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Salem, New England: My kind of town

Head to the New England settlement of Salem for haunted hotels and fresh lobster rolls - but give the witch museums a miss.

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'There's more to Salem than cackling and hanging' Photo: GETTY

Because seaside towns are what New England does best and because Salem combines an old sensibility with a new-era funkiness. Most people think of the 1692 witch trials first, but Salem is a busy seaport (Derby Wharf lighthouse, above left) with 300 years of culture. There's more to Salem than cackling and hanging.

What do you miss most when you are away?

The smells: briny salt air when the breeze is coming off the Atlantic, crisp and cold dead leaves in autumn, sweet hyacinths and daffodils in the early spring.

What's the first thing you do on your return?

Grab a blueberry beer and some carrot cake with friends at **The Old Spot** (121 Essex Street; 001 978 745 5656; www.theoldspot.com)

Where is the best place to stay?

Located right on Salem Common is one of the most haunted hotels in America, the **Hawthorne Hotel** (744 4080; www.hawthornehotel.com; doubles from £70). It dates from 1925 and has the kind of shabby elegance that I enjoy in hotels, while also being walkable from everything you might wish to see and do. Or try the **Salem Inn** (741 0680; www.saleminnma.com; from £78), three historic houses with true New England charm.

Where would you meet a friend for a drink?

Gulu Gulu Cafe (247 Essex Street; 740 8882; www.gulu-gulu.com), a laid-back place with live music, comfortable sofas, delicious crêpes, outdoor seating and obscure beers on tap. **O'Neill's** (120 Washington Street, 740 8811) is a more traditional bar.

Where are your favourite places for lunch?

Front Street Coffeehouse (20 Front Street; 740 6697) for tasty and inexpensive sandwiches and soup, displays of local artwork and fantastic coffee. **Red's Sandwich Shop** (15 Central Street; 745 3527; www.redssandwichshop.com) is for the locals, a greasy spoon with low counters and huge portions.

And for dinner?

Sixty2 on Wharf (62 Wharf Street; 744 0062; www.62onwharf.com) for delicious American bistro food with an Italian influence. Or head to Beverly, one town to the north, for authentic Mexican food at **Cielito Lindo** (150 Cabot Street; 922 4657).

Where would you send a first-time visitor?

The Peabody-Essex Museum (161 Essex Street; www.pem.org) combines exquisite decorative arts from Salem's shipbuilding past with maritime and Asian art, historic houses, contemporary photography, and many documents pertaining to the infamous witch trials of 1692.

What would you tell them to avoid?

Anything that includes the words "wax museum"; the **Salem Witch Museum** is expensive and cheesy, and the **Witch Dungeon Museum** worse.

Public transport or taxi?

Most of Salem can be easily seen on foot.

Handbag or moneybelt?

Salem is very safe, so handbag.

What should I take home?

A taste for fresh lobster rolls and one witch T-shirt for good measure.

And if I've time for only one shop?

Drop by **Old Naumkeag Antiques** (1 Hawthorne Boulevard; 745 9280) and rummage through New England's past, including porcelain, scrimshawed whale teeth, poor nautical paintings, carpets, whale oil lamps and at least one cello.