

Salt air, smoothies, the slow take on Montauk

By Marie Elena Martinez
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

EAST HAMPTON, N.Y. — By the time I get to Montauk from New York, I'm ready to stretch my legs. On an uneventful 3-hour drive to Long Island's end, I feel I am almost there when the dunes of Amagansett's Napeague State Park rise high into the horizon. If I roll the car windows down, the salty ocean air gently reminds me why I have come. Then the highway shrinks to one lane, and traffic slows for pedestrians, and I know I have arrived. It feels removed here, of a different era, a time with less fuss. It feels like I have hit the end of the road. And I have.

Past the glitz and glamour of the tony Hamptons, Montauk is a sleepy village determined to retain its charm. For me, it evokes childhood memories of fishing off pristine Long Island beaches, coveting saltwater taffy from the candy shop at Gosman's Dock, watching the yachts make their way in and out of the marina, and learning how to eat a lobster. For many others, it's a quintessential surf town, a dusty throwback to the simplicity of summers past.

Ditch Plains Beach is always my first stop. I sit on the damp sand and simply . . . well, watch. Energized surfers carrying oversized boards jump out of mud-spattered pickups with license plates like "Surfari." A few shimmy and they have found their way into slick, dark wet suits. One by one, they paddle out into the icy Atlantic for a shot at the day's first break. The ocean rollicks and rolls in the morning light and each lithe body is thrown, sometimes mercilessly, out to sea. I subconsciously draw circles in the sand with my toes and fingers, but never, ever, do I take my eyes off the water. It's transfixing, and just like it does the surfers, it draws me in.

At Gosman's Dock, morning brings a different energy. Here, night fishermen unload their catch, while others set off to work. Nearby markets open, selling not only fresh seafood but also a rainbow of fruits and vegeta-



MARIE ELENA MARTINEZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

One of the fleet of commercial fishing boats that dock in Montauk Harbor on Long Island, N.Y.

bles, pies and taffy, all locally produced. There is an underlying camaraderie in Montauk; everyone smiles and says hello.

As the day warms, my stomach calls me to action. There's only one place to brunch. Joni's is authentic Montauk, and it's always packed. At this comfy, organic food joint two blocks off the beach, the hungry gather around the wooden community table reading newspapers. The killer breakfast wraps filled with eggs and veggies are my salvation, while smoothies, lattes, muffins, salads, stir-fries, and sandwiches round out the scrawled chalkboard menu. Vintage black and white surfing photos line the blue walls, a collage of local canines hangs next to the register, and surf maps of Hawaii and California add to the hippie feel.

On those perfect sunny beach days, I rarely venture off the sand, holing up at one of the weather-beaten, shingled beachfront properties such as Daunt's Albatross or Solé East Beach for a cheap night's lodging, or Solé

East's Fort Pond outpost, a grassy compound that elevates relaxation to an art form. But make no mistake, there's much to do. Yoga offers escape for the mind; runs around Fort Pond, along the beach, or a 10-mile sprint to the lighthouse can carry me through midday; and for weary bones, a deep-tissue massage at the Spa at Montauk Yacht Club always does the trick.

At sunset, bursts of color illuminate the sky and reflect off the ponds, bays, lakes, and inlets that make up this watery paradise. An ideal viewing perch is the Montauket, an out-of-the-way dive with just right bar food, \$5 beers, and a view overlooking Fort Pond Bay; or popular Navy Beach where local crooners such as Nancy Atlas drop by to play spontaneous sets and groups of friends lap up portions of the succulent ribs at white wooden picnic tables. Past the center of town, the Crow's Nest Inn takes in the sunset from the southern end of Lake Montauk. If it's raining, I hit the Memory Motel, thrust into the spotlight back

when the Rolling Stones, staying at Andy Warhol's nearby, named a song after the joint.

Montauk promotes its own, so Harvest on Fort Pond is perfect for a family-style dinner made from local ingredients that rocket tastebuds to otherworldly places. The menu changes seasonally, but the pastas and pizzas always hit their mark, while the cozy waterfront setting and the low-lighted pier again remind me to cherish my temporary surroundings.

Coming straight from the beach? Hit West Lake Clam & Chowder on the docks. There, you can bear witness to the day's weighing and filleting of fluke, bass, and tuna. Add killer bloody Mary's, a full sushi bar, and a local crowd, and you're set for the night. Primed to give the old-time favorites a run for their money, the just-opened Ruschmeyer's, a campy bar, restaurant, and small hotel, serves up not only good food, but also ping-pong tables and a beer garden.

Sundays are my favorite Montauk days — lazy mornings when

If you go . . .

Where to stay

Solé East
90 Second House Road
Montauk, N.Y.
631-668-2105
www.soleeast.com
A 69-room boutique hotel with beachfront sister property. Rates from \$269 weekdays to \$650 for weekend suites.

Montauk Yacht Club

32 Star Island Road
631-668-3100
www.montaukyachtclub.com
Montauk Harbor location with waterside restaurants and a renowned spa. Rates \$299-\$799.

Where to eat

Joni's
34 South Etna St.
631-668-3663
The place to go for their

smoothies and breakfast wraps. \$5.95-\$11.95.

Harvest on Fort Pond

11 South Emery St.
631-668-5574
www.harvestfortpond.com
Dinner only. Outdoor seating. Entrees \$21-\$30.

What to do

Montauk Point Lighthouse
2000 Montauk Highway
631-668-2544
www.montauklighthouse.com
Museum: adults \$9, children \$4.

Deep Hollow Ranch

Route 27 (3 miles past Montauk Village on the left)
631-668-2744
www.deephollowranch.com
Trail rides \$35 (30 minutes) to \$75 (90 minutes). Reservations essential.

the wind blows just enough to make you burrow back under the covers and sleep in. The posh Montauk Yacht Club's silky linens make this very easy. Later, after in-room coffee, I throw on jeans and boots; it's time to ride.

Fifth generation ranchers Diane and Rusty Leaver own Deep Hollow Ranch, said to be the oldest cattle ranch in the United States. Diane tells me that in 1898 Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders came to the ranch's Third House property to recover from the Spanish-American War. Riding through the beautiful rises and falls of Montauk's flora and fauna, I envision a land of ranchers and cowboys, of boundless tranquility and peace.

Before heading back to the city, I usually stop into Surf Lodge for a dose of live Sunday night reggae, accompanied by a helping of the restaurant's finger-licking fried chicken. Then, finally, I take a ceremonial lap around the Montauk Point Lighthouse. Authorized by President Washington, the 1796 lighthouse is the

oldest in the state. The 137 steps take me 110 feet into the air to gaze out at the Atlantic Ocean. With deep breaths, I try to get enough of Montauk to sustain me until my next trip.

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