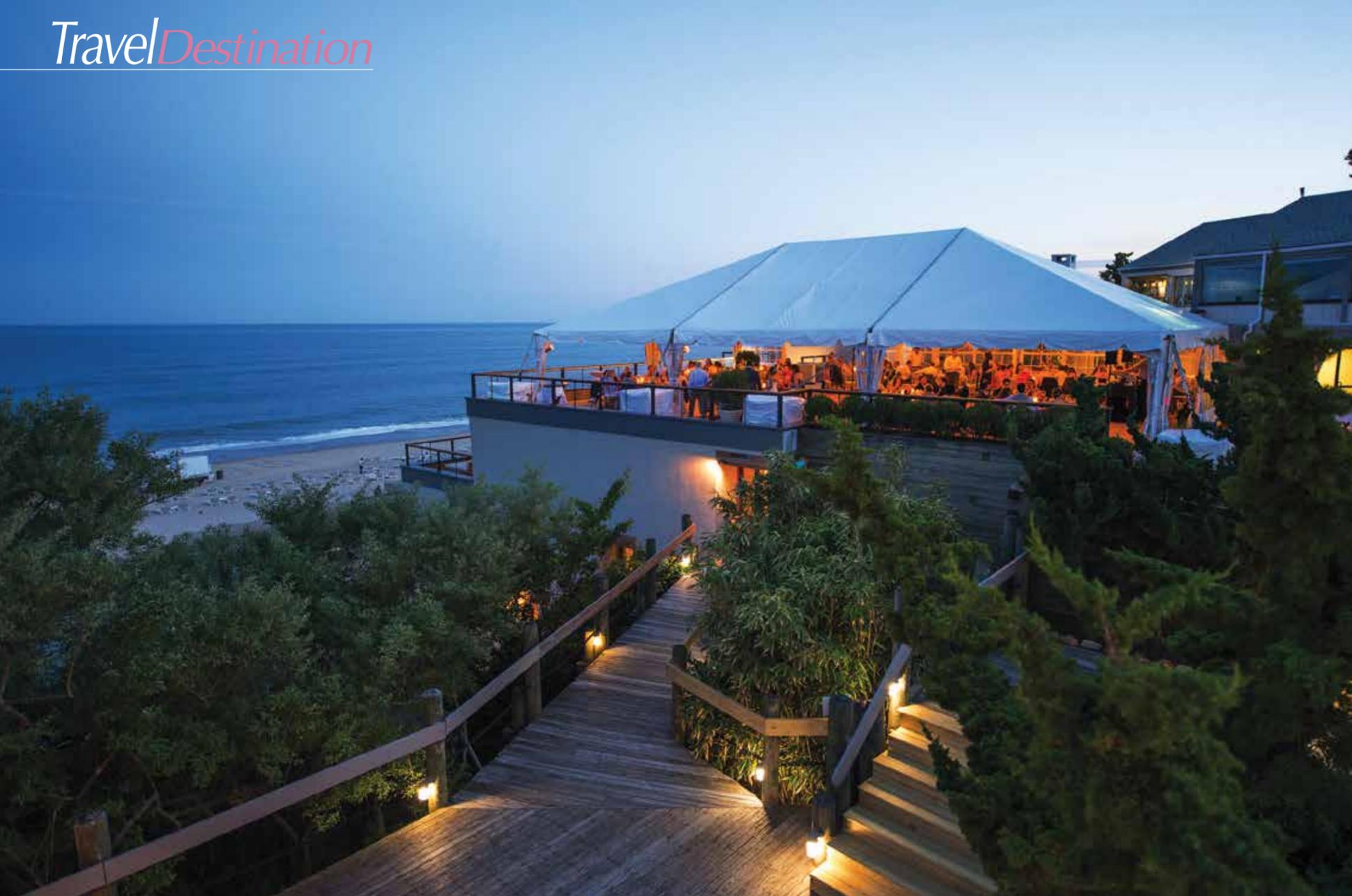


A HANKERING FOR *The Hamptons*

Our insider's guide to the real side –
and hidden gems – of New York's summer getaway

Writer Michael Nassar





THIS PAGE: Unwind on the beach at Gurney's Montauk Resort & Seawater Spa; Gurney's Montauk boasts spacious event areas. OPPOSITE PAGE: Gurney's Montauk is situated on a stretch of private beach

Growing up on Long Island, I didn't know any better. The Hamptons was always just 'the beach' – an endless stretch of carefree coastline at the eastern end of home. My family would load up the car every summer and journey down a two-lane highway through a 40-mile stretch of small towns and historic villages with mysterious sounding names like Speonk, Quogue, Wainscott, Tuckahoe and Amagansett, until the road came to an abrupt halt at land's end: Montauk.

