A TOUR OF MAINE

The Southern Gateway

Less than an hour by car from Boston, York County - Maine's southernmost shire - is by far its most visited region. It's also the state's fastest-growing county, experiencing a development boom that's only likely to continue with the widening of the Maine Turnpike and recent return of passenger rail service in the form of the new Amtrak Downeaster. The towns of Kittery, Old Orchard Beach, and Parsonsfield sit at the corners of the roughly triangular county, and each characterizes the diversity of the region. Kittery is known as the home of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and myriad factory outlets, and is the state's principal gateway. The sleepy, rural town of Parsonsfield is in the foothills of the western mountain region and, like many of the communities on York County's northwestern flank, its forested knolls are still dotted with pastures and farms. There are also several developed lakes and ponds, sites of summer camps and cottages, in the area. Old Orchard Beach, with its beach, pier, and amusement park rides has an allure unlike any other in Maine, attracting thousands of visitors, many from French-speaking Québec, with its carnival atmosphere.

Many more thousands flock to the long white sand beaches of the Yorks, Ogunquit, Wells, and the Kennebunks. Mark Twain once quipped that it would be difficult to throw a brick in the Yorks and not hit a postmaster. It's still true - the town is divided into a handful of distinct villages with their own services: York, York Harbor, York Beach, and Cape Neddick, each of which has its own waterfront.

Ogunquit is probably best known for its three-mile beach, considered by many to be Maine's finest stretch of sand. Brimming with tourists come July, Ogunquit gained fame early in the twentieth century as both art colony and summer resort - today it functions more as the latter with its gift shops, inns, condominiums, and large hotels, but the presence of the former can still be felt. Ogunquit's neighbor to the north, Wells, is also a busy summer community and its many antique shops and used bookstores make it popular with shoppers of the rare and unique. Much of the large Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, acres and acres of salt marshes and stretches of woods, sits in Wells.

The profile of nearby Kennebunkport was first raised when George H.W. Bush was elected president and has again found itself in the news with the presidency of George W. Bush. Tourists are again flocking to Walker's Point, the Bush family's impressive summer compound, but more come to the neighboring towns of Kennebunkport and Kennebunk for their beaches, inns, scores of shops, impressive Colonial architecture, and historic small-town ambiance.

With their robust Franco-American heritage, the twin cities of Biddeford and Saco constitute the industrial and population centers of York County - although they also include the summer colonies of Camp Ellis and Biddeford Pool. Inland, Sanford is one of the state's fastest-growing communities, and the Berwicks and the Eliots are residential, riverside communities that house many who work at the shipyard and in New Hampshire.

Greater Portland

Portland, Maine's largest city and its cultural and commercial center, is the hub of Cumberland County, the state's most populous region. Including its suburbs - which range from Scarborough in the south to Freeport in the north, and North Windham in the northwest, Portland is the

largest metropolitan area north of Boston, expanding outward every year. But Cumberland County still has nearly as many rural residents as it does city dwellers.

Founded in 1632, Portland has several historic neighborhoods and a number of buildings of architectural interest. Many of these are congregated in the city's West End, in the neighborhoods near Maine Medical Center, the state's largest hospital. Congress Street anchors the city's downtown, running from one end of the L-shaped peninsula in Casco Bay to the other. It begins on Munjoy Hill in a residential area near the Eastern Promenade, where there is a park and beautiful views of the bay, and descends to become a commercial and retail district downtown. Congress Street has enjoyed a bit of a boost lately thanks to some new stores, new restaurants, and the continued prosperity of many arts establishments located here. Portland City Hall, home of Merrill Auditorium and the Portland Symphony Orchestra, sits at one end of the city's official Arts District, and the Portland Museum of Art anchors the other. Only a few blocks separate the downtown from the Old Port, a historic waterfront quarter with boutiques and specialty shops, restaurants, and nightclubs, which is popular with tourists and Mainers alike. Ferries leaving Portland's waterfront provide access to the Calendar Islands in Casco Bay, which have a number of summer homes and many year-round residents, and a huge ocean-going vessel departs regularly from Portland for Nova Scotia.

