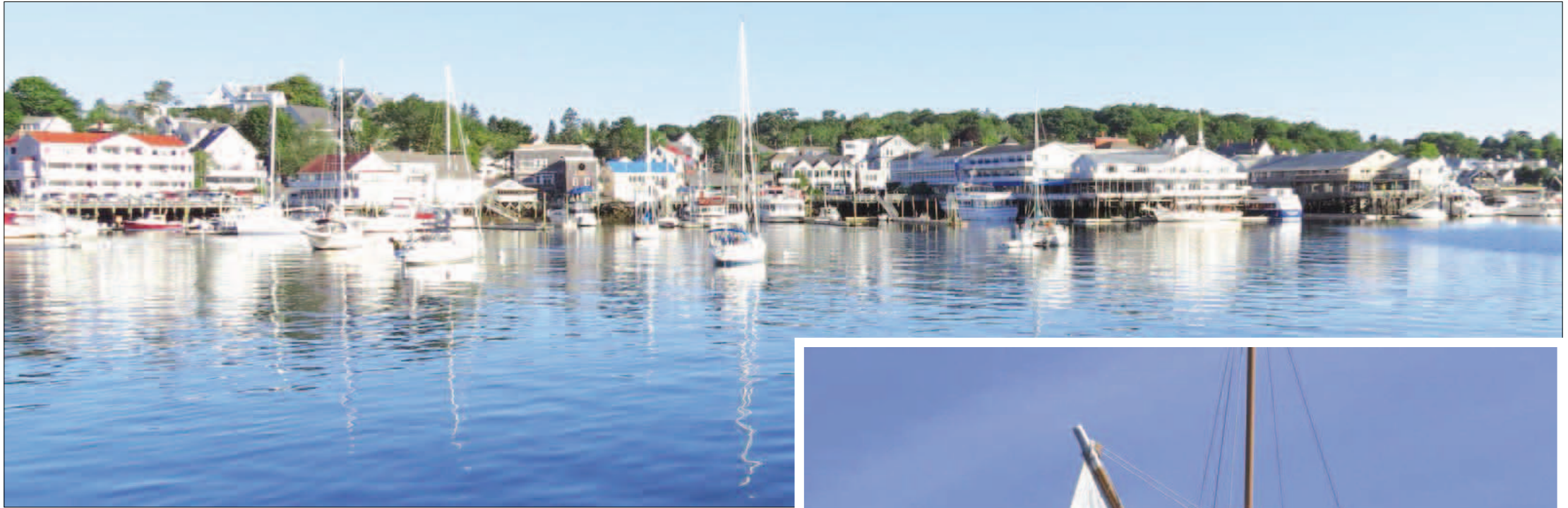


LEISURE & TRAVEL

EDITOR: Leigh Williams, 859-4978

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Popular tourist attraction Boothbay Harbor is pictured from the water.

Kicking back in Boothbay Harbor

■ Picturesque town offers many sights and delights

BY CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

It's early afternoon on a summer Saturday as my travel mates and I wind our way south towards the coast on Maine's Route 27.

Other than a few summers in the '90s when I lived in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, I've made this trek annually for two decades, bound for a family cottage in the New England state.

This trip is different, though.

Instead of heading straight to my seasonal getaway, I'm first taking my oldest daughter and friends on a two-day tour of the picturesque town of Boothbay Harbor.

It doesn't take long before we're all gushing about the cuteness of this mid-coast community, nestled in the centre of a peninsula between the Sheepscot and Damriscott rivers.

For more than a century, Boothbay Harbor has been a favourite destination of travellers looking for some down time. About 2,000 people live here year round.

The seaside town was incorporated in 1889, having previously been a part of Boothbay, located just three kilometres to the north. Incidentally, Boothbay itself is worth a stop, whether to try its 18-hole golf course, hiking trails or to take a gander at other attractions,

such as its railway museum, playhouse or botanical gardens – the largest in New England.

You've reached the heart of Boothbay Harbor proper at the crest of a hill near the bank clock, where incoming traffic is directed one way onto Oak Street.

