

GAY VACATION DESTINATION: Ogunquit, Maine

~ Where the Quaint and the Queer Meet ~

By Alan Bennett Ilagan

When the commercial excess of Provincetown gets to be too much and the ports of South Beach and San Francisco are too far away, there's a place where the quaint and the queer happily merge ~ the enchanted land of Ogunquit, Maine. It is a spot where each person truly matters ~ every one an integral character of the storyline and a vital component of what makes the town tick. There is drama and the occasional hometown political bickering intrinsic to any place where the inhabitants care passionately, but a powerful thread of unity weaves throughout the population, with nary a glimpse of uppity New England coldness in evidence.

A sense of calm and community imbues the salty sea air as the rocky Maine coastline winds its gorgeous path along the Marginal Way, and no one passes by without a friendly greeting or a nod of the head. The town has a well-earned reputation for welcoming strangers ~ as one of the bars claims, "Everyone is a local." At this overpopulated time of technological speed and vacuous superficiality, Ogunquit remains a place of simple goodness, where neon has been beautifully banished and friendly folk form the unjaded majority.

For lesbian and gay travelers, Ogunquit is an open and accepting town that is no longer a second-cousin to Provincetown and Fire Island, but a grand destination in its own right. The past few years have seen it coming fully into its own, wisely managing to steer clear of the encroaching commercialism that has insidiously invaded other, more-popular gay hot spots. Ogunquit offers beautiful beaches (one of theirs was voted one of the country's ten best) on a breathtaking coastline, and at a mere hour and fifteen minutes from Boston it is a convenient car-ride away for much of New England. (It's also only four and a half hours from New York City, which makes it closer than Provincetown.)

The charm of Maine country living is exemplified by the many guest houses available to travelers. A pleasant throwback to the days of amenable New England Inns with personal touches, individual care and one-of-a-kind rooms, each bed-and-breakfast is unique, and all of the owners are overwhelmingly hospitable. These inn-keepers aren't

just businessmen and women – they live here, their lives and futures are invested here, and such commitment can't be faked. The care they exhibit for their guests is genuine, because most guests become friends by the end of their stay. To truly experience the local flavor, and get a little inside gossip as to the goings-on of the town, one's best bet is to indulge in these reasonable guest houses. The following is a brief list of available lodgings ~ all are gay-friendly, and most are gay-owned and operated: {As these are all self-run enterprises, it is wise to call ahead for changes in rates and availability.}

- Black Boar Inn ~ (207)-646-2112
Located at 47 Main Street, with just a 5 minute walk to beach.
Charmingly nestled in the heart of Ogunquit Village, there is a fireplace in every bedroom and a full gourmet breakfast prepared each morning by Chef Linda. Afternoon tea is also served.
- Carriage Trade Inn – www.carriagetradeinn.com - (866)-500-0650 or (207)-646-0650
Located at 254 Shore Road. Innkeepers Chris Robinson and Jake Burrill offer six well-appointed rooms with private baths, open year-round. Convenient to the beach and the village.
- Distant Sands Bed & Breakfast – www.distantsands.com - (207)-646-8686
Located at 632 Main Street. Hosts Steve and John make guests feel at home. Everyone is introduced to everyone else, so by the end of a stay one feels like a cherished old friend who can't wait to return again
Wine and cheese and crackers can often be found on hand during cocktail hours; a full gourmet breakfast is served daily as well. John's art can be viewed throughout the inn, which is a restored 18th century farmhouse. With names like 'The Tea Rose Room', 'The Magnolia Room', 'The Beach Plum' and 'The Snap Dragon Room', the botanically-appointed rooms illustrate the artistic flair of John's

handiwork. Footbridge Beach is just a ten-minute walk away. Open year-round.

- Moon Over Maine Bed & Breakfast – (800)-851-6837 or (207)-646-MOON

Located at 22 Berwick Road. Host John is in charge of 9 individually decorated guest rooms, each named after a planet. (The Mars, Venus, and Moon (Earth) rooms have French balcony doors.) A buffet-style breakfast is served in the living room, and there is an outdoor hot tub for guests.

- Ogunquit Beach Inn – www.ogunquitbeachinn.com - (888)-97MAINE (for reservations) or (207)-646-1112

Located at 67 School Street. Two of the friendliest (and funniest) innkeepers in town, Greg and Mike, open their home mid-March through New Year's. The bars and the beach are just a few minutes' walk away, and Mike makes scrumptious muffins every day. A buffet-style breakfast selection is also available daily in the breakfast porch area from 8 to 10 AM, featuring congenial conversation and uproarious local tales.

This is just a sampling, and there are quite a few more places to stay in the area, including a number of higher-priced beach-front properties, though there may not be the same sense of personal care and effects that a guest house offers. Still, no matter where one stays, the magic of Ogunquit is always on hand. Whether one is looking for a quiet weekend get-away of leisurely strolling and antiquing, or a raucous vacation week of bar-hopping and beach-sunning, Ogunquit has something for everyone.

{For one of the best resources of information on Ogunquit of particular interest to gay travelers, check out www.gayogunquit.com.}