The cities that border Portland - South Portland and Westbrook are Cumberland County's second and third-largest urban areas, the former known for its ever-growing shopping mall (the largest north of Boston), its bustling commercial port, and its family-friendly neighborhoods, the latter for its imposing paper mill and comfortable new subdivisions. Beyond them are Gorham, a commuter town and home of a campus of the University of Southern Maine, and Scarborough, which claims the state's largest saltwater marsh, a wildlife sanctuary beloved by birders, and has some of Greater Portland's nicest stretches of beach. Beyond South Portland is craggy Cape Elizabeth, which, like Falmouth Foreside to the north, is full of beautiful homes on the water and is where many of the city's top-level executives opt to live.

Unlike larger cities, Portland offers easy access to green countryside and open space. Within a twenty-minute drive of the city, Cumberland, Pownal, and North Yarmouth have few businesses and large rural tracts, though they have seen building booms in the past decade. Gray, with its neat downtown, and New Gloucester, with its historic Shaker colony at Sabbathday Lake, have agricultural traditions that continue to this day.

North of Portland, Yarmouth is a pleasant waterfront community with a pretty downtown and frontage on the Royal River. Better known is the shopping mecca of Freeport, home of L.L. Bean and the blocks of factory outlet stores that surround it. Brunswick, where Route 1 and Interstate 95 diverge, bills itself as the gateway to Maine's midcoast. Many shopping centers have sprung up here during the past decades, catering to the families of the aviators at Brunswick Naval Air Station, among others, but thanks to Bowdoin College and its 1,700 students, Brunswick's downtown remains vibrant. A highly regarded liberal arts school, Bowdoin adds youthful vitality to the community and offers many amenities to local residents, from health-club memberships to lectures and concerts.

The towns of North Windham, Raymond, Bridgton, Naples, and Casco make up the Sebago Lakes region, a much-visited recreational area with a large summer population on the northwestern edge of Greater Portland. Small towns in the off-season, these villages bustle during summer when scores of cottagers return to the lakes. The hills begin to roll here, making the area seem far from Portland's cobbled streets.

Western Mountains Region

Two counties make up the western mountains region - Oxford and Franklin - and they extend

from Porter, a tiny agricultural town near the New Hampshire state line, up to Gorham Gore, an unorganized township on the Québec border. The lofty peaks and deep lake valleys of the region attract the most tourist dollars in Maine outside of Acadia and the south coast, but most visitors to the western mountains come in the fall to see the area's dazzling foliage (some of the best in the state) and in the winter to ski at nationally known resorts like Sunday River and Sugarloaf/USA. Summer camps, lakeside cottages, and the Appalachian Trail are popular spots when the snow melts.

The village of Fryeburg, along the Saco River, serves as the base for excursions down the Saco, one of the most frequently paddled waterways in the state. This historic little town is also the home of the Fryeburg Fair, Maine's largest agricultural celebration, and Fryeburg Academy, arguably the state's most cosmopolitan prep school. To the northeast lie Norway, Oxford, and South Paris, three towns that form the commercial hub of Oxford County. South Paris especially has some outstanding old buildings - virtually every home in the village of Paris Hill is on the National Register of Historic Places. Much of the rolling country surrounding these towns is quiet and rural, filled with lakes and high hills.

Bethel and Rangeley are widely associated with skiing, thanks to their proximity to Sunday River, Saddleback Mountain, and Sugarloaf/USA. Not far from the stunning notches, rivers, and trails of the Maine section of White Mountains National Forest, the small town of Bethel is also home to Gould Academy, a private school. Famous for its fishing and boating, Rangeley, and its upscale neighbor Oquossoc, is surrounded by expansive lakes and ponds and is the site of another of the state's more popular state parks. Near Sugarloaf, Kingfield has a charming old downtown that sits along the pretty Carrabassett River.

Besides tourism, the main industry in the western mountains remains pulp and paper. There are large paper mills in Rumford and Jay, and much of the land in both counties is still owned by paper companies.

Farmington, the region's commercial center, is dominated by a lively University of Maine campus, which is consistently listed among the best small public liberal arts colleges in the nation. Nearby is Weld, site of Mount Blue State Park, a popular hiking and camping spot.

The Midcoast

Anchored by the historic shipbuilding communities of Bath to the west and Waldoboro to the east, the counties of the southern midcoast - Sagadahoc and Lincoln - form one of the state's tiniest, yet most picturesque, regions. All of the midcoast's population centers are located on or very near Route 1, which runs roughly parallel to the coast and provides the region's economic and cultural backbone.

