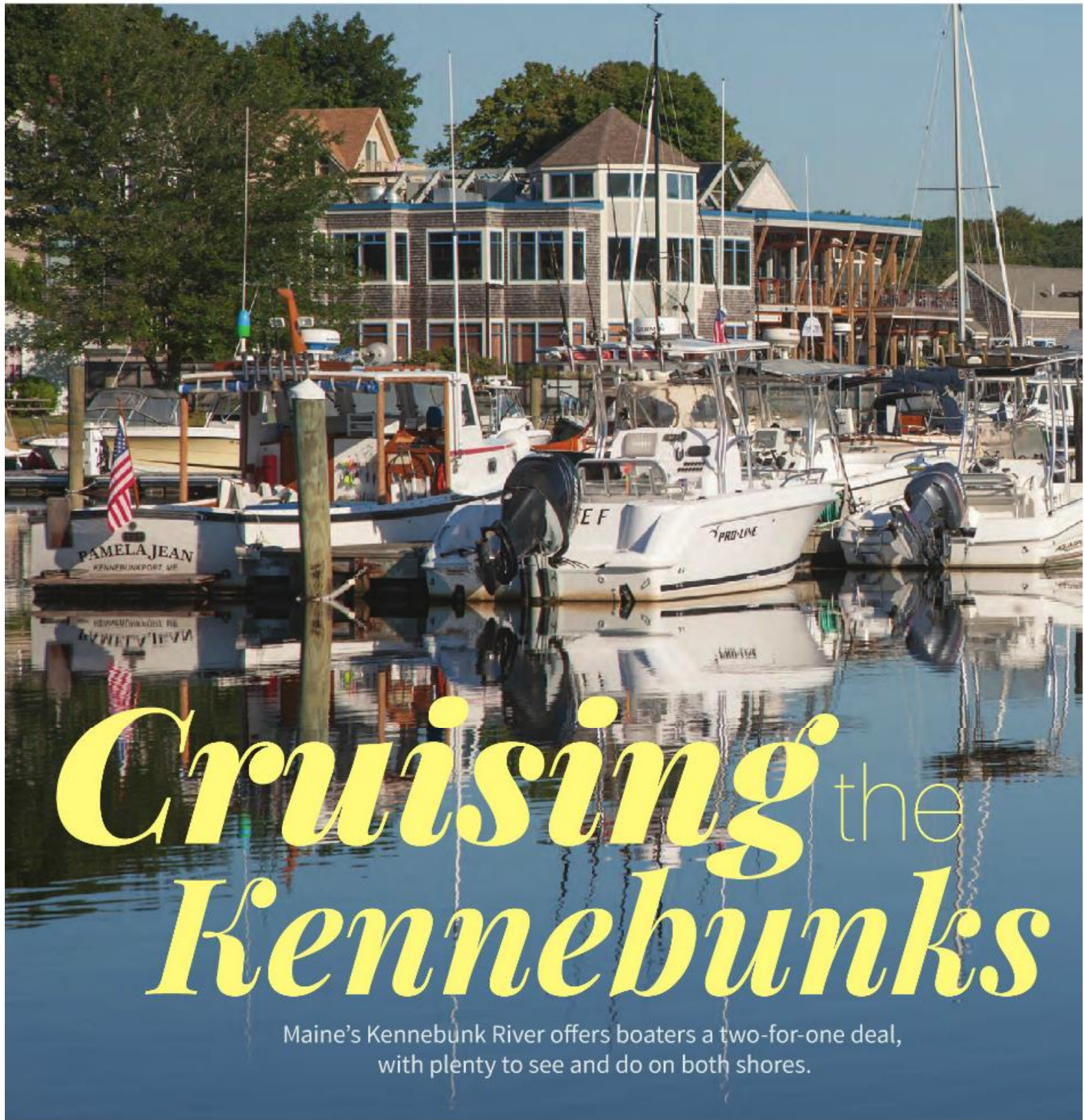


# NEW ENGLAND BOATING

Candlewood to Kennebunkport, Mattituck to Marblehead



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# *Cruising* the *Kennebunks*

Maine's Kennebunk River offers boaters a two-for-one deal, with plenty to see and do on both shores.



