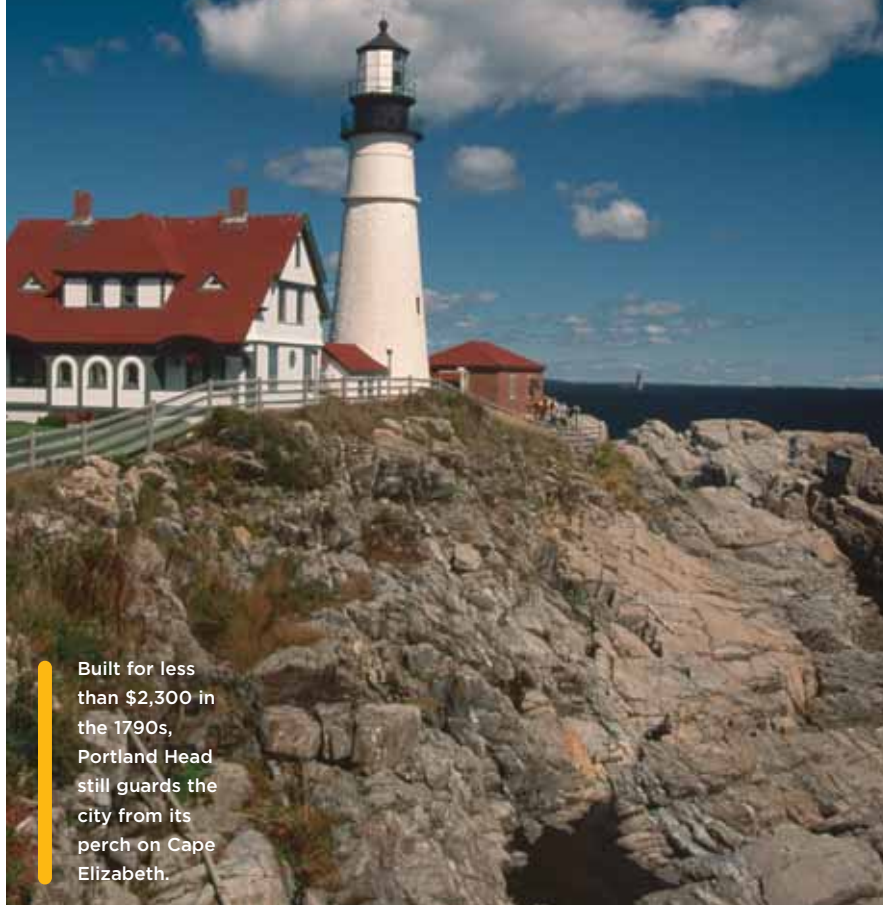


REGIONAL + NORTHEAST HIGHLIGHTS



Built for less than \$2,300 in the 1790s, Portland Head still guards the city from its perch on Cape Elizabeth.

Best Water Town

Portland, Maine

PERCHED ON A HILL, THIS WORKING PORT CITY OFFERS CLEAN AIR, A LAID-BACK CULTURE AND TOP ACCESS TO ALL THINGS AQUATIC

Portland may be small by metropolitan standards (population 64,000), but it's big on liquid character. At Old Port, the trendy, revitalized cobblestone part of town, paddlers and old sea dogs share a microbrew at local watering holes—Gritty McDuff's is a favorite—while others head to DiMillo's, an old car ferry-turned-floating-restaurant, for Cajun-style lobster tails.

Anglers fly fish for brook and brown trout (on the Presumpscot River), troll for salmon and lake trout (on nearby Sebago Lake), and surf cast for stripers and bluefish (out at the lighthouse on Cape Elizabeth). Kayakers have access to miles of coastline and hundreds of islands—many just a day's paddle from downtown—plus the Maine Island Trail, a 325-mile salty waterway that links 108 islands from Portland to New Brunswick, Canada (207-761-8225, www.mita.org).

If you'd rather stay dry, hike the Harborwalk Trail across the Fore River to Bug Light Park, go for a run on sandy Crescent Beach, or bike along the 7-mile, sea rose-lined Eastern Promenade Trail, an old railway bed. Locals stock up on trail snacks at the year-round Portland Public Market (picture Seattle's Pike Place set inside the East's largest timber-framed building).

