

Coastal Tourism in Maine

by Steve Lyons

Tourism is an important industry in Maine, and while we can't put a specific date on when the first tourist visited Maine, its heritage stretches back nearly 200 years and continues to be an economic driver today.

As one story goes, in the 1830s a farmer in Old Orchard Beach was offered \$1.50 a week to board visitors on his farm, which was one of the earliest records of people traveling to Maine for leisure.¹ In 1842, more visitors discovered the area thanks to the railroad running from Boston to Old Orchard. By the 1880s, there were 30 hotels in Bar Harbor, and in 1919, Acadia National Park, originally named Lafayette National Park, became the first national park east of the Mississippi River. In 1889, the Samoset Resort was built in Rockland.² After that, more hotels, restaurants, and attractions were built along Maine's 3,500-mile coastline, complementing traditional fishing and shipping industries with tourism, which has an economic driver for the state.

Tourism in Maine had an economic impact of about \$15 billion in 2022 thanks to an estimated 15.3 million people who visited the state that year. This figure includes direct expenditures for lodging, restaurants, shopping, groceries, recreation and transportation, as well as the indirect expenditures of this spending circulating through the state's economy (DSGR 2022). Before we break down the coastal impacts, it is helpful to understand that the Office of Tourism divides the state into eight tourism regions, four on the coast and four inland. The coastal regions are called Downeast

and Acadia, Midcoast and Islands, Greater Portland and Casco Bay, and Maine Beaches.

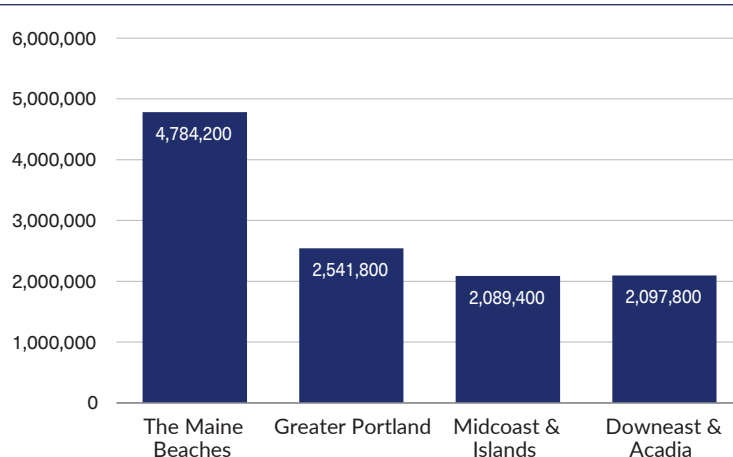
Each year the Office of Tourism estimates spending and economic impact for each of the eight regions, with the coastal regions making up about 71 percent of the \$15 billion. The largest portion of statewide spending in 2022 was \$2.1 billion for accommodations, followed by restaurants coming in a close second with nearly \$2 billion in spending. The third highest expenditures were from shopping, which topped out around \$1.5 billion.

There is a plethora of tourism opportunities along the coast of Maine, leading to the question, What are all these people doing while they are here? Culinary tourism has grown by leaps and bounds over the years as people seek out restaurants serving locally grown, harvested, or produced foods and beverages. This type of tourism supports farmers, fishermen,

lobstermen, and other small companies making beer, wine, soft drinks, whoopie pies, and other culinary delights. Nearly 75 percent of visitors in 2022 said they engaged in food/beverage/culinary activities while in Maine, and 45 percent of these people said they ate a lobster, and 39 percent ate other local seafood (DSGR 2022). According to the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, there are 5,600 independent lobstermen, who harvest 100 million pounds of lobster worth more than \$100 billion to the Maine economy.³ The Maine Department of Marine Resources estimated that in 2022 the total value of commercially harvested seafood was \$574 million (Maine DMR 2023).

Eating fresh seafood is one of the many activities visitors enjoy while in Maine, but there are countless other contributors to the coastal economy. In 2018, the economic impact derived from cruise passengers was approximately \$33 million (DPA 2019), not including an additional \$6.6 million in economic impact coming from the Maine

FIGURE 1: Estimated Number of Visitors to Maine's Coastal Tourism Regions, 2022



Source: Maine Office of Tourism.

Windjammer Association fleet (MWA 2020). In 2022, Acadia National Park hosted more than 3.9 million recreational visitors, and day use of coastal Maine state parks accounted for more than 2 million visitors.⁴

What keeps visitors coming back to the coast? Boat tours, sea kayaking guides, saltwater fishing guides, state and national parks, ferry services, marinas, boat builders, and pilots to guide cruise ships into our ports. We also need to add to this list all the fishermen, clammers, fish farmers, seaweed and mussel harvesters and others who are out every day so visitors can enjoy our restaurants, lobster shacks, and retail seafood providers.

While it is seemingly impossible to quantify the overall economic impact of coastal-based tourism, we know that from beaches to boat tours and lobsters to lighthouses, a large part of the Maine economy is reliant upon the bounties of the sea.

Impact & Visitor Tracking Report.
<https://motpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Maine-Office-of-Tourism-2022-Visitor-Tracking-Report.pdf>.

Maine DMR (Department of Marine Resources). 2023. "2022 Commercial Fisheries Value Returns to Levels More in Line with Recent Year." News release, March 3, 2023. <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/news/fri-03032023-1200-2022-commercial-fisheries-value-returns-levels-more-line-recent-years>.

MWA (Maine Windjammer Association). 2020. "How Much Does the Maine Windjammer Association Add to the Local Economy? You'd Be Surprised." News release, June 4, 2020. <https://www.sailmainecoast.com/how-much-does-the-maine-windjammer-association-add-to-the-local-economy-you-d-be-surprised/>.

Steve Lyons is director of the Maine Office of Tourism, where he has worked for more than 20 years. Before taking over as director in 2017, Lyons was the director of marketing and played a critical role in developing a tourism marketing strategy for the state.

NOTES

- 1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Orchard_Beach,_Maine
- 2 <https://acadiamagic.com/acadia-national-park.html>; <https://lobsterfrommaine.com/article/maine-lobster-fact-sheet/>
- 4 For Acadia National Park figures, see [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=ACAD](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=ACAD). Maine state parks data from monthly reports from the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

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- DPA. 2019. Survey of Cruise Visitors to Maine: Behavior, Attitudes, and Spending of Passengers and Crew. Portland, ME: DPA. <https://motpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Survey-of-Cruise-Visitors-to-Maine-Behavior-Attitudes-and-Spending-of-Passengers-and-Crew-August-2019.pdf>
- DSGR (Downs & St. Germain Research). 2022. Maine Office of Tourism 2022 Economic