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Exploring Boston's North Shore

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COURTESY OF CAPE ANN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

“**this area** is not as well-known as Cape Cod, and we hope it doesn’t get that way,” said Eddy McKenzie. It was a strange thing to say, given her job. My husband and I had just arrived for a two-day midsummer getaway on Cape Ann. At our first stop, the Rockport Visitor Information Center, she was behind the counter armed with maps and brochures for area attractions. “We don’t want the traffic,” she explained. But despite her unscripted comment, it quickly became clear she adores her adopted hometown and is happy to extoll its virtues. We soon understood her mixed emotions.

Rockport Harbor

Cape Ann, about an hour from Wellesley or Weston, on Boston’s North Shore, offers plenty to enjoy on a day trip or longer. McKenzie was positively poetic describing scenic lighthouses,



COURTESY OF CAPE ANN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

excursions “bold and colorful nautical scenes”

art galleries, hiking trails, kayak tours, paddle boarding, and overnight camping on Thacher Island. She bragged about the five-minute walk from the heart of Rockport to the beach. We should drive Route 127A for its wonderful water views, she suggested.

Coastline and marshes, fishermen’s shacks, and farms long ago helped make Cape Ann arguably America’s oldest art colony. Such notable painters as Fitz Henry “Hugh” Lane, Winslow Homer, Frederick Childe Hassam, Edward Hopper, Marsden Hartley, Mark Rothko, and many equally talented but less famous women have been among artists living and working here since the mid-19th century. Last October, the area’s four waterfront communities, Gloucester, Rockport, Essex, and Manchester-by-the-Sea, inaugurated an annual Cape Ann Plein Air competition and festival (www.capeannpleinair.com), honoring the tradition of painting outdoors.

It’s no wonder many memorable movies have been filmed in these parts, including *Captains Courageous* (1937), starring Spencer Tracy and Lionel Barrymore; *Mermaids* (1990) with Cher and Winona Ryder; and *The Perfect Storm* (2000), based on Sebastian Junger’s non-

Gloucester Harbor

fiction bestseller about a Gloucester-based commercial fishing vessel lost at sea.

Whether stormy or serene, Cape Ann is distinctly New England. Photo-worthy vistas appear around every bend. We also found satisfying seafood, historic lodgings, and topnotch live music despite McKenzie’s good-natured claim that “the sidewalks roll up early.”

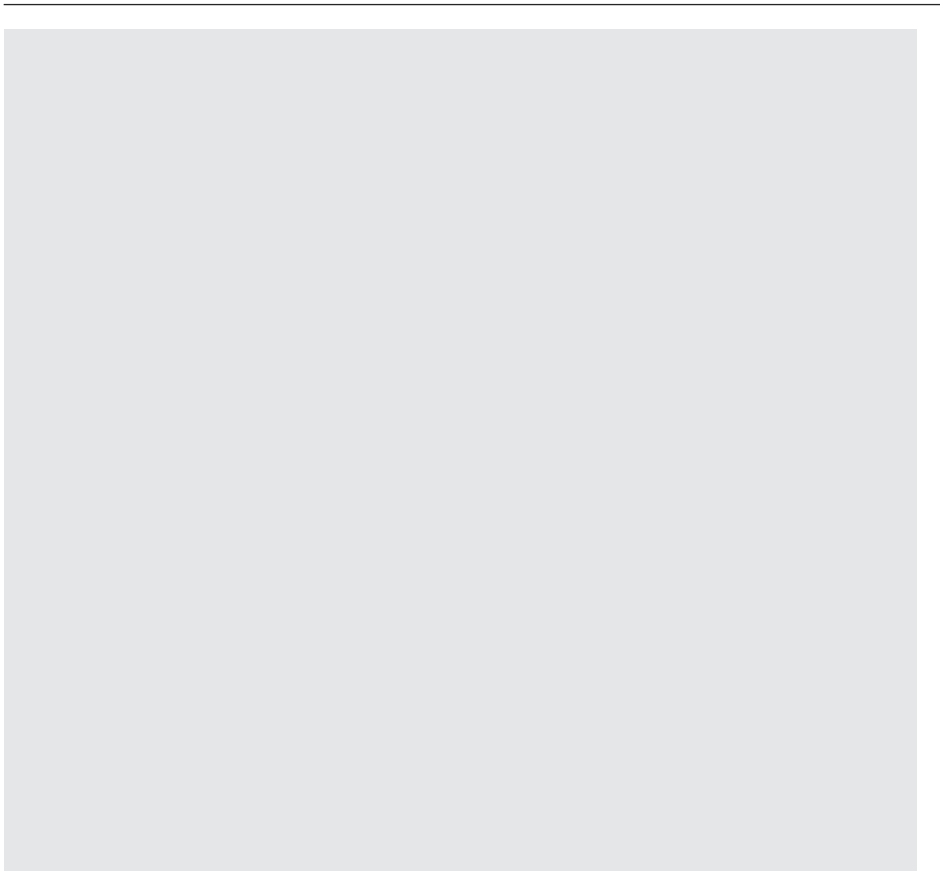
Essex is the birthplace of fried clams. Lawrence “Chubby” Woodman invented the recipe in 1916, and Woodman’s restaurant still gets big crowds although some prefer nearby J. T. Farnum’s or The Clam Box in Ipswich. They’re all great clam shacks. But on this trip the full-service Village Restaurant (55 Main Street, Rockport), jumped to the top of our list for light batter, freshness, and taste. On the other hand, it’s hard to beat lobster rolls for lunch at Roy Moore (two Rockport locations: 21 Dock Square and 39 Bearskin Neck).

