




The Big Wet Summertime Southern Maine BEACH Guide

By Brian Kevin,
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IF NOTHING SAYS “Maine” to you quite like the mingled scents of salt water and sunscreen, the crisp tug of a wetsuit around your torso, or the damp slap of flip-flops on a wooden boardwalk, you are far from alone. For better or for worse, the state’s beach-speckled southernmost 50 or so coastal miles *are* Maine for legions of summertime visitors. Some 40 percent of overnight guests — more than 8 million people — made a destination last year out

of the sunny, seaside stretch that tourism types simply call “The Maine Beaches.” And who can blame them? Miles of surf and white sand, funky beach towns with a foot in yesteryear, pockets of unspoiled splendor (if you know where to look), and more oddball family attractions than you can shake a souvenir lobster-claw at. Maine’s southern coast offers the American summer vacation at its beach-blanket best. Grab a towel and come with us.



KITTERY/YORK

- 1 Fort Foster Beach** Pocahontas Rd. Pebbly/sandy, paid parking, toilets. Light use.
- 2 Seapoint/Crescent Beach** Rte. 103. Sandy, free (limited) parking, no facilities. Light use.
- 3 York Harbor Beach** Rte. 1A. Sandy, free (limited) parking, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 4 Long Sands Beach** Long Beach Ave. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Heavy use.
- 5 Short Sands Beach** Ocean Ave. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Heavy use.
- 6 Cape Neddick Beach** Shore Rd. Sandy, paid (limited) parking, no facilities. Light use.

Where the Beaches Are

OGUNQUIT/WELLS

- 7 Little Beach** Marginal Way, off Israel Head Rd. Pebbly/sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, no facilities. Moderate use.
- 8 Ogunquit Beach** Beach St. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Heavy use.
- 9 Footbridge Beach** Ocean St. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, toilets. Moderate use.
- 10 North Beach** Ocean Ave. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Moderate use.
- 11 Crescent Beach** Gold Ribbon Dr. Pebbly/sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Moderate use.
- 12 Wells Beach** Mile Rd. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, toilets. Heavy use.
- 13 Drakes Island Beach** Drakes Island Rd. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Moderate use.

BIDDEFORD/SACO/OLD ORCHARD

- 21 Timber Point** Timber Point Rd. Pebbly, free (limited) parking, no facilities. Light use.
- 22 Fortunes Rocks Beach** Fortunes Rocks Rd. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Light use.
- 23 Biddeford Pool Beach** Rte. 208. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 24 Hills Beach** Rte. 9. Sandy, free (limited) parking, no facilities. Light use.
- 25 Ferry Beach State Park** Bay View Rd. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 26 Old Orchard Beach** Rte. 9. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, toilets. Heavy use.

THE KENNEBUNKS

- 14 Parsons Beach** Rte. 9. Sandy, free parking, toilets. Light use.
- 15 Mother's Beach** Beach Ave. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Heavy use.
- 16 Middle Beach** Beach Ave. Pebbly, paid (limited) parking, no facilities. Light use.
- 17 Gooch's Beach** Beach Ave. Sandy, paid parking, lifeguards, toilets. Heavy use.
- 18 Colony Beach** Ocean Ave. Pebbly/sandy, free parking, no facilities. Light use.
- 19 Cleaves Cove Beach** Halcyon Way. Sandy, no parking (bike in is best), no facilities. Light use.
- 20 Goose Rocks Beach** Kings Hwy. Sandy, paid parking, no facilities. Moderate use.

CAPE ELIZABETH/SCARBOROUGH

- 27 Pine Point Beach** Rte. 9. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 28 Ferry Beach** Ferry Rd. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 29 Scarborough Beach State Park** Black Point Rd. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, toilets. Moderate use.
- 30 Higgins Beach** Ocean Ave. Sandy, paid parking, showers and toilets. Moderate use.
- 31 Crescent Beach State Park** Rte. 77. Sandy, paid parking, concessions, lifeguards, showers and toilets. Heavy use.
- 32 Kettle Cove** Kettle Cove Rd. Sandy/pebbly, paid parking, no facilities. Moderate use.

B

If you can only hit a few stretches of sand, make it these three.

