

Maine’s unlikely desert an enduring curiosity

By Ellen Albanese
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

FREEPORT, Maine — It’s a bit of a shock. Sure, you have heard of the Desert of Maine, a Ripley’s Believe It or Not desert in one of the leafiest states in the country. But when you pull into the dusty parking lot, the site looks like a lot of other home-spun attractions. You enter a gift shop filled with a predictable assortment of T-shirts and souvenir spoons. You buy your ticket, exit the gift shop — and feel as if you have fallen into an “X-Files” episode.

A shimmering expanse of sand spreads out before you — 45 acres in all. Wind-carved ledges and dunes create an undulating effect. The desert is dotted with trees buried so deep only their tops are visible. L.L. Bean meets Lawrence of Arabia.

Admission includes a narrated 30-minute tram ride through the desert and surrounding woods. Our tour guide explained that the desert was created by a glacier some 10,000-12,000 years ago. The sand, which is technically glacial silt, ranges in depth from 45 feet at the spring, discovered in 1935, to 90 feet at the top



ELLEN ALBANESE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A narrated 30-minute tram ride takes visitors around the Desert of Maine and surrounding woods.

of the tallest dune. It’s silky to the touch, and the colors range from rust to beige to pink, based on the mineral content. It never gets too hot because of the amount of mica, which reflects the sun’s heat, and the relatively high water table.

The tops of trees emerging from the sand create pockets of shade. They help to hold the sand in place, our guide said, and they don’t die because the sand rose around them so slowly. The

desert ends abruptly; at the top of the 90-foot dune, the land just drops away over a wooded cliff.

In the 1800s the site was the Tuttle Farm. Two generations of Tuttles raised vegetables and cattle, with no thought of crop rotation or land stewardship, our tour guide said. Eventually all the topsoil eroded, exposing the glacial sand underneath. In 1919 the farmhouse burned to the ground, and the Tuttle heirs abandoned the property. Henry

Desert of Maine
95 Desert Road
Freeport, Maine
207-865-6962
www.desertofmaine.com
Open 7 days 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. through Oct. 14, half-day Oct. 15. First tour 9 a.m., last tour 4:30 p.m., adults \$10.50, teens \$7.75, 4-12 \$6.75, under 4 free.

Goldrup bought it for back taxes of \$400.

Goldrup was an enterprising sort, and the story goes that when geologists from the University of Maine told him, “You bought a desert,” he ran out and posted signs along Route 1, “Visit the Desert of Maine.” Goldrup ran the attraction for more than 60 years.

Later owners paired the natural attraction with a focus on farm history. The 1783 Tuttle Barn, untouched by the fire that destroyed the house, now operates as a farm museum, exhibiting farming tools and other artifacts “circa 1900,” some of which were found on the property. Also on display are photos of the

desert in earlier years — one shows buried apple trees, their tips still bearing fruit — sand art, and sand specimens from deserts across the world.

Each morning the staff scatters polished gemstones on the desert sand, and children under 12 are welcome to search for them and take home up to three. A new attraction is the butterfly room, a screened-in area filled with colorful plants, where visi-

tors can see eight to 10 varieties of butterflies in various stages. Other activities for children, offered for a small fee, include making sand art in a bottle, gemstone ring making, and “mining” for minerals and fossils in a running-water sluice.

But nothing beats that first view across the desert.

Ellen Albanese can be reached at ellen.albanese@gmail.com.

Fashion plus function: a travel bag to create then carry



RICKSHAW BAGWORKS

San Francisco-based Rickshaw Bagworks lets you custom-design your own messenger or commuter bag, tablet or computer sleeve, backpack, or zippered folio for travel documents. Go to the company’s website and start creating: Select a product, and pick either vertical or horizontal orientation if you are making a laptop or tablet sleeve. Then choose the material, including Cordura nylon, performance tweed, or waterproof

X-Pac for the exterior, Cordura nylon or a plush felt-like material for the interior, and a nylon binding, all in dozens of different colors. All products are made from recycled materials. You can watch your bag come together on the screen, and easily tweak your selections along the way. Prices range from \$30 (vertical sleeve) to \$190 (backpack). 415-904-8368, www.rickshawbags.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

THE BOSTON GLOBE'S

WHERE TO STAY

NEW ENGLAND & BEYOND

MAINE

MID COAST

COLONIAL GABLES OCEANFRONT VILLAGE
Relax on private seaside porches. Magnificent ocean views. Sandy beach for swimming. Quaint cottages, guest rms w/cable TV & internet. Belfast is a historic seaside town. Antique Shops, Dining Arts. www.colonialgables.com 800-YES-MAIN

