



# News Release

*Cape May County, New Jersey*

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## **AN ESCAPE TO THE JERSEY CAPE: TOWN BY TOWN**

### **Cape May County**

From the sandy beaches of the Atlantic Ocean to the natural strands along Delaware Bay, north to south and east to west, Cape May County has it all! Home to more than 100,000 year-round residents, the county welcomes literally thousands of visitors every year who enjoy the sun and sand, the birds and butterflies, the excitement and relaxation – and more – of a weekend, a vacation or an extended stay in Cape May County.

Once primarily a summer destination, the county is quickly becoming more and more of a year-round resort. Cape May's Victorian Week and winter holiday calendar extend to New Year's Eve. Ocean City has a varied schedule of unique events including a First Night celebration. The Wildwoods celebrate their Doo Wop heritage with a rock and roll weekend every October and a growing list of attractions at the Convention Center draw big crowds.

Part of the county's charm is its history. A number of local museums and arts centers help preserve this history that goes back to the 1600s when whalers from New England, many of whom were descendants of the Pilgrims, followed the whales to this area. Cape May's Victorian architecture, the stately colonial-era homes along Route 9 in

Cape May Court House and north plus Wildwood's fun and funky Doo Wop styles and neon lights are all part of the county's eclectic history.

Accommodations include rentals, condos, motels and campgrounds. Many people – perhaps the lucky ones – have a second home here in Cape May County so they can enjoy all that we have to offer whenever they want. Restaurants range from the family friendly with menu choices popular with the youngsters to bistros and café with the ambiance of fine dining, excellent wine, often an ocean view and always breathtaking décor.

Many of the changes that have added to the quality of life in Cape May County for all residents – improved health care, higher education opportunities and expanded shopping facilities – are also attractions for our visitors to enjoy.

## **Ocean City**

In the late 1870s, a group of Methodist clergymen, who were also astute business people, established a Christian seashore resort on Peck's Beach with strict regulations against liquor, Sunday travel and other pleasures on the Sabbath.

The first camp meeting was held in tents on the campgrounds on what would be Ocean City in August 1880 with an estimated one thousand people attending services. Soon a wood and fabric structure was built, called simply the Auditorium, as the first permanent structure on the island to be used as a place of worship. In the 1950s a more modern facility was built by the Ocean City Tabernacle Association to accommodate the thousands of people who attend the non-denominational services throughout the summer.

Ocean City is one of Cape May County's favorite resorts and a year-round home to about 15,000 residents. Located at the northern tip of Cape May County, the city has a main shopping district on Asbury Avenue with more businesses establishing a presence on the avenue. Eight miles of pristine beaches, three miles of exciting boardwalk and a wholesome family atmosphere that includes public tennis courts, a 12-hole golf course, arts center and a full calendar of unique events including the county's only First Night celebration, add to the town's appeal for both residents and visitors.

The Ocean City Music Pier on the boardwalk was built in 1928 and is home to the Ocean City Pops Orchestra. Concerts, from classical to rock, are held in this beautifully refurbished music center throughout most of the year.

Eventually, some of the Sunday restrictions and “Blue Laws” were abolished but the deed restrictions against liquor remain, giving the town an ambiance different than other seashore resorts. The slogan “America’s Greatest Family Resort” has been used to describe Ocean City for over 85 years.

### **Sea Isle City**

Sea Isle City, a barrier island between Ocean City and Avalon with five miles of sandy beaches, is not the town that Charles Landis first envisioned on Ludlam’s Beach back in 1880. His idea was a seaside city with elaborate canals, fountains similar to Venice and Italian-style piazzas decorated with art and sculpture.

Lack of reliable railroad service to the island plus other difficulties slowed development in Sea Isle City and by 1891 Landis was selling his oceanfront lots for \$50. Eventually, however, the town grew and prospered, becoming a popular resort in the northern part Cape May County.

The Promenade that runs along the beach is the main hub of activity for visitors who enjoy leisurely walks, concerts, special events, shopping, biking or just sitting and enjoying the cool ocean breezes.

Famous for its fleet of charter and fishing boats, Sea Isle is a fisherman's paradise with boats leaving the docks daily on four, six and eight-hour fishing trips. Special canyon trips for trophy fish are also available.