Best of the Coast

Ogunquit Beach

Ogunquit's 3½-mile marquee attraction is the Platonic ideal of a New England beach, with sand as fine and soft as anyplace north of Daytona, beach grasses swaying on the dunes, and a vibrant (if sometimes crowded) scene on the sand. The southern-most section, known as the Main Beach, has copious concessions and spots to rent everything from beach chairs to bodyboards, along with warm(-ish) commingled waters where the Ogunquit River spills into the sea. Plus, there's room to roam. Head north, and the crowds thin out at Footbridge and North beaches — with their own parking and access, they're technically extensions of Ogunquit Beach, and a beachcomber can spend a lovely afternoon wandering there and back. 207-646-5139. ogunquit.org

Goose Rocks Beach

Although it still welcomes plenty of beachgoers in midsummer, Goose Rocks Beach, in Cape Porpoise, has a touch of wildness to it. Partially enveloped by the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, it supports only a fraction of the tourism infrastructure that beachgoers expect out of neighboring Kennebunk, so while you won't find showers or lifeguards, you may well spot harbor seals sunning on the white sand or hermit crabs skittering around the tide pools. The 3-mile beach consists of two well-protected crescents, and the slope is gentle, making Goose Rocks a favorite of families with young kids. 207-967-4243. gokennebunks.com

Crescent Beach State Park

This snug state park in Cape Elizabeth is really two beaches in one. Crescent Beach itself is a mile-long half-moon scattered with skipping stones and ringed with beach roses. An outpost of Portland Paddle offers paddleboard and kayak rentals and tours, plus there's a snack bar, picnic areas with grills, and a playground for the kiddos. For a little more seclusion, though, visitors can follow the footpaths to adjacent, undeveloped Kettle Cove (which also has its own parking area), a pebblier pocket beach flanked by dramatic granite shelves. On the way out, Kettle Cove Creamery and Café is a stone-cold classic for cones and lobster rolls. 207-799-5871. maine.gov/crescentbeach

Top to bottom: Umbrella forest at Ogunquit Beach; Goose Rocks Beach overlooks the green rise of Timber Island; magic hour at Crescent Beach.



LINES IN THE SAND

What not to do on the southern Maine seashore.

► **PUBLIC ALCOHOL** consumption is illegal statewide, including on beaches. Glass bottles are also a no-no, regardless of what's in them.

► **SMOKING** (anything) is prohibited at state parks and by most town-run beaches. (Vaping, if not banned, is still obnoxious.)

► Some beaches ban **DOGS** or mandate leashes, while others set aside hours (often early) when four-legged friends are welcome. Don't bring Fido without checking.

► Expect to carry out your **TRASH**. Where receptacles are available, don't fill them with huge bags or

large items like broken umbrellas or chairs.

► Stay off the **GRASS!** Beach ecosystems are fragile, and visitors should never walk across vegetated areas.

► Don't disturb piping plover or least tern **HABITAT**. Admire the endangered birds from a distance, stay out of

signed restricted areas, and fill any beach holes (since chicks can tumble in).

► Some beaches (Goose Rocks and Long Sands among them) allow **FIRES** (conditions obliging), but town permits are a must. Don't leave logs on the beach or fires unattended.

► **PARKING** often requires a trip to the town office for a permit. Don't show up without calling or going online to check out local parking regulations first.



Can I come?



GABE SOUZA (SURF-CASTING); COURTESY OF OLD ORCHARD BEACH PARASAILING & JET SKI; SETH GAFFAR (SURFING); MICHAEL D. WILSON (PADDLEBOARDER); ERWIN SHERMAN (PADDLEBOARD ILLUSTRATION)

SURF-CASTING ☆

Glenn Dochtermann (go ahead and call him “Doc”) learned to fish off the beach from his dad some 60 years ago, and he’s been out surf-casting ever since for stripers, pollack, and more. The manager of South Berwick’s Vaughan Woods State Park and Kittery’s Fort McClary State Historic Site, Doc leads a series of free (with paid park admission) drop-in surf-casting clinics at coastal state parks. This summer, he’ll be at Saco’s **Ferry Beach** on July 19, Cape Elizabeth’s **Crescent Beach** on July 26, and **Fort McClary** on September 23 (plus Reid, Popham Beach, and Wolfe’s Neck state parks, farther down the coast, in August). Participants technically need a saltwater fishing license and are encouraged to bring their own rod and tackle (particularly hooks, sinkers, and bait) but Doc shows up with enough rods and reels for a crowd, plus a few buckets of mackerel. Expect about an hour of instruction and another hour of fishing. Call Doc at 207-384-5160 or visit parksandlands.com for more details.

