

CLOSE-UP ON YORK, MAINE

The Boston Globe

You'll dig it

Maine beach town has both old-time feel and an elegant side

By Kathy Shorr , Globe Correspondent | May 21, 2008

DISTANCE FROM BOSTON: 70 miles

POPULATION: 13,306 for all of York, which also includes York Village, York Beach, York Harbor, and Cape Neddick.

WEBSITES: gatewaytomaine.org, yorkmaine.org.

ODD FACT: In the early 1600s, Native Americans in the area that is now York Beach shot at and turned back European explorers trying to come ashore.

The New England coast doesn't have many places left like York Beach. Ignore the makes and models of cars on the street, and you could believe you were in a scene from "Beach Blanket Bingo." Short Sands Beach here has the look and feel of an old-fashioned family-friendly summer town: salt water taffy and kettle corn, bowling and a game arcade right on the beach, with the Ferris wheel and elephants a block away. York Beach continues along Long Sands Beach another mile or so to York Harbor. Which is not to say that York Beach isn't changing. The town's been getting a facelift for the past few years, in part to repair an estimated \$9 million in damage from flooding in 2006. Newly opened is the restored 19th-century Atlantic House, with upscale shops, condos, and Blue Sky on York Beach, the new restaurant by Boston restaurateur Lydia Shire, of Locke-Ober fame.

Rest

[Article edited to list only the Candleshop Inn on our own site.] If you need more help unwinding, **Candleshop Inn B&B and Holistic Retreat Center** (44 Freeman St., 888-363-4087, 207-363-4087, candleshopinn.com, doubles \$80-\$185) has a studio on the grounds for yoga classes, reiki, and massage treatments. [OWNER NOTE: Because independent practitioners have joined our community, these services are now being provided off site. We can assist with practitioner recommendations.] A full vegetarian breakfast, with offerings for vegans, starts your day healthily.

Fuel

Aficionados of York Beach traditions will be happy to find many old standbys remain. You'll find the **Purple Palace** (Railroad Avenue, 207-363-4650, \$3.50-\$8.50) with its chef statue on the roof. Owner Sandy Wilson's parents opened it in 1946; she now runs it with her daughter Deborah, serving breakfast till noon. **The Goldenrod** (Railroad Avenue, 207-363-2621, the goldenrod.com, breakfast \$2-\$7, lunch or dinner \$4-\$15) has been here since 1896, and crowds still gather at the windows to watch them make the saltwater taffy known as Goldenrod Kisses. They'll make you an egg cream at the soda fountain, or any meal you want; you can also eat in the full dining room. For great chowders or lobster bisque, head to **York Beach Fish Market** (15 Railroad Ave., 866-363-2763, 207-363-2763). Lydia Shire's newest incarnation, **Blue Sky on York Beach** (2 Beach St., 207-363-0050, blueskyonyorkbeach.com, entrees \$18-\$38), mixes the industrial look of exposed silver-colored heating ducts with a beautiful formality of chocolate brown walls, white seats, and plenty of sparkly golden light. And that's just the surroundings. It ain't cheap, but the food, like the decor, is memorable. If you like the Irish soda bread and other breads they're serving at Blue Sky, you can buy them and other pastries downstairs in the just-opened **Clara's Cupcake Café** (2 Beach St., \$2-\$5.50 for pastries, breads, and breakfast items, sandwiches \$6-\$7), named after Lydia's granddaughter. Clara's will also be serving breakfast and lunch.

Spend

If your idea of a vacation is shopping, York Beach doesn't offer a lot. Spots to check out include mainstays **Shelton's Gifts & Clothing** (Railroad Avenue, 207-363-3810), which includes a range of items from dolls, housewares, and marine-themed wares to unusual clothing and accessories; and **Bill & Bob's** jewelry store (3 Railroad Ave., 207-363-2965), where many of the designs are made by the owners' son, who's a gemologist.

There are new shops in the newly renovated Atlantic House, including **SEA** (2 Beach St., 207-361-6500, mynecessaryluxuries.com) for women's clothing and accessories with a gossamer feel, many of them handmade and/or from local designers. SEA also carries its own cosmetic line and gives free 15-minute skin care and cosmetic consultations.

Do

When you've got the beach, how much else do you need, really? You can still enjoy the gentle surf, skip rocks, walk, play catch, or drag your chair down to the water's edge and just gaze. Right on Short Sands Beach are a fenced playground and **Ellis Park** (207-363-4422 for schedule), with a gazebo where you can hear free concerts each evening starting at 7 from early July to Labor Day. Another of York Beach's longstanding traditions is getting your palm or tarot cards read at **Readings by Pauline** (25 Railroad Ave., 207-361-4212). Pauline Mitchell's been doing it in this spot for more than 30 years and greets you in her small red-draped den, where she works beside a large statue of King Tut.

Play

Many of York Beach's attractions are decidedly retro and very family friendly. Opening for the season this weekend is **York's Wild Kingdom** (Route 1, 800-456-4911, 207-363-4911, yorkzoo.com, zoo/ride package \$19.50 adults, \$14.50 ages 4-10, \$4.50 3 and under; all day amusement park ride pass \$10, go-karts \$3, animal rides \$4-\$7), a small, old-fashioned amusement park and zoo. You'll find paddle boats, bumper cars, 18-hole mini golf, a petting zoo, elephant and pony rides, a Ferris wheel, other rides, and animals from around the world. Side by side on the beach are two institutions: a candlepin bowling alley, and **Fun O Rama** (7 Beach St., 207-363-4421, funorama.us, 25 cents-\$2), a 13,000-square-foot arcade that dates nearly to World War II. Fun O Rama has more than 250 games, from vintage Skee Ball you can play for a quarter, to contemporary LCD TV computer games like Deal or No Deal. And the shelves are stocked with plenty of prizes.

Party

Hang out on the porch with a drink, then stick around for live performances from nationally-known blues musicians like Duke Robillard, James Montgomery, and more at **Inn on the Blues** (7 Ocean Ave., 207-351-3221, innontheblues.com/entertainment.htm, charge varies). You'll find live music weekends in the shoulder season, and pretty much nightly come summer. **The Bluff Pub** (8 Beach St., 800-833-0721, 207-363-1333, unionbluff.com) at the Union Bluff Hotel is open year-round, and the bar is a local favorite. It has five large-screen TVs, and drink specials are generally geared to the sports season. Right now, it is Red Sox Drafts: half-price beer during games.

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