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Courtesy MC Perkins Cove

PORTLAND, MAINE TRAVEL GUIDE

3 Best Day Trips from Portland, Maine

After getting your fill in Portland, head to these three nearby destinations for great shopping, biking, and eating.

BY ALEXANDRA HALL
September 22, 2020

When in Maine, way just tends to lead on to way. One minute you're happily ensconced at a diner in Portland, the next you're marveling at the natural beauty within an hour's drive. Before you know it, you're haggling over handmade pottery and biking in Kennebunkport, strolling along the Atlantic's crashing waves in Ogunquit, or hiking to the rare nesting grounds of osprey in Freeport. When you get the urge to explore some of the most memorable sights around the city, here are a few spectacular places and ways to do it, all of them easy to fold into your next Maine trip. Read on for our picks for Portland's best day trips.

Click the link to read our complete Portland, Maine city guide.

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Jonathan Carroll/Alamy

THE KENNEBUNKS

It was the shipbuilding, farming, and fishing industries that set the stage to turn Kennebunkport and Kennebunk into two ridiculously cute seaside summer resorts in the first place. But for more than a century now, it has been the historic mansions, charming inns, posh shops, soft-sand beaches, and renowned restaurants that have bolstered its cachet. The two sibling towns meet at the Kennebunk River, home to Dock Square's slew of boutiques and art galleries, and the working harbor where you can catch a whale watch, eat a lobster roll, or sip a hoppy locally brewed ale.

Courtesy White Barn Inn, Auberge Resorts

HOTEL

White Barn Inn, Auberge Resorts Collection →

$$$ | READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2020

Ever since Kennebunk's White Barn Inn & Spa opened in 1973, the 26-room, 19th-century main house and two renovated barns have attracted couples seeking enchantment and celebrities seeking discretion. They've indulged in all the decadent property has to offer—the infamously rich lobster fettuccine with cognac coral butter sauce; the 90-minute Himalayan Salt Stone Massage in the spa; the hand-packed picnic baskets made for sunrise (or sunset) beach picnics. What's most remarkable about The White Barn Inn is the extent to which they seem to have thought of everything: You walk away from a stay here wondering why all of life can't be this seamless.

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Douglas Merriam/Courtesy Sandy Pines

HOTEL

Sandy Pines Campground – Glamping →

$$$

Known for years in Kennebunkport as Salty Acres Campground, it was bought and renamed Sandy Pines by local hoteliers Tim Harrington and Debra Lennon, who have also produced a handful of upscale and luxury spots around town. The entire campsite was renovated and reopened in 2017 with glamping tents and retro-cool mobile homes, a nostalgia-driven general store (peddling everything from s'mores fixings to lobster rolls), a heated saltwater pool, sparkling new bathhouses, and a swanky, modern lodge centered around games and a fireplace.

Alamy

SHOP

Dock Square →

Window shopping is elevated to an art form in this cluster of boutiques, art galleries, and curiosity shops around Kennebunk's Lower Village and Kennebunkport's downtown neighborhoods. It's an ideal stomping ground for those who treasure independent and local stores crammed with creative and clever wares. Be prepared to bring home paintings, sculptures, and jewelry by local artists; high-end clothing; handmade goods like candles or furniture; and plenty of touristy gifts for your friends and family.

Alamy

ACTIVITY

Goose Rocks Beach →

As Maine beaches go, this one is exceptional for one thing: its powdery white sand. You can walk barefoot on the entire three miles here without worry that you'll go home bruised and battered from kicking rocks. The beach is very DIY, unless you're a guest of The Tides Beach Club or one of its sister restaurants (in which case you'll be provided with chaise lounges and umbrellas). You'll have to hit up the Club's restaurant for food, too.

Courtesy Hidden Pond/Photo by Adam Policky

HOTEL

Hidden Pond →

$$ | READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

Drive down the subtly marked dirt road into the resort, and the first thing you come upon is a garden on your right and a small pond on your left. Slowly, you realize that tucked between them and the countless birch trees are cottages and treehouse suites. Hidden Pond has been expanding over the decade-plus since it opened, adding private bungalows and cottages and one of the standout restaurants in the entire state in Earth. Personal, quiet, and soothing, but with plenty of activities for all ages, this is one of those places people come back to again and again.