Choose your own Adventure

MAKE THE MOST OF THE SURF WITH A LOCAL OUTFITTER.

PARASAILING ☆

Getting pulled behind a speedboat is more relaxing than it sounds when you’re drifting 1,200 feet above the waves. Coast Guard-certified captains from **Old Orchard Beach Parasailing & Jet Ski** (5 Bay Ave., Saco; 855-359-2759; oobparasail.com) head a ways

off the OOB shorefront with groups of up to six, and the parasail itself accommodates up to three for what is basically a tranquil, 15-minute aerial cruise with lighthouse and Ferris wheel views (\$90 per person, extra if you want pics or to wear a GoPro camera). If you need more adrenaline, they’ll kill the engine and let you parachute into the drink.

SURFING ☆

Yes, Virginia, there is surfing in Maine. You’ll need a wet suit (because brrrr), and the steep swells can be elusive, but Maine’s surfing community is passionate and welcoming. The southern coast’s best breaks are at Scarborough’s Higgins Beach, York’s Long Sands Beach, and Wells Beach, and each has surf shops that offer rentals and lessons for newbies. Instructors at **Black Point Surf Shop** (134 Black Point Rd., Scarborough; 207-939-6016; blackpointsurfshop.com) lead 90-minute tutorials by appointment (\$90 for one person, \$140 for two, with discounts if you BYO gear); **Liquid Dreams Surf Shop** (171 Long Beach Ave., York; 207-351-2545; 696 Main St., Ogunquit; 207-641-2545; liquiddreamssurf.com) has a whole catalog of 3-day beginner’s programs (\$170), kids’ clinics and mini-camps (\$50–\$90); private lessons (\$70–\$105), and ladies’ nights (\$40); Maine’s original surf shop, **Wheels N Waves** (365 Post Rd., Wells; 207-646-5774; wheelsnwaves.com) offers multiple 2-hour tutorials daily in summer (\$40–\$90, depending on group size and gear needs).

UP A CREEK

EXPLORE THE TIDEWATER ON A PADDLING DAY TRIP.

Where there are beaches, there are estuaries, and southern Maine’s quiet, wildlife-rich tidal creeks reward exploration — particularly for those who prefer protected waters to open-ocean paddling. Plenty of outfitters offer kayak or stand-up paddleboard rentals and tours. A few best bets for paddling day trips:

Chauncey Creek, Kittery

Harbor Adventures leads kayakers on a half-day “lobster luncheon” paddle that takes in Fort Foster and heads up shady Chauncey Creek, with a lunch stop at a lobster pound. ▶ \$65, plus lunch. 207-363-8466. harboradventures.com

Stevens Brook, Wells

They don’t offer tours, but the folks at World Within Sea Kayaking (at the Ogunquit River Inn) rent kayaks and SUPs that paddlers can launch out the back door, into the lower Ogunquit River, at high tide. It’s a short paddle to Stevens Brook, behind Footbridge Beach, and a network of tiny tidal streams in the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge. Watch for wading birds. ▶ \$35–\$40 for 2-hour rentals. 17 Post Rd., Wells. 207-646-0455. worldwithin.com

Mousam River, Kennebunk

Multiple outfitters in the Kennebunks can guide short paddles along the tidal Mousam River, which winds through the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge to meet the sea at Parsons Beach. Boat traffic is minimal, and sightings of bald eagles, ospreys, and other raptors are common. ▶ *Kayak Excursions SUP tours, 1½ hours, \$50. 207-204-8888. southernmainekayaks.com. Coastal Maine Kayak & Bike, kayak or SUP tours, 3 hours, \$85. 8 Western Ave., Kennebunk. 207-967-6065. coastalmainekayak.com*

Scarborough Marsh

A mile up the road from Pine Point Beach, Fun and Sun Rentals and Tours offers kayaks, SUPs, and car shuttles for one-way, self-guided tours through the vast Scarborough Marsh, and the neighboring Scarborough Marsh Audubon Center has canoe and kayak rentals. Shorebirds, waterfowl, otters, and even harbor seals abound. ▶ *Fun and Sun, \$30 kids, \$50 teens and adults. 10 Snow Canning Rd., Scarborough. 207-730-1926. funandsunrentals.com. Audubon Center rentals, \$16–\$45. 92 Pine Point Rd., Scarborough. 207-883-5100. maineaudubon.org*



Maine’s quiet, wildlife-rich tidal creeks reward explorers.

