKLAND; IN GOOD COMPANY, 415 MAIN STREET, ROCKLAND; BOATHOUSE BISTRO, 12 BYWAY, BOOTHBAY HARBOR; THE THISTLE INN, 55 OAK STREET, BOOTHBAY; EPHEMERE CAFÉ & WINE BAR, 51 BAYVIEW STREET, CAMDEN

WHERE TO SHOP: ABACUS, UNUSUAL JEWELRY, CRAFTS AND HOME ITEMS, 6 MCKOWN STREET, BOOTHBAY HARBOR; JOHN SIDELI ART & ANTIQUES, 52 WATER STREET, WISCASSET; DENNIS AND NATALIE LOUWERS ANTIQUES, 54D WATER STREET, WISCASSET; STONEWALL KITCHEN, SAMPLE, THEN BUY SPECIALTY FOOD ITEMS SUCH AS RASPBERRY PEACH CHAMPAGNE JAM, 13 ELM STREET, CAMDEN; SALON ETIENNE, PERRET IS A MASTER PLATINUM SMITH WHO SPECIALIZES IN COLORED DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING RINGS. 14 SEA STREET, CAMDEN



ART AND LOBSTERING The tasty crustaceans are also a draw in Rockland, especially during the Maine Lobster Festival. The industry is integral to the city, but has recently experienced falling prices and increasing operating costs. And while some fear the days of independent lobstering are numbered,



residents of this close-knit community continually band together in support.

Rockland is a study in contrasts—a place where sun and wind-burnt lobstermen coexist with urban hippies and talented artists. It's no wonder the town has become an artist's enclave. It overlooks scenic Penobscot Bay, where colorful trap-marking buoys bob in the waters, sailboats tack and a lighthouse guides vessels home. Anchored by the Farnsworth Museum and Wyeth Art Center, Rockland celebrates its creative side on the first Wednesday of each month. During the Art in Rockland Gallery Walk, galleries stay open late and offer wine-and-cheese tastings as well as chances to visit with locals. At the art museum, visitors can purchase tickets to the Olson House, the farmstead depicted in Andrew Wyeth's famous painting, "Christina's World."

FOR KIDS

CAPTAIN JACK LOBSTERBOAT ADVENTURES,

ROCKLAND, 207-542-6852,

WWW.CAPTAINJACKLOBSTERTOURS.COM;

MORNING IN MAINE, ROCKLAND, 207-691-7245,

WWW.AMORNINGINMAINE.COM; **MAINE EASTERN RAILROAD,** BRUNSWICK OR ROCKLAND, 866-637-2457, WWW.MAINEEASTERNRAILROAD.COM;

PROJECT PUFFIN VISITOR CENTER AND THE MONHEGAN BOAT LINE PUFFIN CRUISE, 311 MAIN STREET, ROCKLAND, 207-372-8848,

WWW.MONHEGANBOAT.COM; **OWLS HEAD TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM,** ROUTE 73, OWLS HEAD 207-594-4418, WWW.OHTM.ORG; **BOOTHBAY RAILWAY VILLAGE,** ROUTE 27 SOUTH, BOOTHBAY

Rockland is also home to the Maine Lighthouse Museum, with its glimpse into the intriguing world of these life-saving beacons.

MOUNTAINS OF SAILS My last stop, Camden, was the sharpest contrast yet to my home state of Colorado—a quintessential New England town, postcard pretty with tall church spires, period homes and sweeping views of the ocean. On a wind-swept, moody day, I wandered through Camden Harbor Park, which overlooks the bay. A fleet of Windjammer schooners danced on the waters, their unfurled sails fluttering like a tiny undulating mountain range. It was then I realized that yin and yang aren't just opposites, they are complementary. **CE**

The ocean is the antidote to anything that ails Parker-based writer Shelly Steig.