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Courtesy Batson River Brewing & Distilling

ACTIVITY

Batson River Brewing & Distilling →

With a notably strong craft cocktail game, Batson River brings in plenty of people for drinks made with its own spirits, like the "Whatsa Matcha," made with the house's Riparian Gin, matcha, and honey. Or the Rhubarb Sour, a mix of lemon, rhubarb, and Batson's Langsford Road Whiskey. That said, the beers here have their own fan club; a rotating list of about ten IPAs, pilsners, and ales are sampled from with gusto (and no shortage of analysis and discussion) by regulars and beer tourists alike. The food menu is its own delicious reason to come. Fried chicken comes with delectable duckfat cornbread and jalapeño and jicama ginger slaw. It's the perfect foil to any of the soothing ales.

Courtesy The Tides Beach Club

BAR

The Tides Beach Club →

$$

The restaurant at this hotel sits directly across the street from, and looks out to, Goose Rocks Beach, a gorgeous slice of shoreline. From the kitchen, though, you won't find any culinary acrobatics, precious ingredients, or esoteric dishes. The lobster roll comes on a meticulously grilled roll, either cold with a light dress of garlic aioli and scallion, or hot with a pour of tarragon and brown butter. The short ribs are braised in apple cider and fork-tender. The chicken sandwich arrives fried to a light crispiness on the outside, is moist as can be in, topped with pickled green cabbage, and locally made maple mustard.

Courtesy Cliff House Maine

HOTEL

Cliff House Maine →

$$ | READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

Just a few steps in the front door, and you're confronted with the hotel's raison d'être: the jaw-dropping cliffs. Framed by epic floor-to-ceiling windows, they dominate the lobby, tumbling down from the resort's perch down to the crashing ocean waves. The rooms are in keeping with the rest of the resort's quiet coastal cool aesthetic. Navy buffalo check bedding beneath the Cuddledown comforters here, subtle striping on drapes and carpets there. But just as in the lobby, the real star is outside the window, where the Atlantic Ocean does its thing with waves crashing or lapping, gulls crying, and breezes soothing beneath your private terrace.

MAKE A RESERVATION

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Ninette Maumus/Alamy

Ogunquit

It isn't just the juxtaposition of culture and nature that makes this former shipbuilding village a standout. Though there certainly is that, the area's status as a longtime artist colony is made even more resplendent set against its shores and sprawling beaches. But then there's the other juxtaposition—crowds of families all summer here for the beaches; city slickers hanging at the trendy bars; and LGBTQ+ tourists and business owners, many of whom have decided they love it here so much, they now visit year-round.

Alamy

ACTIVITY

Ogunquit Beach →

Running alongside the town of Ogunquit, this beach couldn't be easier to access. The 3.5-mile-long stretch of soft sand is a big hit with families for its consistently gentle surf and its collection of tide pools that both toddlers and parents love. The clean, clear waters are fantastic for swimming, and at low tide, there's extensive room for long walks onto sand bars. The middle section of the beach is called Footbridge Beach, and it's where you'll find public restrooms, gift shops, changing rooms, and snack bars.

TAGS

NATURE

Meadowmere Resort

The personal qualities of an inn with the functionality of a resort, The Meadowmere is an independent property owned and run by the Caverzola Family since 1985. The Inn/rest inn around, it's not. But on vacation, that can be an attribute. Its staff is friendly, no-no-be, and in handsome and well-kept rooms, plethora of amenities (from the spa to the indoor/outdoor pools to ping-pong to shuffleboard to bocce ball courts) dogs and ecotourists have made it an annual favorite of families visiting Maine.

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Maine

NATURE

Ogunquit Trolley

The hop-on, hop-off Ogunquit Trolley is a convenient and inexpensive way to get around downtown Ogunquit's crowded streets in the summertime. Isn't it also a great way to see the town's biggest attractions, from Perkins Cove to Marginal Way to Ogunquit Beach. While trolley drivers aren't formal tour guides, they sometimes offer commentary on points of interest and answer questions from riders. There's no need to buy tickets in advance—just pay the driver the $2 fare. For adults, $1.50 for kids. They run every 15 minutes and operate seasonally, from late June through mid-October.