17 Things

TO KEEP KIDS ENTERTAINED APART FROM THE BEACH

- On Sundays, hit up the **Kittery Community Market** for picnic supplies, live music, and a kids’ corner with art and science projects. **2.** See what 40,000 pounds of candy looks like at **Yummies Candy & Nuts** in Kittery. **3.** Visit **Fort McClary State Historic Site**, also in Kittery, where an 18th-century fort overlooks the Piscataqua River. **4.** Make faces at the monkeys (not the white tiger) at **York’s Wild Kingdom**. **5.** Play Skee-Ball, Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, and more at the retro **Fun-O-Rama** arcade pavilion on York Beach. **6.** See Bernard Langlais’s whimsical wooden creatures in the seaside sculpture garden at the **Ogunquit Museum of American Art** — come Wednesday mornings for kiddie story time and crafts. **7.** Pick your own strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and even tomatoes at **Spiller Farm** in Wells.
- Hit the **Scoop Deck** near Wells Beach to choose from among a whopping 72 flavors of ice cream. **9.** Ride a restored streetcar at the **Seashore Trolley Museum** in Kennebunkport. **10.** Explore gentle wooded trails at Kennebunkport’s lovely **Edwin L. Smith Preserve**. **11.** Ferry out to the 19th-century **Wood Island Lighthouse** in Biddeford Pool, part of a guided tour offered by the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse. **12.** Ride a rollercoaster at Saco’s **Funtown Splashtown**. **13.** Channel your inner pirate at **Schooner Miniature Golf**, in Saco, where you’ll putt around (and aboard) a 75-foot windjammer. **14.** Catch the weekly **Thursday night fireworks at Old Orchard Beach**. **15.** Ride the Ferris wheel at **Palace Playland** for a bird’s-eye view of the iconic Old Orchard Beach pier. **16.** Get free ice cream with your kids’ meals at **Ken’s Place**, a locally beloved, counter-service seafood joint near Scarborough’s Pine Point Beach. **17.** Walk the coastal trail, explore the children’s garden, and admire Portland Head Light at **Fort Williams Park** in Cape Elizabeth.



Our Sediments, Exactly

KNOW YOUR PEBBLES FROM YOUR SAND.



SHINGLE BEACHES

That's what geologists call a beach made primarily of pebbles and/or cobbles (the former measure 4 to 6.4 centimeters across, the latter 6.4 to 25.6 — anything bigger is a boulder). Most of Maine's beaches are shingle beaches, particularly northeast of Portland, and many of those shingles were deposited there by the Laurentide Ice Sheet, which scraped them up inland as it moved across the continent some 15,000 years ago. That's why you can find pink-granite stones in spots where the local granite outcrops are all gray, says Jon Dykstra, a retired geologist on the board of the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust. Wave action also breaks down the bedrock alongside beaches, rolls stones until they're smooth, and washes away mud and sand.



SAND BEACHES

So why does Maine have so many sandy beaches down south? First, you need to understand glacial rebound. Since the last retreat of the ice sheet, Dykstra says, "the coast of Maine has been slowly rising . . . not unlike when you push your hand into a mattress and then release the pressure." Along most of Maine's coast, this rebound has exceeded or kept pace with naturally (and gradually) rising sea levels. Down south, though, glacial rebound has been more subdued these last couple thousand years. That means the southern coast has seen a gentle rise in apparent sea level (picture a slightly tilted plane with the sea in a higher position than the shore), so wave action preferentially piles up sand-size grains of sediment on the land (those same grains have a tougher time accumulating if the plane's tilt is reversed). Of course, Dykstra says, specific local conditions — currents, the shape of a coastline, wave directionality — can monkey with this process, which is why a single mile of Kennebunk coastline can host a shingle beach right between two sandy ones.

MICHAEL D. WILSON (PEBBLES AND SAND); BENJAMIN WILLIAMSON (WALKS); PORTLAND PRESS HERALD | CONTRIBUTOR (SHIPWRECK); SHUTTERSTOCK (TIMELINE ILLUSTRATION)

Walk This Way

FAST FACTS ABOUT OGUNQUIT'S MARGINAL WAY, MAINE'S MOST BELOVED SHORELINE STROLL.



