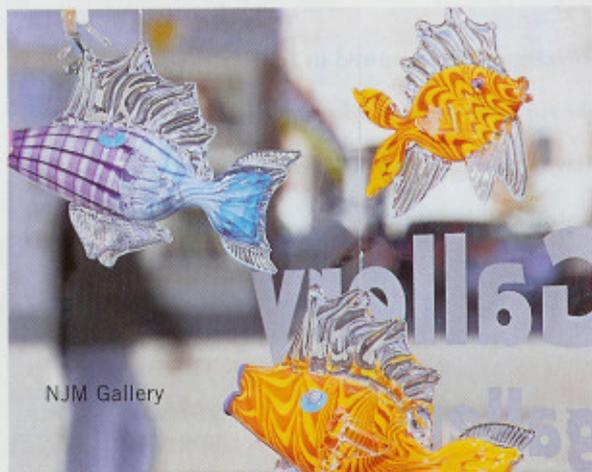


portsmouth pride



NJM Gallery





*This resurgent
New Hampshire
town has earned its
bragging rights.*

Three elderly gentlemen, all wearing straw hats, stroll along streets edged with handsome chocolate-brick buildings. Behind them, hipsters with spiky hair and sardonic T-shirts duck into a coffee shop. Both groups seem perfectly at home in this small harborside town. "Portsmouth's more cosmopolitan than people might think," says Stacey Brooks, who lives in the adjacent community of Rye. "There's a great mix of artists, expats from the city, and students. But New Hampshire's crusty old salts will always keep it from being precious."

Locals gather in Market Square, where a musician strums his banjo. A pleasant breeze blends the sea's salty fragrance with the smell of a café's fresh-baked bread. With Boston so close and New York four hours away by car, day-trippers drive up to browse boutiques, enjoy exceptional restaurants, and cruise the state's 18-mile coastline.

"People who live here know they've got something good," says Stacey, who works at Strawberry Banke, an

People come here to discover antiquity, old Colonial mansions, history," says local Randa Charland. Visitors also enjoy such modern diversions as abstract art galleries, theaters, and jazz clubs. Randa adds, "Portsmouth's the cultural hub of New Hampshire." Right: Retro diner Friendly Toast serves a mojito milk shake (vanilla ice cream, lime juice, and fresh mint). The menu reads, "Don't think, just try it."



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impressive compound of 40 rehabilitated structures that span more than 300 years of the city's past. Museum guides, occasionally costumed, bring the exhibits to life. "Sometimes you visit a place where there's a lot of history, but it's like an empty stage," says Diane Tyrrell, a traveler from Australia. "When you meet people and learn their stories, it adds to the authenticity."

For more than two centuries, tradesmen and sailors near the mouth of the Piscataqua River built boats and rode the waves. But in the late 1800s, as the coastal trade declined, the port turned into a rowdy mess. An effort to restore the historic buildings took shape in the late 1950s, and by the 1970s, artists and entrepreneurs began fixing up neighborhoods. Today, tree-lined sidewalks stretch past fine wooden homes. "Everywhere you look," Diane says, "there's something different."

That's certainly true of the bustling shopping district. Despite the presence of Gap and Starbucks, most businesses remain unique. Art galleries, clothing stores, and funky markets hide down winding alleys. Stylish patrons stop by Attrezzi for fine kitchen accessories or NJM Gallery for blown-glass creations. And Tugboat Alley, a nautical gift shop, offers model boats and lighthouse collectibles.

Tourists enjoy amazing dining options. For breakfast,



Harbor cruises pass shipyards, lighthouses, mansions, and forts. On land, tourists may pause at an open-air café to refresh and people-watch. Below: Strawberry Banke preserves 10 acres of historic structures and gardens. Costumed role players, some working in the 1950s grocery, others demonstrating traditional woodworking skills, teach visitors about life in the town's oldest coastal neighborhood.

the clear choice is Friendly Toast, a retro diner that recalls an era when no one counted carbs. Here, omelets and sinful home fries cover the oversize plates. For dinner, visitors should try the oysters at Jumpin' Jay's Fish Cafe or the yellowfin tuna with bacon ravioli at Pesce Blue. Local boats still supply restaurants with fresh fish every day, and The Portsmouth Brewery continues crafting hearty ales to pair with it.

Out past the cafés and shops, working ships traverse the fast-moving river. Tugboats hunch together at the dock, their bulldog-like hulls guarding the harbor. Narrated cruises give insight into mariners' lives. Kimberly Paquin, one of the crew on the tour boat *Heritage*, says, "Portsmouth isn't a typical suburban area—there's more substance to it than some cookie-cutter towns." But the memories made here are just as sweet. 🍪

NAVIGATING THE PORT

Strawbery Banke; 603/433-1100 or strawberybanke.org. Attrezzi; 603/427-1667 or attrezzi.com. NJM Gallery; 603/433-4120 or njmgallery.com. Tugboat Alley; 603/430-9556 or tugboatalley.com. Friendly Toast; 603/430-2154. Jumpin' Jay's Fish Cafe; 603/766-3474. Pesce Blue; 603/430-7766. The Portsmouth Brewery; 888/881-4677 or portsmouthbrewery.com. Portsmouth Harbor Cruises; 800/776-0915 or portsmouthharbor.com. Portsmouth makes a great day trip, but for lodging, visit portsmouthnh.com.