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What's new at N.J. beach resorts

By Stephanie Citron, Special to The Baltimore Sun



In anticipation of a busy summer, fresh boutiques, eateries and activities are popping up all over Cape May County. Still just as appealing are some of the region's perennial favorites. Here's a look at some of the newest, along with some of the most venerated favorites of southern New Jersey's coast.

Cape May

Cape May, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay on New Jersey's southernmost tip, is the nation's oldest seaside resort. This storybook Victorian town is laden with beautiful beaches, paving stone alleyways and quaint shops and restaurants. *Info: Go to capemay.com and capemaymac.org.*

What's new

YB Restaurant, 314 Beach Ave., 609-898-2009. The new eatery serves up creative American fare, including innovative vegan options. Entrees start at \$15. YB stands for "younger brother"... of John

Karapanagiotis, of George's Place, featured on Food Network's TV show "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives."

What's tried and true

The Virginia, 25 Jackson St., 800-732-4236, virginiahotel.com. This grand 1879 landmark mansion, a half-block from the ocean, includes breakfast and valet parking. Rates start at \$209.

Washington Street Mall, a charming, outdoor concourse of multi-generational shops and cafes. *Info: washingtonstreetmall.com*

Summer Concert Series. Pull out your tie-dyes and love beads. These weekly concerts feature retro-1960s bands like Dave Mason and Jay and The Americans at Cape May's new oceanfront Convention Hall, 8 p.m., Fridays, July 9 to Aug. 20. Tickets: \$30. *Info: capemayconventionhall.org*

The Wildwoods

Generations have long-flocked to Wildwood's tag-free beaches and family-friendly boardwalk, filled with nostalgic confections, sundry shops and amusement parks. Bike trails crisscross everywhere. Remember to check out that glitzy Doo-Wop architecture. *Info: wildwoodsnj.com*

What's new

Downtown Wildwood, 26th Street to Cresse Avenue, dowildwood.com. This downtown district is a mix of boutiques, nightclubs and restaurants, including the delish new Irish steakhouse, Cattle and Clover (3817 Pacific Ave., 609-522-3800, cattlenclover.com). Don't miss free downtown tours on Dolly The Trolley.

Boardwalk Central, between Schellenger and Cedar Avenues, is home to a collection of new eateries, attractions and shops. Daredevils can ride the mechanical Super Bull. Also new is Five-Mile Marketplace, Philly's famous Chickie's and Pete's and Potitos Italian American Pastries.

Water park deals: Early-bird thrill-seekers can head to Morey's Piers water parks, mornings until 12:30 p.m., where unlimited passes are just \$20-\$26 and \$88 for a family of four. *Info: moreyspiers.com*

What's tried and true

Reges Oceanfront Resort, 9201 Atlantic Ave., 609-729-9300, regesresort.com. An award-winning family resort with rates starting at \$199 per night.

The Insectarium, 216 Boardwalk, 609-488-6939, wildwoodinsectarium.com. Bugged? Check out creepy-crawlies on display at this branch of the Philadelphia original.

Good Night Irene's, 2708 Pacific Ave., 609-729-3861, goodnightirenes.com. This bar has dozens of popular, craft and imports on tap, and scores more in the cooler. Don't miss Beer Geek Thursdays for Video Quizzo, with 35-cent wings and steamed clams.



Stone Harbor

Known as "the Hamptons for the Princeton set," highbrow and artsy Stone Harbor has frou-frou shops, a hip Friday night vibe and stunning Seven Mile Beach. Locals glide around town on bicycle or on foot, a la Bridgehampton. *Info: stoneharborbeach.com*

What's new

Yvettes Cafe, 221 96th St., 609-368-1855, yvettescaffe.com. This new eatery serves up European-inspired sandwiches and salads, starting from \$11.

Bradley's Steaks, 10725 3rd Ave., 609-368-2039, bradleyssteaks.com. Home of the 2011 Guy-Fieri Food Network award-winning cheesesteak.

Jessie Creek Winery, 1 North Delsea Drive, 609-536-2092, jessiecreekwinery.com. Sipping savory samples at the new Jessie Creek Winery is worth the eight-mile trek from town. Learn how this area's unique "micro-mini-climate" extends the grape growing season. Tastings are \$5.