- Linking Perkins Cove to Ogunquit Beach, the mile-and-a-quarter paved walkway traces its origins to 1925. Former state rep Josiah Chase almost turned his oceanfront parcel into a cottage subdivision, but a civic-minded pal, architect F. Raymond Brewster, convinced him to donate it to the town instead.
- Thirty-nine benches face the ocean, each with a sponsorship plaque that sold for \$5,000 to fund trail maintenance — which is necessary. More than once, a bench has been washed out to sea by storms that can wreak havoc on the path.
- Tucked below the cliffs at about the midpoint, Little Beach is a pocket beach that's submerged at high tide. When the tide's out, tidepoolers mingle with surfers and plein-air painters.
- The deskbound can get a moment of zen thanks to live webcams operated by the nonprofit Marginal Way Preservation Fund at marginalwayfund.org.

...or This Way

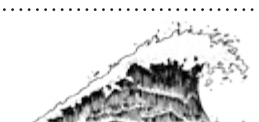
MOVE OVER, OGUNQUIT, YORK'S GOT A DRAMATIC CLIFF WALK OF ITS OWN.



- York Harbor's ¾-mile shoreline path — an out-and-back walk from York Harbor Beach — doesn't have its neighbor's notoriety, in part because it's more rugged (a mix of paved segments with railings and unimproved trail) and in part because decades of landowner squabbles have kept access in flux.
- The formal trail dates to York's days as a posh summer colony and crosses right through the yards of some of the town's most historic homes (be respectful, obv).
- The cliffs rise nearly 50 feet in spots, and the waves can put on a show. They can also take out chunks of wall and pathway, and storm damage can make for tricky footing.
- The path connects (awkwardly, via the beach and social trails — the Cliff Walk ranger can steer you) to the ¾-mile Fisherman's Walk from the harbor to the Wiggly Bridge, the "world's smallest suspension bridge."

LOST COASTER

THERE'S A SHIPWRECK BURIED BENEATH YORK'S SHORT SANDS BEACH. HERE'S WHAT LITTLE WE KNOW ABOUT IT.



1750 to 1850 Colonial or post-colonial ship-builders launched the vessel — either a sloop or a schooner, probably about 60 feet long, judging from the hull fragment that's left on the beach.	1769 A ship called <i>Industry</i> ran ashore at Short Sands Beach, according to records — some believe the wreck is <i>Industry's</i> remains.	1958 A nor'easter removed enough sand from the beach to uncover the wreck for the first time in modern memory. Local officials have said that it's typically buried beneath 6 or 7 feet of sand.	1970s–2000s Storms periodically revealed the wreck for brief periods, about every 10 years. In 2007, archaeologists measured the hull and took samples of the wood.	2018 The ship skeleton made its most recent — and most publicized — appearance, following one of the winter storms the media dubbed a "bomb cyclone."
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Looking Like a Snack

DON'T SKIP THESE BEACH-TOWN BITES (AND SIPS).

Holy Donuts

Maine's Holy Donut micro-chain has a **Scarborough** outpost a few miles from the town's best beaches. All the potato donuts are tasty, but don't sleep on this summer's customer-chosen flavor, honey lavender. Plus, there's always some Maine-y blueberry variation — blueberry coffee cake, blueberry with lemon glaze, blueberry maple bacon. ▶ 398 Rte. 1. 207-303-0137. theholydonut.com



Pier Fries

Follow the crowds to the Original Pier French Fries stand near the **Old Orchard Beach** pier, where daily shipments of New England potatoes are delivered whole, then washed, peeled, crinkle-cut by hand, and fried golden brown (but soft inside). The stand goes through 250,000 pounds of potatoes a season. ▶ 12 Old Orchard St. 207-934-2328. pierfrenchfries.com

Dunne's Ice Cream

Sucking down an ice cream cone while admiring **Cape Neddick's** Nubble Light has been a tradition since 1967, when a stand called Brown's opened up at Nubble Point. Steve Dunne ran the place from 1993 to 2014, then opened his own stand across the way, serving generous scoops of Shain's of Maine right in between Short and Long Sands beaches. ▶ 214 Nubble Rd. 207-363-1277. dunneseicecream.com

