

September 6, 2005

From a Sunken Forest to a Seal Watch Cruise

OUTDOORS: Long Island Offers an Escape from the Ordinary

Written by the Long Island Convention & Visitors Bureau and Sports Commission for [Greenlight Long Island Magazine](#)

Only on Long Island can you explore a 200-year old Sunken Forest in Fire Island's ocean dunes, hike the beachside Seashore Trail in New York State's only Federal Wilderness area, see the rare Dwarf Pines in the Pine Barren region, or view the bluff-top hiking trails of the Greenbelt Trail system. You can get up close and personal with wildlife on a whale watching boat or seal watch cruise, or see free-roaming deer, a bat conservation site and rare species of birds.

The Sunken Forest, just behind the dunes of Fire Island's spectacular beaches, offers visitors the opportunity to feel like a giant in a forest that won't grow any higher than the sand dunes that protect it from the ocean's salty wind. Also on Fire Island, the Long Island Seashore Trail offers ocean views, high dunes and wildlife along the barrier beach off L.I.'s south shore, with easy access by ferry or bridge at Smith Point Park.

The Dwarf Pine Plains of the 100,000-acre Pine Barrens region in Eastern Long Island, is one of only three such sites in the world. Located in Westhampton, these stunted trees grow in defiance of the sandy white forest floor. A trail information center is located in Manorville. The Pine Barrens is a protected area featuring over 150 miles of trails and a rare assortment of plant and animal species.

The Greenbelt Trail on Long Island winds 32 miles through the woods of Connetquot State Park, traveling up to the high sandy bluffs of Sunken Meadow State Park overlooking the waters of Long Island Sound.

For more natural interaction, experience life aboard a whale research vessel with the Coastal Research and Educational Society of Long Island, out of Montauk Point. For bat fanatics, Connetquot State Park is the only designated Bat Conservation Society viewing area in New York State, spring through fall.

Long Island is a bird-watchers delight. The Piping Plover was listed federally as a threatened species, with only 106 pairs nesting here in 1986. Now nearly 400 hundred nesting pairs can be found in places such as Jones Beach State Park and at beaches all along the north and south shores. Or come down to the Nissequogue River State Park in the early evening to see a gathering of the tall-standing, curved-neck egret at the park's fresh water pond in late summer. The Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center in Oyster Bay is a popular site for bird-watchers, while the Morton national Wildlife Refuge in Noyack attracts terns lingering on its sand bars through September. Long Island is home to over 40 preserves and refuges.

Walking along the winding boardwalk through the dunes of Fire Island at Robert Moses State Park after the summer crowds leave, toward the Fire Island Lighthouse, visitors can view deer and other wild life that roam freely among grass and shrubs behind the beach.

In fact, some of the Island's best kept secrets are revealed when the cooler weather sets in and the summer crowds have departed. Long Island is home to a large seal population in the winter, which can be viewed during guided seal walks, or seal watch cruises out of Point Lookout in Nassau.

Long Island also cares for its wildlife through rescue centers, ecology centers and game farms open to the public. The Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research offers visitors the

opportunity to get up close and personal with wildlife, such as sea turtles and seals being rehabilitated under their care. The Foundation is located at Atlantis Marine World in Riverhead, a full-scale aquarium.

The Holtsville Ecology Center in Brookhaven features a range of animals, from bears to mountain lions; while the Long Island Game Farm in Manorville features a "Big Cat" show and kangaroos.

Sweetbriar Nature Center in Smithtown acts as a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation center, and also offers beautiful gardens, trails and a live butterfly house.

The Cold Spring Harbor Fish Hatchery & Aquarium features more than sixty species of New York State fresh water fish, and six outdoor rearing pools holding trout in various stages of development. Feeding is permitted.

Come explore the unique opportunities Long Island offers and get back in touch with nature.

The Long Island Convention & Visitors Bureau and Sports Commission (LICVB & SC) was established to promote the local travel and tourism industry. Based in Hauppauge, the LICVB & SC contributes to the economic development and quality of life on Long Island.

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