

Destination: Gay Maine

Ogunquit, Maine may well be the best GLBT friendly resort destination you've never heard of. Ogunquit is smaller and more laid-back than Provincetown. Its easy access, welcoming attitude, active GLBT nightlife, abundance of gay owned and GLBT friendly accommodations, great food, stunning shoreline, and pristine beaches, make it stiff competition to its Massachusetts counterpart.

First, it's easier to get here. It's a mere 66 miles up the coast from Boston which translates into a 90 minute drive if the traffic is moving. I met several couples from Boston who said that the drive was the deciding factor that led them to choose Ogunquit over Provincetown. If you've ever gotten stuck in traffic crawling down the cape, you'll understand what an ordeal the commute can be in the summer. Ogunquit's also just a half an hour from both Portland, Maine and Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Like Provincetown, Ogunquit began as a fishing village whose landscape drew the attention of artists. In the early 1900's, a colony of post impressionist artists settled here. They brought their eclectic tastes, open lifestyles and acceptance of diversity with them and set the stage for the large gay and lesbian presence that exists in the town today. Even the cops are reputedly GLBT friendly. And, if you and your honey have been hearing wedding bells, Ogunquit may well be the place to say, "I do." Maine recently became the fifth state to legalize gay marriage. The law takes effect in mid-September 2009 and covers residents and non-residents alike.

This tiny village takes up only four square miles, yet Ogunquit boasts a lively gay and lesbian nightclub scene. If you're in the mood to just sit and chat, check out the Five-O Lounge, the Old Village Inn Lounge and Oxygen Lounge. The first two are connected to established restaurants and have a reputation for great pub food. While Oxygen's menu is more limited, its atmosphere is a bit more vibrant. If you're looking for entertainment, Front Porch Piano Bar and Lounge features rousing sing-alongs as well as live comedy. When we popped in, Jason Weber had the crowd crooning to pop music by artists like Cher and Madonna and plenty of Broadway show tunes. If you've got your dancing shoes on, check out the Mainstreet Video Bar. It's the center of gay and lesbian nightlife in Ogunquit. They feature weekly pool tournaments, live DJ's, stand-up comedy on the weekends, and monthly Women's Tea Dances. And while it's not specifically focused on GLBT entertainment, Jonathan's Restaurant hosts some national touring acts with large GLBT followings. The 2009 season bill features comedians Paula Poundstone and Susan Westenhofer.

Gay owned and GLBT welcoming accommodations abound in Ogunquit. We stayed at The Admiral's Inn. Centrally located, it features two heated swimming pools, a gym and sauna, two hot tubs, on-sight massage, and a bar and grill that stays open late. This is a great place to stay for gym bunnies as the larger pool is great for lap-swimming and the gym is stocked with treadmills, ellipticals, bikes, freeweights, a variety of weight machines, fitness balls and exercise mats. When it's time to relax, the view from the hot tub of the sun setting over the hillside is spectacular.

The Admiral's Inn has been a popular destination for years. Rumor has it (I heard it in the hot tub from guys who have been staying here for 25 years so it must be true!) that back in the 80's, the innkeeper greeted his gay male patrons in the nude. At a time when gay bashing was an acceptable popular sport, AIDS was decimating our community and our leaders were content to watch our brothers die, I imagine that being greeted by an innkeeper who was so accepting of his sexual identity would feel both liberating and empowering to gay male guests.

With several dozen restaurants, you can choose the meal and/or dining experience you'd like to have. If you're thinking, "I'm in Maine, I should have lobster," you're in luck: a host of restaurants offer lobster fresh off the boat. If you're in the mood to dress for dinner and want something with a French flair, you can check out 98 Province. If you're craving Italian, you might check out Angelina's, Julie's Ristorante, or Café Prego. If vegetarian is your thing, Gypsie Sweethearts is just the ticket. Gypsie Sweethearts also has a wide selection of great non-vegetarian international fare. If what you're looking for is a meal with a view, head down to Perkins Cove on the south side of town. Here you'll find numerous restaurants with great views of either the shore or the cove. My partner and I were drawn to Jackie's Too by the smells wafting from their kitchen. We sat almost at the water's edge on their outdoor terrace. Our evening felt magical because a double rainbow arched over the ocean. We took it as a good omen. MC Perkins Cove also provides a spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean. It's a bit more upscale with a comfortably elegant atmosphere, friendly service and fantastic food.

The Marginal Way and the beach are Ogunquit's top attractions. The Marginal Way is a mile and a quarter long footpath that hugs the shoreline between the village and Perkins Cove. Lined by honeysuckle bushes, sea roses and a few outcroppings of cedar trees that have been gnarled and twisted by the wind, it provides breathtaking views of the rocky coast. The view is accented by the pungent smell of seaweed mingled with a salty ocean mist from the rush of waves crashing against the shore. Perkins Cove, at the southern end of the path, is still a working harbor with lobster boats, charter fishing boats, whale watching boats, sightseeing boats and private sailboats. The peninsula that protects the harbor is lined with shops, galleries, and restaurants. At the other end of town, you'll find three miles of unspoiled, white sand beach. Surprisingly, the shore produces great waves for surfing for the brave souls who can bear the chilly water of the Northern Atlantic. For less intrepid beach-goers, the people-watching is great, especially if you go up to the gay section of the beach about 200 yards north of the main entrance.

Years before Europeans settled the New World, Naddick Indians dubbed the area Ogunquit, which translates as, "beautiful place by the sea." Centuries later, the name still fits.

For more information on accommodations, restaurants and other GLBT tourist information about Ogunquit, check out:

<http://www.purpleroots.com/>

<http://www.mainestreetogunquit.com/friends.html>

<http://www.gayogunquit.com/>

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