EAST WIND INN
Historic seaside inn on the water in Tenants Harbor. Reviewed in Architectural Digest. From \$99 per night, including full breakfast. “The Real Maine”. Nr Rockland/Camden/Monhegan. www.eastwindinn.com 800-241-8439

GLENMOOR BY THE SEA **CAMDEN**
Fall foliage & lobster! Expansive ocean views from each guestroom private deck. Two heated pools, tennis and more. Minutes from scenic Camden Harbor. All rooms w/private bath, flatscreen TV, fridge and microwave. WiFi access. glenmoorbythesea.com Call Toll Free (855) 706-7905 for Special Globe Rate (BG5)

INN AT OCEAN'S EDGE **CAMDEN**
Inspired cuisine & never-ending ocean views from every guestrm. Couples seeking a romantic getaway will enjoy in-rm frpl & oversize Jacuzzi, outdoor hot-tub, infinity edge htd pool, massage treatment rms, & 4 Diamond dining at The Edge. Perfect secluded loc to explore Camden & mid-coast. theinnatoceansedge.com 207-236-0945

PORTLAND AND CASCO BAY

BLACK POINT INN **PROUTS NECK** **SCARBOROUGH**
From romantic getaway weekends to holiday and mid-week specials, your chance to stay in luxurious oceanfront rooms and wine & dine in 4 star facilities at spectacular savings — just 2 hours from Boston, and 15 minutes from Portland’s Old Port. Check us out at: www.blackpointinn.com 207-883-2500

SOUTHERN COAST

ANCHORAGE INN & RESORT
200+ oceanfront, Atrium rooms and suites. 2 indr/2 outdoor pools, WiFi, oceanfront dining. 3 day/2 night Fall Getaway Packages from \$239.95/cple includes dinner for 2. Code WTSFL. 9/6/11-10/15/11 Restrictions Apply. www.anchorageinn.com 207-363-5112

COLONY HOTEL
Oceanfront historic green hotel, gardens, sandy beach, heated saltwater pool, 2 oceanview restaurants, complete breakfast & Wifi. Shops, sail and lobster cruises. Seaside Escape Package from \$99.00 per night! 800-552-2363 www.thecolonyhotel.com

FRANCISCAN GUEST HOUSE HOTEL
Short stroll to beach & Kennebunkport. Full continental breakfast incl. Saltwater Pool, A/C, WiFi, parking, mini-fridge, private bath. 90 min from Boston. Select summer dates & rooms as low as \$89. www.franciscanguesthouse.com 207-967-4865

STAGE NECK INN ON THE OCEAN
OCEANFRONT Resort with cozy guest rooms, spa, indoor pool, fine dining, golf, spectacular beach-side setting. Unhurried pace; AAA Four Diamond Award. Breakfast included. Also available, seaside cottage sleeps 16. 800-340-8581 www.StageNeck.com/bosglobe.html

WESTERN LAKES & MOUNTAINS

THE BETHEL INN RESORT
\$119 Bed & Breakfast for Two. Country elegant resort accommodations, hearty country breakfast, 200 acres of resort activities. Ask about our golf, golf school & spa vacations. Call today! www.bethelinn.com 800-654-0125

MASSACHUSETTS

BERKSHIRES & WESTERN MA

CRANWELL RESORTS, SPA & GOLF CLUB, LENOX
Dining, 18-hole golf course & full-service spa. Free Extra Golf with Unlimited Golf Package. Near Norman Rockwell Museum. Rooms from \$189 midweek. 2 hours from Boston! www.cranwell.com/globe 800-272-6935

THE WILLIAMS INN
Centrally located North Berkshires 125 rms, indoor pool, sauna, hot tub, FS dining room, Tavern, weekend entertainment, 3 day/2 night plan incl. 2 breakfasts/1 dinner each. Near sports/cultural attracts. On-the-Village Green Rt 2 & US 7 Williamstown www.williamsinn.com 800-828-0133

MID CAPE

THE CORSAIR & CROSS RIP OCEANFRONT RESORT
On our Private Beach with Indoor Outdoor Pools, Game Room and WiFi! All rooms with Kitchenettes 2Q beds, LCD/blueray *HBO*. Great Fun Packages with meals and event tickets for 2 nights - 7 nights. #1 in our area on Travel Websites. 508-398-6600 www.corsaircrossrip.com

NANTUCKET

76 MAIN STREET INN
Lovely updated Sea Capt’s mansion w/20 rooms all w/private baths, a/c, WiFi & cable TV. Our website lists rates, every room is pictured. We accept singles, couples, families. Ideal location just a minutes walk from the town & wharf activities. Call for details & to book. www.76main.com 800-876-6858. Hope to hear from you soon.