Barnacle Billy's Special Rum Punch

Late founder Billy Tower concocted this fruity sipper, so popular that the **Ogunquit** institution mixes it up in 5-gallon batches. The record served in a day is 923 punches — that's with a three-drink limit on this potent stuff. Served with an orange slice, pineapple chunk, cherry, and a sprinkle of what witty servers will say is beach sand (it's nutmeg). ▶ 50 Perkins Cove Rd. 207-646-5575. barnbilly.com

The Goldenrod's Salt-Water Taffy

Taffy technicians have been stretching masses of boiled sugar at the Goldenrod, in **York Beach**, since 1896 — today, passersby watch through the windows as mechanical pulling machines do their thing. Tiny taffy "kisses" are made fresh daily and come in old-school flavors like molasses, licorice, and peppermint. ▶ 2 Railroad Ave. 207-363-2621. thegoldenrod.com

Huot's Fried Clams

A third-generation, family-owned business, Huot Seafood Restaurant in **Saco's** beachside village of Camp Ellis still uses Doris Huot's batter recipe from 1935. The result: a perfectly crisp coating that keeps clams from losing flavor to the fryer. Enjoy inside or from the takeout window for a picnic. ▶ 29 Eastern Ave. 207-282-1642. huotseafoodrestaurant.com

The Clam Shack's Lobster Roll

Fresh (round!) rolls from Reilly's Bakery in Biddeford, Kate's Homemade Butter from Arundel, and fresh, hand-picked lobster meat: the unconventional rolls at this classic **Kennebunk** seafood stand, right on the Lanigan Bridge over the Kennebunk River, have racked up awards and accolades (expect a line). ▶ 2 Western Ave. 207-967-3321. theclamshack.net

FIND

THE CLASSIC MAINE WATERFRONT LODGE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU



Fantastic *Sea Glass* and Where to Find It

LINDA MEHLHORN, OF SOUTH PORTLAND, COINED THE TERM "SEAGLUNKING" — THAT IS "SEA GLASS" + "SPELUNKING," THE ACT OF EXPLORING BEACHES AND WATERWAYS IN SEARCH OF SEA GLASS. SHE'S BEEN AT IT 50 YEARS, SO WE ASKED HER FOR SOME TIPS.

- The best time to spot sea glass, Mehlhorn says, is at sunset. The dusky glare helps hunters distinguish darker colors against rocks. It's also easier to go seaglunking at low tide, and searching after a summer storm can pay dividends, as more glass tends to wash up then.
- To aid her search in sand, Mehlhorn uses a sifter attached to a long handle.
- Keep an open mind. For example, Mehlhorn says, people tend to overlook brown pieces of sea glass — but hold it up to the light and what appears brown can truly be dark red. Less dazzling ceramic bits and pieces of "frozen Charlottes" — antique porcelain dolls — are also fun to collect.
- Scout rocky, rather than sandy, beaches, since sea glass often ends up wedged in among the rocks.



Peerless

The OOB pier is one of the great American boardwalks — and a slice of southern Maine at its unassuming best.

THE GEOMETRIC confusion of silhouetted rooflines, a sunrise or sunset streaking the backdrop orange and pink, the spring tide surging through the spindly forest of pilings: you can keep your Portland Head Light — for our money, the Old Orchard Beach pier is the state's most compelling man-made landmark. Built by a Connecticut bridge company in 1898, it's a remnant of the golden age of Atlantic beach towns, when seaside boardwalks and pleasure piers sprang up from Atlantic City to Daytona Beach. Such places have always threaded the needle between glamorous and honky-tonk, and so it is with OOB: in the interwar years, you wore a jacket to see Duke Ellington or Count Basie

in the pier ballroom; these days, you wear a tank top to hear a musical comedian working blue at Hooligans. Like Mainers, the pier doesn't let the elements keep it down: a storm partially wrecked it the year it opened, a fire burned the entrance in 1907, waves diminished its length throughout the mid-20th century, and a blizzard took it down in 1978. The pier was rebuilt every time, and its current, 600-foot incarnation dates to 1980. Its slightly ramshackle look complements OOB's come-one-come-all vibe — this is a beach where you can attack a hunk of fried dough while wading in a Speedo and nobody looks at you twice, and the pier is the charmingly ragtag monument it deserves.