



# BAR HARBOR & ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

IT'S HARD TO BEAT AUTUMN ON THE MAINE COAST.

BY HILARY NANGLE • PHOTOS BY TARA RICE



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Fresh-baked popovers at Jordan Pond House; downtown Bar Harbor; lunch at the Terrace Grille; a detail of the Abbe Museum exterior; sweet treats at Ben & Bill's Chocolate Emporium; a carriage road in Acadia National Park.

THIS PAGE: The Ocean Path in Acadia National Park, with Otter Cliffs in the distance.



No matter how often I drive, pedal, or hike the Ocean Drive stretch of Park Loop Road in Acadia National Park, it's never the same. Tides ebb and flow, sunlight dances with shadows, waves whisper or roar. Sometimes Thunder Hole lives up to its name; other times, as a ranger quipped, "it's a gurgling gulch." Sun, rain, fog, and even snow add their quirks and splendors, as do the seasons. But during

Bar Harbor visitors can take to the water in style aboard the four-masted schooner *Margaret Todd*.



autumn, nature pulls out all the stops in its zeal to impress. Mountains dressed in seasonal couture plunge to rugged granite shores and rim fresh-water lakes, their reflections rippling in the waters. Add the softer light and sweater-weather temperatures, and it's hard to beat autumn in Acadia.

Acadia is both a natural wonder and a cultural one with constructed treasures, such as the Park Loop, carriage roads, Jordan Pond House, and stair trails. Unlike most other national parks, it was created from private lands, assembled piece by piece from donations by wealthy summer rusticators as well as locals of modest means. Its porous, hodgepodge boundaries nudge backyards and downtowns. The town of Bar Harbor's history is woven into these boundaries. Staying here underscores and eases the transition between town and park, then and now, human ingenuity and nature's grandeur.

I love strolling along the harbor-hugging Shore Path in the predawn stillness before Bar Harbor's waterfront emerges from its overnight hibernation. I might linger by the town pier to watch the sun peek over the horizon, radiate across the water and Porcupine Islands, illuminate the schooner *Margaret Todd*'s four masts, and turn a pebbly beach into shimmering starbursts.



Locally owned shops and restaurants invite exploring on Bar Harbor's Main Street.

## EXPLORING BAR HARBOR & ACADIA NATIONAL PARK



### EAT & DRINK

#### ▲ Terrace Grille:

The front-lawn tables at the Bar Harbor Inn's restaurant offer sweeping views of Frenchman Bay. Opt for the full lobster bake with potatoes, corn on the cob, and blueberry pie. [barharborinn.com](http://barharborinn.com)

**The Barnacle:** Maine beers make the perfect pairing with Maine oysters at this laid-back pub. [thebarnaclebarharbor.com](http://thebarnaclebarharbor.com)

**Havana and Parrilla:** One of the island's best tables, Havana offers fine dining with Latin flair, a Maine accent, and an eco-conscious ethos. More casual is Parrilla, its street-side outdoor tapas bar and grill. [havanamaine.com](http://havanamaine.com)

**Café This Way:** Follow painted footsteps down an alley to this casual, artsy favorite serving globally inspired, eclectic fare. [cafethisway.com](http://cafethisway.com)

**Project Social Kitchen & Bar:** Sit indoors, on the porch, or in the garden, and enjoy craft cocktails, small plates, and crepes. [socialbarharbor.com](http://socialbarharbor.com)

**Rosalie's:** Bring quarters to feed the Wurlitzer jukebox, playing retro 45s, while savoring scratch-made pizza, calzones, salads, and pasta dinners. [rosaliespizza.com](http://rosaliespizza.com)



**TOP:** Even on cooler autumn nights, the al fresco grill and tapas bar Parrilla is a warmly inviting spot for drinks and a bite. **ABOVE:** Established more than a century ago, the Shore Path offers a scenic 1½-mile out-and-back stroll along Frenchman Bay.

If the tide cooperates, I'll cross the name-sake sandbar tethering Bar Harbor to Bar Island and hike into Acadia, climbing gently through gold-and-orange-speckled hardwoods preening amid the spruce on the Bar Island Trail. The high point reveals the town backed by Champlain and Dorr mountains. The return frames Millionaire's Row, as the grand "cottages" fronting the shoreline were called during Bar Harbor's Gilded Age.