In bathing suits and bare feet we'd pitch a tent on the beach, anticipating another summer spent choosing our own happy-go-lucky adventures. What would this year's holiday bring? The annual Shinnecock

Pow Wow on the Indian reservation in Southampton? Sailing at the Montauk Yacht Club? Fresh lobsters at Duryea's? Everything seemed possible. And best of all, there was the feeling of toes tromping through silky sand, followed by sleeping to the crashing sounds of the Atlantic Ocean.

To this day, I make the journey out east every summer for a nostalgic antidote to my Manhattan high life. The Hamptons have changed, of course, from a sloe-eyed summer colony of artists who mixed it up with the local farmers and fishermen, to a temporary supernova of celebrities, dignitaries and the rich gathering for a sun-kissed season of conspicuous consumption and paparazzi-dodging. Call me old-

fashioned, but I find the former much more inviting. And yet that languorous, free and easy, quintessentially New England beach holiday can be kept Kardashian-free (almost) if you know how. Just listen to the local who whispers "follow me; I know a place".

My home base is invariably Gurney's Montauk, a Hamptons institution situated on an immaculate stretch of private beach. Effortlessly chic following a recent renovation, it's hard to resist the allure of a breezy oceanfront room with a veranda that cries out for lengthy naps in the sun. Not to be missed is the only ocean-fed, sand-filtered seawater pool in North America – and an authentic Thalasso Therapy programme in the lavish 30,000-sq-ft spa adjacent. A

Seawater Hydrotherapy Massage does the trick, banishing all thoughts of the gritty city I've left behind, and then it's time for the first of many beach-walks, divided equally between gazing at the expansive horizon of the Atlantic and ogling some of the most expensive real estate in America.

Inevitably I'll start to crave lobster, which

means heading to Lunch, an unassuming roadside shack in Amagansett. It's actual name is The Lobster Roll Restaurant, but never referred to as such due to the iconic Lunch sign out front. It's strictly paper placemats – and there'd be a revolt if it ever changed – so settle in at an outdoor table with a classic buttered and toasted roll stuffed full of the chunkiest lobster salad around, fresh coleslaw and an ice-cold beer to wash it all down while watching the seagulls fly overhead. Rounding off a meal there's no place like Candied Anchor, a 1950s sweet shop in the heart of Montauk village. Equal parts classic Americana and organic Bohemia – goat's milk caramels anyone? – I crave the clever and elegant pies-in-a-jar in flavours, such as key lime, blueberry crumble and red velvet. Summer – my ideal summer, that is – has officially begun.

There's plenty to do in the high season, from art fairs and charity events, to celebrity-studded polo matches, film festivals and the Hamptons Classic Horse Show – considered the height of the social season. However, I'm particularly fond of doing absolutely nothing





THIS PAGE: The Montauk Beach House and its swimming pool. OPPOSITE PAGE: Elegant interior of The Montauk Beach House; the Montauk Blue Hotel now offers seaside chic guest rooms facing the Atlantic Ocean

during a casual afternoon-into-evening at the charming Wölffer Estate Vineyard's Wine Stand in Sagaponack. Perched atop a slight rise, it looks out over the vineyards, part of a 175-acre estate of former potato fields, along with boarding stables and an indoor jumping ring. The relaxed atmosphere, live music and European-style wines by the glass only serve to heighten an already breathtaking view of the sunset.

Pursuits of a cultural – and not just cultivated – kind get their proper due, too. Abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock lived and worked in nearby East Hampton. The house and studio shared with his wife, painter Lee Krasner, is fascinating – but somewhat randomly open for tours, so be sure to call ahead. Watermill's Parrish Art Museum is a striking example of organic architecture blending seamlessly into the surrounding landscape. Specialising in artists who have at various times called the East End home – Childre Hassam, James Whistler and Fairfield Porter are all well represented – the museum's unrivalled collection of portraitist and landscape

painter William Merritt Chase is a true revelation. Cappy Amundsen was a friend and contemporary of Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and why he's not better known is a mystery to me. I always make a point of lingering over the tension conveyed in his adventurous seascapes at the petite and bijoux Sag Harbor Whaling Museum, before wandering the antique stores of the charming waterfront village – often followed by drinks on the porch of the elegant American Hotel or catching the latest Broadway-bound play at Bay Street Theater.

The walks here are wonderful, as you'd expect, especially along Long Beach, the thin strip of land that connects Noyac to North Haven, and through the Elizabeth A Morton National Wildlife Refuge, where you're bound to cross paths with families of wild turkeys. Further east, the two concrete bunkers erected during World War II to protect the coast against invasion are a curiosity of Shadmoor State Park, named for the shadbush that grows across its 99 acres. And the just-opened Amsterdam Preserve runs from the highway all the way out to the

beach, with top trails that meander along the bluffs, giving over to a sweeping panorama of the iconic Montauk Lighthouse.

