

A bewitching city

Rich maritime heritage, museums, mansions add to magical charm

By Sacha Pfeiffer, Globe Staff | January 30, 2008

Witches put Salem on the Colonial map, and this historic North Shore city has its share of creepy and comical tributes to the practice of witchcraft. Magic supplies, herbal potions, tarot cards, "spell baskets," custom-made capes - you'll find them all here. But this beautiful coastal community also has a rich maritime heritage (it was once one of the busiest shipping ports in the country), excellent museums, and stunning 17th-century architecture, including gorgeously restored mansions. Even better, you don't need a car to find your way around; there are numerous guided walks, trolley rides, harbor cruises, and rickshaw tours of the city. And to avoid the meandering drive from Boston to Salem, book a spot aboard the Salem ferry, a high-speed catamaran with pickups and drop-offs at the New England Aquarium dock and Blaney Street Wharf.

Do

Salem is loaded with museums, many of them funny-spooky places that document the city's witchcraft history. Among them are the **Witch History Museum** (197-201 Essex St., 978-741-7770, witchhistory museum.com), the **Witch Dungeon Museum** (16 Lynde St., 978-741-3570, witchdungeon.com), the **Salem Witch Museum** (19 Washington Square North, 978-744-1692, salemwitchmuseum.com), the **Salem Wax Museum** (288 Derby St., 800-298-2929, salemwaxmuseum.com), the **Spellbound Museum** (190 Essex St., 978-745-0138, spellboundtours.com/spellbound_museum.htm), **Salem's Museum of Myths & Monsters** (59 Wharf St., 978-745-0303, museumofmythsandmonsters.com), the **New England Pirate Museum** (274 Derby St., 978-741-2800, piratemuseum.com), and **Salem's 13 Ghosts** (131 Essex St., 978-744-0013, salems13ghosts.com), a 3-D walk-through exhibit in which ghosts float out of walls, and the floor opens into a spinning funnel. Some of these are closed for the season but will reopen in spring. The recently renovated **Peabody Essex Museum** (161 Essex St., 978-745-9500, pem.org) has more than 250,000 square feet of gallery space for art from around the world. For a cruise on historic Salem Sound, buy a ticket aboard the **Fame** (departs from Pickering Wharf Marina, 978-729-7600, schoonerfame.com), a replica of an early 1800s schooner whose crew teaches passengers about the pirates and traders who once sailed the North Shore. **Mahi Mahi Cruises & Charters** (departs from Salem Willows Park Pier, 800-992-6244, mahicruises.com) also offers water tours aboard a 50-foot boat called the Finback. Salem's most famous tourist site may be the **House of the Seven Gables** (115 Derby St., 978-744-0991, 7gables.org), the oldest surviving 17th-century wooden mansion in New England. Its special features include a secret staircase. The historic buildings, wharves, and reconstructed tall ship at **Salem Maritime National Historic Site** (160 Derby St., 978-740-1660, nps.gov/sama) are reminders that this city was once one of the most important ports in the nation. For discounts at attractions, eateries, hotels, and stores, buy a **Haunted Passport** (hauntedpassport.com), sold online and at a few downtown locations.

Fuel

Around since 1958, **Dotty & Ray's Family Restaurant** (112 North St., 978-744-9730, entrees under \$10) is a casual spot for a no-frills breakfast, lunch, or dinner. A takeout-only joint, **Ruthy's Kitchen** (102 Webb St., 978-745-5545, entrees \$10-\$15) makes delicious prepared foods, including shrimp scampi and chicken marsala. For simple soups, salads, and sandwiches, try the **Front Street Coffeehouse** (20 Front St., 978-740-6697, under \$10) or **Fuel Coffee & Juicebar** (196 Essex St., 978-741-0850, under \$10). Mexican fare is on the menu at **Cilantro** (282 Derby St., 978-745-9436, cilantrocilantro.com, entrees \$17-\$24), including avocado soup and tequila-marinated salmon, and **Edgewater Cafe** (155 Washington St., 978-740-4669, edgewatercafe.com, entrees \$10-\$14), which makes a famous chicken chimichanga and homemade margaritas. Housed in a historic 1698 building, **Red's Sandwich Shop** (15 Central St., 978-745-3527, redssandwichshop.com, under \$6) is a popular spot for cheap, hearty breakfasts. For Italian, head to **Ristorante Gioia** (140 Washington St., 978-744-7333, ristorantegioia.com, entrees \$13-\$19), **Caffe Graziani** (133 Washington St., 978-741-4282, caffegraziani.com, entrees \$10-17), or **Strega** (94 Lafayette St., 978-741-0004, stregasalem.com, entrees \$18-\$26). **Finz** (76 Wharf St., 978-744-8485, hipfinz.com, entrees \$18-\$26) is a seafood restaurant and raw bar. Delicious baked goods are sold at **A&J King** (48 Central St., 978-744-4881, ajkingbakery.com), an artisanal baker. For dessert, try **Niko's Cakes** (98 North St., 978-741-1454), **Sophie's Sweet Shop** (230 Essex St., 978-740-1820), **Maria's Sweet Somethings** (26 Front St., 978-825-9111), or **Ye Olde Pepper Company** (122 Derby St., 866-393-6533, yeoldepeppercandy.com), which claims to be the country's oldest candy company.

