

If Maine's much-debated slogan, "the way life should be," were a place, the towns of Camden and Rockport and their surroundings might be it. On the Eastern Seaboard, where mountains meet ocean, the area has long attracted rusticators and "vacationlanders" who far outnumber residents in summer. These clapboard-and-brick towns sit two miles apart on schooner-spotted harbors next to rounded mountains and sparkling freshwater lakes. What more does a rural getaway need? In this case, it's a vibrant community of year-round locals who've created a nexus of arts, dining and outdoor activities to rival some cities. The area's charm lies in an authentic belief in family businesses, locally grown food and ingenuity against the odds. Not to mention, they made it through the winter, and summer is everyone's reward.

36 Hours in Camden and Rockport, Maine

1) 3 p.m. Beans and books

The Owl & Turtle Bookshop Café in Camden is the place to dish or talk books and coffee with the owners, Craig and Maggie White, and their amiable staff. They'll wax rhapsodic about the Coffee on the Porch beans, roasted at home by a local teacher and brewed here, or upcoming readings with local authors like the best-selling crime novelist Tess Gerritsen and the children's book author and illustrator Chris Van Dusen. The former boat shop on Bay View has been renovated to include nooks with chairs and beanbags for relaxing with lattes and books. For those considering a move to the area, grab "Ditch the City and Go Country," by the local writer-photographer-blogger Alissa Hessler.

2) 4 p.m. Lay of the land

The view from the top of Mount Battie inspired the words that launched Edna St. Vincent Millay's career as a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. "All I could see from where I stood was three long mountains and a wood; I turned and looked the other way, and saw three islands in a bay." Accessed by a 1.4-mile trail and road, there's a stone World War I commemorative tower at the top and a hawk's eye perspective of Camden and the islands of Penobscot Bay. Also visible is Camden Snow Bowl, the community-owned ski mountain that hosts the U.S. National Toboggan Championships every February. Admission (\$6) to Camden Hills State Park includes the network of hiking trails, a campground with hookups, plus picnic tables and grills near the rocky shore.

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3) 6 p.m. Local and fresh

Portland may have been Bon Appétit's 2018 Restaurant City of the Year, but Camden, Rockport and nearby Rockland have significant culinary cred of their own. As far back as 2000, the two-time James Beard Award-winner Melissa Kelly launched the garden-and-greenhouse-to-table formula at Primo, in a charming Victorian in Rockland. Following suit in Rockport, Nina June restaurant, in a brick and wood-accented venue at historic Union

Hall, offers the latest expression of classic Italian-Mediterranean cuisine by the chef and cookbook author, Sara Jenkins. From New York City's Porsena to her native Maine, she brings her vast knowledge of Italian cuisine to the local-and-fresh theme, evidenced here in, among other dishes, a chive chitarra pasta with Maine crab and lemon butter (\$25). Finish up with a nightcap and native oysters at 18 Central Oyster Bar & Grill next door. Both restaurants have coveted outdoor seating and harbor views.

Saturday

4) 8 a.m. New spin on breakfast classics

Change doesn't come easily in small towns, as Brian Beggarly, a former chef at Primo, found when he took over Boynton-McKay Food Co., a longstanding locals' breakfast and lunch joint in downtown Camden's historic apothecary. The key to success was merging old classics such as skillet eggs and "Wavos Rancheros" with racier tacos and to-die-for brisket hash with potatoes and greens (\$9.50). Now old- and new-timers alike fight for the high-backed booths and even begrudgingly enjoy recent décor updates that include a restored 1947 Italian motorcycle on the wall.

5) 10 a.m. D.I.Y. cruise

As an alternative to a schooner, the sea kayak provides affordable and intimate access to the water on one's own schedule and muscle. Harbor tours with Maine Sport Outfitters depart from the Camden waterfront three times daily, for a two-hour paddle around Curtis Island and the coastline (\$45). Maine Sport also offers trips on the freshwater lakes and three- to four-day kayak camping excursions to Stonington and Muscongus Bay. Family-owned by Stuart and Marianne Smith since 1976, the flagship sporting goods store is in Rockport, with a satellite shop in downtown Camden. Kayaks, paddleboards, bikes and canoes are all available to rent by day, week or month from the Rockport location.

6) 12 p.m. Locavore lunch

Bangkok's loss was Camden's gain when Ravin Nakjaroen and Paula Palakawong opened Long Grain's eclectic 30-seat restaurant in 2010. At the time, authentic, locavore Asian food was not quite a thing in lobster country. Now, thanks to the couple's delightful dishes, i.e. Pad Kee Mao housemade wide rice noodles with local Thai basil, chile, garlic, kale and Heiwa tofu or pork belly (\$17), Long Grain is a destination in and of itself. A bright new location has increased square footage to include an Asian market with Long Grain Magic Sauce and other staples, but seating remains limited to 38. Reservations are a must, and walk-ins have better luck at lunch. Check back for vegetarian counter service at the original location come autumn.

