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MEANWHILE, IN NEW ENGLAND ...

Across the country, American Cruise Lines offers guests “sea smoke,” lobster boats, and other inspiring shoreline views.

I had never heard of the term “sea smoke” until I found myself engulfed in it.

It’s just after 8 a.m. as our transport boat slowly maneuvers through a glistening ethereal-like mist — a thick, steamy fog that has settled over Camden’s harbor. Our captain dodges anchored sailboats on eerily quiet and glassy waters, their masts bare of puffy sails, almost like they’re still asleep in the early morning light.

“It’s like living in a ghost world,” whispers a woman sitting next to me.

The view becomes clearer as we approach the shoreline, where metal-mesh lobster traps clang as fishermen stack them on boats. Seagulls flutter along the docks. I see a waterfall tumbling down a hillside and a whitewashed New England-style church steeple shooting out from atop the tree line — seemingly spotlighted by sunbeams flittering through the mist.

And I soon learn that “sea smoke” is just another way of saying fog formed when cold air settles over warmer water, a more descriptive way, perhaps, to capture the essence of a summer morning along Maine’s jagged coastline.

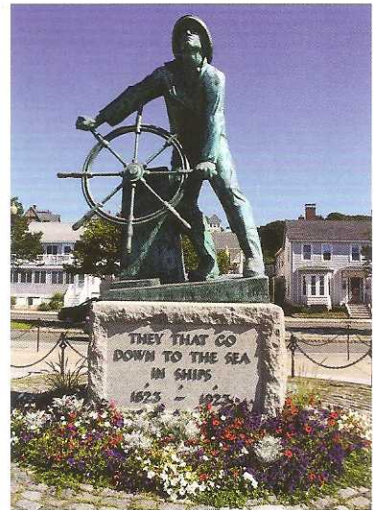
It’s Day 4 of my 11-day New England Grand Cruise aboard American Cruise Lines’ 175-passenger *American Constitution*, on a journey that departs Boston and visits nine ports of call along the rocky and sandy shores of Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. One of the cruise line’s newest ships, the *Constitution* clings to the water with Rolls-Royce stabilizers. Creative three-course menus (yes, lobster specialties are on them),

comfortable plush lounges, and outdoor decks enhance the journey.

Along the way, there’s no shortage of panoramas with briny fishing vessels, sleek sailboats, and coastline surrounded by outer islands — a stunning view, in particular, from atop Acadia National Park’s 1,527-foot Cadillac Mountain at Bar Harbor. Yet each coastal town — although similar with ice cream stands, walking tours, and tourist-filled souvenir and antique shops — has unique character accented by its own history, traditions, and even local fare.

In Boothbay Harbor, for example, I stop by the storefront selling cream-filled Wicked Whoopie pies found only in Maine. Martha’s Vineyard has its so-called gingerbread cottages trimmed in cool hues of red, gray, and Caribbean blue. And in Cape Cod’s Provincetown, I climb the imposing century-old, 252-foot granite Pilgrim Monument commemorating the *Mayflower*’s first New World landing in 1620.

Historic Portland sights include Portland Head Light, commissioned by President George Washington and thought to be the nation’s most photographed lighthouse, and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s well-preserved boyhood home. Newport, Rhode Island, not only has colorful 18th-century homes and the 1673 White Horse Tavern, where employees avow a ghostly presence, but also a string of waterside 19th-century summer-home mansions including former Vanderbilt properties: Marble House and The Breakers, a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo.



Yet another way of appreciating New England’s tall-masted sailboats, lighthouses along craggy shorelines, and yesteryear’s schooners slicing through choppy surf is through artists’ eyes. Impressionist-like light reflects off the sea at Provincetown, America’s oldest art colony with more than 70 galleries. “Because we’re so far out from the mainland, there’s lots of water and sand and a very narrow land mass,” says local artist and Cape School of Art Board Member Lauren Byrne. “So the light bounces off the sky and the water into the atmosphere.”

Winslow Homer’s stormy shoreline panoramas hang in the Portland Museum of Art, while Gloucester’s Cape Ann Museum holds the largest collection of Fitz Henry Lane’s 19th-century harbor and city views of that famous fishing community. And just a short walk from Rockland’s docks leads to Maine’s Farnsworth Art Museum with its expansive collection of Andrew Wyeth’s canvases painted with his signature egg tempera technique.

“You’ll see the woodworking, the people who fished and who tended boats,” explains Farnsworth spokesman David Troup. “So you’ll understand the history and culture of our state through these beautiful works of art.”

BY RICHARD VARR