Sea Isle has an abundance of clubs, hotels, motels and special events including the popular Skimmer Weekend and a Polar Bear Plunge in February. It’s also conveniently located to other county attractions including nearby Atlantic City.

### **Avalon**

When the Avalon Beach Development Company purchased the island in 1887 the intent of the investors was to make Avalon one of the most fashionable and exclusive resorts along the Jersey Shore.

The high dunes of Avalon have been carefully preserved over the years and create a beautiful natural setting for the beaches and also help protect them from erosion. The dune areas of the beach are covered with natural foliage and plant life indigenous to the area with walkways at street ends to allow beach access. The Washingtonian magazine called Avalon beaches “the best beach in New Jersey” for the gentle surf, natural dunes, wide beach and good lifeguards. The town also has a small and well-maintained boardwalk.

Today, this community on the northern end of Seven Mile Beach is an upscale residential area of distinctive homes, beach cottages and boats of all descriptions, much as the original developers had envisioned. During the summer months both homeowners and visitors enjoy the beach, back bays, sailing, fishing, dining and shopping, all of which add up to the perfect summer vacation.

Because Avalon extends into the ocean about a mile further than nearby resorts, the town is often said to be “Cooler by Mile,” an apt description for this trendy town.

## **Stone Harbor**

Bordered on one side by the Atlantic Ocean and on the other by the Intracoastal Waterway, Stone Harbor is located on the southern portion of the Seven Mile Beach Island, seven miles long as the name implies but only three or four blocks wide so anywhere in town is close to the water.

Seven cottages formed the original resort in the 1890s; today, Stone Harbor has more than 3,000 properties. Once railroad service started and later bridges over the inland waterways were built, the town quickly became a popular summer destination and has remained so for decades.

In addition to miles of protected beaches, the resort offers plenty of outdoor activities nearby, including golf courses, the county zoo, historic and cultural sites plus a full calendar of art shows, craft shows and other special events throughout the summer. Kayaking around the back bays is especially popular and provides an up close and personal look at some of the town’s impressive waterfront homes.

Stone Harbor still has the only heronry sponsored by a municipality in the United States. The Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary, 21 acres tucked away within the resort, was registered as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service over 40 years ago.

Over the years thousands of herons of many varieties have nested in this safe, protected sanctuary.

The Wetlands Institute on the way into town on Stone Harbor Blvd. is a research facility located on 6,000 acres of pristine wetlands that also offers educational, informative and fun programs throughout the year about nature with a special emphasis on turtles.

Stone Harbor personifies small town charm with a pedestrian friendly downtown area, a quaint shopping district, exceptional restaurants and a relaxed atmosphere.

## **North Wildwood**

The northern tip of Five Mile Beach was first settled around 1870 by Scandinavian fishermen, although Native Americans had long been coming to the island every summer. With plentiful fishing areas offshore in Hereford Inlet, they established a tiny hamlet called Anglesea. Before long, however, it also started to develop as a resort area, thanks to the railroad. Margaret Mace who grew up in Anglesea was the town's first doctor when she opened her practice in 1905 and later established a hospital.

Large hotels were built in North Wildwood and catered to people anxious to escape the summer heat in the city. By the 1950s, most of those original wooden buildings were replaced with motels along the beachfront.

Hereford Lighthouse erected in 1874, is the focal point of the community for both residents and visitors. Overlooking Hereford Inlet which leads from the Atlantic Ocean to the Intracoastal Waterway linking Maine to Florida, the lighthouse was placed on the Department of Interior's List of Historic Places in 1977. The cottage gardens around the lighthouse are especially beautiful and attract thousands of visitors annually.

The wide, sandy beaches, gentle surf, fun-filled boardwalk amusement rides and some of the best salt water fishing bring vacationers back to North Wildwood year after year.

## **West Wildwood**

An island unto itself connected by just a bridge to the communities on Five Mile Island, West Wildwood is a small community where residents and visitors know each other, chat from deck to deck or wave while sailing by. Many of the small vacation homes have been replaced with multi-story houses commanding spectacular views of the inland

waterways in and around Grassy Sound that are great for boating, jet skiing, sailing, fishing or crabbing. An old fashioned 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration reinforces that small town feeling, the reason several hundred people live there year round and visitors wish they could.