7) 2 p.m. California dreaming

A scenic byway that leads to a wine-tasting room in a 1790s timber frame barn? It's not in Napa, but at Cellardoor Winery, where Bettina Doulton has created a bacchanalian playground for wine lovers and casual day-trippers alike at the 5.5-acre vineyard in Lincolnville, about six miles

from Camden. The tasting room opens daily at 11 a.m. for samples of the four estate wines by the glass (\$8) with cheese boards and complimentary winery tours. Events include pairing lunches on Sundays with local producers, and pop-up dinners with partnering chefs, food trucks and music. The standout is VINO AL FRESCO (\$175), an open-air dinner with Trillium Caterers, Aug. 15, at a 120-seat table on a platform in the middle of the vines.

8) 4 p.m. Summer cooking

Annemarie Ahearn of Salt Water Farm has been championing local ingredients and traditional methods at her cooking school since she left New York City for Lincolnville in 2009. Her classes and workshops at the antique post-and-beam barn and stone patio on Penobscot Bay inspire hundreds of attendees to bring new perspectives to the home kitchen. Summer courses include Modern Country Cooking (\$185), a three-day French Regional Cuisine Workshop (\$545) and the Cookbook Club Series (\$185) dinner with special guest, Alison Roman (who writes about food for The New York Times), to sample recipes from her new book, "Nothing Fancy." Classes sell out quickly, but check the email wait list for cancellations.

9) 5 p.m. Saturday night out

Camden's village is exceptionally walkable, which lends itself to a relaxed or spirited evening on the town. The View, a new rooftop bar at 16 Bay View Hotel, is the place to start with a craft cocktail, small plate and open-air outlook on the bay. Rhumb Line, across the maze of sailboats and schooners at Lyman-Morse at Wayfarer marina, calls out for dinner beside the water. Bryan Romero, the chef, has elevated fish and chips (\$17) to delicacy status, along with an exceptional haddock chowder. A full bar and the Something Fierce signature cocktail (\$10) means it's a hard spot to leave, but the walk back to town is rewarded by after-hour specials and a lively vibe at 40 Paper Italian Bistro & Bar in the historic Knox Mill, where friendly locals close out the night over flatbreads and half-price drinks.

Sunday

10) 9 a.m. Local hangout

If a coffee shop gauges community, Rockport is thriving at Seafolk Coffee. Behind a sign-less blue door, the freshly renovated space with a pine-tree slab counter and tall windows is a word-of-mouth favorite and cozy hangout above the harbor. The owners, Jacob and Madrona Wienges, serve espresso and cortado from micro lot beans, as well as housemade pastries and Danish-inspired open-faced toasts on dense rye bread (\$9-\$12). A photograph by the entrance sets the tone with an ocean scene and Isak Dinesen quote: "The cure for anything is salt water. Sweat, tears, or the sea." For more photography, come back Monday to Saturday for the acclaimed Maine Media Gallery and Tim Whelan's photographic book shop up the street.

11) 12 p.m. Maine-inspired art

Starting in the 1950s, Alex Katz, Lois Dodd, Neil Welliver and their gang of avant-garde artist friends, notable for their return to realist nature

and figure paintings against the tide of Abstract Expressionism, migrated from New York City to Lincolnville's Slab City Road every summer to make art and relax en plein-air. The Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland celebrates these artists this year with the Slab City Rendezvous exhibition and Maine in America award. Permanent collections include the curious assemblages of the sculptor Louise Nevelson, and a church in back houses the paintings of N.C., Andrew and Jamie Wyeth (\$15 adult admission). Look into tours of the Olson House, the iconic Colonial on the hill in Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World."

12) 2 p.m. Contemporary cool

Designed by the architect Toshiko Mori, who summers on the nearby island of North Haven, the new Center for Maine Contemporary Art is worth a visit for the stunning glass and corrugated metal building alone. The art is pretty great, too. Since its founding in 1952 by the Maine Coast Artists collective, the center has shown works by the Maine-inspired artists Robert Indiana, Fairfield Porter, Louise Nevelson and Alex Katz. A block from the Farnsworth in Rockland, the new space opened in 2016. Summer shows include a Slab City Road veteran, Ann Craven, who brings her serial treatment of time to birds, flowers and the moon.

Lodging

Airbnbs and Vrbos in the area include everything from a double occupancy R-Pod Camper on a farm and a private studio apartment overlooking an apple orchard, to a restored 1840s four-bedroom farmhouse with pick-your-own lettuce, tomatoes, herbs and blueberries in the garden; from \$52 to \$134 to \$499.

As far as oceanside resorts go, Samoset Resort (220 Warrenton Street, Rockport) has the bases covered with 230 acres on a point across from Owls Head Lighthouse, plus 178 newly renovated rooms, indoor and outdoor heated pools, fitness club and spa with hot tubs and steam saunas, and an 18-hole golf course. Summer rates start at \$379.

Despite a guest list boasting a king, president and Edna St. Vincent Millay, Whitehall (52 High Street, Camden) still manages to feel like a classic Maine summer home. Brightly updated in 2015, the rambling clapboard inn, a 10-minute walk from downtown, has 36 rooms and suites, farmer's porch, bocce court and fire pit. Book direct for best rates, starting at \$229 for a queen.