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SUMMER FUN!

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**WAYS TO BEAT THE HEAT
AND GET THE MOST
OUT OF YOUR SUMMER**

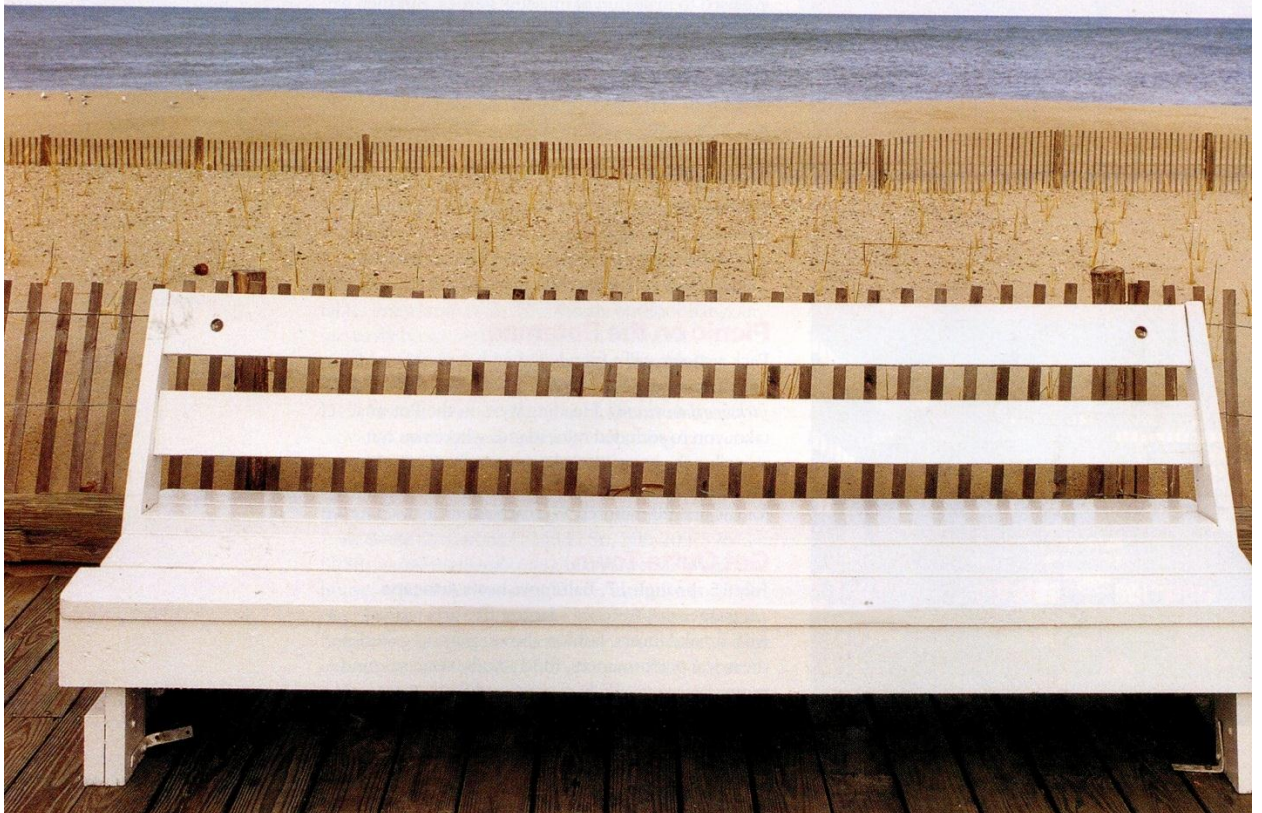
*Beaches, outdoor bars,
concerts, hikes,
water parks,
mini-golf,
and more*



YOUR **BEST SUMMER EVER** IF ...

... YOU LOVE **THE BEACH**

From the lively boardwalk town of Rehoboth to pristine Assateague Island to family-friendly Bethany Beach, here's where to find the perfect stretch of sand



Hundreds of wild ponies roam Assateague Island. Visitors can also see bald eagles, ospreys, and dolphins.



UNTAMED BEAUTY

Assateague and Chincoteague islands offer the chance to enjoy nature up close, with their wild ponies and unspoiled beaches. And you might see a rocket launch.

BY ANDREA C. POE

Assateague and sister island Chincoteague—off the Maryland and Virginia coasts—are where to go for an unprogrammed vacation. You don't visit for the stuff to do but for the unspoiled natural beauty of the area, with its quiet beaches, and the chance to hike among the flora and fauna, including Assateague's famed wild ponies.

