

Coastal jewels

Summer programs at Boston Harbor Islands designed to entice history buffs, music lovers, athletes, families



Julie DuPuis (right) of Plymouth and her children, Jake, 6, and Madison, 8, enjoy the ferry ride from Fore River Shipyard in Quincy to Georges Island. (Jessey Dearing for The Boston Globe)

By [Emily Sweeney](#)

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They're so close to the coast, but can seem so far away.



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Getting there

Public ferry service to the Boston Harbor Islands is available in Hingham, Hull, and Quincy, though finding the piers can be tricky. Round-trip fare for adults is \$14; \$8 for children ages 3 to 11; \$10 for seniors age 65 and older; and children under 3 years old can ride for free. Family discount "four packs" (two adults and two children) can be purchased for \$39. Visit bostonharborislands.org for more information.

In recent years, however, the Boston Harbor Islands are feeling closer.

There's been a big push to entice more visitors out to the islands, and the effort appears to be successful: Last year 150,000 people visited the islands - a roughly 25 percent increase from the previous year, according to Thomas B. Powers, president of the Boston Harbor Island Alliance, the nonprofit organization that acts as a steward for the 34 islands.

Now that summer is here, the South Shore is again a gateway to the islands. The public ferries have returned to piers in Hingham, Hull, and Quincy, and that service will continue until Labor Day.

HINGHAM SHIPYARD

349 Lincoln St., Hingham
Serves Grape, Bumpkin,
Peddocks, Georges, and Lovells
Islands. Parking is available in two
lots and costs \$3 per day. Visitors
camping out on the islands can
park overnight in the MBTA lot. To
reach the pier, follow the paved
road past the smokestack until
you reach Building 45. Look for the
Boston Harbor Islands sign in the
front.

PEMBERTON POINT

183 Main Street, Hull
Serves Grape, Bumpkin,
Peddocks, Georges, and Lovells
Islands. Free parking is available
at Hull High School, which is
across the road from the pier.

FORE RIVER SHIPYARD

Washington Street, Quincy
Serves Georges Island, with free
connections to Spectacle. Daily
parking is \$1; overnight parking is
\$6. The ferry pier is not located
right on Washington Street, but on
an unnamed street, next to the
USS Salem.

Echoes of the Civil War

The history of the Boston Harbor
Islands is entwined with the South
Shore and the Civil War. Among
those connections:

- ▶ Granite from the Quincy
quarries was used to build Fort
Warren on Georges Island.
- ▶ During the Civil War, Fort
Warren's prisoners included the
mayor of Baltimore, the governor
of Kentucky, and several members
of the Maryland Legislature.
- ▶ Sheep Island was deeded to
the town of Weymouth in 1636,
and was once used for grazing
sheep. Back in those days, it was
also called Round Island and
covered 25 acres. But due to
erosion, the island has since
shrunk to 3 acres.
- ▶ Nut Island was once called
Houghs Thumb.

"Because the South Shore is so close, it has a
robust connection to the islands," said Powers.
"The South Shore can look out and see them."

This season, more programs and activities will
be offered on the islands than ever before,
Powers said. (When Powers became president
of the Alliance in 2004, there were eight island
events offered; this year, there are more than
150.)

There's plenty to do throughout the summer,
from kayaking to kite-flying to youth yoga.
The Berklee College of Music is putting on free
concerts, and Jasper White's Summer Shack
will host clambakes and an Iron Chef
competition.

For history buffs, there are tours of Boston
Light (the oldest lighthouse station in the
country), as well as special events to
commemorate the 150th anniversary of the
Civil War.

"We're trying to provide something for
everybody," said Rebecca Smerling, director of
community programs for the alliance.

"The push is really to engage different
audiences, and drive different audiences to the
islands," said Smerling. The ultimate goal, she
said, is to "enliven the park."

Collectively, the entire network of islands is a
designated national park area, but individual
islands are owned, managed, and staffed by
different entities (which include the
Massachusetts Department of Conservation
and Recreation, the City of Boston, the
Massachusetts Water Resources Authority,
and National Park Service).

While the islands are now officially known as
a national park, the South Shore has long held
close ties to them. Georges Island, for
instance, was once owned by a Hingham man
named Caleb Rice.

► Edward Rowe Snow of Marshfield was a longtime champion of the islands and authored numerous stories about island lore and their historic significance. Snow used to say that Fort Warren “has more memories of the Civil War days than any other place in New England.” And the head of the Massachusetts Historical Society has said of Snow: “Fort Warren on Georges Island stands today because he would not let it disappear.”

► In the days of the Civil War, an Irish heritage unit known as the Massachusetts 9th Infantry once trained on Long Island.

► Georges Island was the birthplace of the famous battle song “John Brown’s Body.” It’s believed that soldiers at Fort Warren came up with the lyrics, and the song became so popular among the troops that it inspired Julia Ward Howe to write the patriotic tune “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

SOURCES: National Park Service; www.BostonHarborIslands.org

a training facility for Union soldiers and to house Confederate prisoners of war, the most famous of whom was Alexander H. Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy.

On Saturday, visitors can take a “living history tour” of Georges Island with a reenactor playing the role of Dr. Charles Macgill, who will reminisce about the time he spent locked up there as a Confederate political prisoner. Other reenactors will play members of the Massachusetts 54th Infantry Regiment, and demonstrate marching and military exercises on Fort Warren’s parade ground, to show what life was like for Civil War soldiers.

The Berklee Music Fest will take place at Georges Island on July 23 and Aug. 27. The Saturday afternoon concerts feature bands performing pop, R&B, Latin folk and blues-rock. (To those who are 21 or older, take note: Summer Shack will serve beer and wine at these two concerts, according to Powers.)

The Boston Harbor Islands are also offering the “Let’s Move Outside Junior Ranger” program, in which youngsters can work toward receiving a junior ranger badge by participating in physical activities outdoors. The season kicked off with the first Spectacle Island 5K Road Race & Kids Fun Run.

Quincy has also had an especially strong connection to Peddocks Island, according to Lieutenant Robert Gillan, who patrols the harbor on Police Department boats daily. Gillan remembers a time when residents of Peddocks Island - known to locals as “islanders” - would use rowboats to reach Quincy’s shores to attend school.

“There’s a big family connection,” said Gillan. “And there’s a lot of history out there.”

Up until last Friday, Peddocks Island had been closed to the public because workers were demolishing old dangerous structures and remnants of Fort Andrews. Visitors can now once again visit Peddocks Island - public ferry service has resumed, and camping reservations can be made online at www.reserveamerica.com.

Throughout the summer, several events will highlight the oft-forgotten history of the islands and their significant roles during the Civil War, which started in 1861. For example, Fort Warren on Georges Island once served as

A variety of sporting activities continue to be offered every week, including the seventh annual Boston Harbor Islands Regatta, youth fishing clinics, youth yoga, family fitness day, kite-flying, disc golf, and hiking, to name a few.

For a complete schedule of events, visit www.bostonharborislands.org.

Island advocates hope this diverse calendar of events will draw new faces out to the islands.

“People protect what they know and love,” said Powers. The island park area “is a just a fabulous resource.”

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