

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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Issue\_WINTER \$7.99





## THE KENNEBUNKPORTS

### *Debunking the Off Season*

by **Linda Kavanagh**

"Maine is a joy in the summer. But the soul of Maine is more apparent in the winter."

~ *Paul Theroux*

**S**URE, YOU CAN'T BEAT MAINE in the summertime. Stunning beaches with panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean, crashing waves against the rocky cliffs, swimming, boating and hiking, seafood shacks and shopping – it's truly New England at its best. In the heat of the season, Maine's population practically doubles from tourism and migrating summer homeowners. But that's not my scene. I'm a cold weather type of gal. And Maine in the fall and winter months is an equally breathtaking and adventure-packed destination for rogue travelers such as myself.

Cool fall breezes brought us to Kennebunkport, an affluent township in southern York County Maine, rich in artistic talent, beautiful inns and a rather progressive culinary scene. Its "main street" hub is right out of a Norman Rockwell painting, bustling with boutiques, local watering holes and good-natured tourists traps. Colorful hand painted road signs mark each corner, directing you to beaches and attractions. And while there are still leaf-peepers in town taking in the vibrant fall foliage and enjoying brisk walks along the shoreline, shop owners and restaurateurs are starting to close up shop anticipating the self-induced "off-season" winter days ahead.

"Not us. We stay open 11 months out of the year," says Nick Maucieri the proprietor of Maine-ly Drizzle, a fabulous shop featuring olive oil and

vinegars from around the world. "Food is always in season and we look forward to the holiday business which could be even better if more shop owners stayed open longer, contributing to the overall success and attention attracted to the area during the cooler months."

Upon sampling an array of aromatic and tasty oils and vinegars, and ultimately purchasing black truffle oil, green chili oil and a robust jalapeno white balsamic vinegar, my travel companion and I continued to browse the many art galleries and retail therapy outlets throughout town, a stone's throw away from the Kennebunkport Inn (circa 1890), our hotel located in the center of it all at Dock Square. The Victorian style estate is decked out in red, white and blue attire, exuding a colonial time-meets-Ralph Lauren feel. Crisp linens, warm comforters and attractive furnishings fill the guestrooms. Eat at the Inn's *One Dock* restaurant offering a well-rounded menu of globally inspired small plates such as bourbon glaze pork belly, fish flautas and lobster ragoon. Sip on the Incognito Tea for Two made with Hendrick's Gin, St. Germain, pineapple juice and mint or the KPI Old Fashioned shaken with Blanton's bourbon, black walnut bitters, maple simple syrup and muddled fruit at *The Pub at One Dock* while listening to some of the area's most rockin' local musicians or while lounging on the patio with the fireplace to warm you.

[www.kennebunkportinn.com](http://www.kennebunkportinn.com)

[www.maine-lydrizzle.com](http://www.maine-lydrizzle.com)

WE FOLLOWED THE LOCALS down the road to *Alisson's Restaurant & Pub*, a fourth generation family owned and operated locale which oozes





Kennebunkport Inn Lobby



Mark's Hot Dog Stand



Spices from Vervacious



Alisson's Restaurant

New England charm and a wonderful upbeat energy. Wrapped in exposed brick and dark wood furnishings, it's easy to sink into Alisson's relaxed vibe, toss back a few beers and dive into some hearty American fare. Our faves included: a decadent lobster mac n cheese where you could actually taste the cheese and savor the sweet fresh lobster meat; a fresh and crunchy kale and arugula salad laced with apple vinaigrette and flecked with roasted Brussels sprouts and pumpkin seeds; and a juicy blackened salmon topped with house made pineapple salsa. This year-round gathering place is truly a local gem.

[www.alissons.com](http://www.alissons.com)

"YEAR ROUND ESTABLISHMENTS are gaining in number and popularity," local shop owners and restaurateurs were excited to share. Jeff Fightmaster, General Manager of *David's KPT* located at The Bouthouse Waterfront Hotel and part of the KRC (Kennebunkport Resort Collection) family says this year's holiday and winter festivities are bigger and better than ever, with added businesses keeping their lights on throughout the snowy months ahead. Day trippers and weekend rompers can look forward to a host of activities from December thru March including:

*Art Workshops at The Galleries at Morning Walk* - local artists and artisans present a series of art workshops, lectures and hands-on classes.

