

Travel

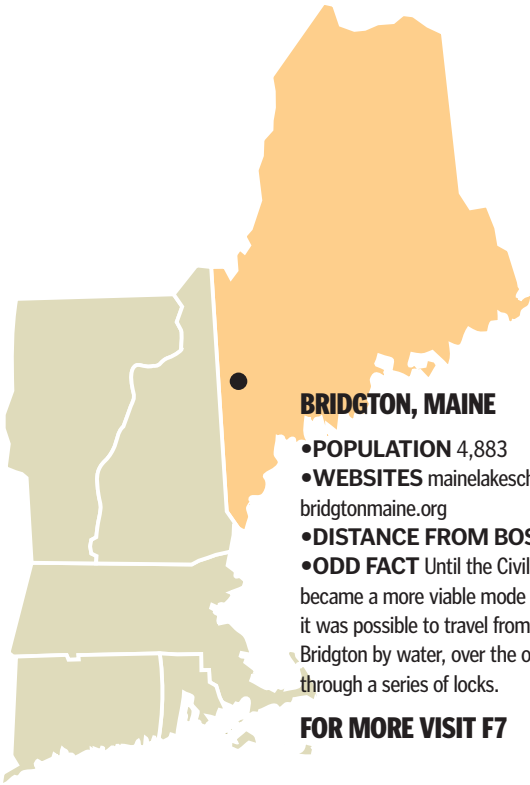
CLOSE-UP ON BRIDGTON, MAINE

SUN AND FUN

WATERWAYS, HIKING TRAILS, AND A DRIVE-IN MAKE TOWN’S SUMMERTIME SPECIAL

BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ts motto may be “The Maine Place for All Seasons,” but Bridgton remains a relatively sleepy spot outside of July and August, when this town of about 5,000 people swells to about 35,000. Most visitors head to their lakeside camps or rental cottages and emerge only for grocery and ice cream runs, trips to the double-feature drive-in or town events, like the bimonthly tailgate auctions or big July Fourth celebration. The area’s waterways draw boaters of all varieties, and Bridgton is a perfect jumping-off point for local nature walks and hikes in the eastern White Mountains. • This wonderfully laid-back town feels like it’s about to experience a boom. Renys, a family-run Maine institution (think: Building 19 meets Target) is doubling in size; The Magic Lantern, a local movie house, is being rebuilt and will have a beer and wine license when it reopens this summer; and the big-name, Maine-based Hannaford supermarket and Hancock Lumber opened in the last year.



PLAY

Bring your canoe, motorboat, windsurfing board, inner tube, or water wings to Bridgton and enjoy the dozens of lakes and waterways that dot this outdoor haven. Here, you can explore islands, hidden coves, sandy beaches, or just drift along listening to the haunting calls of the local loons.

Sports Haus (103 Main St., 207-647-5100, sports hausski.com; canoes \$25/day; kayaks \$20-\$30/day; \$30 delivery fee for canoes and kayaks) rents canoes, kayaks, sunfish, water skis, and kneeboards.

Families can enjoy easy rambles along nature trails in the **Holt Pond Preserve** (Grist Mill Road, 207-647-8580, mainelakes.org), which also offers guided walks and environmental lectures throughout the summer and miles of groomed cross-country trails come winter. Or, do a 5.8-mile loop up 2,006-foot **Pleasant Mountain** (Lake Road, 207-647-4352, elt.org), where you may spot lady’s slippers and red columbine, and enjoy views of cascading brooks, a glacial-formed chasm, and sprawling Moose Pond. More ambitious hikers have easy access to some of the most stunning and rugged treks in the White Mountains, including a challenging 9.1-mile loop up **Speckled Mountain** (Route 113) on the Maine-New Hampshire border.

Lifeguards keep an eye on swimmers at **Highland Lake** (Highland Road) and **Woods Pond** (Route 117) from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., June through August. You can also fish for salmon, trout, and smallmouth bass on local lakes (grab a permit from Town Hall or any marina, or hire a guide through maineguides.org).

Highland Lake is a destination for paddlers and swimmers. Those interested in fishing local lakes need a permit.



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

DO

When you’re ready to explore town, the **Rufus Porter Museum and Cultural Heritage Center** (67 North High St., 207-647-2828, rufusportermuseum.org) is worth a stop. The museum highlights the work of Porter, an artist and inventor whose original 1828 murals are on view in this historic home-turned-museum.

Visitors to **Narramissic** (Ingalls Road off Route 107, 207-647-9954) can tour a Federal-style home, a working blacksmith’s shop, and a temperance barn on this restored, 19th-century farm.

The **Bridgton Twin Drive-In** (Route 302, 207-647-8666) offers first-run flicks on two screens from late April to early October, and **The Magic Lantern** (69 Main St., 207-647-5065) will show mainstream, independent, and foreign films on four screens when it reopens in August.

SPEND



The Cool Moose’s inventory ranges from Vera Bradley bags to books.