Rockport alone has 33 art galleries, many in the harbor district, from Main Street to Bearskin Neck. It’s a fun place to stroll, with galleries,

excursions “a beautiful place”



COURTESY OF CAPE ANN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Motif No. 1, fishing shack replica in Rockport

ice cream, antique shops, and boutiques brimming with décor and clothing. You'll catch multiple views of Motif No. 1, a replica of a fishing shack said to be the most-often-painted building in America. At George Anderson Gallery (11 Main St.), which features the eponymous artist's bold and colorful nautical scenes, we met Scott Tubby, a potter and painter who was happy to discuss the current art scene.

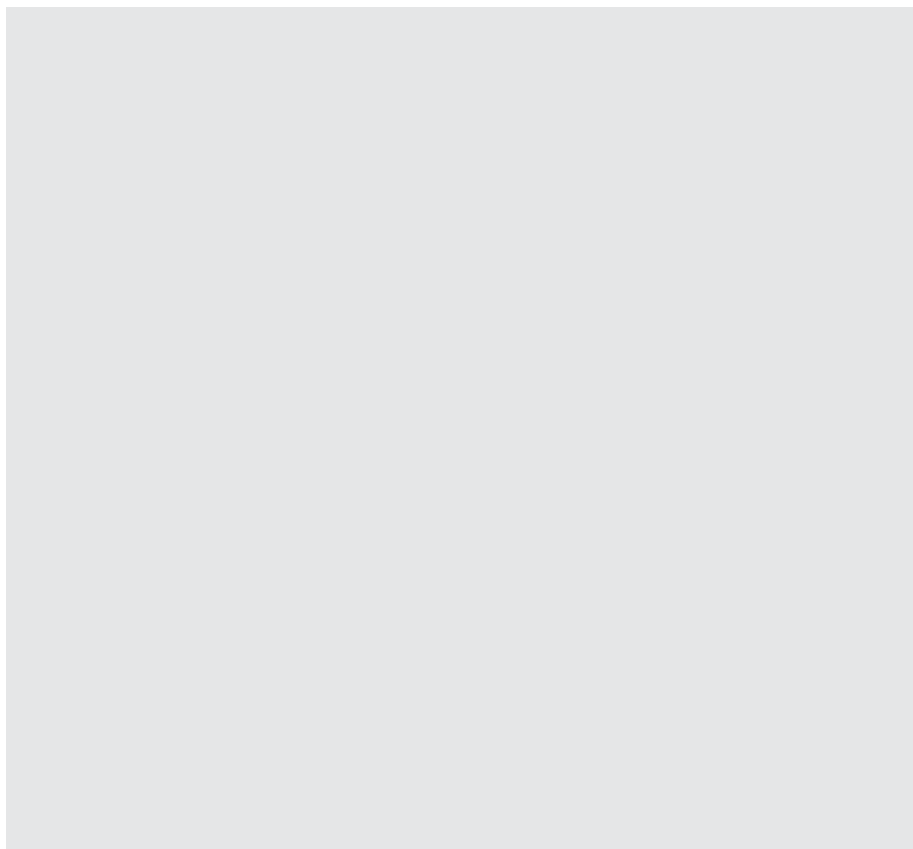
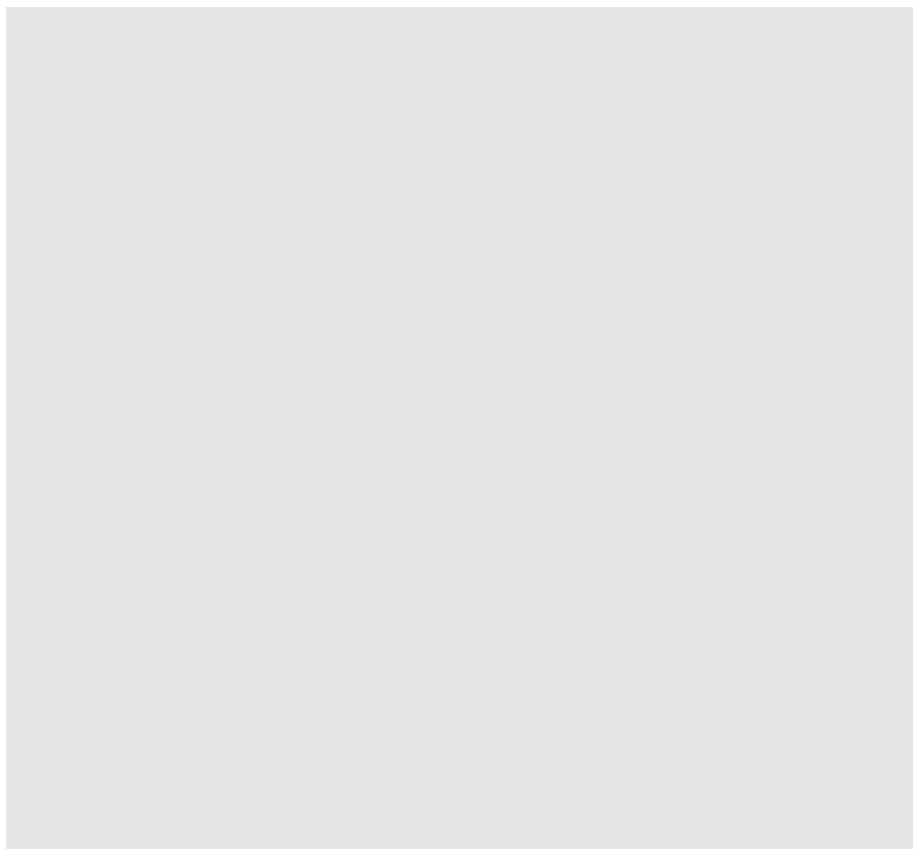
“Rockport became known for impressionist plein air style but now is attracting more varied artists,” said Tubby. “It's such a beautiful place. Everywhere you look could be a painting. So artists are attracted here by color and traditional motifs, but they often work in non-traditional styles.” His own paintings of

architecture have a contemporary Cubist, at times whimsical, sensibility.

To see varied works by more of today's local artists, we visited the Rockport Art Association (12 Main Street). Founded in 1921, the organization currently has more than 250 exhibiting members. Three adjacent buildings display their paintings, graphics, sculpture, and photography. The oldest is a sea captain's house (circa 1787). Another is a contemporary barn.

The day was hot under cloudless skies despite a forecast of impending rain. Taking advantage of the weather, we drove to Halibut Point State Park (Route 127, Rockport) for a leisurely hike with spectacular coastal views. There's an old quarry at Halibut Point where for nearly a century beginning around 1840, stone blocks were cut from the 450-million-year-old granite. Now filled with water, the quarry is wonderful for birdwatching. The park's self-guided trails are not well-marked and can be confusing; nonetheless, most people find the hiking easy along narrow paths through low brush and across granite ledge. On clear days, there are expansive views of the Eastern seaboard and across Ipswich Bay to the Isles of Shoals in Maine as well as New Hampshire. (Wear proper footwear.)