## **Wildwood**

Wildwood by the Sea has been the number one destination for fun-filled family vacations for generations. Wildwood beaches are the widest on the Jersey Cape and every day all summer long, thousands of vacationers come to the Wildwood beaches to enjoy the sun and sand.

The boardwalk, built at the turn of the century, stretches along the beach for more than a mile and a half. A convention center, four incredible amusement piers, two movie theaters, hundreds of souvenir and novelty shops and a variety of restaurants, ethnic food stands and salt water taffy shops line this wooden walkway.

Early morning boardwalk visitors can watch the sun rise out of the sparkling blue sea. At night, the lights brighten the skyline and the boardwalk takes on a new look. The combination of the flashing neon, mixed with lively music, the spin of the game wheels and the enticing aromas coming from the open air eateries create a carnival-like atmosphere and an aura of excitement.

Chubby Checker and Bill Haley and the Comets – along with many other rock and roll musicians – put Wildwood on the map in the 1950s. Clubs from one end of the island to the other booked name acts throughout the summer – Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell, and anybody who was somebody in the music business was here during the doo wop days. The town pays homage to its musical past hosting a huge doo wop weekend every October. But it's not all doo-wop – there are kite festivals, the National Marble Tournament, life guard races, movies on the beach and so much more that makes the resort such a popular vacation destination.

The back-bay area hosts hundreds of private, charter and party boats for daily bay and deep sea fishing excursions. Sight seeing and whale watching trips as well as sailing, jet skiing and motor boating are available from most Wildwood docks.

Wildwood is also building a reputation as a town with some fine gourmet restaurants that compliment a wide range of choices that cater to every taste.

## **Wildwood Crest**

The only Revolutionary War battle to take place in Cape May County happened in 1776 when the Nancy, an American brigantine carrying supplies to Philadelphia, was blown up by her captain as British sailors were boarding the ship. The British chased The Nancy into Turtle Gut near today's Wildwood Crest and it's possible that the Battle of Turtle Gut helped discouraged British plans to sail up bay to the Delaware River.

It wasn't until the early 1900s that Wildwood Crest was developed after Philip Baker bought a tract of land south of Holly Beach. Turtle Gut Inlet was filled in and construction of a road to Two Mile Beach helped spur real estate development. Baker's stately home on Pacific Avenue is now a private residence.

Many of the island's larger motels and hotels line the ocean front, overlooking the town's three miles of clean, free, protected beaches and providing hundreds of rooms for visitors. On the west side of the Crest, Sunset Lake is a protected tidal area filled with sailboats, water skiers and sightseeing boats during the day. At dusk it's a favorite place to watch the spectacular sunset and in the summer enjoy an outdoor concert.

Charter fishing boats leave Wildwood Crest ports daily starting in early April and run through October. The Crest offers plenty of family-oriented activities with the boardwalk and nightclubs just a short distance away in Wildwood.

## **Cape May**

Slated for demolition in the 1970s, the Physick Estate on Washington Street is now the centerpiece of Cape May's Victorian renaissance. The estate, which dates to the 1880s, was saved, restored and refurbished, thanks to dedicated volunteers who founded the MidAtlantic Center for the Arts, an organization that propelled this once sleepy seaside community into one of the most visited towns in the state.

Today, Cape May is a National Landmark City and literally every street in town is lined with Victorian homes, colorful examples of the preferred architectural style of the

late 1800s when the town was rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1878 that wiped out homes, hotels and businesses.

Many of the Victorian mansions are bed and breakfast inns, a romantic complement to the town's reputation as the "Restaurant Capital of New Jersey." Tours of the historic district and many of the Victorian inns including the Physick Estate are scheduled daily through the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts.

Often called the Nation's Oldest Seashore Resort, Congress Hall was the Summer White House for several presidents and John Philip Sousa, who composed the Congress Hall March, played with on the ocean front sprawling lawn of the hotel. The Chalfonte Hotel on Howard Street has been in business for more than 125 years even though there is no air conditioning or other modern amenities.

Cape May has year-round appeal well beyond the summer. A Tulip Festival in the spring celebrates the town's Dutch heritage, a 10-day Victorian Week in October is filled with tours, dances, workshops and more and at Christmas, the town is a scene from a Charles Dickens' story with beautifully decorated homes bathed in gas lights, horse and carriage tours and other special events.