Formerly a mill town and bedroom community to Brunswick, Topsham sits just off Route 1 along the Androscoggin River at the point where it converges with Merrymeeting Bay, one of the largest confluences of rivers in the East and a body of water rife with birds. Topsham still has quiet neighborhoods of fine old homes, but increasingly it is becoming a retail center to rival Brunswick. The rural communities of Bowdoin and Bowdoinham, with few stores and much open space, lie just north of Topsham.

Not far to the east is Bath, home of Bath Iron Works, a century-old shipbuilding yard dependent on defense contracts and one of the state's largest private employers. Perched on the bank of the Kennebec, Bath's well-preserved downtown provides services to the residents of the peninsula and island hamlets of Arrowsic, Robinhood, Georgetown, and Popham. Some of the finest Federal architecture in Maine can be found by driving Bath's neighborhood streets, once

the home of wealthy ship captains and shipping magnates. The city celebrates its long and proud tradition of boatbuilding at the highly regarded Maine Maritime Museum.

Wiscasset and Damariscotta, a bit farther along Route 1 to the northeast, are the economic and social centers of Lincoln County, hubs for the many small towns along the harbors, inlets, and islands that reach out to sea from Route 1.

Once an important shipbuilding center, Wiscasset now bills itself as "the prettiest village in Maine," and can make an argument for its claim with block after block of beautiful old sea captains' homes overlooking the tidal Sheepscot River. Today it's known for its fun downtown, a tidy mix of antique shops and restaurants, and for the defunct Maine Yankee power plant, the state's sole nuclear facility. The towns immediately inland - Alna, Dresden, and Whitefield are rural, riverside communities of gently rolling countryside.

Damariscotta, like Wiscasset, is also defined by a river. It even takes its name from the sleepy waterway that loops south from Damariscotta Lake through the Great Salt Bay and out to sea. The community has many handsome old homes and a postcard-pretty downtown, lined with red-brick shops overlooking the town landing. Damariscotta and the coastal villages of Pemaquid, Christmas Cove, New Harbor, and Round Pond to its south, have increasingly become a haven for retirees, as well as longtime summercaters.

One of Maine's most famous summer playgrounds, Boothbay Harbor, is located on a peninsula between the Sheepscot and Damariscotta rivers. Tourism is Boothbay Harbor's bread-and-butter industry, but lobstering and deep-sea fishing play important roles as well. Among the earliest settled places in Maine, Boothbay is now home to many excursion vessels, restaurants, boutiques, and inns.

The Penobscot Bay Area

The grand expanse of Penobscot Bay forms the eastern horizon for the coastal towns of Knox and Waldo counties. Fittingly, the sea is still the basis of the region's prosperity, bringing tourists, yachts, lobsters, and fish to the many communities that hug the bay. Overflowing with travelers in the summer, Route 1 runs parallel to the shore and is the most populous corridor in Knox and Waldo counties. It connects all of the larger towns and is the focus of shopping, dining out, and recreational activity.

At the southern end of Knox County, Thomaston's tidy main street is lined with graceful white Federal and Colonial homes. Its compact downtown is flanked by Montpelier, the reconstructed estate of General Henry Knox, George Washington's secretary of war.

Up the road, Rockland calls itself the "Lobster Capital of the World," and the hardy fishing port makes a strong case for itself with its fleet of lobster boats and bustling commercial waterfront. But the home of the annual Maine Lobster Festival is also a burgeoning arts and retail community. It's the site of the Farnsworth Museum, which has an exceptional collection of Maine art and is home to the Wyeth Center - the largest facility devoted to the works of that famed art clan. With a new public boardwalk constructed by credit-card giant MBNA, Rockland is also the homeport of most of the Maine windjammer fleet and provides access by state ferry to the bay's populated islands - Vinalhaven, North Haven, and distant Matinicus. Due south of town, Port Clyde is the mainland link to the famed artist's colony on rugged Monhegan Island. Several tiny harbor hamlets - Owls Head, Tenants Harbor, and Spruce Head are located on the peninsulas that jut into the bay.

Two of Maine's prettiest harbors, Rockport and Camden, are north of Rockland along Route 1. Full of beautiful seaside homes that cluster around a V-shaped inlet, Rockport is home to the Maine Photographic Workshops, an internationally known photography school, as well as the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (formerly Maine Coast Artists), a noted arts organization and gallery that sponsors shows by both established and up-and-coming art talents.

