

# Fall for it

## Shopping, dining, and scenery are big draws for visitors

By Hilary Nangle, Globe Correspondent | October 10, 2007

While many of Maine's coastal communities all but roll up the sidewalks after Columbus Day, Camden continues humming along, albeit at a slower pace. Sure, some shops and restaurants close or cut back days and hours of operation. But rates drop at Camden's tony inns, so it's far easier to get dining reservations. End-of-season sales make holiday gift buying fun, and special events keep the town hopping through the darkest days of the year. No matter what the season, Camden's dreamy setting, with its mountain-backed, boat-filled harbor, is a draw. If you hurry, you'll catch some fine foliage, too.

### Rest

Winter rates make Camden's pricier lodgings a steal. For a romantic retreat with a gourmet twist, look no further than the **Hartstone Inn** (41 Elm St., 207-236-4259 or 800-788-4823, [hartstoneinn.com](http://hartstoneinn.com), \$125-\$265 until late October, then \$105-\$185), a bed-and-breakfast that doubles as a fine dining restaurant and cooking school. Camden's biggest splurge is the **Norumbega** (61 High St./Route 1, 207-236-4646 or 877-363-4646, [norumbegainn.com](http://norumbegainn.com), \$235-\$375 Oct. 10-29, then \$155-\$295), an 1886 turreted stone castle-turned-B&B, with elevated views over Camden's outer harbor and elegance and amenities fit for royalty. Wood-burning fireplaces and a wonderful Queen Atlantic cookstove add cozy warmth to the **Camden Maine Stay** (22 High St./Route 1, 207-236-9636, [camdenmainestay.com](http://camdenmainestay.com), \$160-\$170 to Nov. 1, then \$115-\$250), a B&B within walking distance of downtown. Smack downtown is the recently renovated **Lord Camden Inn** (24 Main St./Route 1, 207-236-4325 or 800-336-4325, [lordcamdeninn.com](http://lordcamdeninn.com), \$159-\$289 to Nov. 1, then \$99-\$159), a boutique hotel in a historic building.

### Do

Read a copy of poet Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Renaissance," in the **Camden Public Library**, then cross Atlantic Avenue to find her sculpture in the restored Olmsted Brothers-designed waterfront park. Through Oct. 20, view memorabilia in the Millay Room at the **Whitehall Inn** (52 High St., 207-236-3391 or 800-789-6565, [whitehall-inn.com](http://whitehall-inn.com)), where she first read the poem. Follow the Camden-Rockport Historical Society's walking tour and bicycle or car tour brochure, which details local architecture and historical sites ([crmuseum.org](http://crmuseum.org)). Meander through **Merryspring** (30 Conway Road, 207-236-2239, [merryspring.org](http://merryspring.org)), a 66-acre nature park with trails, gardens, and occasional educational programs and special events. For more cultural pursuits, check the **Camden Opera House** (29 Elm St., 207-236-7963, [camdenoperahouse.com](http://camdenoperahouse.com)).

### Spend

Ahhh, here's where Camden shines year-round, with boutiques, specialty stores, and unusual shops lining its streets. Camden's literary heritage is intact with four bookstores, including two independent shops, the Owl & Turtle Bookshop (32 Washington St., 800-876-4769) and **Sherman's Books & Stationery** (8 Bayview St., 207-236-2223), the wonderful antiquarian shop **ABCD Books** (23 Bayview St., 207-236-3903, [abcdbooks.com](http://abcdbooks.com)), and **Stone Soup Books** (35 Main St./Route 1, no phone), a tiny second-floor shop crammed floor-to-ceiling with contemporary used fiction. Indulge your inner child at **Lucy's Dollhouse** (49 Bayview St., 207-236-4122, [lucysdollhouseshop.com](http://lucysdollhouseshop.com)), filled with antique dolls, dollhouses, teddy bears, and miniatures. Right next door is **Downshire House** (49 Bayview St., 207-236-9016, [downshire.com](http://downshire.com)), specializing in antique clocks.

### Fuel

Call before heading out, as many restaurants change hours and days of operation in late fall and early winter, and some will close early if the crowd is light. Light breakfasts, lunches, pastries, and the area's best coffee are at **Zoot** (31 Elm St., 207-236-9858, \$4-\$8). Pair breakfast or lunch with dreamy views at **Camden Deli** (37 Main St., 207-236-8343, [camdendeli.com](http://camdendeli.com); \$4-\$18). Order at the counter, then grab a seat by the window overlooking the harbor - the best views are from the second floor. Chowder, seafood, and good times are served at **Cappy's** (1 Main St., 207-236-2254, [cappyschowder.com](http://cappyschowder.com), lunch and dinner, \$8-\$20), a downtown institution. Gingerbread lobster is the signature dish at **Ephemere Café & Wine Bar** (51 Bayview St., 207-236-4451; dinner \$6-\$25, closed Sunday), a lovely little surprise for its creative menu ranging from nibbles to entrees. Reserve in advance to snag a table at **Francine Bistro** (55 Chestnut St., 207-230-0083, [francinebistro.com](http://francinebistro.com), dinner \$20-\$25, Tues.-Sat.), where chef/owner Brian Hill's menu is based on what's fresh and locally available each day. Earning raves is French-inspired **Natalie's** (83 Bayview St., 800-236-4266, [camdenharbourinn.com](http://camdenharbourinn.com), dinner \$25-\$35), at the recently renovated Camden Harbour Inn, a historical country inn now flaunting a contemporary, European vibe.

### Party

Camden isn't renowned for its nightlife, but there are a few spots with entertainment. **Gilbert's Publick House** (16 Bayview Landing, 207-236-4320) often has live entertainment or DJ in addition to pool tables, darts, and a nice selection of local microbrews. The nearby **Quarterdeck Bar & Grill** (21 Bayview St., 207-236-3272) also often has live music.

# Play

The views over Camden Harbor and out to island-salted Penobscot Bay from the summit of Mount Battie, in **Camden Hills State Park** (280 Belfast Road/Route 1, 207-236-3109), get even better once the leaves are off the trees. The summit road is open to cars through the first week in November, but you can always hike. No matter the weather, there's always something to do at **Ragged Mountain Recreation Area** (20 Barnestown Road, 207-236-3438, [camdensnowbowl.com](http://camdensnowbowl.com)), a town-owned park with hiking, swimming, and boating on Hosmer Pond, tennis courts, and single-track mountain biking trails, all available in warmer weather; in winter there's skiing, snowboarding, tobogganing, and ice skating. Biggest event on the schedule is the **National Toboggan Championships** (Feb. 8-10, 2008), open to anyone who preregisters. ■

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