

BUSINESS

City inns combine promotional efforts

ROCKLAND — While the tides of tourism ebb and flow throughout Maine, a group of Rockland inns, calling themselves the Historic Inns of Rockland, Maine, have set out to buck the tide and the recent headlines that Maine tourism is flat.

Working together to market the Rockland vacation experience, members of Historic Inns of Rockland have put many of their own individual marketing priorities aside for the betterment of cooperatively attracting attention to Rockland's premier inns and

vacation experiences. Made up of historic properties, including The Berry Manor Inn, Captain Lindsey House and LimeRock Inn, the Historic Inns of Rockland are working closely with local businesses and the Rockland-Thomaston Chamber of Commerce to collectively attract vacationers to Rockland through public relations campaigns, creative marketing, a wedding consortium, a central reservation line and a highly charged and informative Web site.

The core of the Historic Inns
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of Rockland's cooperative marketing effort is in the newly designed Web site: www.HistoricInnsOfRockland.com. From here, guests can connect to each of the individual inns's Web sites, learn about Rockland's attractions and seasons, and gather information about the inns's wedding facilities. Travel media are offered profiles of each of the inns, press releases and a full photo library. Visitors can access room-by-room availability for not only the three premier Historic Inns of Rockland members, but other partner inns, including the Lakeshore Inn, Old Granite Inn and Waterman House and Gardens.

To build shoulder season visits, the Historic Inns of Rockland have created a number of events and special packages. Debuting in the worst blizzard of the winter last January, the group launched the annual Pies on Parade Inn to Inn Tour to commemorate National Pie Day in January. Next year, the event will be held January 21-22 and takes in a weekend package that includes

pie tastings and demonstrations, along with overnight stays and a collection of the inns's original recipes.

Knowing that inngoers love to enjoy the sweetest of getaways, the Historic Inns of Rockland will hold the first Chocolate March to coincide with the kick-off of American Chocolate Week during the second weekend in March. This event will partner with businesses throughout Rockland to make chocolaty scrumptious concoctions available, such as chocolate pasta, chocolate soap and a hot chocolate massage, using hot cocoa oil. An inn-to-inn chocolate tour on Sunday, March 12, will allow tour-goers to sample chocolate treats, tour the Historic Inns of Rockland and take in wonderful demonstrations from area businesses.

To boost visits during the past June, Historic Inns of Rockland launched the Lobsters, Luxury and Lighthouses package, combining the three most appealing attributes of a stay in Rockland. It was so successful, it was extended to the rest of the summer and

will be offered again next June.

Similarly, a package combining overnight stays with historic tours and discussions, geared entirely toward the baby boomer and senior set will be offered for the first two weeks of September.

The result of these efforts was that the Historic Inns of Rockland hosted more than 25 travel media and their guests in June alone. The media outreach through a coordinated public relations campaign and the press room on the Web site has attracted a host of writers to visit. Journalists from the Boston Globe, Woman's Day Magazine, St. Louis Post Dispatch and North American Inns & Resorts are in the process of creating articles now. A producer from the new High Definition Outdoor Channel was in Rockland filming for an upcoming segment, and media from the popular Lovetrip.com and TravelStoriesMagazine.com have sent stories far and wide via the Internet. Stories already have appeared in such magazines as Coastal Living and Home & Away.