Wildest River: Dead River, Maine

Ironically, the Dead gets its name from the dead-calm water found here before the river was dammed in 1949. Today, the Dead boosts endorphin levels with the longest stretch of continuous whitewater on the East Coast. Ride 16 miles through Class III–V rapids between the towns of Grand Falls and The Forks. 800-723-8633; www.raftmaine.com.

Best Whale-Watching Spot:

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, Massachusetts

Formed by retreating glaciers, this 842-square-mile, nutrient-rich feeding ground 25 miles east of Boston draws humpbacks, finbacks, minke and endangered northern right whales—so many that tours guarantee sightings. 800-277-6277; www.massvacation.com.

Tallest Waterfall:

Taughannock Falls, New York

Niagara Falls may be the biggest in volume, but Taughannock Falls near Ithaca is 33 feet taller and considered the highest, year-round, single-drop waterfall in the Northeast. It plunges 215 feet, past rocky cliffs that tower 400 feet above a gorge. www.nysparks.state.ny.us/parks.

Best Public Drinking Water:

Independence Village, Montville, Connecticut

Looks like wine isn't the only liquid that gets better with age. When residents of this small community fill their bottles they're using water that's 5,000 years old—water that comes from a rock-driven well 360 feet below the earth's surface. Water that's so good, it won the 2000 Great American Water Taste Test, a competition run by the National Rural Drinking Water Association, in which judges assess the taste, clarity, sparkle and bouquet of nature's tonic.

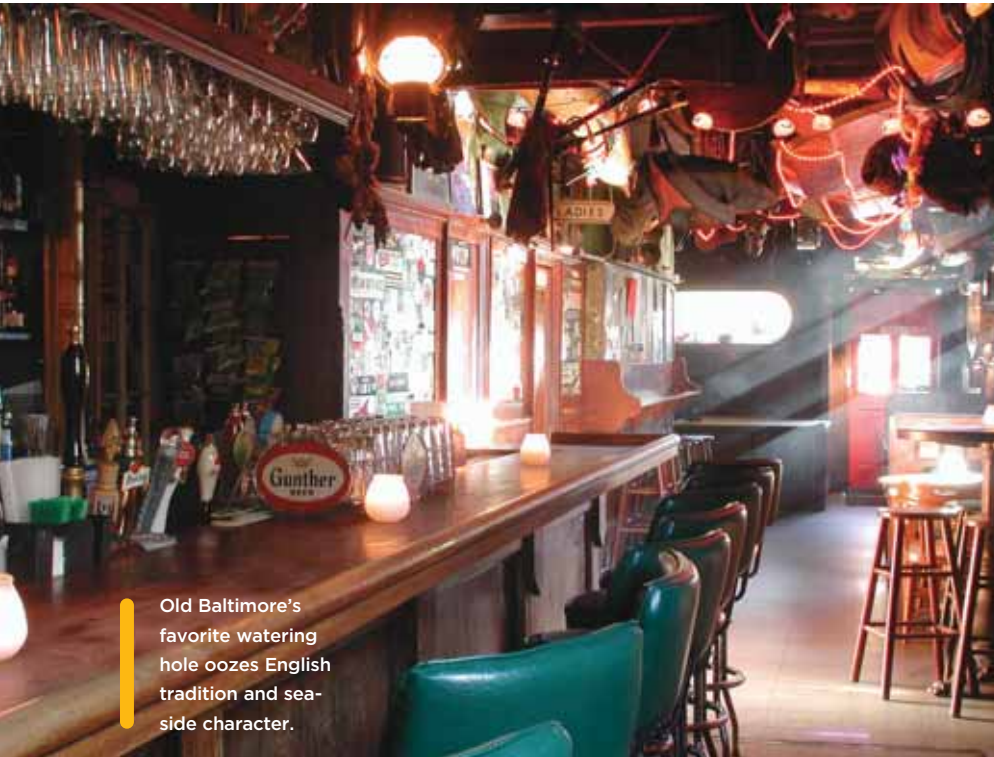
Best Water Park: Camelbeach, Tannersville, Pennsylvania

You'll have plenty of opportunities to wet your shorts at Camelbeach, with 22 heated waterslides, including the new eight-slide Checkered Flag Challenge, which pits eight people against each other in a race to the finish line. The Titan—eight stories high and nearly three football fields in length—is the world's largest slide of its kind. 570-629-1661; www.camelbeach.com.