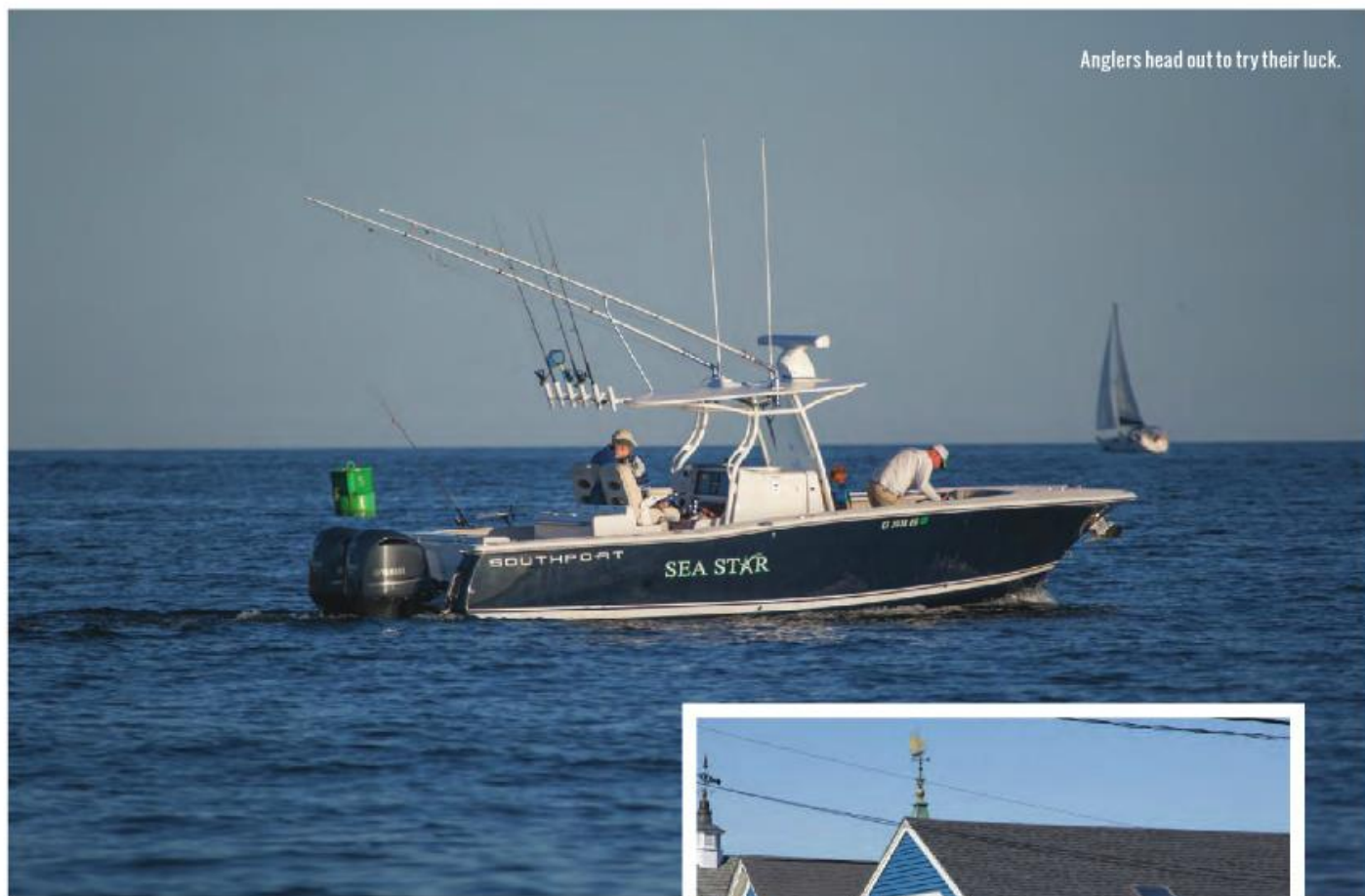
Chicks Marina welcomes transients on the Kennebunkport side of the river.