Camden is dominated by Mount Battie and Mount Megunticook, two high hills that loom over the sea like Scandinavian peaks and make up Camden Hills State Park, one of Maine's busiest state parks. Clustered in the red-brick downtown that rings yacht-filled Camden Harbor are many restaurants and boutiques that cater to the tourist trade in the summer but, unlike many resort communities in Maine, also stay open year-round.

Lincolnville, Camden's northerly neighbor, is divided into halves - Lincolnville Beach and Lincolnville Center. The former is the site of a ferry that connects the large island of Islesboro and its many year-round residents to the mainland. Lincolnville Beach has a few inns and three restaurants just off its small swath of sand. The center of town lies three or four miles inland, in a very rural area dotted with lakes, ponds, and hiker-friendly hills.

Beyond Lincolnville and its low-profile neighbor, Northport, is Belfast, shiretown of Waldo County. Popular with back-to-the-landers in the seventies, Belfast still has a funky vibe, with an over-the-top art deco movie house, crunchy food co-op, noted theater troupe, and various coffee shops and eateries. And it has enjoyed a remarkable boom in the past decade with the arrival of banking titan MBNA, which now employs some 2,000 people here to service its credit-card empire. Some of Maine's finest architecture can be found in Belfast's quiet neighborhoods and in the two or three blocks of Victorian commercial buildings that comprise the downtown.

The inland towns of Knox and Waldo counties are Maine's answer to Vermont's rolling green countryside. Blue ponds lie in the hollows of the hills, and small farms dot the landscape. Union, Hope, and Appleton have sizable blueberry barrens, Winterport is a quiet commuter town just south of Bangor on the tidal Penobscot River, and the popular Lake St. George State Park brings many to Liberty.

Central Maine

Two of the state's largest and most important rivers - the Androscoggin and the Kennebec - give their names to the counties of central Maine. A great portion of the state's population - and economic and political activity - lies in the belt that follows I-95 and the Maine Turnpike from the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn, through the Augusta-Gardiner area to Waterville and Winslow. If you venture far from the highway, however, the landscape quickly turns to farms and fields, lakes, and ponds.

By Maine standards, Lewiston-Auburn is a truly urban community and has nearly as many residents as Portland, a statistic that always seems to surprise people in southernmost Maine. In fact, Lewiston is the state's second-largest city, Auburn is the fourth, and they are closely entwined both economically and socially. Lewiston is known primarily for its sizable Franco-American community, its textile mills, and Bates College, a fine liberal arts school that plays a large cultural role in the city. L-A has been enjoying something of a renaissance of late as increasing numbers of businesses have set up shop because of the twin cities' advantageous location - almost equidistant from Portland, Brunswick, and Augusta.

Also well situated is Maine's state capital; Augusta sits on the Kennebec about an hour north of Portland and an hour and a half south of Bangor. It was chosen as the hub of politics because of its central location (in terms of population rather than geography), and with its busy shopping

plazas, restaurants, and UMaine campus, it serves as the economic and cultural center of the region. Just south of Augusta is Hallowell, known for its historic brick downtown and the lovely old homes on its leafy hillside streets.

North of Augusta along the river is Waterville, Kennebec County's second city and an economic and cultural center in its own right. The city rose to prominence as a mill town, but its claim to fame today is the highly regarded Colby College, which brings 1,600 students to the city.

West of I-95 is the Belgrade Lakes region - a scenic group of lakes, ponds, and streams that have been developed as a summer colony - and the hillside apple farms of Monmouth, Wayne, and Readfield.

Northern Maine

Geographically, northern Maine probably begins north of the 46th Parallel, but population becomes increasingly sparse north of Bangor, the state's third-largest city. Encompassing the fabled North Woods, the counties of Somerset, Piscataquis, Penobscot, and Aroostook dominate the state in terms of area but have relatively few residents outside of the Bangor-Brewer region. Aroostook (aka The County) alone is larger than the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined.

The three principal industries of this region are logging, tourism, and agriculture. Despite major upheavals in the paper industry that have resulted in mill closings and land sales of millions of acres, the counties of Somerset, Piscataquis, and Penobscot continue to bank on the industry's future. Logging is also important to Aroostook, as are potatoes grown in vast fields along the Canadian border.

