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FIRE & ICE

Deep in the dark heart of Maine's winter, local bars and restaurants entice us with extremes—blazing hearths and outdoor fire pits. Come a little closer.

BY SARAH MOORE



Thompson's Point

WHEN THE DAYS are blink-and-you'll-miss-it short and the wind knifes up Congress Street, even the most hedonistic Friday night excursion is tinged with an urgency to stay warm. For those of us who have chosen to abstain from abstinence during the month of January—isn't the post-holidays period hard enough without quitting alcohol?—why not fight the freeze with the help of some of Portland's perfectly positioned fireplaces? Whether you're draped beside some merry hearth or pressed close to the grate of an outdoor fire pit, the irresistible urge to gaze into the dancing flames seems to enrapture some caveman corner of the brain. Allow your more primal instincts to take over and seek out some heat this wintertime with Portland's best fires. And for the daring there are opportunities to embrace the season and enjoy the ice in style with rinks, ice bars, and ice luges galore.

It's that time of year again, a time when the call of the cold compels you to dust off

MEAGHAN MAURICE



Samoset Resort



The Samoset Resort transforms its patio into a glittering winter wonderland, complete with carved ice bar and sculptures, on display from January 12-20.

your old ice skates, lace yourself in, and emerge gingerly onto the treacherous white polish of the ice rink, legs shaky and fawn-like. Take your time: you'll find your ice feet and be gliding (or at least moving) around the perimeter before long. And even if your Olympic figure skating skills fail to kick in, the view across **The Rink at Thompson's Point** and beyond is worth any potential falls, especially during sunset. Admission is \$7 for one session and rental skates will set you back just \$3. Because ice skating is a tried-and-true romantic date trope, take your partner on Monday night for two-for-one admission. If you happen to prefer skating as a spectator sport or simply need to refuel, The Rink has built two outdoor fire pits overlooking the action. Grab a drink and post up in front of the flames for a while. **The Yurt Bar** offers rotating beer lines with two dedicated Bissell Brothers taps (they are neighbors, after all) and, most invitingly, spiked hot cider, coffee, and hot chocolate.

"Having the fireplace and woodstove is

lovely in the winter," says Janet Foley, bartender at **Boone's Fish House and Oyster Room**. "Burning the wood stove means that the restaurant smells like wood smoke, not fish. People seem to really love that." Can't say we blame them. Olfactory benefits aside, the choice spots at Boone's are undoubtedly the tables and booths positioned near the open fireplace that crackles away through the evening. Foley suggests you improve the experience with a drink: "I'd go for the Spiced Rum Punch, our winter punch with cinnamon," she says. The punch is syrupy sweet, like a sip of the tropics, but the cinnamon stick garnish adds a warming spice ap-



Portland Harbor Hotel



propriate for winter in Maine. "An espresso martini with chocolate shavings or a cognac would pair well, too."

An outdoor bar might seem like a stretch in January, but when it's carved out of 20,000 pounds of glassy glacier ice, you'll be feeling less numb and more Narnia. **The Samoset Resort** in Rockport knows how to winter in style thanks to the annual Glacier Ice Bar & Lounge that appears every year alongside an assortment of themed ice sculptures. Carved by hand, the vast ice bar looks out across the ocean from the resort's decking—an ethereal sight all lit up and bedecked with bottles. Take a seat on a frozen "chair" (they'll provide a sheepskin rug to take the chill off) and channel the White Witch as you sip a cocktail on ice.

Another seafood joint sure to ignite your senses is **BlueFin**, formerly Eve's at the Garden, in the Portland Harbor Hotel. Thankfully, whoever oversaw the restaurant's rede-

Harraseeket Inn



Inset: Grab an Adirondack chair and settle in front of the blazing fire pit at the **Harraseeket Inn**. With the firelight on your face and the stars overhead, you'll be swept away in the moment. **Below left:** The **Ice Bar** event at the **Portland Harbor Hotel** is a rowdy night of martini luges and music. **Below right:** You can't beat a table by the fire and a spiced cocktail at **Boone's Fish House and Oyster Room**.

sign knew better than to get rid of its generous fireside options. Inside, grab an icy martini and sling yourself into the deep, blue couches that frame the bar's working fireplace. The plush setting, dancing firelight, and quiet, clockwork efficiency of the hotel's staff creates a soporific sense of comfort. You won't want to give up your spot for the entire night, much to the chagrin of the other guests. But wait, a fireside spot beneath the stars is in reach. Step outside to the garden area where the restaurant's fire pit will be burning all winter. From January 25-27, the hotel will bring winter indoors for the return of its celebrated Ice Bar event after a hiatus in 2017. Guests can buy tickets (\$30) to enjoy a party of music and martinis on ice—quite literally. A large, carved ice luge will make sure your drinks slip down in style and at lighting speed. Luge responsibly.

If you take a trip north to brave the post-holiday sales in Freeport, you'll need a moment to unwind and shake the knots from your shopping bag-laden shoulders. Just a short distance from the furor of Bean's and

the outlet stores, you'll find the hidden oasis of **Harraseeket Inn's** outdoor patio, complete with an array of Adirondack chairs encircling a vast stone fire pit. "It's lit every day at dusk," says hotel manager Chip Gray. "Guests can order food and drink from the **Broad Arrow Tavern**" to be enjoyed under the night sky.

Even if you don't have a suite booked, the **Portland Regency** and "restaurant with rooms" hotel **The Francis** both offer options for guests looking for a slice of fireside luxury with their dinner. Book ahead to secure the choice spot at **Twenty Milk Street** in The Portland Regency Hotel, where an open hearth will warm your backs as you devour cedar plank-roasted Maine lobster. The Francis's **Bolster, Snow & Co.** has two fireplaces to choose from, each complete with glazed green tiles, polished mantel, and ornate brass fire guards winged by dark velvet chairs. What else would you expect from the restored Mellen E. Bolster Mansion, a Francis Fassett classic on Congress Street? "You

can come in to the hotel on a cold night and sit in The Parlor with a book and order a drink," says manager Anthony DeLois. This is a hot seat you can relax in. "It's absolutely available to the general public, not just hotel guests. And if you want a full meal fireside, we'll seat you at a table right by the fire in Bolster, Snow & Co.; it also offers a great view of the kitchen." ■