Party

One of Salem's oldest pubs, **In A Pig's Eye** (148 Derby St., 978-741-4436, inapigseye.com, entrees \$7-\$13) is also a full-fledged restaurant with live entertainment, from Monday open-mike nights to Friday afternoon blues jams.

Gulu-Gulu Café (247 Essex St., 978-740-8882, gulu-gulu.com, entrees \$5-\$8) hosts live music and uses its dining room as a gallery for works by local artists. The restaurant **Rockafellas** (231 Essex St., 978-745-2411, rockafellasofsalem.com, entrees \$10-\$27) also offers musical entertainment, from rock to reggae. **Bangkok Paradise** (90 Washington St., 978-825-9202, bangkokparadise.com, entrees \$10-\$16), a Thai restaurant, has live music about four nights a week, including jazz bands and vocalists. **Salem Beer Works** (278 Derby St., 978-745-2337, beerworks.net/html/locations_salem.html) makes more than 50 types of lagers, ales, stouts, and pilsners. **Tavern at the Hawthorne** (18 Washington Square West, 978-744-4080, hawthornehotel.com), a more sedate bar, is at the Hawthorne Hotel. For a cultural night out, the **Salem Theatre Company** (978-790-8546, salemtheatre.com) puts on a range of shows, from contemporary comedies to Greek epics, often performed at **Griffen Theatre** (7 Lynde St.).

Play

Children are enthralled by Salem's witchcraft history, and a great way to learn more about the city's bewitching past is by taking a walking tour of its neighborhoods. **Salem Historical Tours** (8 Central St., 978-745-0666, salemhistoricaltours.com) offers family-friendly strolls and trolley charters, including witchcraft walks and cemetery visits. **Salem Scavenger Hunt** (63 Wharf St., 978-744-4885, salemsscavengerhunt.com) arranges self-guided tours - like the rhyme-inspired "limerick challenge" - that explore Salem's history and architecture. The **North Shore Children's Museum** (294 Essex St., 978-741-1811, northshoreymca.org) is a small but fun spot for kids, who can celebrate their birthdays in its party room. A waterfront amusement park, **Salem Willows** (171-185 Fort Ave., 978-744-9444, salemwillowspark.com) has a historic carousel, arcade, kiddie rides, picnicking facilities, food, and harbor views.

Rest

On Pickering Wharf, **Salem Waterfront Hotel & Suites** (225 Derby St., 978-740-8788, salemwaterfronthotel.com, rooms \$119-\$349) is a recently built property near the city's harborside shopping and entertainment district. Salem's most historic lodging spot may be the **Hawthorne Hotel** (18 Washington Square West, 978-744-4080, hawthornehotel.com, rooms \$104-\$309), which has 18th-century reproduction furnishings. Salem's B&Bs include **Amelia Payson House** (16 Winter St., 978-744-8304, ameliapaysonhouse.com, rooms \$125-\$175), a restored Greek Revival home, and **Suzannah Flint House** (98 Essex St., 978-744-4080, suzannahflinthouse.com, rooms \$99-\$169), which shares services and amenities with the Hawthorne Hotel. The **Salem Inn** (7 Summer St., 978-741-0680, saleminnma.com, \$119-\$219) comprises three historic homes in the heart of the city. The only motel in downtown Salem, the **Clipper Ship Inn** (40 Bridge St., 978-745-8022, clippershipinn.com, rooms \$75-\$225) is about a mile from Salem's big attractions.

Spend

A self-described "boutique for the discriminating knitter and crocheter," **Seed Stitch Fine Yarn** (21 Front St., 978-744-5545, seedstitchfineyarn.com) also hosts workshops, lectures, and classes. Colorful **Pamplermousse** (185-189 Essex St., 978-745-2900, pmousse.com) boasts that it has Salem's "hippest selection of gifts for the home, kitchen, and bath," including platters, specialty foods, body-care products, and fine wines. **Picklepot** (139 Washington St., 978-744-6678, picklepot.com) is a contemporary New England craft gallery whose art selection includes photography, paintings, and sculpture. Classy **Fiddlehead** (24 Front St., 978-745-0008, fiddlehead-flowers.com) is a florist that feels more like an art gallery. If you're looking for vintage or new-release comic books, action figures, and classic toys, **Harrison's Comics & Collectibles** (252 Essex St., 978-741-0786, harrisonscomicsltd.com) is the place to go. A cutesy cafe, **New Civiletea** (318 Derby St., 978-740-2832, newciviletea.com) doubles as a tea shop selling hot and iced teas, herbal coffees, and tea-themed gifts like teapots. "Gifts from the Mineral Kingdom and Beyond" is the motto at **Treasures Over Time** (131 Essex St., 978-745-2330, treasuresvertime.com), which sells artsy gifts made from minerals, stone, beads, and jewels. Salem is also home to the North Shore's largest waterfront antiques mall, the **Antiques Gallery** (69 Wharf St., 978-741-3113, pricelessads.com/antiques), where dozens of dealers sell their goods daily. ■