

## Cape May: The GLBT Destination on the Jersey Shore

A month or so ago, my girlfriend and I heard the call of the sea. We listed all the usual GLBT beach destinations but rejected them all because we wanted to go someplace neither of us had been with an ex. Back to the drawing board, we found Cape May, a quiet, gay friendly beach with historic charm on the southernmost tip of the Jersey shore. Eight and a half hours from Columbus and an hour and a half from Philadelphia, it's an easy day's drive. There aren't separate gay beaches, gay bars or dances, but Cape May has an active GLBT community and shop keepers and wait staff refer to couples as couples with the warmth that used to be reserved for heterosexual couples.

Cape May, New Jersey is a quirky little town. The traffic police drive a white VW Beetle with little black spots. The weekend we were there, the town hosted a parade to celebrate the dedication of a new fire engine replete with a marching band and fire engines rolling down the street with blaring sirens.

Most of its charm is rooted in history. Cape May is America's oldest seaside resort and the whole town is designated as a National Historic Landmark. It hosts the highest concentration of Victorian buildings in the country. The downtown area is small enough to meander along the streets looking at houses on your own, or you can take a trolley tour to get more of the local history and color. For a more romantic sight seeing trip, you can roll along the Victorian neighborhoods in a horse drawn carriage. If looking at the houses from the outside isn't enough to satisfy your craving for all things Victorian, you can stay in any number of historical Victorian Bed and Breakfasts or take a tour of the Emlen Physic Estate – a museum portraying life in Victorian times.

If your historical interest lies more with the “dish” about local characters than with their historical accomplishments, check out one of the ghost tours. You have several options. You can take a walking tour or a trolley tour, or even the *Ghosts of the Lighthouse* trolley tour that gives you a chance to climb up to the top of the lighthouse to view night sky after dark

Spirits aside, the Cape May Lighthouse is one of the oldest operating lighthouses in the U.S. and has its own rich history. The docents will gladly tell you about some of the more memorable moments. The view of the Atlantic Ocean, Delaware Bay and Cape May Point State Park make the 199 steps to the top worth the climb. The lighthouse is a nice walk up the beach from town. The catch is that it's 5 or 6 miles round trip. If you're not really enamored with walking, the walk back gets old fast, especially if it's hot, you're hungry, you run out of water and your sunscreen wears off. My girlfriend and I learned this the hard way.

When you've had enough history, check out the local shops. Cape May is a shopper's paradise. Whether you're looking for antiques, the obligatory beach vacation fudge and salt water taffy, hokey t-shirts (you gotta check out the ones sporting a glow-in-the-dark pirate), gifts, toys, jewelry, or surf boards, you can find it either in shops along Beach Drive or at the Washington Street Pedestrian Mall.

Don't get so focused on history and shopping that you forget the beaches! They're gorgeous. Cove Point Beach is especially popular for everything from lounging or reading, to hunting seashells, to splashing in the waves, to boogie boarding or surfing. Sunset Beach, on the west side of the Cape, is a bit less crowded and offers a spectacular view of the sunset.

Cape May is also an ideal spot for the nature lovers among our ranks. There are a number of wetland tours, a bird watching observatory, and whale and dolphin cruises. You can even rent kayaks at the marina if you get the irresistible urge to paddle.

Foodies will be interested in Cape May's numerous restaurants. The locals recommend George's, Sean's, Backstreet Café and Gecko's. All are BYOB (bring your own bottle), reasonably priced and have great food and great service. George's and Sean's both have a great vibe and really cute wait staff. George's serves up amazing Greek food while Sean's serves up an eclectic fair. The husband and wife team who run Backstreet Café are fanatics about fresh produce and have created an atmosphere reminiscent of cafes in Greenwich Village feel. Gecko's has more of a Key West feel. They serve food with a southwest flair, and weather permitting, have outdoor seating. Though it's a bit more touristy and the service isn't quite as warm, Henry's is the place to go for oceanfront dining. Overlooking the beach, it offers a nice seafood menu and great views of the sunset to the west. If you're lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of dolphins swimming by. Like the other restaurants, Henry's is BYOB. If you decide to take advantage of the corking service, you might pick up a bottle of wine from the local Cape May Winery. Their red and white wines are worthy of the price. And by buying local, you can help reduce your carbon footprint.

Cape May's small size takes some of the stress off finding lodging. Although Cape May doesn't scream "gay paradise," it does host a number of GLBT friendly accommodations. Moreover, the Eldredge House is gay owned and the Cottage Beside the Point is lesbian owned. Both offer warm, friendly, helpful service.

Built in 1780, the Eldredge House couples historical charm with the convenience of private baths, air conditioning and wireless internet access. Local restaurants, shopping, Cove Point Beach, and a couple of gyms are all in easy walking distance. And Todd is a wealth of scoop about where to go and what to do.

If peace and quiet is what you're after, check out the Cottage Beside the Point. Even though it's only a mile and a half from downtown, you'll feel like you're in your own private getaway. The single studio apartment overlooks lush gardens with a naturally landscaped pond. The scenery is simply gorgeous. With a small but adequate kitchen and an outdoor grill, it's easy to feel right at home. Other perks: the Cottage Beside the Point is in walking distance to Sunset Beach and the owners even provide beach passes and bikes for your stay.

If the rising temperatures have you craving a peaceful, relaxing beach vacation with historical charm, set your aim for the Jersey shore and see why some of Cape May's GLBT weekend residents prefer it to more explicitly GLBT beach destinations.

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