During the nineteenth century, Bangor was the lumber-shipping capital of the world, and it remains both a principal entryway into the North Woods and its economic, cultural, and population center. The Queen City hugs the west bank of the Penobscot River, and just as its history is closely tied to this mighty waterway, so is its future, with a major development planned for the revitalized waterfront. Bangor has many fine homes that still stand in various neighborhoods; buildings of architectural distinction are also collected in the residential Broadway area and the West Market Square Historic District. The Bangor International Airport - boasting one of the longest runways on the East Coast - is located minutes from downtown. On the city's north side are dozens of retail outlets in plazas and the Bangor Mall that serve as the center of commerce for much of northern Maine.

Across the Penobscot lies Brewer, an industrial city closely allied with Bangor economically and socially. Once a center of shipbuilding, Brewer's economy today is reliant on the pulp and paper industry and manufacturing.

Just a few minutes' drive out of the Bangor-Brewer area the landscape turns to farms and woods. The only other sizable communities in the area are Orono, home of the University of Maine, the flagship state university, and Old Town, known internationally for its canoes and also the site of a Penobscot Indian Reservation and a paper mill. UMaine is the largest school in Maine, with 11,222 students, and its Maine Center for the Arts brings world-class entertainment to the area. The university has traditionally excelled in men's ice hockey, women's basketball, and baseball, making it a source of pride among sports fans across Maine.

Other important communities in northern Maine include Skowhegan, a brawny paper-mill town not far from Waterville; Dover-Foxcroft, on a diagonal between Bangor and Moosehead Lake; Greenville and Rockwood, which provide services to the many visitors to massive Moosehead

Lake; **Millinocket**, a mill town just outside the state's largest wilderness area, Baxter State Park; **Houlton** and **Presque Isle**, centers of the potato industry; and **Fort Kent**, the commercial center of the French-speaking St. John Valley and site of a small UMaine campus.

The Down East Coast

Hancock County, home of Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park, has the longest coastline of any county in the state - if you take into account all its nooks and crannies. So it's no surprise that its most important industries are related to the sea - tourism and commercial fishing. Like its eastern neighbor, Washington County, Hancock is also blanketed by forests and blueberry barrens that blaze red in the autumn.

At the mouth of the Penobscot River, **Bucksport** marks the western boundary of Hancock County. It faces Fort Knox, one of the state's largest old stone and earthworks forts, across the water, and is dominated by an imposing paper plant visible from miles away. On spectacular peninsulas reaching southeast from Bucksport are **Castine**, with its towering old elms, rich history, picture-perfect downtown, and Maine Maritime Academy; **Deer Isle**, home to a colony of artisans and crafters; Stonington, a fishing village with a beautiful harbor and terraced downtown; and **Blue Hill**. Located beneath the small rise that gives the town its name, Blue Hill is a sweet village of venerable homes and artsy boutiques that overlooks a protected ocean inlet. Nearby are the villages of **Penobscot**, **Brooklin**, and **Surry**, each of which is a small town with interesting architecture and fantastic views.

The gateway to Acadia, **Ellsworth** is Hancock County's shiretown, best known for the plazas and strip malls that stretch for several miles down Route 1 and Route 3. One of the most visited of the nation's parks, **Acadia National Park**, on **Mount Desert Island**, is a breathtaking combination of rounded mountains and crashing surf. Most of these visitors end up in **Bar Harbor**, with its myriad bed-and-breakfasts, shops, and restaurants. Several of the island's other communities, such as **Somesville**, **Southwest Harbor**, and **Northeast Harbor**, also attract sizable populations of summer residents and shoulder-season visitors.

East of Ellsworth, traffic tails off and a quiet descends, making the Sunrise Coast - as it is called - as different as can be from Acadia. The little towns that Route 1 passes through on its journey east - **Milbridge**, **Cherryfield**, **Addison**, **Columbia Falls**, and **Jonesport** - are known for their fishing fleets and blueberry barrens. **Calais** is a border town on the St. Croix River and also abuts the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, an important wildlife sanctuary for breeding birds. **Machias** is home to a University of Maine campus and has an angular old downtown perched above Bad Little Falls. Eastport is the nation's easternmost city (not to be confused with **Lubec**, which is the easternmost town), and is a hub of the fishing industry and an important deep-water shipping port. The humpbacked island upon which Eastport sits gives most of the homes in the salty little city extraordinary views of Passamaquoddy Bay, and its brick downtown - where entire buildings sell for the price of a new Mercedes - has "potential" written all over it, just waiting to be discovered.