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## **Mystic Seaport – Tall Ships, Whaling, And Preservation**

**By Cliff Calderwood**

A day at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut is a link to the glorious seafaring past of New England. The

Museum of America and the Sea is an entertaining journey through 19th century nautical life as you visit the three main exhibits at Mystic Seaport: the historic ships, the authentic seaport village and exhibits, and the preservation shipyard.

The coastline in this part of New England was once home to huge whaling fleets and many were built along these shores. The area of Mystic had its share of shipbuilding yards and the recreation of the seaport village is an authentic and accurate depiction of life in a New England seafaring town.

Open year-round Mystic Seaport is on the Mystic River a short hop from the historic downtown area. Here's what you'll see and how to get the best out of your trip...

### **THE JEWELS AT THE DOCK**

Tall ships still fascinate people and Mystic Seaport has an amazing collection in the museum dock area. I'm drawn like a magnet to these magnificent vessels, and the most popular to tour is the Charles W. Morgan – a wonderful example of a wooden whaling ship. It made 37 whaling trips from its launch in 1841 and before retiring in 1921. Other exquisite Tall Ships in the Mystic museum collection are the Joseph Conrad and L.A.Dunton.

Additional ships beautifully restored with a rich legacy include the Sabino and Emma C. Berry. The Emma C. first launched in 1866, and since then has undergone many changes as a fishing vessel and a coastal freighter. Allocate plenty of time to tour all the ships as they remain the centerpiece of the Mystic Seaport Museum. And when you're finally ready for a rest take a 30 or 90 minute cruise on the Sabino steamboat as she travels up and down the Mystic River.

### **THE AUTHENTIC VILLAGE AND EXHIBITS...**

A short walk from the ships is the village exhibits and galleries. Painstakingly recreated and authentic, the village consists of many buildings moved from other locations in New England and the Northeast.

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Stroll around the nautical shops and discover rope making, rigging, cooperage, and the sail loft.

There are over 40 delightful exhibits for you to enjoy, but two must-see displays are the Mystic River Scale Model, and the Shipsmith shop. Further down from the village check out the galleries and make sure you spend time inside both the Voyages and Figurehead exhibits.

The three-floor exhibit of Voyages celebrates the legacy of America and the sea, and how it continues to impact our lives in many subtle ways. And across the street is the Figurehead exhibit, and a wonderful collection of ship carvings. Unfortunately, these carvings are a bittersweet display. The desire for these on ships has dwindled and it's now become an endangered art form.

### THE PRESERVATION SHIPYARD...

In the Henry B. duPont Preservation Shipyard many of the old mastercraft shipbuilding skills are still

practiced to keep the museum ships in tip top shape. Unfortunately many of these skills are being lost as the economics of our time reduce the need for them. Wooden ships are a thing of the past, and so the wonderful carpentry and shipwright skills have dwindled throughout the world.

But in this corner of the world they are practiced and preserved.

In the yard you'll see a rigging loft, a paint shop, carpenters and metalworking shops, a lumber shed, and an old-fashioned sawmill. The documentation shop contains vital records used by the museum's craftsmen to maintain accuracy as they work on preserving the ships. At the nearby shipbuilding display you'll not only see the keel of the whale ship Thames, but take in a revealing exhibit of the many stages of building a ship.

Mystic Seaport celebrates the historic seafaring past of New England. Its one of my favorite three living museums in New England. The other two are Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, Central Massachusetts, and Plimoth Plantation and Mayflower at Plymouth, Eastern Massachusetts. All three for different reasons are marvelous experiences of New England's contribution to American history. To discover more about each visit my web site at

[www.new-england-vacations-guide.com/](http://www.new-england-vacations-guide.com/)

For more details on these and other attractions on Connecticut vacations and to pick up your free travel reports go to Cliff Calderwood's New England Vacation site at:

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## **Seven Reasons To Take A Connecticut Vacation**

**By Cliff Calderwood**

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As a New England vacation travel writer I've always considered Connecticut an overlooked state when people choose destinations and attractions for a New England vacation. As you'll discover here a Connecticut vacation offers excitement... or peace and quiet, depending on your mood.

Let's take a quick look at seven reasons why you should consider a Connecticut vacation for your next New England trip.

