

# Opinion: Cannabis Tourism on the “Beast Coast”

With a multitude of popular tourist destinations, New England has been a vacation hot spot for over a century. From Cape Cod and the islands in Massachusetts to Acadia National Park in Maine, New England offers a variety of coastal attractions, amusement parks, museums, historic cities, music festivals and more to keep a tourism industry bustling in spite of recession or tense political atmosphere. Whale watches, beach resorts, camping, shopping, dining and the arts are found throughout every part of the Northeast, providing entertainment for almost every class, gender and culture. What could possibly make this spot more enticing with all that New England has to offer? Legalized weed - that's what.

Yes, Colorado has been the primary cannabis destination since they legalized recreational use back in 2012, but their draw as a tourist destination appeals to the outdoorsman or winter sport enthusiast more than anyone else. But what about those “green” vacation seekers who are looking for a little bit more than just greenery? Well, with Maine and Massachusetts legalizing recreational use and Rhode Island, Vermont and Connecticut poised to follow suit in the near future, New England has quite a bit to offer, and here's why I believe that the “Beast Coast” will soon be the leading cannabis destination in the world.

Have you ever visited Six Flags in Springfield, Massachusetts, and plunged down some of the largest water slides and roller coasters in the country? Or have you ever attended a show at one of the many historic venues throughout the Northeast (Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel, The Middle East, The House of Blues, The Xfinity Theatre, or Harry's Farm) where many of the top national acts visit on their tours? Have you ever gone on a whale watch and traveled alongside the largest mammals in the world, under the clear blue sky of a Cape Cod summer day? Have you ever done any of those things - on weed?

Never fear, because 2018 could be the year that you take that first vacation to somewhere that is not only fun, but is also cannabis friendly! Recreational shops should be in full operation in both Maine and Massachusetts by next year, and even now in Rhode Island, where recreational legalization is still pending, there are a number of cannabis-related events happening every year. For example, 2017 will be RI's inaugural year to host one of the infamous *High Times Cannabis Cups*. **The Secret Cup** will also be returning to Rhode Island this year at an undisclosed location. And let's not forget the **Wonderland Tea Party**, a cannabis “bake off” that takes place in the mists of an *Alice in Wonderland*-themed costume party that also will be coming back to Providence this Halloween. It's a pretty intense showing for a state that's still on the cusp of full-out legalization.

Just over the border from Little Rhody is good old Massachusetts where they're taking their sweet time fleshing out all of the details for the new cannabis laws and regulations, but they will work out the kinks soon enough. As far as cannabis-related events, there are a few staples in the region. **The New England Cannabis Convention** has made Boston a recurring stop on its tour, and the **Boston Freedom Rally**, one of the largest cannabis rallies in the world, will be in its 28th year. There are literally hundreds of other “non-cannabis” related attractions that may be enjoyed in their fullest by the regular or casual consumer: The New England Aquarium, the Museum of Science, the Museum of Fine Arts, Faneuil Hall, the Hard Rock Cafe, duck tours and Fenway Park — and that's just in Boston! Cape

Cod boasts some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, some of the finest seafood and one of the most eclectic artist communities in the world, known as “P-Town” to the locals.

If that doesn't float your boat, you can head out west to enjoy Six Flags New England for one of their many holiday events or get wet and wild in their Hurricane Harbor Water Park. If it happens to be August while you're in town, you can always head just around the corner in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, and check out Milltown, one of the largest classic car shows in the country. It offers two days of kick ass music, camping, entertainment, and - you guessed it - cars. Greenfield, Massachusetts, hosts **Wormtown's Strangecreek Campout** every May, which is a four-day event that offers fun for the entire family and boasts one of the best music festival lineups in the Northeast. And if you are just looking for some woodsy adventure, you can go to the Thunderbolt Mountain Coaster at Berkshire East Mountain Resort to tempt your fate on their combination alpine slide/roller coaster. There's also a lot of open space for hiking, fishing, and whatever other kind of outdoor activity tickles your fancy. There's no better way to experience Mother Nature than with Uncle Herb - assuming that you don't get eaten by a bear.

Speaking of bears, the University of Maine is located in Orono, just about two hours out of Portland, one of the hippest little cities on the East Coast. Portland is not only a beautiful city, but it offers some great shopping, restaurants, music and a most excellent craft beer scene. Further inland, you can check out the **Great North** music festival in September, or traverse the mountains to one of Harry Brown's famous festivals out on the hill, which he does every June and August. The festival scene is quite amazing in Maine, probably due to the fact that people don't get many opportunities to venture outside during the winter so they take full advantage of the warm weather whenever given the chance. If you are the “snow bunny” type, in season you can always go blaze your own trail down any one of Maine's famous ski slopes.

Maine will also be establishing cannabis-related social clubs in those towns that decide to allow it. This could bring a whole new meaning to the words “bed and breakfast.” I don't imagine that you'll be able to purchase alcohol in these establishments, but it would be a nice tip of the hat to the old coffee shops of Amsterdam. After a long day of combing the beach or racing down a black diamond, who wouldn't want to take a break and unwind at the old Chiba House? Nothing tops off a great day like a couple of puffs of some “Grade A” Mary Jane.

I'm very excited to see what the future of this industry has to offer in the name of tourism. Colorado has given us a taste of what the tax-and-regulate model can do, but only on a very narrow scale. This is only the beginning of the cannabis era here in the US, and people will flock to whichever free market has the most to offer. Colorado may have experience and time on their side, but New England has an advantage in natural resources, history, art and culture. It seems only logical that the Beast Coast will become the “new” Amsterdam.