Winterfest - Skating party, chowder contests, sledding at the Nott House, Ice Bar at One Dock

Paint the Town Red for Valentine's Day - Lobster-centric Red Plate Specials at restaurants, romantic "Five Shades of Red" packages at local hotels, "Red Tag" sales at neighborhood boutiques and more. The "lovely" happenings begin on February 1, when the community flips the switch to reveal a rose-colored town covered in red, twinkling lights.

*River Tree Arts Community Arts Center* - Anti-Valentine's Day Gallery Exhibit & Market

*Snow Day at Wells Reserve* - 3 mile snowshoe race, 200 M dash for adults, 1M dash for kids, snowman building, snowshoe rentals, sledding, hot cocoa, bonfire and more.

*Maine Restaurant Week* - March 1 - 14, 2015

And much more found at: [www.destinationkennebunkport.com/winter](http://www.destinationkennebunkport.com/winter)

A MORE CONTEMPORARY setting among a host of traditional New England sites is *David's KPT* and *Raw Bar* located waterside in downtown Kennebunkport. Floor to ceiling windows provide stunning harborside views all year round. Ocean blue carpeting, rich wood paneling and a stately bar accentuated by vertical back lit wine racks conveys an almost steak house persona for a mostly seafood driven restaurant. In addition to robust cabernets and dirty martinis, the sleek and masculine ambience sets the tone for David's not-so-traditional clam chowder spiked with thyme, brown sugar and smoky bacon; market fresh haddock presented with local peekytoe crab, white clam cream, roasted garlic-potatoes



and garlicky spinach; and tasty salmon and grilled corn cakes with sweet-spicy Thai chili remoulade and a crisp summer fennel slaw.

[www.boathouseme.com](http://www.boathouseme.com)

VENTURING 30 MILES NORTH we were Portland bound. "The City", is what our friends in Kennebunkport called this historic Old Port fishing district along Portland Harbor. During a delicious and informative tour led by Maine Foodie Tours, we learned that after four devastating war time fires, Portland was almost completely rebuilt during the Victorian era. As we strolled from café to market, brewery to bakery, we were captivated by the city's 19th century architecture, maintained due to constant attention to landmark preservation. Our brilliant and entertaining tour guide led us over cobblestone walkways and through active alleyways, introducing us to the city's best bites and local artisans. We snacked on tart apple slices with star anise salt at Vervacious spice shop; ate local Maine potato donuts from The Holy Donut; visited the original Stonewall Kitchen shop and slathered everything we could get our hands on with wild Maine wild blueberry jam; drank pumpkin brew and Black Fly stout at Gritty McDuff's Brewing Company; and toured Harbor Fish Market – a real deal fisherman's drop off and lobster hatchery. Did you know that Portland is the home to the largest and continuous running farmers market in the world? Me neither. Maine Foodie Tours are offered in season in Bar Harbor and Kennebunkport and throughout the year in Portland.

[www.mainefoodietours.com](http://www.mainefoodietours.com)

ENOUGH OF THE BIG CITY, we retreated to the cozy confines of Kennebunkport and our next destination, Cape Arundel Inn & Resort. Built in 1895, this gorgeous oceanfront property is located amid a myriad of mansions along Ocean Avenue. Labeled as a "bed and breakfast", the mansion is far from meek in its tasteful design, plush guestrooms, expansive patio and pool area. The Inn is located an invigorating one mile walk or run from downtown. The *Oceanfront Restaurant*, rated as one of the "Top 100 Scenic Restaurants in America" (OpenTable) is spearheaded by Chef Pierre Gignac and is one of the area's finer dining establishments, incorporating a farm-to-table mentality and a New England sensibility throughout his menu. Sunset cocktails on the patio are a must before dinner. Menu standouts included; perfectly seared sea scallops with pernet butter and fennel bulb confit; lobster Thermidor presented with artichokes, oyster mushroom, parmesan and English mustard cream; and lamb loin and crispy lamb breast with chèvre potato purée and sautéed kale leaves.

