Each summer, as the temperature reaches unbearable highs in the city, New York’s most affluent residents cool off in the Hamptons. Rowena Carr-Allinson recently joined the ‘inner circle’ on a retreat to the seaside resort, and discovered that one need not own a Hamptons home to enjoy all that’s on offer in this East End.

When New Yorkers want to get out of town they have several options: head north to the greenery of Connecticut, west towards Delaware, south west to Pennsylvania or east towards Long Island, the obvious choice for the ultimate beach escape, a stone’s throw from the city.

Over the years, the elite of Manhattan have adopted a stretch of Long Island’s 118-mile coastline as their very own bolthole, transforming the Hamptons into a slightly surreal, fairy-tale like place. Now synonymous with swish weekends away and slow summers on the sand, it’s become a place of legend.

Reaching from Southampton via tiny Bridgehampton to East Hampton, some say, all the way to Montauk, on the island’s tip, each village has its own story, and each offers its own attractions.

You’ll find 50 miles of pristine shoreline, sweet boutiques, quaint antique stores, smart galleries – everything pretty as a picture. Jaw-droppingly beautiful homes with eye-wateringly steep price tags go hand-in-hand with fine dining, hot nightlife and delis aplenty to pick up those essential organic goodies. There are golf courses too, of course, horse-riding at Deep Hollow Ranch and 3,000 acres of vineyards to visit.

The star attraction is the beach, with miles of unspoiled sand, as far as the eye can see. Regularly featured on the USA’s list of top 10 beach breaks, there’s plenty to do beyond the dunes and the million dollar homes.

Tiana, Peconic and Noyac Bays are the best for windsurfing, while Shinnecock is better known for diving. The bay was named after the local Shinnecock Indians who still hold their Annual Labor Day Powwow on their reservation. It’s open to the public and a quirky highlight on the Hamptons calendar.

It’s said that the Hamptons are so popular with New Yorkers, that during the summer, traffic can tail back all the way to 5th Avenue. Sadly, with just one road leading in, it’s a case of one way in, one way out. The trick is not to leave when everyone else does.

The 90 odd miles from Manhattan, bumper to bumper can be a trial, so time your departure right. Another option for those conscious of their carbon footprint is taking the (rather slow) ‘Hampton Jitney’ bus or the (even slower) train. No time to waste? Charter a helicopter.

To avoid the crowds all together, make ☺
in nearby Amagansett, an inconspicuous

in these parts. At the Indian Wells Tavern,

have you batting an eyelid.

Paltrow, Apple in tow, at the very sweet

movie set that bumping into Gwyneth

disconcerting. It’s so much little like a

To be honest, its perfection is almost

but no tacky souvenir shops to be seen.

There’s a little cinema, a chic supermarket

Nuit and the crucial Starbucks, all set

independents like Steph’s Stuff or Bonne

Lane, where big brands like Tiffany &Co.,

piece of paradise.

Other famous faces have fallen for the

Pollock and Lee Krasner.

museum in the one-time home of legendary

glitzy International Film Festival in October.

Hampton was first settled in 1648 and

appealingly named spots like Lazy Point or

or just cruise the residential streets for

that elusive empty beach, that coastal path

get a real taste of the Hamptons, finding

some serious property envy.

or crab shacks for the real McCoy, or,

roll, clam chowder or fresh crab cakes.

the local seafood. It’s all about the lobster

clam shoveler or fresh crab cakes.

Stop at one of the many roadside diners or

or chowder for the real McCoy.

An integral part of the experience, is the

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