Best Watering Hole: Bertha's Restaurant and Bar, Fells, Point, Maryland

Locals claim you can survive on Bertha's

NORTHEAST



Old Baltimore's favorite watering hole oozes English tradition and seaside character.

world-renowned mussels and microbrews alone. Drop in for a hand-pulled Bertha's Best Bitter—a genuine, cask-conditioned British-style ale—but save room for dessert. The Lemon Chess Pie, made from a 200-year-old recipe, provides an authentic taste of Colonial America. 410-327-5795; www.berthas.com.

Weirdest Water Creature: "Champ," Lake Champlain, New York/Vermont

This slimy, dark-brown underwater creature has been spotted more than 300 times since 1817 and is protected by the governments of New York and Vermont. Theories abound. Some say it's a descendant of the plesiosaur—a prehistoric reptile with a long, serpentine neck and four paddlelike fins. Others claim it's a primitive whale or maybe a giant lake sturgeon. We say winters in Vermont are awfully long. 877-686-5253, www.lclt.org/Champ.htm.

Biggest Water Issue:

Potomac River, Washington, D.C.

It's an essential feeding and nesting ground for wildlife, an important fishery, a playground, national symbol and drinking water source for millions of Americans. It's also a dumping ground. The river that flows past the Washington, Lincoln and Jefferson memorials contains toxins—at different points along its 383-mile stretch—that seriously threaten humans and wildlife. To help, contact Potomac Riverkeeper. 301-602-4300; www.potomacriverkeeper.org.



THAR SHE BLOWS: Prime Boston whale watching runs April to October

Oddest Water Rules: Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts

Thoreau's famed pond is one of Boston's most popular summer swimming holes—and training spots for triathletes—even though it's prohibited to swim *across* the pond. According to this highly disregarded rule, swimmers must remain within 300 feet of shore. "Wind-powered sail craft" and "novelty flotation devices" are also banned, yet canoes, kayaks and rowboats are OK. 978-369-3254; www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/wldn.htm.

Best Waterfront Chapel: All Saints by the Sea, Southport Island, Maine

Connected to the mainland by a swing bridge, this 1905, wooden, Tudor-style chapel sits just feet from the ocean. It over-

looks several islands and a picturesque harbor with sailboats and lobster buoys. Charter a boat or bring along kayaks to travel to and from your hip and intimate wedding (this cozy, summer chapel seats just 150 people). 207-772-1953; www.diomaine.org.

Best Seaside Grilling Spot: Assateague Island National Seashore, Maryland

On this barrier island, you'll find ospreys, egrets, miles of untouched sand and some of the Northeast's best BBQ spots. Cook up your catch (surf-fishing, crabbing and clamming are popular here) at one of the island's year-round campsites. Just don't feed the wild horses, which have been known to kick and bite! 410-641-3030; www.assateagueisland.com.

Newest Paddling Opportunity:

Blackwater River, Maryland

Soaring ocean levels resulting from glacial melt have created new water trails in

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. Three recently marked paths give kayakers and canoers access to the center of the Blackwater habitat. Here, you may see up to 270 species of birds, plus 165 species of threatened or endangered plants. 410-228-2677; www.friendsofblackwater.org.

Best Clothing-Optional Beach:

Moshup Beach, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

Nothing's more freeing than stretching out like Venus and Adonis on the soft, white sand at Moshup Beach, where you'll have clear views of the sparkling Atlantic and the 200-foot cliffs of Gay Head. It's also a beacon for sailors, but not for the reasons you'd think. Gay Head Lighthouse sits atop these red-and-white clay cliffs. 508-696-7400; www.mvol.com.

—KARI BODNARCHUK