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MAINE ATTRACTION

GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE CHARMING, LESSER-KNOWN PORTLAND OF THE EAST

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There's a whole other Portland out there, but I learned that lesson the hard way. Last year, while planning a trip to Portland, Oregon, I made an accidental phone

call to **Portland, Maine**. With air tickets in hand for the West Coast, I nearly booked my hotel on the Eastern seaboard instead. Chagrined, I admitted my error. “It happens all the time,” said the hotelier. “Oregonians think their Portland is hipper,” he added. “But you should come try ours—it’s much better. You’ll see.” Thus, I vowed someday to find out for myself.

On a breezy summer day, I disembark from the MS *Saint Laurent*, a cruise ship that has taken me from Montreal through the Canadian Maritime region, ending 10 days later in Portland, Maine, located on a peninsula that protrudes into a bay near the Canadian border. It seemed, at last, I would have my chance to try the “other” Portland on for size. (Speaking of size, it’s Maine’s biggest city, but isn’t actually large at all, leveling off at about 70,000 inhabitants.)

Immediately smitten with the red brick warehouse buildings that comprise the **Old Port District** and the piers all catawampus with docked boats and shops, I embrace the scene. On some weathered-looking boats, working fishermen, many clad in knee-high rubber boots, pick through nets or fiddle with lobster traps. In front of more stalwart vessels, families stand in line for whale-watching expeditions. Inside flashy sailboats, preppy teenagers hoist sails for a summertime outing. They are as able as well-studied pros.

Along the wharf, shops, cafes, galleries and bars beckon. From **Commercial Street**, which runs the length of the harbor, narrow cobblestoned streets undulate into town. I leave the vibrant waterfront and explore the hamlet starting with **Congress Street**, which holds the usual respectable edifices, from City Hall to banks. But, eventually, I discover the panoply of ornate Victorian mansions, once the homesteads of wealthy ship magnates in one of the toniest towns in America—and the architecture proves it. Irrationally, I fantasize about buying one. But, finally, I check into the new chic, newspaper-themed [Press Hotel](#), formerly the home of the *Portland Press Herald* newspaper, and plot the rest of my short stay. When you decide to go, here are some essential experiences to try:



Tour: You're in Maine, so you need to eat some lobster. Catch your own on the [Lucky Catch Lobster Tour](#), which pairs you with authentic lobstermen. You'll bait, set and capture a lobster on a real lobster boat in **Casco Bay**.

Sip: While Portland, Oregon, touts high-quality brews, this city has renowned concoctions of its own. [Allagash Brewing Company](#) does a stellar Belgian Black, while [Shipyard Brewing](#) handcrafts more than 20 varieties. Vodka lovers will want to sip cocktails at [Cold River Vodka](#), while coffee aficionados can follow their noses to the aroma wafting from [Coffee By Design's](#) new roastery.

Eat: Packed with more restaurants than the population warrants, Portland has several eateries that have received nods from the James Beard Foundation. I loved [Fore Street](#) for its oven-roasted seafood and [Petite Jacqueline](#) for French-inspired, farm-to-fork fare.

Stroll: Check out the first **Friday Art Walk**, during which downtown art galleries proffer wine, cheese and open studio and gallery parties.

Explore: The state's iconic brand **L.L. Bean** offers affordable discovery tours worthy of their rugged clothing. Fish, kayak, hike, shoot arrows and more under the tutelage of an able guide.