Main Street offers a good selection of gift shops, boutiques, and bookstores, not to mention an outpost of a Maine institution: **Renys on the Square** (71-75 Main St., 207-647-3711, renys.com), nicknamed “Chez Renée” and “Renoirs” by locals. This family-owned store has been in town for 47 years and offers snacks to customers who come here to shop for everything from outdoor gear, clothes, party gifts, and household and food items to small appliances.

A year-round, nonprofit artists’ cooperative, **Gallery 302** (112 Main St., 207-647-2787, gallery302.org), displays and sells work by many local artists in almost all types of media.

The **Cool Moose** (108 Main St., 207-647-3957, thecoolmoose.com) sells everything from Vera Bradley bags, New England crafts, and Yankee Candles to books on all things local, and includes a large children’s section.

Behind the pink awning, **Craftworks** (53 Main St., 207-647-5436) sells rustic and homemade crafts from hooked rugs and hand-painted signs to quilted pillows, gardening items, jewelry, and a selection of Stonewall Kitchen products.

Bridgton Books (52 Main St., 207-647-2122) offers an outstanding children’s selection and is packed with mostly new and some used books on virtually all topics, whereas neat-and-tidy **EFG Books and Art Gallery** (186 Main St., 207-647-9339, efgbooks.com) carries mostly used (even out-of-print) and some new books, with a focus on 20th-century fiction, poetry, biography, art and intellectual, Beat Generation tomes. Don’t miss the small gallery in back.

REST

After a day of play, head for the **Noble House Bed & Breakfast** (81 Highland Road, 888-237-4880, 207-647-3733, noblehousebb.com; \$135-\$225 mid June-Labor Day; \$99-\$199 off-season), located down a quiet street within walking distance of town. At this cozy, rambling farmhouse, where Pier 1 meets chic antique, nine warmly decorated, immaculate rooms await. Catch the afternoon’s cool breeze from a rocker on the wide veranda or sink into a leather chair by the wood fireplace in the lounge, near the bottomless cookie jar.

Grady’s West Shore Motel (177 North High St., 888-442-5638, 207-647-2284, www.megalink.net/~gradywst/index.htm; rooms \$65-\$95 depending on season and length of stay; cabins \$350 for first two nights, \$125 per additional night) has four spacious, well-maintained rooms and three cabins overlooking Highland Lake that offer all the amenities — a kitchenette and free use of a rowboat, canoe, and paddleboat, plus badminton and volleyball courts.

Highland Lake Resort (115 North High St., 207-647-5301, highlandlakeresort.com; rooms \$75-\$95 late October-late May; \$95-\$135 June-October) offers basic rooms that are ideal for families and those looking for features over creature comforts.

PARTY

In summer, **The Big Kahuna Cafe** (270 Main St., 207-647-9031, thebigkahunacafe.com, \$5-\$10 admission) becomes the center of night life, featuring live folk, acoustic, and blues music, plus open mikes, almost every night. You’ll get your \$2 drafts here, too.

Off-season, people drive 3½ miles west of town to the **Route 302 Roadhouse Restaurant and Pub** (656 North High St., Route 302, 207-647-9302). This 135-seat bar/restaurant has a giant flat-screen television, bumper pool, and live entertainment: karaoke every Thursday and live bands on Saturday nights.

FUEL



Venezia Ristorante is so popular it turns away dozens a night in summer.

Get your morning java at **Bailey’s Coffee House** (82 Main St., 207-221-6440, baileyscoffeehouse.com), which opened its doors in February, serves Costa Rican and Hawaiian flavors and its own special blend, plus baked goods, soups, and bread bowls, and has Internet access.

Ricky’s Diner (138 Main St., 207-647-2499, breakfast \$1.80-\$7.95) dishes up breakfast all day, plus whoopie cakes, 21 kinds of homemade pie, and, on the last Wednesday of every month, grilled peanut butter and banana sandwiches served with hand-cut fries. The 1950s-style diner will begin offering old-style drive-in service this summer.

Head for **Morning Dew Natural Foods Grocery and Deli** (19 Sandy Creek Road, 207-647-4003, morningdewnatural.com; hot or cold sandwiches, \$5.50-\$6.50) for your health-food fix, to grab a gourmet wrap, or to pick up all-natural snacks for your hiking, biking, or boating adventures.

There’s a reason why Toni Orlandella, owner of **Venezia Ristorante** (251 North High St., 207-647-5333; entrees \$14.95-\$19.95, closed Mondays year-round and Tuesdays off-season), turns away as many as 40 people a night in the summer months: She offers zesty to gently seasoned Italian dishes, many served with homemade pasta, at some of the best dinner prices in town. In 18 years, she raised prices only once, by \$1.



Shauna Beaudoin of Lewiston, Maine, serves homemade pie to Rylie Harrod of Westminster at Ricky’s Diner, a ’50s-style eatery that serves breakfast all day.

Making it easy to brush up on Maine folk art this summer

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BRIDGTON, Maine — Muralist Rufus Porter produced wonderful scenes for the walls of at least a dozen Bridgton homes in the 1800s. American modernist painters Georgia O'Keeffe and Marsden Hartley, a Maine native, drew inspiration from the local landscapes in the early 1900s. And the town has been a mecca for hundreds of other artists working in all types of media since the first art colony was established here more than a century ago.

