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Long Island

Blue skies and golden coasts

by Jeff Heilman  
Meetings East, February/March 2006

Anglicized from the Dutch "Lange Eiland," the original Indian land of Paumotuck is the place for premium wines, world-class golf and 1,180 miles of beaches, including hot, hot, hot Fire Island and the Carmel-to-like world of the Hamptons. With historical prizes including America's first concrete highway, suburbia and supermarket, Long Island also claims more horses per capita than Texas, and in a double surprise, the birthplace of the American cowboy in 1668 at Montauk's Deep Hollow Ranch. High-tech is big, with more than 1,000 firms, while seafood, flowers and agriculture abound, and don't quack up, but Long Island's farms produce around 2.5 million ducks annually.

Plan on discoveries and revelations, too, when it comes to Long Island gatherings. The Long Island CVB and Sports Commission recently hosted a planner FAM tour that proved the peninsula has its ducks in a row when it comes to meetings and events.

A Universe of Spaces

The tired old joke about the Long Island Expressway being one long parking lot has lost some punch with the completion of a new 40-mile carpool lane, affording groups more travel and scheduling flexibility.

The skies above are busy, too. New York's JFK and LaGuardia airports are close by, and MacArthur and Republic fields handle direct commercial and private flights to the island. Flying, in fact, is arguably the region's greatest claim to fame. From early biplanes to moon shots, Grumman and other area companies are central to America's aviation and space history.

A suspended biplane banking overhead in the gleaming lobby launches your flight adventure at the Cradle of Aviation Museum in Garden City, where events on the Skywalk or in the Red Planet Cafe are elevated by exhibits like Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* or the truly inspiring astronaut boarding an original lunar module.

Even the stingrays are friendly at Atlantis Marine World in Riverhead, swimming up to greet visitors as they enter the realistic "lost-world" environment. The exhibits and amenities at this one-of-a-kind aquarium, including a giant Poseidon in the 12,000-gallon Lost City of Atlantis shark tank, the country's largest live coral reef and boat tours to a private island, create a compelling "at sea" ambience. Plans for an attached hotel and conference center will add to the meetings-centric focus.

From the stylized rooftop pagoda to the lily-padded outdoor pond, the Charles B. Wang Center at Stony Brook University places serenity atop the meeting agenda, with the sounds and sights of water adding contemplative calm to the center's Asian-themed interiors and various meeting spaces.

Bring your best shoes for manning the booth or running in the cavernous field house at the Suffolk Community College Sports and Exhibition Center, featuring an accompanying lecture hall.

Groups will also want sturdy footwear when shopping at the sprawling Tanger Outlet Center in Riverhead, which offers coupon books and meet-and-greet services for groups.

What better way to relax after all this exertion than with an excursion to one of the many wineries or vineyards on the island's North Fork? The open wooden beams of the restored barn at Martha Clara Vineyards, also in Riverhead, add a rustic touch to tastings and events, and the surrounding expanse of farmland softens the rigors of the business day.

Treasures Past and Present

Fresh off a \$10 million makeover, the resort-style Hyatt Regency Wind Watch in centrally located Hauppauge rises dramatically from the area's flat landscape. The comfortable beds are hard to leave, but when that meeting or event calls, there are 17 rooms in-house totaling just over 14,000 square feet of space, and for post-session recreation, an 18-hole championship golf course sits directly behind the property.

One of the nation's first dedicated conference centers, the circa-1910 Glen Cove Mansion and Conference Center, managed by Benchmark Hospitality, continues to stage meetings in the "Gold Coast" style immortalized by *The Great Gatsby*.

The white-glove approach also defines functions at the Fox Hollow Catering and Conference Center in Woodbury. Adjacent to the upscale, all-suite Inn at Fox Hollow, the center's six function rooms, ranging in style from Italianate to clubby, are elegance defined. The private room with a patio for brides-to-be is especially charming.

Attached to the 18-hole Eisenhower Golf Course, Cartlun on the Park is another invitation to luxury. While the cigar haven upstairs is restricted to members, the Cartlun's stately gardens and rooms, including the exquisite Gallery and Gatsby Room, can leave conferees with that "bless my rich uncle" feeling.

The spolling continues through the soaring white columns of the Inn at East Wind in Wading River. Worthy of Scarlett O'Hara, the lobby dazzles with a giant chandelier, a grand staircase and a parade of white-banistered balconies leading to luxurious accommodations and 30,000 square feet of meeting space.

Walking into Danford's on the Sound in ferry-accessible Port Jefferson feels like boarding one of the Old World ships built in this historic town back in the 1800s, and rightly so, for old ship timbers were used in the construction of this harborside inn and conference/banquet facility, complete with a marina and spa. Her sister property, the Montauk Yacht Club Resort on the island's eastern tip, is another historic waterside retreat.

Returning from yesteryear to the present, the world inside Plainview's invigorated Four Points by Sheraton is all "sunshine" (ask for her at the front desk), including an outdoor pool that evokes the boutique hotels of L.A. or Miami. The Melville Marriott's sloping steel and glass atrium is a dramatic backdrop for meetings at this full-service hotel, and in Uniondale, the Long Island Marriott Hotel and Conference Center also has space galore and is a slap shot away from the aging but still viable Nassau Coliseum, home to the NHL's Islanders, concerts by superstars like native son Billy Joel and the island's largest exhibition hall.

Long Island has many more historical and contemporary venues besides—not to mention surprises. The giant roadster duck in Flanders, for one, is waiting.

For More Info

Long Island CVB and Sports Commission 631.951.3900 [www.lunpdl.com](http://www.lunpdl.com)

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