Loving the scenery but drained by the sun and summer heat, we were ready to relax. Our lodging for the night was just up the road. The historic Emerson Inn (1 Cathedral Avenue, Rockport), built in 1856, with a 1912 addi-



excursions “the setting was peaceful”

tion, was purchased in 2015 by Migis Hotels whose properties include the well-known Black Point Inn in Maine. During our stay, the Emerson (www.emersoninnbythesea.com) was in the final stages of an extensive restoration that retained the grand hotel’s traditional features. A sweeping staircase connects guest rooms to an intimate first floor parlor with a cozy bar. Updated public spaces had received sophisticated color schemes and framed works by contemporary local artists. Like many of the 36 guest rooms, ours had a high old-fashioned four-poster bed, luxurious linens, a flat screen TV, and a view to the rocky shore. Without delay, we changed for the pool. Charmingly old-fashioned, it was nothing glamorous and still needed fresh paint but the setting was peaceful and the water fine. It was an unpretentious, sooth-

ing prelude to dinner in the Emerson’s casual Pigeon Cove Tavern, which serves excellent local and seasonal dishes.

We had scheduled our visit around a particular concert at Shalin Liu Performance Center, the home of Rockport Music (www.rockportmusic.org). In the heart of town, a historic building was given a million dollar renovation and a new life. It opened in 2010 with a beautiful contemporary performance space designed by the team responsible for Tanglewood’s Ozawa Hall. Shalin Liu, named for the woman who is its major benefactor, has a reputation for superb acoustics and a year-round schedule of jazz, classical, folk, pop, blues, chamber, and world music. This was our first visit. On the way in, we were greeted by a longtime volunteer, Mary Jane. We told her we were looking forward to seeing the venue’s signature element: the harbor seen through a glass wall backing the stage.

The historic Emerson Inn, Rockport



COURTESY OF EMERSON INN



excursions “superb acoustics”

Shalin Liu Performance Center, Rockport

were rolled to make a bookcase. Newspapers from the capital cities of the then-48 states became a grandfather clock. The Paper House is open daily on the honor system from April to October.

Gloucester’s Rocky Neck merges a bohemian arts district with old industrial maritime New England. In better weather, we would have walked from studios to galleries and stopped to photograph commercial fishing boats and cranes. But not that day. Fortunately, this gave us the chance to see the Cape Ann Museum (www.capeann-museum.org) in Gloucester, a New England gem. Its collections relate the story of “America’s Oldest Seaport” through paintings and sculpture by prominent North Shore artists. It also features tools, ship models, and artifacts of the fisheries, maritime, and granite industries.

There’s more: kayaking; quiet roads for cycling; nature trails to wander; whale watching; abundant sandy and rocky beaches; and festivals celebrating sailing schooners, music, art, or lobsters. See www.capeannvacations.com.

Area accommodations range from campsites and motor lodges to historic B&Bs. The Yankee Clipper Inn in Rockport (www.yankee-clipperinn.com) is a cozy 1929 art deco mansion with ocean views. Of note, John F. Kennedy slept in the Sunrise Suite. At other times the inn has welcomed John Lennon, Bette Davis, and Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward.

“It’s its own little world here on Cape Ann,” marveled Krysten Reilly, the Emerson Inn’s general manager, who had recently relocated from Maine. I certainly agreed with her observation that, “It feels so quaint yet it’s easy to get here from Boston and the suburbs, and feels like a real vacation.” **WW**

“The artists like it here. They’re comfortable,” Mary Jane told us proudly. “All the money went into where it’s important, including a top-notch sound system and an in-floor HVAC that’s silent.” Many performers praise its intimacy, she said. They admire the way it lets them connect with audiences. But inside we were disappointed to find the window blocked by drapery. During intermission, we bumped into Mary Jane again and politely complained. Some artists say the bare window affects acoustics, she explained. They insist on closing the curtain. But on the third floor we could find refreshments and admire the panorama.

Morning dawned rainy, as predicted. Instead of walking Cape Ann’s miles of public beaches, we went to see a curiosity, the Paper House on Curtis St. in Rockport’s Pigeon Cove (www.paperhouserockport.com). The novel structure began as an experiment in 1922 when Elis F. Stenman wondered what could be done with Boston newspapers without destroying the print. With the help of his family, he rolled, pasted, and folded newspapers to make walls 215 layers thick. Over the next 20 years, approximately 100,000 newspapers were used to construct tables, chairs, lamps, a cot, a desk, and more. International newspapers

ROBERT BENSON