What's tried and true

Windrift, 125 80th St., 609-368-5175, windrifthotel.com. The sleekly renovated Winddrift has dreamy ocean views, elegant rooms and a picturesque two-story restaurant. Rates start at \$125 per night.

Springer's, 9420 3rd Ave., 609-368-4631. Stop in this homemade ice-cream shop for a dip of Springer Chip, chocolate-chip coffee ice cream.



Avalon

The purest ocean breezes are inhaled on Avalon's beach, which extends a mile farther into the Atlantic than other Jersey beaches. It is also one of the last remaining high dune systems on the East Coast. The tiny town is legendary for its tony mansions bordering the beach. While its quaint boardwalk lacks kitschy amusements, there are tasteful family activities and entertainment all summer. Avalon is on the northern portion of Seven Mile Island, which it shares with Stone Harbor. *Info: indulgeinavalon.com*

What's new

Fuze Italian, 7888 Dune Drive, 609-368-1919, fuzerestaurantandlounge.com. This new hot spot dishes-up modern Mediterranean fare with entrees from \$15.

What's tried and true

The Golden Inn, 7849 Dune Drive, 609-368-5155; goldeninn.com. A glam, old-world oceanfront resort, with rates starting at \$265 a night.

Free parking. Keep the change because parking is free throughout Avalon. The town also offers a vehicle-charging station, located at 30th and Dune Drive.

Free concerts on the beach at 30th Street, including everything from reggae and Southern rock to steel bands. Saturdays at noon, June 23 to Sept. 1.

Sea Isle City

The town is undergoing a renaissance, reviving original, dynastic businesses, amid a multi-generational Italian-American community. New Jersey's only paved beachfront promenade serves as its boardwalk. In May-July south Jersey's famed sea-terrapins come ashore to lay their eggs in the quiet marshes between the Isle and the mainland. Lodging options in Sea Isle City are sparse — just a few budget motels. Insiders recommend renting a private condo or home. *Info:* seaislecitynj.us

What's new and tried and true

Fish Alley. The century-old marina district Fish Alley has undergone a revival. Visit authentic, family-operated seafood dives and restaurants, bait and tackle shops and charters offering catch-your-own. Try the century-old Braca Cafe at Kennedy Boulevard and Beach (bracacafe.com). Fish Alley's Summer Festival is June 9.

Ocean City

The Travel Channel's "America's Greatest Family Resort," had humble beginnings as a Methodist retreat. Today it's still a dry town with gentler amusement parks, an old-fashioned boardwalk and a vibrant downtown. Big news is its brand-new four-lane bridge from mainland. *Info:* oceancityvacation.com

What's new

Fractured Prune, 1225 Asbury Ave., FracturedPruneOC.com. This shop, one of two new sweet spots on the beach, serves oodles of hand-dipped doughnut flavors.

Sandcastle Cupcakes, 910A Asbury Ave., 609-391-1000, sandcastlecupcakes.com. The bakery fuses wholesome, local ingredients into fresh flavors every day.

Heritage Surf and Sport, 14th St. and Boardwalk, heritagesurf.com. The shop sells and rents surf and paddle apparatus.

Sandra and Roy's, 709 Asbury Ave., 609-399-2200, sandraandroys.com. A trend-setting South Jersey boutique opens its first beach locale.

What's tried and true



Flanders Hotel, 719 11th St., 609-399-1000, theflandershotel.com. The grand, circa-1922 Flanders Hotel is a stylish all-suite resort with a pool and charming tea and lunch room. Rooms start at \$259 a night.

Stainton Co-Op, 810 Asbury Ave., 609-822-3700. Stainton's, a 100-year-old landmark department store, reopens this summer as Stainton's Co-op with more than 70 distinct boutiques, featuring apparel, art, furnishings and craft.

Discover Seashell Museum, 2721 Asbury Ave., 609-398-2316, shellmuseum.com. Ever see a 200-lb man-eating clam shell? This third-generation store and museum houses thousands of varieties of shells. Free.

—*Stephanie Citron*

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