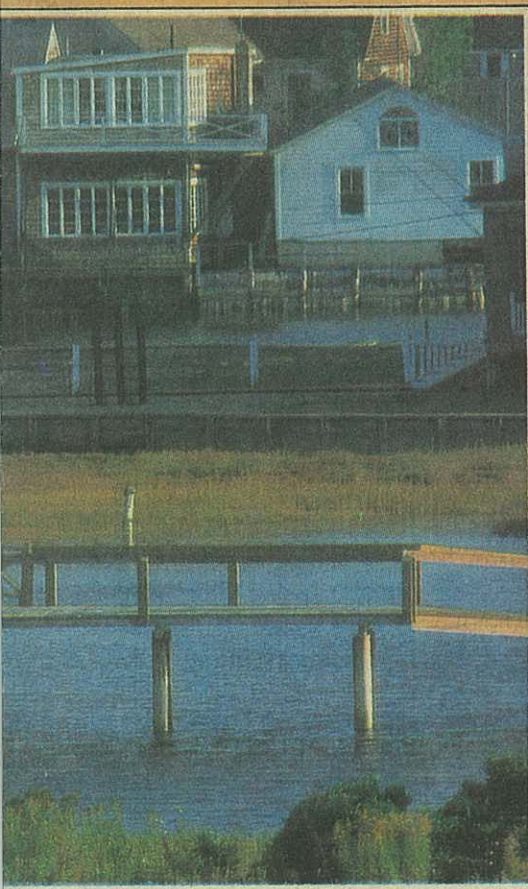


Kennebunkport, Maine, is perfectly disheveled



Photos by Peter Monsees

degree that it has lost its charm.



wntown Kennebunkport.

By Anne Moore

KENNEBUNKPORT, Maine — Some resort towns are too close to perfect, with a glut of charming inns and taffy shops that robs them of the character that first attracted visitors. This town isn't perfect, but it does have the right ingredients for a seaside resort.

Kennebunkport is a soft spot on the otherwise rugged Maine coast, where the ocean beats against the rock-ribbed shore and the wind whips fiercely. Kennebunkport has more the climate and look of a sea town in Massachusetts, but with a little bit of funk and a whole lot of character.

A good insight into the town's zany nature is its affection for its dump. A tattered sign at its entrance boasts that the dump is "America's No. 1, made famous by the Kennebunkport Dump Association." And to celebrate this love, the town holds a dump parade, with dump floats and a dump queen. On the Fifth of July, residents storm the dump, looking for the best garbage to drape, wrap, or hang from any and every limb. Owing to the town's seaside location, the most common costuming items are dangling fish heads.

Bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Kennebunk River, the port's first claim to fame was as a fishing and trading post, and during the 1880's, it was an important shipbuilding town. The shipyards helped lift Kennebunkport from the ranks of the most impoverished cities in Maine to the second wealthiest. Lobstermen still sail from the port, but the harbor is now home to pleasure craft, and industry is all but nonexistent.

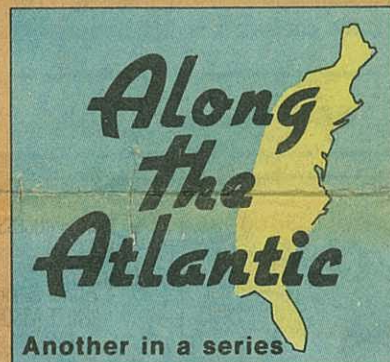
By the 1890's, the area had become a summer resort for the rich from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Their tremendous mansions, many with turrets and widow's walks, line the ocean road. But keeping with the town's off-beat style, the sprawling, sparkling white hotels and a pastel-painted shopping district stand beside sea-battered spooky mansions, fishermen's shacks, and pickup trucks rusted by the salt air.

Some of the summer mansions have been turned into seaside inns, so close to the ocean that waves seem ready to crash over the porch or through the window. And they're not your run-of-the-mill waves — in some spots, they

crash against boulders, sending spray up and out, so that even on a calm day the water is a marvel to watch.

Today, tourism is the area's main income source. Population during the winter is 3,000, but that number triples during the summer. The area is something of an artist's colony, and many painters and craftsmen sell their work in the town's storefronts.

The season runs from June 15 through Oct. 15, but one storekeeper said that as more and more visitors



have discovered Kennebunkport, the season has become longer, with people visiting from as early as May to as late as December. People come up for foliage, or beat the crowds by coming in May and June.

And there are crowds to beat in Kennebunkport, as traffic jams in the middle of town have been a longtime problem on the narrow, often rutted streets.

But you'll find lots of elbow room on the beaches, which are huge by New Jersey standards as well as clean and rock-free. Protected coves provide swimming areas for small children. Uninhabited islands, some of which are nature reserves, are within swimming distance.

