

DAILY NEWS

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There are enough bearded baristas and bartenders in Kittery, Maine, to make you think you're in Williamsburg.

This sleepy New England hamlet has a few small stores in its downtown area known as Kittery Foreside — check out the kitsch and collectible-stocked Lost Coast (230 State Road) — but an inordinate amount of eateries, given that it takes about two minutes to walk through the area.

And unlike Williamsburg, it's two minutes of easy, serene village-y bliss.

At the center of this foodie microcosm is Lil's Café (7 Wallingford Square; lilscfe.com), whose story begins 60 years

earlier. Lil's is the little sister eatery of Bob's Clam Hut on nearby Route 1

(315 Route 1; bobsclambut.com), which originally opened in 1956 as a summer seasonal stop. It's now a year-round favorite and the locals are quick to tell you it's the best place for fried clams in New England. But there's a whole lot more here, too.

The whole-belly fried clams are still served the way Bob thought best: dredged in flour, unseasoned and cooked in clean oil. That's the secret to enhancing the sweet sea

flavor.

On most days, the patrons at Bob's spill out to the picnic tables outside no matter the weather. These days, Bob's serves around 3,256 gallons of clams a year, and more than 47,000 lobster rolls. The daily "under-loved fish" special offers a less-known, locally harvested and abundant species, like flaky, moist cusk or hake.



Across the street, another sister restaurant of Lil's and Bob's, **Robert's Maine Grill** (326 Route 1; robertsmaincgrill.com), updates Maine coastal dining with a lively bar and an outdoor deck overlooking Spruce Creek. Surrounding both is what many head to Kittery for: the Kittery Outlets (the-kitteryoutlets.com).

This is not your usual shopping outlet experience. Alongside names like Calvin Klein and Ann Taylor is the Trading Post, which sells everything from guns to lobster bibs. Even the largest of five groups of outlets here, Kittery Premium

Outlets, feels more like a town square than a mall. It's both dog- and family-friendly — children's rides dot the sidewalk — and is more like an experience than shopping schlepp. Stop in at KPO's information booth at group number 4 and purchase a voucher booklet for added deals.

Located just over the New Hampshire border, Kittery is Maine's southernmost town and its oldest incorporated town (dating to 1647). Even though Portsmouth, N.H., lies just across the magnificent Piscataqua River, the historic Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is located on Kittery's Seavey Island. Portsmouth all but claims it, causing considerable umbrage from Mainers, who refer to it as the United States Navy Yard.

Established in 1800 and famous for its submarine repair, civilian

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TRAVEL
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When in Kittery, Maine, fill up on lobster and oysters (top right) at Robert's Maine Grill, which overlooks tranquil Spruce Creek (above).

MAINE STREET

Old-time charm, tasty seafood in li'l village Kittery

access to the yard is limited. Take the scenic Route 103 west out of Kittery and after half an hour's walk, or five minutes' drive, there's tranquil Kittery Point. Stop at Fort McClary State Park (fortmcclary.org), a onetime military post with roots in Colonial times and faint fame in the Revolutionary War when fortifications were amped up in case of a sea invasion. That never happened, which is fortunate, because the fortification was never finished. The Block House, accessed up a steep flight of wooden steps, includes historical artifacts and information. (Across the road is a wooded picnic area.)

Kittery Point's First Congregational Church is the oldest church in continual use in Maine. It's a typical New England monolithic, white clapboard building dating to 1730. If peace is what you seek, stand here for a few moments among budding trees and blossoms.

Oddly, the usual quaint inns and B&Bs are in short supply. Kittery isn't a busy tourist destination – yet. Proximity to I-95 means a plethora of indistinct chain hotels and motels, but the Coachman Inn offers contemporary accommodations while Portsmouth Harbor Inn and Spa is a boutique B&B.

For some serious New England charm, stay on Route 103 and continue a few miles past Kittery Point and you'll arrive at York Harbor and the York Harbor Inn. (Kittery is in