The United States Coast Guard Training Center – the country's only recruit training center - has always been an integral part life in Cape May. Patriotic recruit graduations and Sunset Parades held throughout the summer are open to the public.

## **Cape May Point**

Cape May Point, at the southern-most tip of the Jersey Cape, is a tiny but popular community despite the fact that the town has no restaurants, no motels, no bars and no amusements. Still, with its natural attractions, serene beaches and historic sites, the town of only a few hundred people always attracts visitors.

Founded in 1875 as a Presbyterian community, the town was first called Sea Grove when John Wanamaker summered here. Wanamaker also had a house built for President Benjamin Harrison in 1890 although it was never used as a Summer White House.

Sea Grove originally had several large hotels - Sea Grove House, Cape House, Centennial House and the Shoreham Hotel were built between 1875 and 1890. The only one still in existence is the Shoreham, now St. Mary's by the Sea, a summer retreat for the

Sisters of St. Joseph. However, there are many reminders of the early days of this community including the streets that radiate from Pavilion Circle and many of the pre-1900 summer cottages.

The Cape May Lighthouse offers a panoramic view of the peninsula for people willing to climb to the top. Cape May Point State Park, the Cape May Bird Observatory and the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area are always popular attractions. St. Peter's by the Sea, a tiny gingerbread-adorned church that is thought to have been part of the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876, was moved to the Point. The picturesque church and odd-shaped lot are frequently photographed and painted by area artists.

Nearby at Sunset Beach, the remains of the SS *Atlantus*, a concrete ship that went aground in the 1930s are still visible just a few feet off shore.

## ***Inland Communities in Cape May County***

### **Upper Township**

Upper Township was first settled in the late 1600s by whalers, fishermen and shipbuilders. Today it's a growing residential area, although much of the township still has abundant open spaces in a natural state where people can hike through the woodlands, kayak or canoe through the wetlands or enjoy the surroundings that are a natural habitat for birds and butterflies. Cape May County Park North on Route 9 in Palermo is part of the county's public park system plus there are several golf courses nearby. Portions of the Lester G. McNamara Fish and Wildlife Management Area, Belleplain State Forest, and the Marmora Coastal Wetlands Fish and Wildlife Management Area are also within the township.

The tiny community of Strathmere is Upper Township's seashore community with a pristine beach, homes, and restaurants including the historic Deauville Inn that dates back to about 1887 when it was called the Whelen Hotel, built by a man who came to America from Ireland in 1862.

Route 9 is lined with antique shops and many of homes of historic vintage

including the Tuckahoe Inn on Great Egg Harbor that has been part of the area's history since the 1700s.

Upper Township is close enough to the excitement of the resorts but far enough away for those looking for quiet and solitude.

## **Middle Township**

The recent opening of a branch campus of Atlantic Cape Community College in Middle Township has added an exciting new component to life in Cape May County, Centrally located in Cape May Court House, the college will help provide a better trained work force for the hospitality industry and also afford everyone – from teenagers to senior citizens – the opportunity to take classes, earn a degree or participate in college-related activities.

The modern college building, one of the newest in the area, isn't far from some of the oldest buildings in the county along Main Street in Court House, buildings still in use today. The Bellevue Tavern, a popular stop with locals and visitors, dates to 1839 when it provided both food and lodging. Interestingly, the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh spent a night at the Bellevue in 1932 while he was searching for his kidnapped baby son.

On the northeast corner of Mechanic Street and Route 9, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian mansion that was once a stop on the Underground Railroad has been restored to an elegant boutique hotel, the Doctor's Inn. North on Route 9 is the John Holmes House, portions of which were built about 1704, and has long been the home of the Cape May County Historical Museum with extensive and varied exhibits from the 17th to 20th centuries.

The Cape May County Park and Zoo is one of the most popular places for both residents and visitors to the county. With 80 acres and almost 200 different species of mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles, the zoo is open 364 days a year and admission is free. The African Savanna is a natural environment of 57 acres where giraffes, lemurs and bongos roam and graze.

The township covers approximately 75 square miles and is comprised of 15 communities. A large portion of the township along Delaware Bay provides an abundance of wetlands and salt marsh that is a natural habitat for shore and migratory birds.

Cape May Court House is the county seat and the old Court House is on the National Registers and is still used today for community events and meetings.