**D**istantly within the orbit of the Greater Boston area, Kennebunkport maintains a personality all its own. Just a quick stroll around the town's bustling commercial center, Dock Square, confirms you're not in just any old ordinary Maine coastal town. Shoppers range from all-American, shorts-and-knit-shirt types to North African families attired in burnouses. Moreover, amid every American accent imaginable, it's just as common to hear languages ranging from Canadian French and Mexican Spanish to German, Bulgarian and Chinese.

"Oh, it's been like that for a long time now," says Lillian Fox, general manager of Chicks Marina, the go-to facility for most transient boaters who visit the Kennebunk River. "People from all over the world have heard about the town, and want to see it for themselves."

**BY KEN TEXTOR**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE DEVENNEY**

Anglers head out to try their luck.



### Bush Garden

Indeed, Kennebunkport's international notoriety dates from the late 1980s, when then-President George Bush, Sr. spent his summers at the family's seaside home not far from downtown. Photos of "H.W." fishing for striped bass and bluefish just outside the mouth of the Kennebunk River were beamed worldwide—especially when the media made the President's poor angling luck the object of ongoing ridicule.

The former President and his family still turn up in town every summer, and stripers remain the target of many local fishermen, regardless of political affiliation. And although the fishing can be good at times, most visitors to the Kennebunkport area come here for the extensive shopping, dining and all-around Maine coastal experience.



Kennebunkport, on the east side of the river, is home to most of the area's shops, restaurants and marinas.



MAINE  
DESTINATION | KENNEBUNKS

Cruising boats of every  
description call on the  
Kennebunks each season.



Kayaks at Goose Rocks Beach.

### Summer Show

For a town of only 3,500 year-round residents, the array of diversions is truly remarkable, hence the summer population of nearly four times the official census. Curiously, the original attraction at both Kennebunkport, on the east side of the river, and the separate town of Kennebunk, on the west side, were the local beaches. They still are. In fact, if you happen to be in the area for the July Fourth fireworks, the fine, white-sand beaches—most of them west of the river mouth—are the best spot for catching the impressive show.



Stripers highlight the inshore fishing in and around the Kennebunk River.

PHOTO TOM RICHARDSON

## FISHING THE KENNEBUNKS

While George H. W. Bush did little to promote the fishing in Kennebunkport thanks to his well-documented lack of success in the 1980s, the action with striped bass can be quite dependable. According to Captain Ben Welch of Striker Charters, based at the Boathouse Waterfront Hotel, schoolie bass arrive in June and can be caught inside the river through September. "When fishing the river, trying slow-trolling a half-ounce tube lure with a seaworm on the hook," he advises, adding that he fishes his tubes on straight braided line with a three-foot, 20-pound-test mono leader. "Channel edges and deep holes often hold the most fish. Also, I like to troll with the current, to get the lure near the bottom."

Light-tackle and fly fishermen can also score with schoolies in the Kennebunk. "First light is your best bet for taking stripers on soft-plastics and flies," says Welch. "Fish your lures near the jetty rocks and any kind of structure in the river, including drop-offs. I've even seen guys catch fish around the lobster pots and mooring balls. Try to mimic the little sand eels that are prevalent during the summer."

For larger fish, live and chunked mackerel are the ticket to success. Welch usually finds good numbers of macks schooled up between the green daymarker and the bell buoy, about a mile outside the inlet. Once he marks a school of bait on his depthsounder, he sends over a chum bag and starts jigging with a Sabiki rig. If he doesn't find any macks within 10 minutes, he tries a new spot.

After making bait, he'll head for any number of structure spots along the coast. "Any rocky structure in the bay can produce," he says. "The trick is to cast your bait as close to the rocks as possible. If you're not seeing bottom, you're probably in the wrong spot."

Welch also fishes chunks of mackerel on circle hooks around the same rocky areas. Indeed, he says that he caught more big fish on chunks than live mackerel last season. In this situation he will anchor and fish the chunks a few feet above bottom on a bobber rig.

If you want to learn how to fish the Kennebunkport area from a local pro, give Welch a shout. He can be reached at **(207) 590-9093; [strikercharters.com](http://strikercharters.com)**.