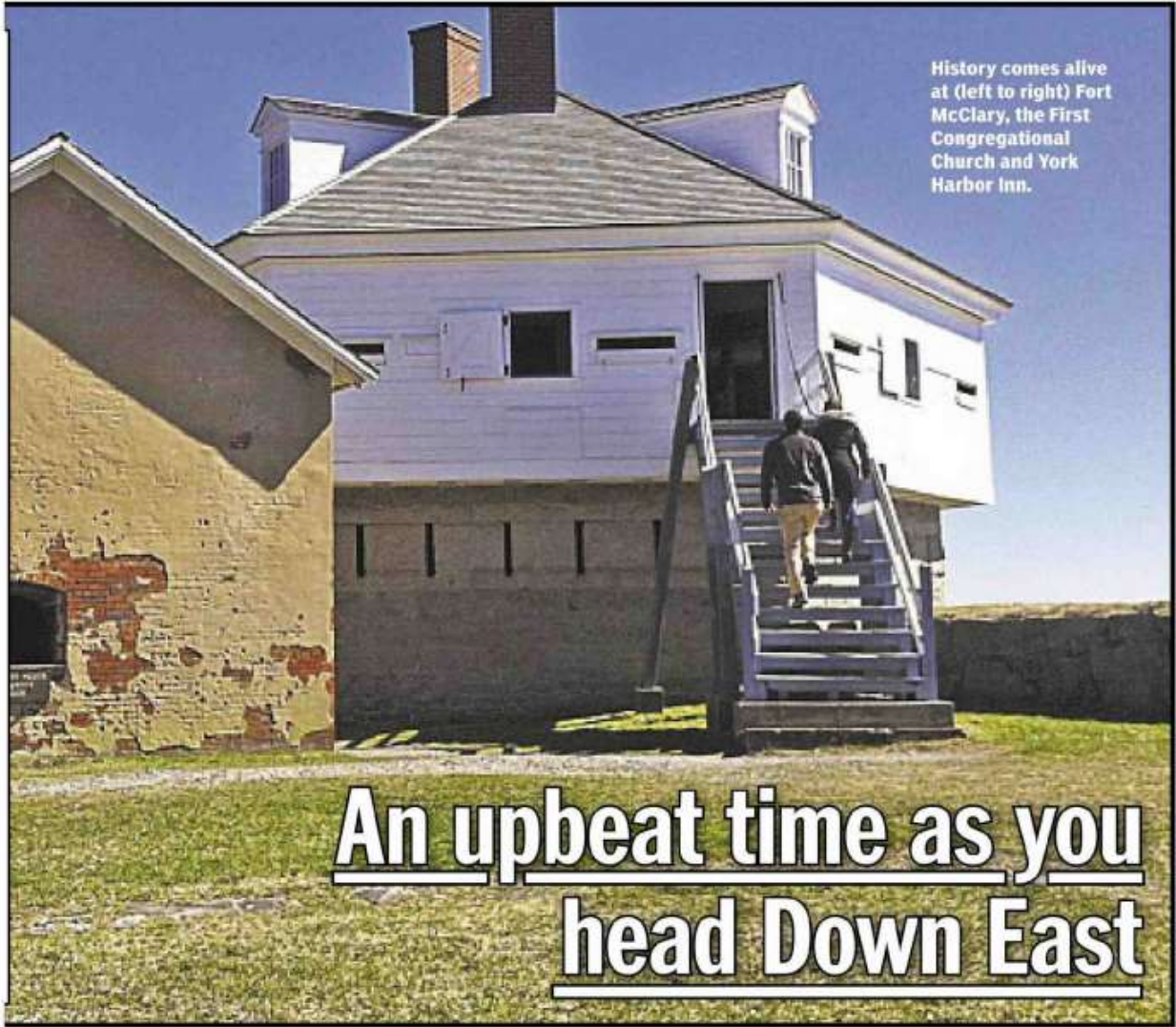
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York County.) This grand collection of six separate inns has ocean view rooms, ocean view dining and luxury suites with fireplaces and decks. Continental breakfast and Wi-Fi are included. The Harbor Crest Inn is pet-friendly and the Chapman House, a gorgeous renovated summer cottage named for socialite Fanny Chapman, offers curated rooms and wonderful dining, either fireside or on the deck, depending on the weather. A drink or two in the main inn's Ship's Cellar Pub, which replicates a ship's living quarters, is recommended.

Heading south and then east again from the inn, you're soon returned to Kittery. Stop in at Lil's, which is set in a converted bank. The giant Mosler safe door is now part of the Vinyl Vault, a small alcove selling records.

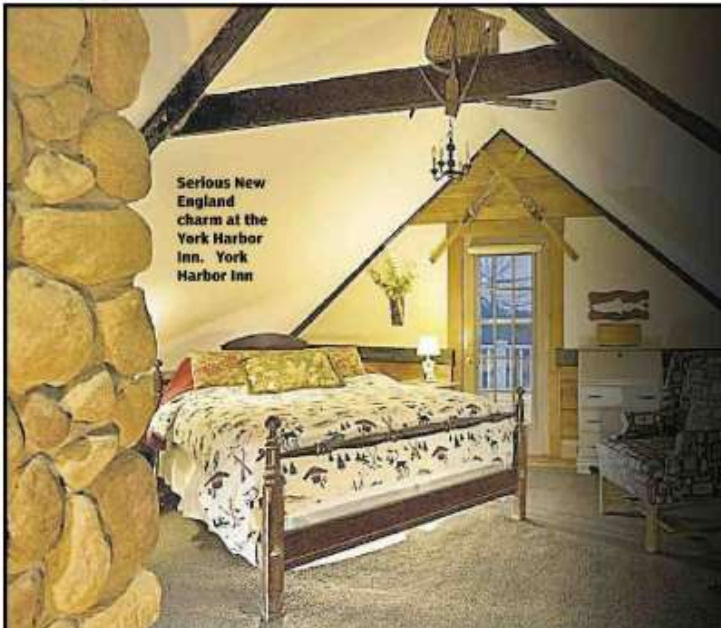
Besides excruciatingly tempting pasties, all made in the kitchen

downstairs – don't leave without trying a chocolate-coated cream puff – there are appetizing salads and sandwiches. Order up a rose latte chai (made with Earl Grey and rose petals) and a glazed cruller, a doughnut-style New England staple, and relax into Kittery. It's so easy-going.



History comes alive at (left to right) Fort McClary, the First Congregational Church and York Harbor Inn.

An upbeat time as you head Down East



Serious New England charm at the York Harbor Inn. York Harbor Inn

IF YOU GO...

STAY:

● COACHMAN INN. From \$79. 380 Route 1; (800-824-6183) coachmaninn.net

● PORTSMOUTH HARBOR INN & SPA. From \$165. 6 Water St.; (207) 439-4040, innatportsmouth.com

● YORK HARBOR INN. From \$129. 480 York St., York Harbor; (207) 363-5119/(800) 343-3869; yorkharborinn.com

EAT AND DRINK:

● ANJU NOODLE BAR, 7 Wallingford Square; anjunoodlebar.com

● ANNEKE JANS, 60 Wallingford Square; annekejans.net

● BILL'S B.O.K. ORIGINAL KITCHEN, 1 Government St.; billsoriginal.com

● BLACK BIRCH, 2 Government St.; theblackbirch.com

● TRIBUTARY BREWING COMPANY, 10 Shapleigh Road; tributarybrewingcompany.com

