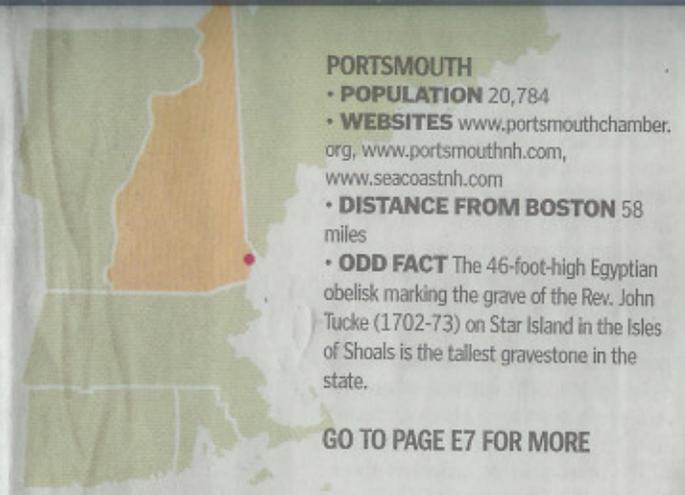


PORT OF CALL

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RESIDENTS TAKE PRIDE IN THE PAST AND PRESENT OF THIS SEACOAST CITY

Pumpkin cherubs frolic in puffy clouds against a cerulean sky, while the face of Bacchus surveys the scene. It was only when reconstruction of Portsmouth's Music Hall began last spring that this 1901 mural was discovered, said Monte Bohanan, front-of-house manager. Work to restore the theater, designated one of "America's Treasures" by the US Senate, to its Victorian splendor will continue until 2011, Bohanan said. Just down the street, renovations are underway on another landmark, the 150-year-old North Church steeple. Pride of place is palpable in this seacoast city. Residents and merchants are proud of its history and proud that it's a working port. They are unfazed by the frequent wail of a siren when the Sarah Long Bridge is raised to let vessels pass on the Piscataqua River and unapologetic about mountains of salt offloaded from ships from South America and deposited at the mouth of the harbor, obstructing the water view. Walk the brick and granite sidewalks of the Harbour Trail to see stately homes, colorful gardens, and historic public buildings. Then travel the Piscataqua by boat, past lighthouses and old forts, to the open ocean and the Isles of Shoals to see how another breed of early settlers lived, as proud of their rocky foothold as their counterparts on shore.



PORTSMOUTH
 • **POPULATION** 20,784
 • **WEBSITES** www.portsmouthchamber.org, www.portsmouthnh.com, www.seacoastnh.com
 • **DISTANCE FROM BOSTON** 58 miles
 • **ODD FACT** The 46-foot-high Egyptian obelisk marking the grave of the Rev. John Tucke (1702-73) on Star Island in the Isles of Shoals is the tallest gravestone in the state.

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DO

It seems there's a stunning historic house around every corner in Portsmouth. The Harbour Trail passes many of them, including the **53 Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden** (154 Market St., 603-436-8221, www.moffattladd.org, mid-June to mid-October), with its 230-year-old horse chestnut tree planted by General William Whipple upon his return from signing the Declaration of Independence.

The city's best-known attraction is **Strawbery Banke Museum** (64 Marcy St., 603-433-0000, www.strawberybanke.org), where costumed role players interpret life in New Hampshire's oldest seacoast neighborhood from the late 1600s to the 1950s. Special programs include "Ghosts on the Banke" Oct. 27 and "Candlelight Strolls" in December.

For a glimpse into the world offshore, take a trip with the **Isles of Shoals Steamship Co.** (55 Market St., 603-431-5500, www.islesofshoals.com, April-October). The Victorian replica Thomas Lighton cruises by nine islands off the coast known for shipwrecks, pirates, artists, lavish resorts, and lurid crimes. The narration is crisp and informative, devoid of the corny hyperbole that often characterize such tours. Boat tours are also offered by **Portsmouth Harbor Cruises** (64 Ceres St., 603-436-8084, www.portsmouthharbor.com), and **Tug Alley Too** (47 Bow St., 603-955-9556, www.tugboatalley.com).

The Revolutionary War-era Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden is a popular tourist spot.



SPEND

In August, Boston Magazine's New England Travel & Life named Market Street New Hampshire's best shopping street for 2006, and for good reason. There is a refreshing dearth of chains and an abundance of boutiques and galleries. Several of the galleries participate in **Art Round Town** (www.arroundtown.org) on the second Friday of each month when they stay open until 8 p.m. and reward browsers with free refreshments.

You may want to expand your kitchen to accommodate the dazzling dinnerware and accessories offered by **Attrezzi** (78 Market St., 603-427-1667, www.attrezzi.nh.com). Upstairs is given over to exotic flavored olive oils, wine, coffee, spices, and other gourmet food items.