"Anywhere you turn, there is something worth capturing: covered bridges, lakes, mountains, waterfalls, and wonderful historic buildings," says Nelle Ely, a local artist in her 70s. "It's a very picturesque place to be if you enjoy painting and the arts."

Works by Ely and other local artists are on display in galleries, museums, and public buildings around town. Bridgton also hosts a Cultural Heritage Series in July and its Rufus Porter Museum will be one of a dozen museums on the 2008 Maine Art Museum Trail, a program designed to highlight the state's best folk art.

"The art culture has been very strong here for many years, but until the Bridgton Art Guild came



Gallery 302 was established by the Bridgton Art Guild to display and sell works by local artists, including Elna Stone.

into existence in 2003, there was no real cohesive group to bring artists together," says Nancy Smoak, treasurer of the Porter Museum and Cultural Heritage Center and a member of the guild's board of directors.

The guild's most important accomplishment has been establishing Gallery 302, a nonprofit artists' cooperative that displays and sells work by more than 60 local

artists in almost all types of media. Here you'll find woodcarvings, baskets, blown glass, photographs, sculpture, ceramics, and paintings of every variety.

The gallery includes work by established artists, like folk painter Donna Derstine and stained-glass artist Jane Croteau. It also welcomes up-and-coming talents, like jewelry maker Cathy Curry Starck, 19, who started exhibiting her work here four years ago, and photographer Alyce Clifford, 79, a summer resident who took up photography at 73 when she won a Nikon camera.

Several small galleries in town are not to be missed either. At Topnotch, artist Craig Jud sells watercolors that depict local landscapes, old buildings, and all things nautical; new mirrors crafted to look like they were made in the early 1700s; and handmade porcelain dolls produced by his wife, Janie.

Across the street, EFG Books and Art Gallery hosts single-artist shows in an exhibit space at the back of the store. Works by Bridg-

ton artist Perri Black, 46, who produces small-scale, abstract collages, are on display through July 1. Her show includes a selection of mixed-media, two-dimensional collages depicting the temples at Angkor in Cambodia. Black uses materials such as handmade paper, feathers, decorative buttons, old books, and gold-leaf photocopies of photographs that she took while on a trip to Angkor Wat.

Learn about one of Bridgton's most notable folk artists at the Porter Museum. Porter (1792-1884), an artist and inventor, founded Scientific American magazine, patented more than 100 inventions, and produced hundreds of wall murals for homes throughout New England. The small museum contains his famous 1828 murals and a set of 15 murals, originally from a home in Westwood, that are the only signed and dated Porter works in existence.

The museum also houses antiques dating to the Porter period and works by other Maine artists, including John Brewster Jr., who painted scenes of the Bridgton area and portraits of the town's founders; James Lombard, a farmer and carpenter from Bridgton who is known for his rooster weather vanes; and George M. Hathaway, who painted Portland lighthouses and beach scenes.

The Porter museum hosts a new exhibit each summer. This year, it features approximately 30 pieces of needlework produced by New England schoolgirls from 1700 to approximately 1840.

Lectures on needlework will be included in this year's Cultural Heritage Series, a three-day event sponsored by the museum that includes classes and talks on topics relating to the Porter period. Learn about folk painting, grain painting, faux finishes, and calligraphy, and see demonstrations in 19th-century spinning, woodcarving, silhouette cutting, and oil-on-

wood painting. Bob Dunning of Bridgton will lead tours of old barns in western Maine, and Robert Hall of Needham will offer a living-history, illustrated talk on Porter's paintings, publications, and inventions.

One of the goals of this series, according to Smoak, is "to keep these techniques and traditions alive."

Next summer, Charles Burden, an active member of the Folk Art Society of America, and Ray Egan, a volunteer at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, are putting together a program that aims to revive and celebrate folk art. They have convinced 11 museums around the state to hold simultaneous folk art exhibits.

"There's an awful lot of great folk art in Maine, much of which

has never been exhibited," says Burden. "We thought why not have the museums put everything out at once?"

The multi-museum exhibit, which includes the Porter Museum, opens in June 2008 and will feature more than 500 works. Burden plans to produce a catalog with 100 of the best objects from these collections and a brochure with a road map and exhibit details for people who want to do the two- to three-day self-guided tour.

"This will give all the visitors who come to Maine and locals a chance to learn about Maine's wonderful folk art heritage," says Burden.

Kari J. Bodnarchuk, a freelance writer and photographer, can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

If you go. . .

What to do

Gallery 302

112 Main St., 207-647-2787
gallery302.org
Daily 10 a.m.-8 p.m. June-August;
10-5 off-season.

Topnotch

191 Main St., 207-647-4321
Thursday-Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
year-round and by appointment.

EFG Books and Art Gallery

186 Main St., 207-647-9339

efgbooks.com

Wednesday-Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
year-round.

Rufus Porter Museum and Cultural Heritage Center

67 North High St., 207-647-2828
rufusportermuseum.org
Daily except Mondays noon-4 late
June-August; weekends noon-4 after
Labor Day through the first weekend in
October, or by appointment. Adults
\$5-\$9 donation, seniors and students
\$4-\$8.

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