[www.capearundelinn.com](http://www.capearundelinn.com)



WE ARE HEADING SOUTH THIS TIME – heading home via Kittery, its many retail outlets and the highly recommended *Robert's Maine Grill*. The staff's warm hospitality is instantly felt the minute we walked through the door. The bi-level space is packed on a Sunday afternoon, buzzing with bardside revelers, ladies who "brunch", and exhausted shoppers in need of a chowda and beer. Robert's is all about LOCAL, from local ingredients and craft beer, to the local artists featured throughout the space. Maine crab cakes, flatbread with Grafton cheddar, steamers in Allagash White beer and that wonderful local lobster roll are just a few of the menu items marked with a lighthouse to highlight local ingredients.

We are in serious need of some good ol' seafood shack staples that we neglected to partake in while exploring Kennebunkport and Portland. And it seems we've come to the right place! Finally, a lobster roll done right in our eyes (we sampled many along the way but none seemed to do the trick). Our soft buttered hot dog roll came overflowing with sweet juicy lobster chunks barely tossed with mayo. The freshness of the lobster spoke for itself. New England clam chowder was an unbastardized rendition of the classic made with freshly shucked clams, potatoes, onions, broth and cream. Simple and sensational. Beer batter fish and chips were of the local haddock variety, meaty and flavorful with a mouth-watering crispy exterior. Good tartar sauce and crunchy slaw completed the experience. Or maybe it was the Moxie soda pop that brought it all together. Yes, my travel companion and I are officially addicted to the locally adored beverage which was created by a local Maine doctor in 1876 and is flavored with gentian root extract which is believed to have medicinal benefits. So you see; it's actually good for us.

I say Maine in general is good for us. It proved to be refreshing, detoxifying, revitalizing and stimulating. It's a country and coastal respite all in one – without giving up the luxury, good food, style and sensibility of the big city. □

## OUR FAVORITE THINGS:

- Mark's Hot Dog Stand, Portland – Serving the best steamed hotdogs since 1983, on the corner of Middle Street and Exchange Street. [www.facebook.com/pages/Marks-Hotdogs](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Marks-Hotdogs)
- Spices from Vervacious, Portland – salts, spices, mustards, vinegars, sugars and cocoa [www.Vervacious.com](http://www.Vervacious.com)
- Maine Food Tours guide extraordinaire Randy Judkins – He had us all at "Hello" and thoroughly involved in his city. This comedic vaudeville performer and historian is a super talent and made a believer out of this anti-tour tourist! [www.randyjudkins.com](http://www.randyjudkins.com)
- Cocktails at The Tides Beach Club, Kennebunkport – Love, love, love the view, the beach, the hip décor, funky furnishings, eclectic artwork and a killer cocktail culture that includes; Vanilla Bourbon Fizz made with vanilla bean infused Buffalo Trace bourbon, Byrrh, orange bitters and club soda; Citrus Kiss prepared with Titos Vodka, house limoncello, grapefruit, citrus, and Izzy's Sparkling Grapefruit; and the El Diablo comprised of jalapeno infused tequila, ginger liqueur and blood orange. [www.tidesbeachclubmaine.com](http://www.tidesbeachclubmaine.com)
- The ambience and view at Pier 77 and its underground man cave The Ramp Bar & Grill, Cape Porpoise Harbor, Kennebunkport – sleek and sexy upstairs, edgy and eclectic below. [www.pier77restaurant.com](http://www.pier77restaurant.com)
- Dancing with strange men at the local margarita infused Mexican joint Pedro's, Kennebunkport [www.pedrosmaine.com](http://www.pedrosmaine.com)
- Lobster Roll at Robert's Maine Grill, Kittery – And everything else at this bustling restaurant and raw bar set among the retail store outlet stretch in Kittery, south of Kennebunkport. [www.robertsmaine.grill.com](http://www.robertsmaine.grill.com)
- Apple Fritter Doughnut from Congdon's Family Restaurant & Bakery, Kittery – There's a drive-thru and everything! Over-the-top fried dough goodness filled with tart apple chunks and covered in sweet glaze. Good for the ride home... [www.congdons.com](http://www.congdons.com)