Need a handbag to complement that perfect outfit? You can probably find it at **Anna Street Studio** (113 Market St., 603-433-2247, www.anna.street.com), but if not, just go to a table in the back of the shop and custom design a bag from a large selection of fabrics and trim.

Then there's the irreverent Macro complex (89 Market St.), really three shops in one. Macro Polo (603-436-8338) sells funky gadgets, games, and cardboard cutouts of celebrities. Macroscopic (603-436-8383) features jewelry, home goods, and bath and body products. Macro Unleashed (603-436-8887) is "dedicated to pets and the people who love them."



Market Street is full of boutiques and galleries, not chain stores.

PLAY

The city has live theater at the **Seacoast Repertory Theatre** (125 Bow St., 603-433-4793, www.seacoastrep.org), which presents familiar plays and musicals; the **Pontine Theater** (959 Islington St., 603-436-6660, www.pontine.org), which performs original plays, often based on historic events; and **The Music Hall** (28 Chestnut St., 603-436-2400, www.themusichall.org), which features film, music, theater, and dance, and is gradually being renovated to its 1901 grandeur.

There's plenty of live music, too. The **Press Room** (77 Daniel St., 603-431-5186)

REST

In the historic district, bed-and-breakfasts offer basic accommodations and easy foot access to the area's attractions, shops, and restaurants. The **Bow Street Inn** (121 Bow St., 603-431-7760, www.bowstreetinn.com, double \$99-\$180) provides discount tickets to the Seacoast Repertory Theatre in the same building.

The **Inn at Strawberry Banke** (314 Court St., 603-436-7242, www.innatstrawberrybanke.com, double \$110-\$150) is on a quiet side street just steps from busy Market Square.

The **Sise Inn** (40 Court St., 603-433-1200, www.siseinn.com, double \$119-\$279), housed in a Queen Anne Victorian on the edge of the historic district, is part B&B, part inn.

The **Sheraton Harborside** (250 Market St., 603-431-2300, www.sheratonportsmouth.com, doubles \$109-\$795) boasts an indoor pool and sauna and suites overlooking the harbor.

Among the nicest of the economy lodgings at Portsmouth Circle, just 10 minutes from downtown, is the **Port Inn** (Route 1 Bypass at Portsmouth Traffic Circle, 603-436-4378, www.theportinn.com, double \$70-\$190, \$6 for each additional person).

FUEL

Portsmouth has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to dining out, and while sushi and burritos have made inroads, seafood restaurants reign. At **Jumpin' Jay's Fish Cafe** (150 Congress St., 603-766-3474, www.jumpinjays.com, entrees \$18-\$25), you pick your fish, then choose a sauce.

At **Pesce Blue's** outdoor patio (103 Congress St., 603-430-7766, www.pesceblue.com, entrees \$20-\$28.50), diners can sample pastas and plates of Italian-influenced fare, such as linguine with Peekytoe crabmeat and seafood risotto.

Several downtown restaurants offer deck dining overlooking the Piscataqua. On a Friday night **Poco's Bow Street Cantina** (37 Bow St., 603-431-5967, www.pocosbowstreetcantina.com, entrees \$9-\$17) was rocking with 20-somethings nursing margaritas and mojitos.

On a Sunday morning, it was worth the wait in the block-long line at **The Friendly Toast** (121 Congress St., 603-430-2154, breakfast entrees \$4-\$10) for "New Hampshire's Finest" scramble with goat cheese, scallions, and asparagus and Anadama bread, a New England classic made with cornmeal and molasses — served in a retro '50s diner by waitstaff with an apparent fondness for tattoos.

PARTY

Smell the flowers and the at **Prescott Park**, a beautiful landscaped waterfront space. In July and August it is the site of the Prescott Park Arts Festival (Marcy Street, 603-436-2300, www.prescottpark.org), which hosts performances by music and theater groups. For aquatic thrills in summer, you can't beat **Water Country** (2300 Lafayette Road, 603-427-1111, www.watercountry.com).

The newest game at the **Children's Museum** (280 Marcy Street, 603-436-3853, www.childrensmuseum.org) is "Play It Cool." In a mindplay using electroencephalograms (EEGs), players don headbands that register their brain waves, which in turn move a ball along a track. The most recent player wins. **The Rye Airfield** (Lafayette Road, Rye, 603-436-2800, www.ryearfield.com) is a 50,000-square-foot indoor park, will keep the most energetic tweens and teens entertained.

It looks like a beached whale, but the **USS Albacore** is a decommissioned sub open as a museum (100 Market St., 603-436-3680, www.ussalbacore.org). Children will be climbing into and through claustrophobic spaces and peering out the periscope.