— TOM RICHARDSON

## Clam Up, Brew Down

Back in town, though, Dock Square is where most of the crowds congregate. The shopping tends to be upscale, with only a smattering of "T-shirt" shops that seem to dominate other popular Maine ports. Exotic and fashionable apparel boutiques battle it out with numerous jewelry and antiques shops for prime locations in Dock Square. But if you see a long line of people queued up just west of the Square, there's little doubt where it leads.



A fish painting and signs decorate the entryway of a shop on Ocean Avenue.

The tiny take-out place known as the Clam Shack has been operating near the Taintown Bridge over the Kennebunk River since the 1960s, possibly longer. Even before President Bush made it internationally famous for the luscious fried clams on which he doted, this open-air eatery attracted big crowds enthusiastic about all of its seafood offerings—especially the lobster rolls. Most grab their orders and sit on nearby wooden benches or lobster crates, watching the crowds and traffic go back and forth across the busy bridge, which is unofficially named "Taintown" because residents of the 'Port side of the river tease their cross-river brethren by alleging, "It t'ain't really the town!"




### Kennebunk Debunked

In truth, however, there is much to be seen, appreciated and consumed on the Kennebunk side of the river. Indeed, one of Maine's oldest craft brewers, the Shipyard Brewing Company, got its start here in 1992, about a block west of the bridge where you'll find Federal Jack's Brew Pub—an offshoot of the original brewery. Known locally as just plain "Jack's," it occupies the site of one of numerous shipyards that were the commercial reason for settling the Kennebunk area in the 18th century.

Like many early shipyard towns in Maine, successful settlement depended on a long, watery highway to forests that provided the lumber out of which 150-foot barques, brigs and schooners were built. The Kennebunk River did just that, running some four to five miles through somnolent salt marshes to the interior woodlands. Today, that inland waterway makes for a delightful and scenic kayak or dinghy trip.

Even better, the river stays nicely dredged to about six feet of depth in the main channel. Its high priority among national waterways makes it easy to reach any one of the four marinas that squeeze into the tightly packed available spaces along the estuary's edges. Obviously, it's wise to plan well ahead of time, especially in summer, to be assured of a slip or mooring.

Of course, you can also visit by car—but that's not nearly as fun! 

CONTINUED 



Top: Arundel Yacht Club members and their guests enjoy a fine view of the river and its parade of boats. Above: Marina slips are at a premium in summer, so call ahead.



Visiting megayachts often anchor outside the river.



Whimsical stairs lead to one of Kennebecport's many shops.

## KENNEBUNKS AT A GLANCE

### HARBORMASTER (207) 967-5040

### DOCKAGE, MOORINGS & SERVICE TOWN OF KENNEBUNKPORT (207) 967-5040

The town maintains two guest moorings, which can be reserved for two nights running. Call ahead.

### CHICKS MARINA (207) 967-2782; [chicksmarina.com](http://chicksmarina.com)

Popular, full-service marina offering fuel, repair and transient slips for boats up to 150 feet.

### KENNEBUNKPORT MARINA (207) 967-3411; [kennebunkportmarina.com](http://kennebunkportmarina.com)

Full-service marina with fuel, repair, transient slips and boat and kayak rental.

### YACHTSMAN LODGE & MARINA (207) 967-2511; [yachtsmanlodge.com](http://yachtsmanlodge.com)

Luxury resort and marina near town.

### PERFORMANCE MARINE (207) 967-5550; [performancemarine.com](http://performancemarine.com)

Transient slips for boats up to 100 feet, fuel dock, storage and outboard service on the Kennebec side of river.

### NONANTUM RESORT (888) 205-1555; [nonantumresort.com](http://nonantumresort.com)

Transient slips and dinghy dock for guests, as well as sailing and fishing charters, kayak rental and more.

### ANCHORAGE

Anchoring in the Kennebec River can be a tricky proposition, as you'll have to set two anchors to prevent your boat from swinging through the fleet as the current changes direction with the tides. Set one anchor upstream, one downstream, and check the soundings carefully.

### LAUNCH RAMPS

There is no public launch ramp on the lower Kennebec. Both Chicks and the Kennebecport Marina have ramps and a parking area that boaters can use for a fee.