There is plenty of water recreation available, with boats for charter, sailing lessons for children, and deep-sea fishing cruises.

You can see and do a lot around Kennebunkport, with its numerous white-steepled churches, and colonial and federal homes. Along the road into town is the Wedding Cake House — a lacy mansion built in the 1800's by a sea captain

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Kennebunkport a perfect mess

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for his bride. The Seashore Trolley Museum houses over 100 trolleys from all over the world and has a trolley ride. The Brick Store Museum has a collection of historical items from the area, including carriages and maritime equipment.

Several summer-stock theaters are in the area, and church fairs, auctions, and stock-car races are held throughout the summer. There

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are golf courses, tennis courts, horseback riding, and whitewater rafting.

A favorite pastime for residents and tourists alike is called "Bush Sightings." Vice-President Bush and his family have a summer home off the Ocean Road, and while it might be hard to catch a glimpse of the man, it is pretty hard to miss the house — the forbidding gate and overwhelmingly bright spotlights make the old mansion look like a space station.

Town stores stay open until 10 p.m. for late shopping, and many visitors just stroll around town to

the ice cream and taffy shops. There's a good bookstore, with a big, soft couch to curl up on, as well as clothing boutiques, antiques shops, a candlemaker, and a canvas-bag store.

An hour's drive north to Freeport brings you to the home of L.L. Bean, where you can buy anything from bug repellent to bicycle bags, a kayak to chamois shirts — at 2 in the morning. And because of the popularity of L.L. Bean, other stores have opened in Freeport, including outlets for Bass shoes, Frye boots, White Stag sports wear, Polo/Ralph Lauren, Dansk housewares, Hathaway shirts, and Cannon Mills sheets. Full-price boutiques abound as well. Stores keep long hours on account of Bean, which stays open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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Places to stay in Kennebunkport:
The Shawmut Inn, (207) 967-3931: Sprawling across 20 acres of oceanfront about a mile out of town, the inn is a good place for families. Cabins with efficiency kitchens or single rooms offer panoramic ocean views, including Cape Porpoise harbor, Goat Island lighthouse, and Vaughn's Island Nature Preserve.

An Olympic-sized saltwater pool sits beside the ocean breakfront.

There are fireplaces in the large common rooms, which are a tad classier than the private rooms. The rooms are clean, but short on charm — just your basic hotel decor. All rooms have private baths and color televisions. Rates: Apr. 25 to June 21, \$50 to \$145; June 22 to Sept. 2, \$65 to \$240; Sept. 3 to Oct. 21, \$52 to \$152. The inn serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but rates do not include meals.

Cape Arundel Inn (207) 967-2125: This small, quaint inn is so close to the ocean, the waves almost seem ready to sweep you away as you sit in the wicker chairs on the porch. There are six large, plush rooms with antiques in the main building, and seven rooms in the adjoining motel, some with efficiency kitchens. The Arundel is not far from town and serves breakfast and dinner in an oceanfront dining room. Rates: May 15 to June 30, \$55 to \$75; July 1 to Oct. 1, \$65 to \$85. Rates do not include meals.

Kennebunkport Inn (207) 967-2621: An elegant 19th Century mansion built by a tea merchant, the inn is in the center of town, overlooking the Kennebunk River. The scrupulously clean inn is full of Colonial

details; rooms and hallways are decorated with furniture and wall-paper of the period. Four large rooms fill the main house, and there are plenty more in the annex, which has smaller, simpler rooms, but is charming nonetheless.

There are two elegant dining rooms for breakfast and dinner, with fireplaces, dark Windsor chairs, and gleaming place settings. And the inn is said to serve the best meals in town. There is a pool, and color televisions are in all rooms. Rates: Apr. 19 to May 23 and after Oct. 27, \$38 to \$81; May 24 to June 20 and Sept. 2 to Oct. 27, \$49 to \$81; June 21 to Sept. 1, \$56 to \$88. Rates do not include meals.

The Captain Lord Mansion (207)

967-3141: A luxurious bed-and-breakfast inn abounding in detail, the Captain Lord is on a hill close to town and is distinguished by its octagonal cupola. The rooms, each decorated differently, are almost too plush — feet sink into the carpet, and the antique furnishings are polished to a high gleam. Eleven of the 16 rooms have fireplaces.

There is no pool, and rooms do not have televisions or phones. All have private baths. There is a two-night minimum stay. Rates (including breakfast): until Apr. 30, \$69 to \$99; May 1 to May 23, \$69 to \$99; May 24 to Oct. 15, \$89 to \$119.

For more information, contact Kennebunk Chamber of Commerce, 43 Main St., Kennebunk, Maine 04043, (207) 985-3608.