Take the change in traffic flow as your signal to slow down, since kicking back and enjoying life seems to be the motto of the friendly folks who call 'BBH' home.

Meandering along the tree-lined streets, past charming clapboard houses and interesting stores, my travel crew and I soon reach our home away from home for the brief visit – Fisherman's Wharf Inn.

There's no shortage of terrific places to stay in Boothbay Harbor but Fisherman's is my favourite. Open mid-May to mid-October, the 54-room hotel is an ideal locale, just a short walk to boat excursions, great restaurants and quaint local shops.

After a quick peek at our lovely harbor-view room and balcony, hunger overtakes my fellow adventurers and their trusty tour guide. While we could have dined at the hotel's restaurant or pub, where I'd enjoyed excellent meals and service in the past, our car-crunched legs yearned for a stretch and eventually delivered us to another of my faves – the Boathouse Bistro.

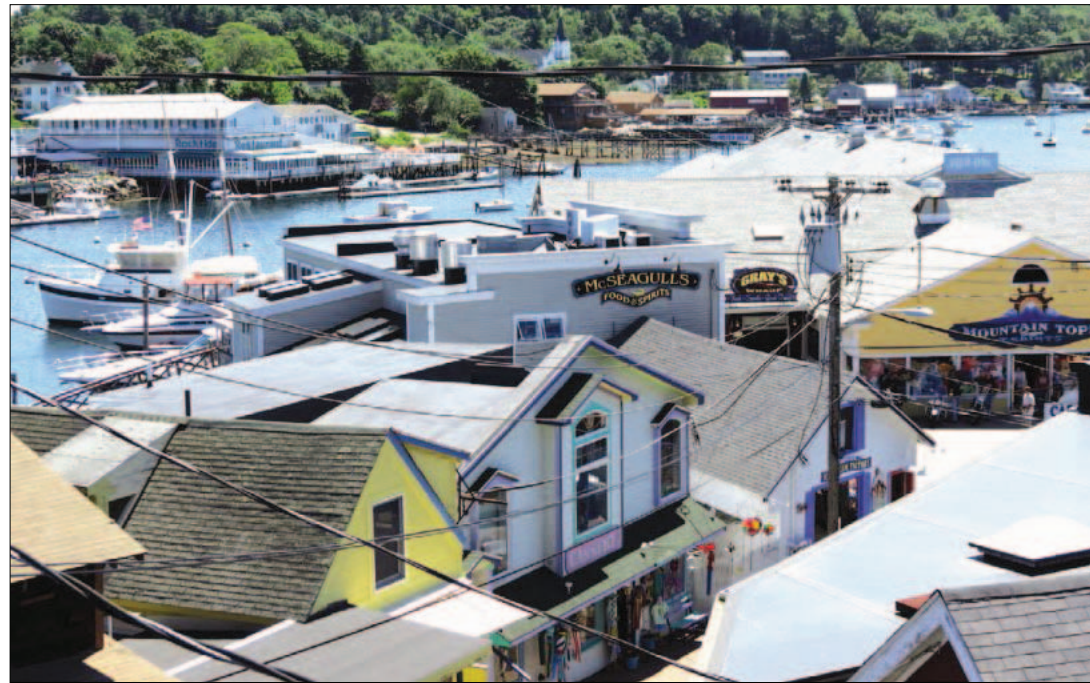
If you can manage stairs and the weather is decent, head to the restaurant's rooftop

► See BOOTHBAY, G3



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

A two-hour voyage aboard the charter schooner Eastwind is a great way to see Boothbay Harbor.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Those dining at the Boathouse Bistro are treated to great harbor views, especially from the restaurant's rooftop deck.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The Novelty, docked at Pier 8, prepares to take guests on a one-hour scenic harbor tour.

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Boothbay Harbor offers quaint sights and attractions for tourists to enjoy

► Continued From G1

deck for stunning views of the harbor and the wide assortment of boats it usually contains. You'll quickly understand why Boothbay Harbor is sometimes called 'The Boating Capital of New England.'