Yes, you might notice paparazzi popping up outside yet another new Marc Jacobs store, or a preponderance of private jets coming in to land at East Hampton Airport, but you're just as likely to stumble into Billy Joel playing an impromptu set at Amagansett's Stephen Talkhouse or a certain bongo-playing Oscar-winner surfing the long breaks at Ditch Plains unnoticed. At heart, the Hamptons are still a seaside resort where you can bliss out on the mix of small-town atmosphere and spectacular scenery, whether your preference leans more toward the historic, holistic, or something a little more happening. Deep Hollow Ranch, founded in 1658, is the oldest working cattle ranch in the United States. The Western style trail-rides wind through thousands of preserved acres on the shores of Block Island sound, giving a glimpse into a rich time in American history when this land was battled over by 'cowboys and injuns'. At the stunning Channing Daughters estate One Ocean Yoga classes take place amidst the fields and rolling hills of Bridgehampton. It's truly a meditative experience – especially at sunset – heightened by fresh sea air and the pulse of natural surroundings. Creator Richard Siegler heads up a loyal crowd that alights at Sagg Main for one of the



areas best-kept secrets: a casual Monday night beach party and drumming circle. The beachfront jam sessions are evocative of everything I love about the Hamptons: an ad-hoc session of African drumming and spiritual dance party that has grown organically over the years without bowing to the pressures of commercialisation.

Hand-in-hand with the great outdoors comes the bounty of the fertile land – and most of the land out here was once given over to agriculture. Hence, in the Hamptons there are farm stands every five miles. Even the most jaded New Yorker finds themselves hauling back satchels of that dynamic duo, sweet summer corn and ripe tomatoes, yet no one runs an operation quite like Round Swamp Farm. The prepared foods here are insanely delicious, from chicken buffalo

balls to guacamole to homemade baked goods. Nothing is labelled with a price tag, however, so be judicious before heading to the till.

The smart set tend to line up for overpriced healthy food at Babette's in East Hampton, but smarter options include the indulgent breakfast burritos and hash browns at Estia's, a tiny mom-and-pop restaurant just outside Sag Harbor, or flax-coconut waffles and freshly squeezed watermelon juice from Joni's Kitchen, a hidden gem for organic foodies in Montauk. Southampton's Silver's is a classic, serving nothing but lunch since 1923. And the people waiting out front for a table know what's up – New Yorkers don't wait unless it's worthwhile. (Make sure to order the tomato-based, Manhattan-style clam chowder.) Pierre's is a boisterous



French bistro designed to appeal to that part of the Hamptons crowd that winters in St Barth's, but the food is quite good – and local seafood makes it worth slicking your hair back and slipping into your finest white trousers for. At Moby's, a beautiful indoor-outdoor space in East Hampton with a rustic, market-driven menu sourced from the best local farms and Montauk day boats, whole fish is rightly the star attraction. And if you're not dripping homemade mint chip from John's Drive-In in Montauk down your chin at some point, well, you're doing something wrong. Ice cream is an integral part of the beach experience. And yet I gladly give a free pass to the treats at Chloe's Soft Serve Fruit Company: a mix of real fruit, filtered water and organic cane sugar that makes a refreshing alternative to dairy.

A few of the welcome additions to the scene I'm looking forward to poking around this season: the chaise loungers perched atop the sand dunes at the newly christened Montauk Blue Hotel. Formerly the iconic Ocean Beach Resort, it's undergone a Cinderella transformation into 82 studio-style seaside chic guest rooms facing the ocean – just steps from Montauk's Green. And there's the revival of the once lively daytime bar scene at The Montauk Beach House – Mark Ronson, Paul Sevigny,



Questlove and Paul Oakenfold have all played there. An eclectic mix of European style and eco chic, I hear they've traded in the 'models and bottles' crowd for a more relaxed beach vibe – with killer cocktails from high-end mixologists. The arrival of celebrated chef Tom Colicchio at Topping Rose House, a 22-room inn in Bridgehampton with a rotating art gallery, is another cause for celebration. It's the East End's first legitimate destination restaurant – and not a bad one at that. But most of all, I can't wait to pick up a few dozen Little Necks and Cherrystones at Gosman's and dig a small pit not far from the surf, layering red-hot charcoals, russet potatoes wrapped in foil, ears of corn, clams and sand. That's

how you make a real nice clambake. Pop open a beer, dig your feet into the sand and give yourself over to the roar of the surf. You'll be mighty glad you came. 🌿

Gurney's Montauk Resort & Seawater Spa
www.gurneysmontauk.com

Montauk Blue Hotel
www.montaukbluehotel.com

The Montauk Beach House
www.thembh.com

Topping Rose House
www.toppingrosehouse.com

THIS PAGE: One of the stylish guest rooms at The Montauk Beach House; take a romantic sunset walk along the beach. OPPOSITE PAGE: The Topping Rose House is the East End's first legitimate destination restaurant



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