The Bar Harbor Historical Society's 41-room La Rochelle Mansion and Museum fills one of those cottages. Stepping inside peels away the centuries, as its furnishings and exhibits tell the town's side of Acadia's story: the Wabanaki and European explorers, artists and rusticators, farmers and fishermen, the wealthy summer elite and the island folk who answered their needs. Images recall the Great Fire of 1947, which put the final punctuation on Bar Harbor's Gilded Age.

By walking or pedaling rather than driving, I better engage with both town and park: I discern pebble beaches from cobblestone ones along the granite shores; perhaps spy an eagle or hawk soaring overhead or hear a red squirrel's nattering. I can pedal from town to Acadia's carriage road circling Witch Hole

**STAY**

**Saltair Inn:** Immerse yourself in the Gilded Age at this handsomely updated waterfront B&B along Millionaire's Row. [saltairinn.com](http://saltairinn.com)

**West Street Hotel:** Although smack-dab in the center of Bar Harbor's action, guests can retreat to the adults-only rooftop pool with dreamy views over the Porcupine Islands. [theweststreethotel.com](http://theweststreethotel.com)

**Bar Harbor Inn:** Since its 1887 founding as the Mount Desert Reading Room, this resort has occupied a prime location along the Shore Path. [barharborinn.com](http://barharborinn.com)

**Holbrook House:** The home-cooked breakfast alone is reason to stay at this in-town B&B with 12 guest rooms—some honoring its Victorian origin, others decorated in a light, contemporary style. [holbrookhouse.com](http://holbrookhouse.com)

**Highbrook Motel:** This meticulously maintained older motel offers spacious rooms a mile from downtown Bar Harbor. [highbrookmotel.com](http://highbrookmotel.com)

**SHOP**



▲ **Island Artisans:** Peruse works by over 100 Maine artists and artisans. [islandartisans.com](http://islandartisans.com)

**The Naturalist's Notebook:** Delve into art, science, and natural history through engaging exhibits, intriguing books,



TOP: Bikers cruise down a carriage road alongside Acadia National Park's glacier-carved Jordan Pond. ABOVE: Curator Starr Kelly at the Bar Harbor location of the Abbe Museum, whose collections represent 12,000 years of Native American culture and history in Maine.

Pond, where flamboyant maples, birches, and oaks frame the turreted, triple-arched Duck Brook Bridge.

One day I walked into history when I came upon Compass Harbor, a wooded, vest-pocket shorefront park parcel about a mile from downtown. George Dorr, who devoted most of his life and fortune to founding and growing Acadia National Park, lived here. He also contributed his name and left footprints at Sieur de Monts Spring, a gentle walk from downtown via the Great Meadow Trail and Jesup Path. I can spend the better part of the day in this woodland oasis shadowed under the face of Dorr Mountain. Human-made treasures here include a nature center, the Wild Gardens of Acadia, the original Abbe Museum, an ornate springhouse, and inviting stair trails zigzagging Dorr Mountain's face.

Those trails, works of art built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, flow with the mountain, easing the way with granite steps and natural balconies. On a brilliant autumn day, there's no finer place to pause—gazing over color-splashed woods, craggy coast, and ocean waters—and appreciate human ingenuity in service of nature's grandeur. 🍂

and fascinating treasures. [thenaturalistsnotebook.com](http://thenaturalistsnotebook.com)

**Rock & Art Shop:**

Gift shop? Art gallery? Natural history museum? Actually this unusual shop is a bit of all three. [therockandartshop.com](http://therockandartshop.com)

**PLAY**

**La Rochelle Mansion and Museum:**

The Bar Harbor Historical Society shares local lore in this Georgian Revival mansion on Millionaire's Row. [barharborhistorical.org](http://barharborhistorical.org)

**Abbe Museum:**

Discover the stories of the "People of the Dawnland," Maine's Wabanaki Nations, at the only museum in the state to be affiliated with the Smithsonian. [abbemuseum.org](http://abbemuseum.org)

**St. Saviour's Episcopal Church:**

View 11 Tiffany stained glass windows inside this 1878 church. [stsaviours.me](http://stsaviours.me)

**Downeast Windjammer Cruise Lines:**

See Acadia's glorious coastline from the water on a morning, afternoon, or sunset sail from Bar Harbor. [downeastwindjammer.com](http://downeastwindjammer.com)

▼ **Acadia National Park:**

Signature experiences abound at this 49,000-acre treasure, from taking in the sunrise from the top of Cadillac Mountain to enjoying a horse-drawn carriage ride. [nps.gov/acad](http://nps.gov/acad); [acadiahorses.com](http://acadiahorses.com)