Along the town's docks, you'll see the largest fleet of excursion vessels on the coast, with tours offered for viewing lighthouses, seals, islands, whales, puffins and, in the fall, spectacular foliage. Deep-sea fishing cruises for cod, mackerel, tuna, haddock and striped bass leave daily for full-day and half-day trips. There are also jaunts to be made aboard sailing schooners, cruises featuring reggae dances and kayaks to rent – something for everyone!

Not keen on taking to the water? The local piers are the perfect place to gawk at the fishing and tour vessels as well as the amazing pleasure craft as they head in and out of the harbor. For yachters, the harbor is one of the best-known destinations in Maine, a super stop between Portland and other touristy areas such as Rockland and Camden, Maine.

Boating fans might also like to spin by the Boothbay Harbor Shipyard, formerly the Frank L. Sample shipyard. During the Second World War, workers at the facility built minesweepers and salvage tugboats for the United States navy. The busi-



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Orne's Candy Store, open since 1885, offers a wide selection of decadent candies and confections.

ness still operates, with work today focused on the repair of commercial vessels and private yachts up to 60 metres long.

From our vantage point at the Boathouse Bistro, I point to the opposite side of the harbor and the Carousel Marina, mentioning another of the town's claims to fame. The marina opened in the 1960s, its name the result of its location being used for scenes in the 1956 movie version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel.

Interrupting my commentary on

the movie are the bells of Our Lady Queen of Peace, a Catholic church not far from the marina. Locals say the 96-year-old place of worship is one of the most photographed in the state.

The bells gives me a chance to get back to my meal at the Bistro – outstanding 'lobstah' and delicious blueberry sangria. To top off a great dinner, my travel troupe and I saunter across the street for dessert at the Boothbay Fudge Factory and its neighbour, the Daffy Taffy Factory.

Munching on our purchases, we roam up to Commercial Street for more sweet sensations, this time at Orne's Candy Store. Operating since 1885, the shop offers a wide selection of candies and confections, many displayed in antique glass and wooden cases. (Drooling is permitted.)

Sufficiently filled with sugar, my sidekicks and I perk up for some shopping. Whether you have a passion for antiques, jewelry, handmade pottery, art, books, clothing or speciality foods, you'll find many unique places to browse in Boothbay Harbor.

After a slight uphill climb, we reach my favourite local shop: Abacus. Opened in 1971, the store has always inspired me with its quirky mix of art and crafts as well as beautiful jewelry pieces.

With tootsies tiring, our four-some zigzags back to Fisherman's Inn, but not before grabbing some ice cream to savour while watching the sun set from our balcony.

Even with our outings the following day, I only had time to show my entourage a fraction of the wonderful spots I've enjoyed over the years in Boothbay Harbor.

No trolley ride to the state aquarium (an awesome place for kids of all ages!) No visit to the historic Boothbay Opera House nor stroll across the 304-metre footbridge connecting the harbor's eastern and western shores. No scrumptious swordfish skewers at McSeagull's Restaurant. No top-notch breakfast



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The Boothbay Fudge Factory and its neighbor, the Daffy Taffy Factory, are popular stops in Boothbay Harbor.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Just a short drive from downtown is the state aquarium, featuring some excellent hands-on exhibits.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Located in the heart of Boothbay Harbor, Fisherman's Wharf Inn is an ideal location for lodging and dining.

in a cozy booth at the Ebb Tide. No sharing a clambake combo at Kaler's.

Maybe I'll take the gang back next summer during Windjammer Days, a two-day June celebration during which the large, fully-rigged ships sail into the harbor and a multitude of events – from street parades to fireworks – take place.

If you're lucky enough to be in the area this September, check out Restaurant Week, being held Sept.

22 to 28. Eateries in the region will offer special menus at exceptional prices. Meanwhile, the town's first Harbor Fest is scheduled for Sept. 29, featuring an artists' showcase, a chowder and chili competition, kids' games and much more.

Enjoy beautiful Boothbay Harbor – your body and soul will thank you!

■ **Cathy Donaldson is a Moncton-based travel and feature writer.**

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