### BOAT & KAYAK RENTAL KAYAK EXCURSIONS (888) 925-7496; [southernmainekayaks.com](http://southernmainekayaks.com)

Kayak rental and guided tours. Will deliver.

### NONANTUM RESORT (888) 205-1555; [nonantumresort.com](http://nonantumresort.com)

Kayak, paddleboard and bike rental.

### COASTAL MAINE KAYAK & BIKE (207) 967-6065; [coastalmainekayak.com](http://coastalmainekayak.com)

Kayak and bike rental and sales.

### KENNEBUNKPORT MARINA (207) 967-3411; [kennebunkportmarina.com](http://kennebunkportmarina.com)

Rents skiffs, canoes and kayaks.

### WHERE TO EAT THE CLAM SHACK (207) 967-2560; [theclamshack.net](http://theclamshack.net)

Follow the lines to this humble shack at the Taintown Bridge, which serves what many consider the very best fried clams in Maine. Lobster rolls also a specialty.

### DAVID'S KPT (207) 967-8225; [boathouseme.com](http://boathouseme.com)

This restaurant at the Boathouse Waterfront Hotel sports a "luxury yacht" feel and features outdoor dining, two vibrant bars and Kennebecport's only raw bar. The chef relies on native Maine ingredients prepared with a creative flair.

### EDGEWATER INN (207) 967-3315

Tasty, elegant—and filling—breakfast dishes in an equally elegant setting.

### KENNEBUNKPORT INN (800) 248-2621; [kennebunkportinn.com](http://kennebunkportinn.com)

Upscale dining at an upscale inn.

### FEDERAL JACK'S PUB & RESTAURANT (207) 967-4322; [federaljacks.com](http://federaljacks.com)

Celebrated brewpub and birthplace of the Shipyard Brewing Co. Offers fresh-brewed beer and ale, plus affordable meals.

### ALISSON'S RESTAURANT & PUB (207) 967-4841; [allisons.com](http://allisons.com)

Solid Maine fare and (possibly) respite from the crowds.

### OCEAN (855) 346-5700; [capearundelinn.com](http://capearundelinn.com)

In the Cape Arundel Inn, Ocean offers spectacular ocean views combined with inspired fine cuisine.

### COOL SHOPS

#### ABACUS (207) 967-0111; [abacugallery.com](http://abacugallery.com)

Dock Square shop full of interesting crafts and jewelry, including New England-inspired wall hangings, nautical jewelry, seascape art prints, pottery, notecards and more.

#### ABODE (207) 317-2121; [abodekennebec.com](http://abodekennebec.com)

Eclectic and imaginative array of home décor and gift items ranging from candlesticks to rugs.

#### COMPLIMENTS GALLERY (800) 248-2269; [complimentsgallery.com](http://complimentsgallery.com)

Wide range of original home décor items, jewelry, hand-painted furniture, beautiful light fixtures and more.

#### FLAMING GOURMET (207) 967-8825; [flaminggourmet.com](http://flaminggourmet.com)

One of the largest inventories of hot sauces in New England.

#### SEA GLASS JEWELRY STUDIO (207) 967-1982; [seaglassjewelrystudio.net](http://seaglassjewelrystudio.net)

Pairing genuine sea glass with natural freshwater pearls, precious gemstones and sterling silver, this shop and gallery offers an array of unique, natural works of wearable art.

#### THINGS TO SEE & DO INTOWN TROLLEY TOURS (207) 967-3686; [intowntrolley.com](http://intowntrolley.com)

Hour-long tours of the Kennebecport area. Trolleys depart from Dock Square.

#### KENNEBUNKPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY (207) 967-2751; [kporhistory.org](http://kporhistory.org)

Historic or architectural walking tours, guided or self-guided, at the Not I House on Maine Street.

#### SAINT ANTHONY'S MONASTERY

Boaters can visit the grounds and gardens of the chapel of St. Anthony Monastery and Shrine, home of Lithuanian Franciscan monks who welcome visitors by water. Tip: go at high tide!

#### KENNEBUNK COASTAL TOURS (207) 831-3663; [kennebunkportcoastaltours.com](http://kennebunkportcoastaltours.com)

Daily river, coastal, lighthouse and sunset cruises aboard a 26-foot Downeast cruiser.