

# 36 Hours in Midcoast Maine



Michael Appleton for The New York Times

Clockwise from top left, Sea Dog Brewing Company, Reid State Park, Primo, Rockland's Main Street, Penobscot Bay, breakwater in Rockland Harbor, Camden Hills State Park. Center: a dish at Primo. [More Photos »](#)

By **BRENDAN SPIEGEL**

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Wedged between the indie environs of Portland and the great outdoors of Acadia National Park, Maine's midcoast region has long enthralled summertime drivers with its quaint towns and pastoral, pine-lined roads. The tranquil harbors and craggy beaches along U.S. 1 offer settings as quintessentially Maine as can be. (Lobster roll with a lighthouse view, anyone?)

Multimedia



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### [Meandering Up Maine's Midcoast](#)



[Map](#)

### [Midcoast Maine](#)

But lately, as Portland's arty influence creeps northward, the midcoast is flush with chic new inns, art galleries and a modern, hyper-local food scene. For visitors, that means the best of both Maines: a cool, innovative spirit that lures city dwellers from Portland and beyond, blended with the laid-back Down East spirit coastal Mainers have long taken pride in.

## **Friday**

**3 p.m.**

### **1. MODERN-DAY MILLS**

Brunswick, a former mill town that serves as the gateway to the midcoast, these days produces less lumber and textiles than artwork and craft beer. The Fort Andross Mill is now filled with art studios; a branch of the Chelsea/Portland contemporary gallery Coleman Burke (14 Maine Street, Brunswick; 207-725-3761; [colemanburke.com](http://colemanburke.com)); and Frontier Café + Cinema + Gallery (14 Maine Street, Brunswick; 207-725-5222; [explorefrontier.com](http://explorefrontier.com)). Stop at Frontier's bar for a cappuccino made with organic wood-roasted beans from Matt's Coffee (\$3.50) or an Oxbow Brewing Farmhouse Pale Ale (\$6) — both local producers — and head into the small theater for a documentary screening or set from a local songwriter. Then walk across the truss bridge to Sea Dog Brewing Company (1 Main Street, Topsham; 207-725-0162; [seadogbrewing.com](http://seadogbrewing.com)), a former pulp mill where wheat ales accented by blueberries and apricots (\$4) pair nicely with a view over the Androscoggin River.

**5 p.m.**

### **2. SCENIC DETOURS**

As Route 1 winds eastward, the region's major towns are each only a few miles apart, but opportunities for rewarding detours are endless. Just beyond Brunswick, the area commonly

called Harpswell Peninsula provides plenty of options for waterfront wandering. Farther east, Reid State Park (\$6.50 admission; 375 Seguinland Road, Georgetown; 207-371-2303) is a pine-filled preserve with a picnic area that has views of a rocky beach and one of the area's few sandy stretches — where towering green pines overlook a sea of swimmers and sunset surfers.

**7 p.m.**

### **3. BACKYARD-TO-TABLE**

The champion of the midcoast's nascent farm-to-table food scene is the James Beard Award-winning chef Melissa Kelly's restaurant, Primo (2 South Main Street, Rockland; 207-596-0770; [primorestaurant.com](http://primorestaurant.com)), set in a century-old house on a hill just south of downtown Rockland. Walk around the restaurant's backyard organic gardens, two greenhouses, chicken coops and pig pens, then taste the fruits of those labors in dishes like honey wine-braised moulard duck over roasted beets, farro, baby leeks, hazelnut and rhubarb chutney. Choose the formal setting downstairs or head upstairs for a more modern, barnyard-chic ambience. Or pull up to the recently reconfigured bar space for house-made wild boar salami and chickpea-fried fiddleheads. Dinner for two runs around \$150.

**9:30 p.m.**

### **4. PRODUCE AT THE PUB**

Primo's locally sourced ethos is catching on just north of Rockland in the tiny harbor community Rockport, where a wood-walled former general store has been remade into an artisanal pub called Shepherd's Pie (18 Central Street, Rockport; 207-236-8500; [shepherdspierockport.com](http://shepherdspierockport.com)). Local crops are put to use in fruit cocktails infused with herbs (\$10), and in snacks like fried clam tacos and pickled baby carrots. Small plates start at \$4.

**Saturday**

**10 a.m.**

### **5. WALK ON WATER**

There is no shortage of ways to get out on the water around here, but one of the most spectacular is the 4,346-foot walk along the breakwater jutting into Rockland Harbor (end of Samoset Road, Rockland; [rocklandharborlights.org](http://rocklandharborlights.org)). The narrow granite structure took 18 years to build in the late 19th century, and leads nearly a mile out into the harbor. In morning light the red brick lighthouse and accompanying wood-frame keeper's house set at the breakwater's end form a dramatic sight as they seem to float in the middle of the harbor.

**11 a.m.**

### **6. ART CRAWL**

The hub of the midcoast's growing art scene is Rockland's revitalized Main Street. It is lined with established sites like the Farnsworth Art Museum (\$12; 16 Museum Street, Rockland; 207-596-6457; [farnsworthmuseum.org](http://farnsworthmuseum.org)) — home to one of the nation's largest collections of works by all three Wyeths — and new galleries like Asymmetrick Arts (405 Main Street, Rockland; 207-

594-2020; [asymmetrickarts.com](http://asymmetrickarts.com)) and Carver Hill Gallery (338 Main Street, Rockland; 207-594-7745; [carverhillgallery.com](http://carverhillgallery.com)), both focused on emerging Maine artists. In Rockport, a former horse stable contains the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (\$5 suggested donation; 162 Russell Avenue, Rockport; 207-236-2875; [cmcanow.org](http://cmcanow.org)), which will spotlight 17 local artists in its 2012 biennial, beginning Sept. 29.

