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Strategies for Seeing **the Maine Coast**



The Maine Coast



Previous page: Paying a little more for an ocean view is well worth the cost.

Going to the Maine coast for a week isn't like going to Daytona, Maui, or even Boston; it's far bigger, chillier, foggier, less expensive, and more thinly populated, to take just a few examples. Here are a few strategies and rules of thumb that can help you get the most enjoyment out of this unique place.

Rule #1: Get yourself some wheels. Public transit in Maine exists, but it's frankly not all that great. (This is a big and mostly rural state, so you can't really blame them for that.) Unless you're planning to confine yourself to Portland—in which case you *could* use city buses, but even then, you'd still end up walking a lot—you're going to need bicycle, scooter, or automobile wheels almost anywhere that you want to go.

Rule #2: Think about visiting during the off-season. Maine is a prime summer destination, of course, but it's pretty wonderful in late spring and fall, too. And you can sometimes save big on coastal hotel rooms by visiting the coast before July or after Labor Day. Weekdays, of course, also tend to be much cheaper than weekends—even in high summer season.

Rule #3: Don't try to do too much. After all, the Maine coast is a place to *relax*. That means traveling and sightseeing slowly. Some of my very best memories here involve

slow, solitary walks along beaches or up mountains when I had no itinerary and no watch on my wrist, and the next day's plans weren't pressing me to hurry back to my room or campsite. Staying in one town—and one room—for 3 days isn't a bad idea at all.

Rule #4: Adjust your expectations slightly downward. Luxury inns and gourmet restaurants are here in increasing numbers, but there are also plenty of villages (Downeast and on out-of-the-way peninsulas) that still offer lodgings best described as throwbacks to the old days—days when a traveler would sleep in a sparsely furnished room, sharing hallway bathrooms and communal breakfasts with fellow travelers. That's not an unpleasant experience at all, so long as you come in expecting it. Anyway, on this coast, Mother Nature is the star attraction.

Rule #5: Pay more for a view (or don't). It's up to you, but know what you're getting before you get here. Even resort rooms on the Maine coast sometimes look out on

Renting a bike is a great way to see the sights along Maine's coast.





Water taxis are a convenient way to experience the sea in Maine.

gorgeous ocean vistas and sometime look out over big parking lots. Prices *usually* reflect these differences in scenery—but not always. When booking, always ask about your view and try to negotiate a better one if possible. You could scrimp, of course, but here's my take: Going to Maine and then skipping the views doesn't make much sense.

Rule #6: Get out on the water. Maine is all about the sea, so at some point, you need to feel that salty, bracing sea spray on your face to really experience the place. Whether it's on a ferry boat, a deep-sea fishing excursion, a boogie board, or a friend's yacht, it doesn't especially matter; just get out there.

Rule #7: Engage locals. You don't need to put on a fake accent and wear a Red Sox hat to fit in (in fact, *don't* do those things if you're not from New England). Mainers are surprisingly open and humorous, you'll find, even if they seem pretty quiet at first. It's a cultural thing. Get past that hard shell (here's where a little Red Sox knowledge really comes in handy), and people are usually pretty friendly deep down. And you can *always* talk about weather.

Rule #8: Get off the beaten track. Throughout this book, I've

tried to nudge you gently toward things that aren't obvious tourist stops—local coffee shops and diners, little-known historical spots, somewhat-secret beaches. You can see just the “greatest hits” if you want, but you'll probably have a better story to tell afterward if you deviate from them.

Rule #9: Bring a good camera. I've traveled and photographed all over the world. Recently, I realized that many of my favorite shots came from right here on the Maine coast, often in anonymous places. The interplay of water, sunlight, fog, stone, snow, and sand never fails to create something I've never seen before—and won't see again, after the next 1/4th of a second.

Rule #10: Be like a Boy Scout. You know, “Be Prepared”? I'm talking about the weather here. We all dream of perfect, sunny days on the beach, but in reality, Maine is a pretty humid place (it's next to a big pile of water called “the ocean,” after all). You can expect to be rained out maybe a third of the time in summer, sometimes much more often than that in a bad year. Bring umbrellas, a sweater, a change of dry shoes, a *TV Guide*, and a thick novel, just in case. ●