### THE MUSEUMS OF CONNECTICUT

With more than 14 diverse theme museums in Connecticut, there's bound to be something to suit your taste. Here's a quick rundown...

Bridgeport is home to The Barnum Museum and Discovery Museum, and at Danbury you'll find the Military Museum of Southern New England and the Danbury Railway Museum. Keeping with a train theme Thomaston hosts the Railroad Museum of New England and Naugatuck Railroad.

In Bristol you can find The New England Carousel Museum and period time pieces at the American Clock and Watch Museum. Just a little south in Waterbury is Time Expo, and a chance to celebrate the heritage of the Litchfield region at the Mattatuck Museum. At the Connecticut Antique Machinery Museum in Kent experience machinery that once drove commerce in the area.

Windsor Locks is not just home to Bradley International Airport but also to the New England Air Museum and south in East Haven experience another form of transportation at the Shore Line Trolley Museum.

And rounding out our must-see list is Mystic's Museum of America and the Sea, and the fabulous Mashantucket Pequot Museum in nearby Mashantucket.

### THE CONNECTICUT WINE TRAIL

Wineries in Connecticut? Yes, in fact there's 16 of them scattered throughout the state, and they make a perfect basis for a Connecticut Vacation. The climate in Connecticut is mild compared to the rest of New England and wines produced include: Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot, and Riesling. While Connecticut wines have only been produced since 1978, many farms where the grapes are grown are hundreds of years old. The wine tasting room will usually be open but call ahead for a tour time. You'll find these wineries not geared for large bus loads, but on the plus much more intimate than wineries in Northern California.

The wine trail is split into two major regions and it's suggested your tour is split up over three to four days. But because the trail takes you near so many other destinations and attractions in Connecticut let yourself be distracted and enjoy the jaunt through scenic and historic New England towns.

### FOXWOODS AND MOHEGAN SUN

Combined Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun make the largest casino complex in the world. Foxwoods in

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owned and run by Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, and Mohegan Sun by Mohegan Tribe on lands they own in Uncasville. These are sophisticated high-style experiences with shopping complexes, hotels, high profile entertainment acts, and top-rated restaurants. They are both close to each other and located in the eastern region of Connecticut, and close to museums, scenic drives, and the Connecticut vacation attractions in Mystic.

### HISTORIC HOMES OF CONNECTICUT

Perhaps the most famous home to see on your Connecticut vacation is Mark Twain's in Hartford, which is now a museum as well full of many artifacts he accumulated in the 17 years he lived there. Also in Hartford is the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe – of Uncle Tom's Cabin fame. Another famous woman's home is the academy run by Prudence Crandall in Canterbury – it's the site of the first academy for black women in New England. Your trip to Connecticut should include the town of Litchfield where you can view museum quality preserved colonial homes, and the Litchfield History Museum and Tapping Reeve House and Law School.

Connecticut includes many historic homes that played an important role in the Underground Railroad and the African-American journey from slavery to freedom.

### ESSEX STEAM TRAIN AND THE CONNECTICUT RIVER

The historic 1892 Essex station is your kick-off point for a unique vintage Steam Train and Riverboat Cruise along the Connecticut River. This combined tour takes 2 and 1/2 hours. In the summer it's cooling, and in the fall stunning with the turning of the leaves. The Connecticut River Museum is also in Essex and vividly brings to life the river's history as told through paintings, artifacts, and interactive exhibits.

### THE TOWN OF MYSTIC

Mystic Seaport and the Mystic Aquarium are magnets for visitors to Connecticut. The seaport is billed as The Museum of America and the Sea and depicts an authentic 19th century seafaring village, tall ships to tour, and a Preservation Yard where master shipbuilding skills are still practiced. The Mystic Aquarium includes a delightful array of indoor and outdoor exhibits, including Beluga whales, and a stunning model of the Titanic.

### THE ANTIQUE RUNS

Connecticut is famous for its concentration of antique shops, and draws thousands of treasure hunters each year who take a Connecticut vacation just to stock up on bargains and specimens to collect and decorate their homes. The village of Woodbury is known as the "Antiques Capital of Connecticut" and has over 45 dealers, but the fact is you're never too far from that special purchase no matter where you are in the state. Just sometimes its nice to take the time to follow your nose along a scenic New England road and see where it takes you... you can bet if it's in Connecticut, it'll take you close to an antique shop.

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