**1 p.m.**

## **7. BOAT TOWN**

Camden Harbor is one of Maine's pre-eminent sailing spots. Visitors can explore it from the deck of windjammer fishing yachts like the 94-year-old schooner Surprise (\$38 for a two-hour sail; Public Landing, Camden; 207-236-4687; [camdenmainesailing.com](http://camdenmainesailing.com)). Or get even closer with a sea kayak tour from Maine Sport Outfitters (\$35; Bay View Landing, Camden; 800-722-0826; [mainesport.com](http://mainesport.com)). Two-hour guided tours teach kayaking basics, then navigate across the harbor and circle tree-lined Curtis Island. Paddlers may spot harbor seals and porpoises, or, if they dare, can pop in for a dip in the sub-60-degree water.

**7 p.m.**

## **8. FLOWER POWER**

For a town of fewer than 7,000, Belfast offers more than its share of sophisticated culinary surprises. Most notable is the new restaurant from the midcoast native Erin French, who started a hush-hush dinner club, then last fall expanded to the Lost Kitchen (108 Main Street, Belfast; 207-930-2055) on the ground floor of the 19th-century home she shares with her boat builder husband, Todd. In a homey but elegant dining room accented with slate walls, milled wood light fixtures and intricate arrangements of local flowers, Ms. French turns out a menu utilizing midcoast ingredients in dishes like pork belly confit with plum jam and pea tendrils, and caught-that-morning North Haven oysters in a cilantro-lime mignonette. Most dishes are finished with edible flowers like chive blossoms or kale flowers. Dinner for two, about \$100.

**10 p.m.**

## **9. BONFIRE BOCCE**

Head down the hill to Belfast's working wharf, home to a lobster pound and Three Tides (2 Pinchy Lane, Belfast; 207-338-1707; [3tides.com](http://3tides.com)), the closest thing midcoast Maine has to a hipster bar scene. The nautical-themed bar (a pile of shucked oyster shells serves as décor) includes a bocce court and a bay-view bonfire pit. Two dozen house-brewed beers range from the hyper-hoppy Big Twitch IPA to playful Snow Cone Pale Ale (\$5).

**Sunday**

**8 a.m.**

## **10. MOUNTAIN BOUND**

Camden may be known for sailing, but for landlubber adventure-seekers it's also fast emerging as a rock climbing destination. With fewer people on the rocks than up north in Acadia, it's an

excellent place to learn the basics. Atlantic Climbing School (207-288-2521; [acadiaclimbing.com](http://acadiaclimbing.com)) runs half-day courses for beginners in Camden Hills State Park, where the climb is rewarded with views of Penobscot Bay and Megunticook Lake.

**12:30 p.m.**

## **11. GREENS TO GO**

The vegetarian restaurant Chase's Daily (96 Main Street, Belfast; 207-338-0555) not only sources most of the menu from a family farm in Freedom, 20 miles inland, it also uses the back of the place as an art gallery/farmers' market. Order a wood-fired pizza topped with four local cheeses and fresh marjoram, then grab some beet greens or Maine products like Swan's raw, unfiltered wildflower honey (\$11) to take home. Lunch for two, \$30.

**2 p.m.**

## **12. BACK TO THE LAND**

The chef Annemarie Ahearn worked for Dan Barber and Tom Colicchio before moving north and turning an oceanfront barn into the Salt Water Farm (25 Woodward Hill Road, Lincolnville; 207-230-0966; [saltwaterfarm.com](http://saltwaterfarm.com)) culinary retreat. Wander through the blooming campus to learn about harvesting medicinal herbs, or hop on a boat to forage chanterelles on nearby Saddle Island. Ms. Ahearn and a roster of guest chefs teach classes on everything from pie making to chicken raising in a hip, natural-wood-filled setting that epitomizes the new midcoast aesthetic.

## **IF YOU GO**

The hillside **Camden Harbour Inn** (83 Bayview Street, Camden; 207-236-4200; [camdenharbourinn.com](http://camdenharbourinn.com)), a once dilapidated Victorian dating to 1874, was purchased by a pair of Dutchmen who reopened it in 2007 as a design-conscious boutique hotel. The 20-room property features modish interiors with art deco accents and sweeping bay views. Doubles from \$199.

Ed and Judy Hemmingsen, longtime Bar Harbor resort owners, recently "retired" to Belfast and converted two Main Street row houses into the luxurious **Belfast Bay Inn** (72 Main Street, Belfast; 207-338-5600; [belfastbayinn.com](http://belfastbayinn.com)). Open since 2008, the inn features an airy garden courtyard and eight large suites appointed with comfortable beds and working fireplaces. Doubles, including in-room breakfast, from \$198.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

### **Correction: August 3, 2012**

The 36 Hours [column](#) on Aug. 5, about Midcoast Maine, described the area commonly called Harpswell Peninsula incorrectly. The area is one oblong peninsula with three islands connected by bridges, plus other smaller islands; it is not three oblong peninsulas.

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