## **Lower Township**

Settled by whalers from New England and Long Island around 1635, this area of the county along Delaware Bay is often referred to as the “Birth Place of South Jersey.” The early settlements on the bay – now hundreds of feet out into the water – were called New England Town, Portsmouth and later Town Bank. One of the first people to arrive was Hannah Gorham, the granddaughter of John Howland who sailed to the New World aboard the Mayflower.

For years, the township was a rural, farming community until the late 1940s when a developer saw the potential to build modest homes for returning veterans. Many of the streets were named after families and things associated with the early settlers including Mayflower Circle, Gorham Avenue and Pilgrim Plaza.

Much has changed since the 1950s. Lower Township is now the largest municipality in the county with a population of about 23,000 people. Located at the southern tip of the state, the township is bordered by the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean along the township’s Diamond Beach section, an area developed over the past 20 years with upscale condominiums. The small bungalows that once lined the Delaware Bay shoreline have been replaced with huge, multi-story new homes with spectacular views of the water and sunsets that rival Key West.

The fishing industry continues to be an important economic factor in the township as well as nearby areas and the Port of Cape May is one of the top fishing ports on the East Coast. The Cape May Canal provides boating enthusiasts with a convenient and scenic route to Cape May and the Intracoastal Waterway and the Cape May-Lewes Ferry crosses the bay from its terminal in Lower Township to Lewes, Delaware on a daily basis.

Recently, an 18-hole golf course along the bay was converted to a wildlife management area and is already a popular spot for birding watching, hiking and other activities.

Historic Cold Spring Village, a recreated farm village of the 1850s with many original buildings from around the county, helps preserve the area’s agricultural and social

history. Cold Spring Presbyterian Church across from the Village traces its beginnings to 1718 when a log cabin was built there. “Old Brick,” the present church, was built in 1823 and is a National Historic Landmark Site and many of the Mayflower descendants are buried in the adjoining cemetery.

Wildwood Naval Air Station at the County Airport is a museum dedicated to World War II pilots who died while training at the facility and houses an impressive collection of vintage aircraft.

## **Dennis Township**

Bordering the Delaware Bay, Dennis Township was a flourishing shipbuilding center from the early 1700's until the early 1900s. Early settlers in the area also harvested cedar logs from the Great Cedar Swamp and made them into shingles that were shipped to other parts of the country including Philadelphia where they were used on Independence Hall.

Rich in history, the village of Dennisville in the township is included as an historic district on the National and State Registers of Historic Places with 69 structures. The Joseph Falkenburg House, dating from about 1806, is the oldest and one of only three pre-1860 brick houses in Cape May County. The house is also important for its association with the Ludlam, Falkenburg(e), and Leaming families, all related and leaders in the 18th and early 19th century development of South Jersey.

The friendly, family communities that make up Dennis Township offer visitors great freshwater and saltwater fishing opportunities and a variety of full-service camping facilities. Popular with nature enthusiasts, this area is home to Belleplaine State Forest, the largest tract of woodlands found on the Jersey Cape for people who enjoy hiking, birding, canoeing and related activities in a pristine, natural setting amid thousands of acres of untouched woodlands.

## **Woodbine**

Woodbine, a rural community in the northwestern corner of Cape May County, was settled in the 1880s by Jewish immigrants escaping persecution in Europe. The Baron de Hirsch Foundation purchased over 5,000 acres of land and helped over 600 Jewish refugees establish themselves in America where many of them farmed or established

businesses that brought economic prosperity to the area for years.

The community also started the Baron de Hirsch Agricultural College in 1894, a school that was a model of progressive education until it closed in 1917. Later the college site became the Woodbine Developmental Center, a state facility for mentally handicapped men and the largest employer in Cape May County.

Between 1893 and 1896 the residents built the Woodbine Brotherhood Synagogue, the center of their community life. Eventually many of the founding families moved away and new residents, primarily from the American South and Caribbean have settled in Woodbine, creating a vibrant, multi-ethnic community.

Around 2000, the closed synagogue was purchased by Michael Azeez. After an extensive refurbishing effort he opened the synagogue as the Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage to honor the memory of his father, a longtime resident of Woodbine and a member of the synagogue, and to chronicle the heritage and history of the town. The building is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Still a rural area, Woodbine is a favorite destination for people who enjoy camping and all outdoor activities.