

# ON CRANBERRY

Julie Le Clerc takes a pilgrimage to beautiful New England, USA



The cranberry pond in front of the guesthouse

There's no doubt big cities like New York and Boston are exciting destinations, but for a relaxing US vacation there's nothing like the countryside. Recently, 55km south of Boston, I discovered breathtaking scenery, fascinating history, unique local produce and some very friendly folk.

The towns of New England are very quaint, with old English names such as Bedford, Rochester and Plymouth – and they're all easy to visit by car. In fact, self-drive car hire is really the best way to get around, enabling you to make a beeline to interesting off-road places.

I decide that Plymouth, where the original pilgrims landed in 1620, is a good place to begin and following a brochure picked up from the visitor information centre, I set out to retrace the footsteps of history.

Plymouth Harbour is the landing site of the *Mayflower*, which arrived in 1620 bearing a load of English settlers who were very keen to get back on dry land. Plymouth Rock itself lies on the waterfront. It's smaller than I'd imagined and well protected by a colonnade. Nearby, a replica of the *Mayflower* is anchored. It's well worth taking a tour of the boat to see for yourself the conditions those poor, intrepid pilgrims had to endure.

Being a harbour-side town, Plymouth has dozens of eateries where regulars and visitors alike can enjoy the luxury of seafood freshly caught in local waters. Succulent lobster, jumbo shrimp (which are bigger than king prawns), scallops and local types of fish feature on every menu in town. I've set myself a mission to compare all the local versions of New England chowder – a thick, creamy potato and clam soup. I do advise you to take a hearty appetite to Plymouth as helpings are more than generous!

During their second fall (autumn), the settlers in Plymouth held the first Thanksgiving Feast – to express gratitude

# POND

for the harvest's bounty – with the local native Americans who brought most of the food. This event is a major milestone on the US calendar, and families and friends gather for feasts revolving around roast turkey and seasonal produce such as pumpkin and cranberries.

I've set up base at On Cranberry Pond, a delightful guesthouse near the town of Middleboro. The area around here feels like real Martha Stewart country, with tall wooden Cape Cod-style houses, antiques, folk art and beautiful woodlands full of pathways strewn with fallen pine needles and pretty autumn leaves.

Indeed, my "innkeeper", Jeannine LaBossiere-Krushas, tells me that Martha's magazine team has visited here and compiled a story on the wonders of the local cranberry harvest. Native to North America and well known to the indigenous Americans, the health-giving cranberry has a long and fascinating heritage and a good part of the district is devoted to cranberry growing.

While staying in Middleboro, I'm delighted when the chance arises to experience an Ocean Spray (farmers' co-operative) cranberry harvest first-hand. The ruby-red cranberry is not only a super fruit with unique health benefits, but it is harvested by quite extraordinary methods which make for truly spectacular viewing.

Cranberries grow in bogs (marshland) under tightly packed, low-growing vines. They are very difficult to harvest by hand, so the majority are cleverly wet-harvested. Basically, the bogs are flooded with water, then the vines are beaten with a paddle-machine which releases the berries.

Cranberries contain natural air-pockets so they rise to the water's surface and there they float in a magnificent sea of swirling crimson. Wearing waders, workers



*This 'egg-beater' harvester feels quite different to beating a cake mix!*

wrangle and corral the berries, which are quickly pumped out of the water, washed, then trucked to a receiving station to be processed into juice or sauces.

If you're lucky enough to find yourself here at harvest time, do try to join a cranberry bog tour. Some local communities also hold cranberry-harvest festivals and information flyers are generally posted at local bogs and towns.

Fall is a great time to visit this region, because there are few other tourists around. The air is crisp, the sky blue and the harvest colours will stop you in your tracks and keep your camera working overtime.

Locals introduce me to "leaf peeping", which involves driving around and watching the foliage change colour. There are even organised "fall foliage tours" wherein groups can marvel at the multi-coloured splendour. This may sound a little like a trivial pursuit but I soon discover that connecting with nature in this way has a wonderfully calming effect on stressed-out city dwellers such as myself.

In fact, I have to pull myself away from leaf peeping to stop for lunch and as I tuck into yet another steaming bowl of New England chowder, I can't help thinking "Bet you wish you were here, Martha Stewart!"

One of Ocean Spray's cranberry barns



The crimson tide of cranberries



## FACT FILE

**WHERE TO STAY** Julie stayed at On Cranberry Pond bed and breakfast, 43 Fuller St, Middleboro, Massachusetts, USA. "Here," she says, "I was spoilt with a home-cooked breakfast every morning (my host's cranberry pancakes are legendary), and packed picnic lunches."

For more information visit [www.oncranberrypond.com](http://www.oncranberrypond.com)

**DON'T MISS** North American Cranberry bog harvest – October to November. Julie travelled to New England courtesy of Ocean Spray.