Country, MC Studios Cove

RESTAURANT

MC, Perkins Cove

$$

Even if they didn't have one of the most beamed-about burgers in New England (the $26 Kobe burger has its own, very committed following), co-owners and James Beard Award-winning chefs Mark Gaier and Clark Frazier would be packing the house on the strength of the rest of their chic bistro menu. While the waters crash against the rocks outside, diners inside can enjoy a dinner of fish and shellfish with haddock, clams, hominy corn cake and smoky tomato butter or the delectable, sweet-tart duck confit with peach-lemongrass sauce and tamarind.

TAGS

NATURE

Marginal Way

Named for being a "margin" between land and sea, Marginal Way is a stunning cliff walk. Along the 1.25-mile paved path are 30 benches perfect for soaking up the incredible views of crashing Atlantic waves, and perhaps spying some seals. It's paved and open year-round, but you'll want to be careful in winter—there can be icy patches. Strolling the trail is free, and anyone who adores nature walks and the ocean will delight in the experience.

Maine Coastal Cottages

Freeport, Maine

Yes, of course it's about the giant duckboot, as well as all the other designer outlets that spiral out from L.L. Bean's world headquarters. But that's far from Freeport's only lure. What distinguishes this retail haven from others is how seamlessly it has woven its local businesses, the area's history, and its stunning natural setting, which includes coastal and mountain hikes, and farmlands. All of it is under an hour drive from Portland.

DINING

Harraseeket Inn

$$$ | $ BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER, BAR, VIEW, BOOK, BOOK

At the Harraseeket Inn, you'll find traditional New England decor in a 1850 Greek Revival filled with wood-burning fireplaces and antiques at nearly every turn. This legendary Freeport hotel is owned by the inimitable Nancy Gray Cong, a champion and pioneer of Maine tourism, and her family. Their personal passion for preserving the area's heritage shines in every nook and cranny, the staff (many of whom have worked for the hotel for two decades) and their connection to the regulars who visit from inside and outside of the state.

BOOK A RESERVATION

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Country Boys Beer Company

RESTAURANT

Maine Beer Company

Maine Beer Co. has a fervent and an ever-widening loyal and regional fan base, which shows up at the brewery's Tasting Room all the and pass dissertine to sample the company's many creations (there are 20 draft lines, plus bottles the company sells to go). Sit at the bar or at a table, and you can watch the beer flow in warm weather, dig into wood-fired pizza, hang at the bar, and obsessor at the water fountain, sipping each brew and discussing it with a seriousness that only real beer geeks can muster.

DINING

Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park

Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park in Freeport is coastal Maine at its finest. The winding hiking paths bring you through pines, hemlocks, and birches, set on salt marshes and along Casco Bay's rocky shoreline. With multiple trails, hikers can be as short as 20 minutes to as long as a few hours, so visitors can easily customize their time spent here. Depending on hiking ability and interest level. Want a more challenging hike? Take the Coastal Trail or simple enjoy ample to sit on a rock and enjoy the view, while others come for a picnic.

DINING

Freeport Village Station

Anchored by the world's retail headquarters of outdoor equipment and gear outfitter L.L. Bean, Freeport Village Station is a mishmash of discount designer shops and a few other retailers, plus a food court and a movie theater. The food court mainly maintains the area's history and rural nature, so even while the outlets are all about shopping, if you have to do a walk-for minutes off-of Main Street and you're among historic homes, Stroll a few more minutes away, and you're in the wilderness of Casco Bay.

Country, Maineiacs Lunch & Lobster Company

RESTAURANT

Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster Company

$$

A true seafood shack of the red-boathouse-and-old-wooden-tables variety, this Freeport landmark has been operated by the Coffin Family since 1970 and not a bit has changed in that time. The Harraseeket Lunch and Lobster Company is a no-frills place where everyone from the local fishermen to the tourists are welcomed around. There are absolutely no reclaimed wood furniture being broken at this restaurant, but what it does, it does extremely well. Some favorites include fried clams and lobster rolls, and the homemade desserts—especially the whoopie pies and blueberry pies—are worth a trip on their own.

Bar in Naval Shoe Office

NATURE

Bradbury Mountain State Park

Think of Mount Bradbury as a one-size-fits-all hike—there are trails for almost all skill levels and uses, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, and dogs are all welcome. It's easy to get to from downtown Freeport, has plenty of parking, and is open year-round. Its winter, there are some show rentals available in summer it's popular for camping. All you long, there are spectacular views across its 850 forested acres.

TOPICS: BYO GUIDES

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