

Beyond Lobster

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Beyond Lobster – by Rona Distenfeld



If all you know about Maine dining is lobster, there are wonderful discoveries waiting for you.

Part of the fun of appreciating great food and wine is traveling to new

places in search of unique experiences. Maine may not be the first place that comes to mind

You can eat lobster almost anywhere in Maine, so why go to all this trouble? Owners Sarah and David Carlson have come up with their own special way of cooking lobster, and it's good enough to draw regular diners from more than an hour away. First, they spent time developing relationships with the best lobstermen, who in turn save the best of their catch for the Three Tides. They wrap these beauties in seaweed soaked in seawater, then cook it all, along with some extras, in a special outdoor open oven built just for this purpose.

when planning this kind of get-away, but this largely undeveloped landscape offers more than just hunting and fishing.

Think of Maine and you think of lobster. With an annual catch of 55 million pounds, there's no question that this tasty giant cockroach is king in the granite state, but unexpected culinary pleasures await those willing to look beyond the obvious.

More Than Breakfast at this B&B

Tucked in a corner of the Belfast Bay Meadows Inn in Belfast Maine, chef Oliver Outerbridge dreams up incredible small plate fusion dishes at his eponymous restaurant, Oliver's. Drawing inspiration from the freshest offerings at the local farmers' markets and indulging his classical training to combine pastry with veggies and butter, Oliver deftly presents his own versions of popular favorites alongside more whimsical offerings.

The one thing you won't find here is lobster. "I figure they get lobster everywhere else," says Oliver. "They don't need to get it here."

The fried goat cheese gazpacho shooter is a menu staple. This light, refreshing starter eschews salt in favor of distinctive flavors. The onion soup is also popular with restaurant regulars. Not your traditional thin broth, Oliver reduces 20 pounds of fresh onions to make just 2 pounds of stock. "It's more like an onion cheese fondue," he says.

Other favorites include scallop cakes with mango sauce, pad thai, Jack Daniels and molasses glazed pork ribs, and the



roast duck and poblano tamale. Every dish finds a balance between textures and spices that surprise and delight the palate, drawing regular diners from as far away as Montreal (where there is certainly no dearth of great restaurants).

Oliver's makes the most of the small plate format to encourage diners to try a variety of dishes at a single meal. He will also cook for a table, creating dishes tailored to your particular affinities.

Oliver's wine list is equally reflective of its owner's individual taste. His preference for French and Italian wines is clearly represented, and the wine list changes frequently to include his ongoing discoveries.

Plan to stay at the Inn, and you can enjoy many different wines by the glass or the bottle and leave your car keys in your room. The rooms are comfortable and well appointed, and you can follow a great dinner with a satisfying breakfast that includes lobster omelets and fresh-baked muffins.

Or try one the many other B&Bs in the area. Two of my favorites were the 1840's Greek Revival Alden House, with it's elegant sumptuous rooms, fresh baked cookies, and wi-fi access and The Carriage House, which is listed

Watching it is almost as much fun as eating it. Start with some tapas, a drink from the well-stocked bar, or a glass of wine as you sit on the porch overlooking the water. The list reflects Sarah and David's personal tastes, and they're happy to talk with you about wines you may be less familiar with. It's the perfect way to relax as you wait for your perfectly cooked lobster.

Other places you'll want to try while visiting Waldo County include The Maine Chowder & Steak House, a Gourmet Diners Society of North American Golden Fork Award winner in 2004, and the Chocolate Grill, known for their lobster fritters and their desserts. If you want to go where the locals have gone for generations, try the Lobster Pound in Lincolnville Beach and Anglers Restaurant in Searsport. Both are family restaurants featuring family recipes and local seafood and produce. The service is personal and the food is fresh, plentiful, and well prepared.

There's More to Freeport than L.L. Bean

Make sure your vacation itinerary includes a few days in Freeport. Known around the world as the home of outdoor outfitter L.L. Bean, Freeport is also home to the AAA Four-Diamond Harraskeet Inn and its two great restaurants. The Inn joins two period buildings built in 1798 and 1850 with a modern addition to offer elegant, luxurious accommodations characterized by the complimentary four o'clock tea in the mahogany paneled drawing room.

The Inn is known for using local, organically grown meats, fruits, and vegetables in both of its restaurants. The Broad Arrow Tavern sports an open kitchen, wood fire oven, and the Grill. A sumptuous breakfast buffet is offered here, as well as lunch and dinner.

