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5 myths about the Jersey shore

By Stephanie Citron, Special to The Baltimore Sun



1. The landscape is toxic and dotted with refineries. Cape May County is an eco-paradise, recognized around the country for its bird observatories, nature centers, protected wetlands and natural wildlife habitats. Bottlenose dolphins swim off these shores, and many indigenous and endangered birds nest here. Perhaps the biggest surprise is the silky-soft sand on Cape May County's beaches. Unlike the dense, darker sand on most northern beaches; it is most often compared to the velvety granules of tropical beaches. Note: Most beaches require beach tags, averaging \$10-\$12 per week.

2. There is no culture. Cape May County is rich with heritage and culture. Each town proudly possesses meticulously preserved historical landmarks of events that shaped our nation. Natives and visitors embrace the profusion of performing arts venues, with shows featuring local talent and top name entertainers, practically every night of the week in the summer. Cape May County's museums showcase a glimpse of the distinctive and indigenous treasures exclusive to this region.

3. The shopping experience is a homogeneous mall. The villages in each of Cape May County's towns are inhabited by independent boutiques, homegrown eateries and local crafts shops. Visitors encounter very few of the chain store establishments seen in traditional malls. Sustainability is a priority in this

county, and there are farmers' and craft markets selling fresh and local provisions. Often parking is an issue because the towns shun unsightly multi-story parking lots. Happily, residents prefer to walk and travel by bicycle. For the record, the majority of New Jersey's 1,354 malls are to the north.

4. New Jersey's concept of fine dining is a diner. While diners do pervade much of the state, Cape May County is home to imaginative eateries and bistros, whose kitchens are governed by well-reputed chefs. These restaurants represent every type of cuisine, and most often incorporate local produce and meat. It results in numerous awards, certifications and even Food Network television shows.

5. Being Italian is king. Yo. With all due respect to Snooki and the Sopranos ... the shore's Italian heritage is significant, but it is not the only ethnic group that claims history here. The region pays homage to its mosaic of ethnicities. Throughout the year there are festivals and parades honoring Irish, German, African-American, Jewish, and of course, Italian, heritage.

—*Stephanie Citron*

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