

TRAVEL

+SKI SITE GETS A FACE-LIFT

SKIRESORTS.COM, an online destination for ski information, is going through a major redesign and will be launched by the end of the month. Changes will include a forum where you can buy and sell used gear, editors' blogs, real-time weather and snow conditions, and articles written by experts. (COURTNEY CROWDER)

Chilling out in Portland

Maine's largest city boasts a quaint, artsy atmosphere and great grub

BY ELAINE PAOLONI
Special to amNewYork

From camping in the North Maine Woods to hiking the majestic cliffs near Bar Harbor, Maine offers plenty of fun in the great outdoors.

But explorations of the Pine Tree state don't have to be rustic. The seaside city of Portland also has much to offer.

The town's Victorian architecture and hilly geography — sloping down to Casco Bay — is reminiscent of San Francisco. Add a dash of city-slicker culture and top-notch cuisine and it's a great getaway for New Yorkers.

WANDERING AROUND Commercial Street

is geared toward tourists, but in an upscale way.

Quaint mom-and-pop stores, antique shops, craft stores and homemade ice-cream shops and waterfront watering holes and eateries abound.

Drop by one of the gourmet markets for some

decadent chocolate-covered blueberries.

THE ARTS SCENE

The city's arts scene is enriched by the presence of a thriving array of venues, including the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art (ICA at MECA), Portland Museum of Art, Portland Ballet Company, Portland Symphony Orchestra and Portland Stage.

Congress Street

Walk up any of the cobblestoned side streets toward Congress Street, and you're sure to find young performing artists hard at work.

First Friday Art Walk firstfridayartwalk.com

On the first Friday of every month, take advantage of free, self-guided tours that allow visitors to sample the works on view at the art galleries, studios, museums and alternative art venues. Many of the venues around town stay open late, and this month, for the first time, a trolley was offered to connect various areas.



Tommy's Park is a nice place to take a break downtown.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

While **Portland** is roughly **21 square miles**, most of the attractions are in the downtown/waterfront district.

Many **hotels and bed-and-breakfasts** are located in the **center of town**.

Visitportland.com is a great resource for accommodations.

Portland has a thriving restaurant scene, with lots of eateries open late. Check out **foodinportland.com** for restaurant and bar reviews.

It takes about **six hours to drive** and about **1½ hours to fly** between New York and Portland.

The **downtown area** is a **10-20 minute taxi ride** from the train station and the airport.

GREAT GRUB

For those who shudder to think of the dining scene outside NYC, rest assured you're in good hands in Portland. In a state synonymous with lobster and blueberries, it's no surprise that there are lots of foodie events going on.

Maine Foodie Tours mainefoodietours.com

While you'll never be able to eat your way through the city on a weekend visit, consider enlisting Maine Foodie Tours for a little help.

Take a two-hour culinary walking tour of the Old Port and feast on fresh Maine lobster, local blueberry preserves, cheeses, smoked seafood and whoopie pie — a sweet cake-and-frosting



Portland Head Light is on Cape Elizabeth.

sandwich. There's also a Just Desserts tour, and a beer tour is coming soon.

Harvest on the Harbor harvestontheharbor.com

For a full-on foodie experience, check out the delicious dishes at Portland's Harvest on the Harbor, which will take place Oct. 22-24.

Maine's Lobster Chef of the Year Competition

Lobster lovers won't want to miss this competition on Oct. 23. There's also a tasting of harvest menus from restaurants, seminars, demonstrations and a marketplace. Wine, beer and spirits also will be featured throughout the weekend.

TRAVEL DEALS

■ **Free Caribbean honeymoon when you book a wedding:** Double your time in paradise by getting a free five-night honeymoon at either the Renaissance Resort in Aruba or Curacao when you book a wedding package at the other location. The package must be booked by Dec. 31 and both the wedding and the honeymoon must take place by Dec. 31, 2010. For more information, visit marriott.com.

■ **Travel abroad with Concorde Hotels and save:** This winter, travel and save with the Concorde Winter offer, valid Nov. 1 through March 31. The \$118 package includes one night in a double room for two, a complimentary buffet breakfast and a surprise gift, ranging from a cruise on the Seine to an insider tour of the Patek Philippe Museum in Geneva, in 21 Concorde hotel locations. Visit concorde-hotels.com or



Marriott is giving free honeymoons at Flamingo Beach at the Renaissance Resort.

call 800-888-4747 to learn more.

■ **Pay for 3 nights and stay for 7:** Stay at

a tropical Club Med resort for seven nights and only pay for three. With packages for families, couples and singles, you can get an all-inclusive vacation for just \$799/person and \$400 for kids ages 2-15. Check availability at specific locations, but most resorts are offering a variation of the package. Travel must be booked by Oct. 31 and take place by April 30. Call 888-WEB-CLUB or visit clubmed.us.

(COURTNEY CROWDER)



Concorde is offering a winter deal at Hotel du Louvre.