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Cultural, Authentic & Sustainable: This is your brain on travel. We showcase the essence of place, what's unique and original, and what locals cherish most about where they live. And we highlight places, practices, and people that are on the front lines of sustainable travel—travel that preserves places'

## Eating Well in Portland, Maine

By **IT Blog**, November 18, 2010 11:00 AM | [Comments \(2\)](#)

Contributing editor **Margaret Loftus** takes us on a culinary tour of Portland, Maine.





I've been known to plan my day around where I might eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner when visiting the venerable food capitals of New York and Paris, but Portland, Maine? You bet.

The city's rise to culinary stardom has been chronicled in the food press, from the *New York Times* to *Bon Appetit*, who named it the "["foodiest small town in America"](#)" last year. Lured from New York and other pricey cities by the relative cheap rents of the Old Port (the city's revitalized waterfront), a small army of top-notch chefs have set up shop here. Combined with an already intense locavore scene--if it grows here, there's a Mainer raising it--and a thriving food artisan community, from whoopie pie bakers to mead brewers, and you have all the makings of a gastronomic utopia.

My last visit, in late October, coincided with the city's third annual [Harvest on the Harbor](#), three days of cooking demonstrations, tastings, and exhibits that celebrate Maine's bounty and enormous pool of culinary



essential uniqueness for future generations. [more...](#)

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talent (*pictured, above*). The high point of Harvest is undoubtedly the Lobster Chef of the Year competition (*right*), a sort of live lobster Iron Chef where the entire audience gets to taste and judge dishes presented by three finalists. This year's contest turned out to be a real nail-bitter--all three entries were knock-outs--but it was a young upstart, Chef Kelly Patrick Farrin from [Azure Café](#) in Freeport, who took the title with his herb grilled Maine lobster on arugula with chive ricotta gnocchi and corn milk.



Lobster, however, is only the beginning. Dining options are downright daunting, especially for a town of 64,000 people. You could start with a small plate of bacon-dusted pig ears at [Hugo's](#). Or check out [Miyake](#) for the multi-course omakase (and don't forget to bring your own sake). Then there's [Fore Street](#), where pioneer Chef Sam Hayward is credited with igniting the farm-to-table movement back in the mid-1990s with his unembellished takes on whatever's local and seasonal (the wood-oven roasted mussels are a local favorite).

For help, my husband and I turned to [portlandfoodmap.com](#), a super-handy website that links to multiple reviews and blog posts of just about every food-related establishment in and around Portland.

We warmed up our palates at the funky [Flatbread Company](#), a cavernous wharf-side pizza joint where you can soak up ocean views from your cozy perch next to the massive Flintstone-style wood-fired oven. The menu's litany of pizza specials listed where each of the toppings was sourced, a testament to the fact that the local food ethos isn't restricted to fine dining. The pie topped with pulled pork, apple, and kale called our name. Washed down with a [Maine Beer Company](#) Spring Peeper Ale, it was heaven.

More memorable meals followed: a crepe poireaux (leek, mushroom, and goat cheese) at the cheery [Merry Table Creperie](#); a lush veal goulash and lovely Dolcetto at the tiny gem [Bresca](#); even Standard Bakery's crunchy, caramely, insanely addictive financier with a cup of tea was unforgettable.

In between bites, we trekked the length of the waterfront, from the arts district in the West End, home of the [Portland Museum of Art](#), to the East End, where old-school businesses like Italian grocer [Micucci](#) share the same block with high-concept restaurants and my favorite bookstore of all time, [Rabelais](#), a paean to books on food, wine, farming and gardening, some of them rare finds, like *The Drinks of Yesteryear*, a



## Recent Comments

[Janelle Nanos on Eating Well in Portland, Maine:](#) Thanks for the update Hilary! Too bad about the closing, but it seems there's still plenty of great [Hilary Nangle on Eating Well in Portland, Maine:](#) And you've only scratched the surface of eating in Portland. My favorite technique is grazing: appet

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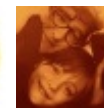
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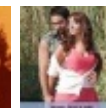
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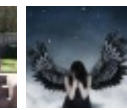
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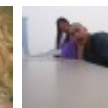
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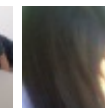
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## Awards



cocktail guide from the Prohibition-era (\$3,000).



I've heard that cheeseburgers top the list of last meals requested by those on death row, but this would be mine: a duck confit and kimchi panini with a side of the best poutine south of Montreal and a Marshall Wharf Tug pale ale (brewed in Belfast, Maine) from [Duckfat](#). It was my last meal in Portland anyway, but I'll be back.

[For more on Maine, check out our travel guide](#) .

*Photo: Top center, and right, Harvest on the Harbor Festival, courtesy of Focus Photography. Bottom left, fish and chips from Hugos; bottom right, confit salad and a beer from Duckfat, both courtesy of the Greater Portland Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

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## 2 Comments

[Hilary Nangle](#) said:

And you've only scratched the surface of eating in Portland. My favorite technique is grazing: appetizers here, small plate there, another small plate, and, if room, dessert (at Bresca, if there's room).

One update: Evangeline has closed. Chef/owner Erik Desjarlais has opted to be a stay-at-home dad. Good for him; bad for those of us who enjoyed his French flair and especially his Monday night fixed-price menu.

November 18, 2010 5:40 PM

Janelle Nanos  said:

Thanks for the update Hilary! Too bad about the closing, but it seems there's still plenty of great food options to choose from.

November 19, 2010 9:47 AM

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