In addition to the Boston Globe the
WHERE TO STAY
directory can be found on-line at
boston.com/travel
and every Sunday in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette.

The Boston Globe **WORCESTER TELEGRAM & GAZETTE**

Call today to advertise 617-929-8350

NEW HAMPSHIRE

LAKES REGION

LANDMARK INN
GREAT VALUE! Cozy guest rooms with the charm of a country inn start @ \$59.99 & include free deluxe continental breakfast. KIDS STAY FREE* Near area attractions & tax free outlet shopping. *Restrix. Email: landmark@metrocast.net 603-524-8000

MARGATE ON WINNIPESAUKEE
Luxury Lakeside Resort *KIDS STAY FREE! 141 guest rms, heated indoor pool, whirlpool, sauna, fitness center, spa. Free Cont. Brkfst. Ski & Stay Program. Save midwk. Minutes to tax free outlets. Restr. www.themargate.com 877-584-1571

LINCOLN - WOODSTOCK

SUMMER IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS
Great Adventures ALL Summer: Zipline, Theatre and Waterpark Packages at Your Base Camp. Come and Enjoy. Rates from \$99pp per night includes choice of Theatre, Loon Zipline ticket, or Dinner and more! Code: BGlobe 800-654-6183 www.BluegreenRentals.com/SouthMountain

NEW HAMPSHIRE

NORTH CONWAY / JACKSON

EAGLE MOUNTAIN HOUSE & GOLF CLUB
Fall Foliage Season: Enjoy foliage, Pumpkin People, Cranmore Ghoulog, Corn Maze....Rate: Midweek 2 adults Room with breakfast \$163. Fall packages available www.eaglemt.com 800-966-5779

OMNI MOUNT WASHINGTON RESORT
Fall Colors Package includes welcome breakfast, carriage ride & scenic lift ride w/welcome gift from \$185ppdo. Enjoy golf, spa, pools, canopy tour, hiking, biking, climbing, fine & casual dining. www.omnimountwashingtonresort.com 800-843-6664

RED JACKET RESORTS – FOX RIDGE RESORT
Near Story Land & free shuttle to Kahuna Laguna in North Conway, NH. From \$169/night + tax, w/free breakfast, mini golf & activities! Military per diem welcome! Book now at www.redjacketresorts.com 800.RJACKET

SEASONS CONDOMINIUM RESORT
Tis the Seasons for Great Golf! Foliage Golf Pkgs from \$278 (2 Nights & One 18-hole round) to \$408 (3 Nights & Two 18-hole rounds). Based on 4 players in spacious 2BR Condo. Choice of 8 courses. Details online. www.seasonsnh.com 800-332-6636

STONEHURST MANOR
Landmark “country elegant” boutique hotel near all area activities, shopping, golf. Mtn views, outdr pool, hot tub, Martini Lounge, renowned dining. Fr \$73ppdo incl. Full Breakfast & Dinner off reg. menu. www.StonehurstManor.com 800-525-9100

OUTSIDE NEW ENGLAND

NEW YORK

RIVERSIDE TOWER HOTEL
\$129 for 2 persons. Singles \$124. Suites \$139-\$159. Lincoln Center area, Hudson River views, 18 floors, kitchenette. 5 minutes to midtown, safe, quiet, luxury area. Riverside Tower, Riverside & 80th St. For more information or brochure: Call 800-724-3136 or visit www.riversidetowerhotel.com

OUTSIDE UNITED STATES

BERMUDA

THE REEFS - BERMUDA
Save 30% on 4+ nights through Dec. 21 at Bermuda’s best hotel (Travel + Leisure). From \$287/night for two in Poolside room incl breakfast, tea & dinner. One week Back-to-Bermuda sale runs Sept. 6-13. www.TheReefs.com 1-800-501-7487

CARIBBEAN

GREAT NON-STOP RATES WITH JET BLUE!
ST. MAARTEN - WWW.BEACHSIDEVILLAS.COM
OCEANEDGE, LUXURY 1,2,3 BR A/C Villas. Fully Equipped Kitchen, BBQ. Daily housekeeping, free WI-FI cable TV. Perfect vacation all year! Call Owner Yolanda 313-884-7706.

ST. MAARTEN CUPECOY BEACH CLUB
Location, Location, Location! OCEANFRONT, spacious, and beautifully appointed 1, 2, & 3 bedroom villas. Stunning views! Beach, Pool, Gym. Across from Atlantis Casino & Restaurant Complex. Convenient to everything! WWW.CUPECOYBEACH.COM 800-955-9008