

Fire Island - Discover a National Park Treasure

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By Staff Editor

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - HAUPPAUGE, NY –While the State of New York holds its fair share of National Historic Sites and National Monuments, Long Island offers access to the state’s only National Park on the ocean- Fire Island National Seashore- and it is A spectacular site.

Maintained by the National Park Service, Fire Island is located within miles of the excitement of New York City, and minutes to the convenience of Long Island, but to venture there is a journey to an unspoiled, pristine wilderness along 32-miles of dazzling white sand beach.

Don’t expect to find high-rise hotels or condominiums, or even cars for that matter, although boardwalks, marinas, restaurants, changing rooms/showers and other facilities are available to accommodate tourists. Abundant accommodations exist nearby on Long Island and some hotel and house rentals are available in communities established before the “National Park” designation.

Access is primarily via ferry from three different ports on Long Island across the Great South Bay (a short 20 minute ride). And since Fire Island is not even ¼ mile wide in most parts, it’s an easy walk from where the ferry leaves off, to the shores of the sparkling Atlantic Ocean. And, you can grab a little red wagon to carry your beach gear.

In between the bay and the ocean are some of the country’s most beautiful dune landscapes, with trails winding through an amazing range of plants and wild life, including a centuries old, enchanting “Sunken Forest.”

Fire Island’s ancestry name has never been clear to historians. Various theories say it resulted

from errors by 17th Century mapmakers who misspelled the Dutch word vier meaning four on early maps as "fire." Others say it came from fires set on the beach by Indians signaling the mainland or by settlers calling for help when a whale landed on shore.

There are two main marinas serving the Fire Island National Seashore wilderness areas: Sailor's Haven, accessible from Sayville; and Watch Hill accessible from Patchogue on Long Island. Other ferries service the communities of Fire Island, of which there are 17 with only 450 year-round residents.

Sailors Haven offers a visitor center; snack bar, gift shops; picnic tables, a life guarded beach during the summer; and ranger-led programs throughout the summer months.

Find the wooden boardwalk leading to the magical Sunken Forest nestled between the natural sand dunes and the ocean. Walk in a woodland menagerie of trees and plants dwarfed by the North Atlantic winds that bear down on the park over in the winter, not allowing the trees to grow any higher than the dunes that protect it.

The 40 acre forest has a mile-½ trail that leads to the ocean. Sunken Forest consists primarily of American holly, sassafras, and shadblow with some trees well over 200 years old.

Treasures lie everywhere for the explorer at heart. Hikers, nature lovers, and families can all take part of this unique ecosystem. Various wildlife can be seen roaming and grazing on the island. White tailed-deer and red foxes are not shy and are found in abundance. Various flora including cranberries and cattails are found between the ocean and the bay. Herons, migrating ducks and geese, egrets, piping plovers, snowy owls, and over 300 birds can be spotted all over the island. On the ocean side, harbor seals can be seen resting in the winter time.

Watch Hill, located on the western edge of the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness, is a camper's heaven. Watch Hill offers a campground with 26 family campsites and one group camp site with a reservation, a self-guided nature trail, picnic area and camping in the Fire Island Wilderness. There are ranger-led programs including a canoe trip.

One of the most spectacular aspects of Watch Hill is its bay-side wooden boardwalk. This boardwalk takes you on a hike through a varied and richly colored landscape of dunes, forest, green wetland grasses and sun-speckled water.

This is in addition to its magnificent ocean beach. Watch Hill also has complete facilities including restaurant, showers, gift shop and other amenities.

There are two bridges that go to parts of Fire Island leading to Robert Moses State Park on the west end and Smith Point State Park on the east end. It is possible to walk from these beaches into the National Park, but ferry access is much easier.

When on Fire Island, water taxis can shuttle you from point to point. Bicycles, scooters and roller-skates are not permitted on boardwalks at Fire Island Lighthouse, Watch Hill, Sailors Haven and Wilderness Area and there are no public roads.

Also part of Fire Island National Seashore are two historic sites: the Fire Island Lighthouse, and the William Floyd Estate (home to one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence).

Fire Island Lighthouse stands as the tallest lighthouse on Long Island with 182 winding steps. It stands at 168 feet tall, and made of red brick. The black and white band seen today was painted on August 1891. The lighthouse offers exhibits, a nature trail, and interpretive programs.

Fire Island Lighthouse is accessed on the easternmost end of the National Park, where Robert Moses State Park adjoins it. A bridge connects Robert Moses State Park to Long Island.

Back on Long Island, the William Floyd Estate was donated to Fire Island National Seashore and contains the ancestral house, grounds, and cemetery of the William Floyd family. William Floyd was a Revolutionary War general and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, who was born in the house in 1734. The house and grounds are open to visitors.

The Long Island Convention & Visitors Bureau and Sports Commission (LICVB&SC) is the official tourism promotion agency for the destination's travel and tourism industry. Based on Long Island in Hauppauge, NY, the LICVB&SC contributes to the economic development and quality of life on Long Island by promoting the region as a world-class destination for tourism, meetings and conventions, trade shows, sporting events, and related activities. For more information about Long Island, please contact the Long Island Convention & Visitors Bureau and Sports Commission by calling 1-877-FUN-ON-LI or visit www.discoverlongisland.com

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