The Inn's Maine Dining Room is the fine dining option with tableside preparation and flaming desserts. The wine list is 11 pages long and presents a nice balance of known and lesser known wines and regions, giving you plenty of good wines to choose from. The European selection is particularly interesting, with wines from Italy, France and Greece. There is also a nice selection of single malt scotch, whiskey, cognac, cordials, even fine tequilas.

The Inn is just a few short blocks from some of the best shopping you'll find anywhere. You'll find hand-made and one-of-a-kind furnishings at Thos. Moser Cabinetmakers, Abacus American Crafts, Chilton Furniture and Shaker Gallery, and Copeland Furniture Company Store. Brown Goldsmiths are known for their exquisite signature pieces and unique diamond and gemstone jewelry. The 20th Maine, American History Center boasts one of the most comprehensive Civil War book collections as well as Civil War music, fine art, maps, collectibles, and more.

There are shops specializing in Maine-made wares, and of course, L.L. Bean, the North Face, Patagonia, and other outdoor outfitters. You'll also find many of your favorite national stores here, such as Coach, Banana Republic, Cole Haan, Brooks Brothers, Jones New York, and Polo Ralph Lauren to name just a few.

The Great Outdoors Awaits

on the National Register of Historic Places and is considered one of the best examples of Second Empire Victorian architecture in the U.S.

They Make Wine in Maine?



Spend your second day exploring some uniquely Maine experiences. For the adventurous, an outing on lobster boat "Good Return" or a kayaking trip on the bay can help you build up an appetite. Or if you prefer more relaxing water sports, book a sail on the historic friendship sloop, "Amity".

If you'd rather stick to dry land, downtown Belfast offers a collection of charming shops lining the hill leading down to the bay. It feels like a coastal town in England or Ireland, and you'll find ships in a bottle, fine textiles from Ireland, art galleries, antique stores, and more.

Or take a drive through beautiful Waldo County. An easy trip takes you to the Bryant's Stove and Music in Thorndike. Talk about unique — you've never seen anything like this museum, which houses the private collection of Joe and Bea Bryant! Hundreds of antique stoves are arranged in rows in the stove room. You can even take one home! Many of the stoves from 1750 to 1850 are on display, and some are for sale. But don't stop there. Make it to the next room and you'll be amazed by a moving display of toys that makes F.A.O. Schwartz look like amateurs. The last room, almost a warehouse, is filled with player pianos, antique cars, hurdy gurdys, music boxes, and other intact and working remnants of a bygone age. It's an amazing collection with something for everyone — even the Smithsonian has expressed interest.

Next, head to Winterport and the Winterport Winery. Michael and Joan Anderson make their award-winning fruit wines in small batches from blueberries, pears, cranberries, and more. The winery was featured on the Fine Living channel's "50 Wines, 50 States" and is definitely worth a trip.

More Fine Dining — and Don't Forget the Lobster!

Head back to Belfast for dinner at the Three Tides in Belfast Harbor. If have a group of 12 or more you can call ahead to arrange for their one-of-a-kind lobster bake. Or, plan your trip to coincide with the 2-3 group bakes they organize every year (and be sure to reserve your place).

If you'd rather be coated with honey and tied to an anthill than go shopping, Freeport gives you lots of other options. Sign up for the L.L. Bean Outdoor Discovery School and try a workshop in fly-fishing, wilderness training, kayaking, outdoor photography. If you like winter sports, there are classes in cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and winter camping.

Get a look at the local wildlife on an Atlantic Seal Cruise. From May through October, choose from several different cruise options that let you view and explore Casco Bay. Or visit Freeport's natural phenomenon, the 40-acre Desert of Maine.

Bird watchers will want to check out the Maine Audubon Society's Mast Landing Sanctuary and Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park. History fans will enjoy Swann Island and the many historic buildings in the area.

Whatever your interests, central Maine offers a lot to see and do, and some special dining experiences to remember.

Helpful links if you go:

Waldo County web site

www.waldocountymaine.com

Harraskeet Inn

www.stayfreeport.com

Winterport Winery

www.winterportwinery.com

Bryant Stove and Music

www.bryantstove.com

Oliver's

www.baymeadowsinn.com

Rona Distenfeld is an Austin-based freelance writer who loves good wine and well-prepared food. Her articles have appeared in local, regional and national magazines.

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