Most people explore both islands in a single trip. Assateague, 37 miles long, is prized for its beaches and ponies, and Chincoteague, seven miles long, is known for its wildlife refuge, dunes, for-

ests, and marshes. Most visitors use Chincoteague Island, a fishing village with shops, restaurants, hotels, and a marina, as a base because no development is permitted on Assateague.

WHERE TO STAY

Camping is allowed on Assateague at the state park and the national park. The national park's site is more rustic, with cold showers and no electrical hookups, but visitors can bring their dogs and set up a tent on the beach. State-park camping fees start at \$26.75, national at \$20. Go to dnr.state.md.us/publiclands, then click on "find

a park" for more information.

Many campers stay across Assateague Channel from Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in one of the campgrounds on Chincoteague Island, such as **Tom's Cove Park** (8128 Beebe Rd.; 757-336-6498; tomscovepark.com), where there's access to water and sewer hookups. A tent site is \$31.50; a hookup site starts at \$49.

Visitors looking for creature comforts will find hotels, motels, inns, and B&Bs on Chincoteague Island. A bridge connects the town to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

Fans of *Misty of Chincote-*

ague can book a room at **Miss Molly's Inn** (4141 Main St.; 800-221-5620; mismollysinn.com), a seven-room B&B where Marguerite Henry wrote her famous children's book. Guests can borrow beach cruisers to ride around the island as well as beach umbrellas and boogie boards. Rooms begin at \$150.

Families will like the **Refuge Inn** (7058 Maddox Blvd.; 757-336-5511; refugeinn.com), which is owned by native islanders and has an indoor/outdoor pool, swings, bike rentals, free wi-fi, and its own herd of gentle Chincoteague ponies. Rooms start at \$165.



You can explore the coast by bike or kayak at the Marine Science Consortium. Miss Molly's Inn has an English garden and five porches for enjoying the sea breezes.

BEST BEACHES

Toms Cove Visitors Center on Assateague—not to be confused with the campground—is the best starting point to explore the beaches. There are secluded nooks in both directions as well as showers and a guarded beach. Go to nps.gov/asis.

THINGS TO DO

You can see a rocket launched from the NASA Visitor Center observation deck and check out a moon rock during a free visit to **Wallops Flight Facility** (Rt. 175, Bldg. J-17, Wallops Island; 757-824-1344; siter.wff.nasa.gov/wvc).

The **Marine Science Consortium** (34001 Mill Dam Rd., Wallops Island; 757-824-5636; msconsortium.org) offers day and half-day programs that start at \$10 a person, such as the hands-on Under the Sea Workshop, which teaches kids about marine animals.

GOOD PLACES TO EAT

All of the following eateries and shops are on Chincoteague Island.

A civilized breakfast awaits you at the **Channel Bass Inn** (6228 Church St.; 800-249-0818; channelbass-inn.com). The B&B serves this meal to non-guests who make reservations. Breakfast might include cranberry nut bread, egg-and-cheese casserole, and scones made by the very British owner.

Woody's Beach Barbecue

(6700 Maddox Blvd.; 410-430-4429; woodysbeachbbq.com) is an outdoor venue with award-winning barbecue and crabcakes. Pull up a beach chair while dining and play ring toss with the locals.

Bill's Seafood Restaurant

(4040 Main St.; 757-336-5831; billsseafoodrestaurant.com), an island tradition known for local seafood such as breaded oysters, is about as upscale as you'll get here.

Saigon Village (4069 Main St.; 757-336-7299) is a cozy Vietnamese restaurant, owned by an expat named Hahn, that makes an authentic version of the soup *pho*. Order takeout and dine at the waterfront park out back.

WHERE TO SHOP

Sundial Books (4065 Main St.; 757-336-5825; sundialbooks.net) has two floors of new and used books, free wi-fi, and a porch overlooking Chincoteague Bay where you can sip a cup of coffee.

Decoys, Decoys, Decoys

(4039 Main St.; 757-336-1402) is a museum-quality shop with 2,000 decoys from nearly 100 carvers.

DON'T MISS

Join 40,000 other visitors at the **Pony Swim** (this year on July 27; assateagueisland.com/pony-swim.htm), an event that has taken place every year since 1925. To thin the herds of wild horses on Assateague, the fire department rounds up about 150 ponies to make the swim across the channel. Some ponies are auctioned off afterward; the others are returned to Assateague to live wild on the island.

Captain Carlton Leonard, a natural storyteller born and raised on Chincoteague, runs **Island Cruises** (757-336-1796; captaincarlton.com), which takes visitors aboard his pontoon boat for the best views of

the 300 or so wild ponies that live along the shore. Bald eagles, ospreys, and dolphins are spotted as well. Tours depart from Curtis Merritt Harbor.

RAINY-DAY DIVERSION

You can take the family bowling at **Libertino Lanes** on Chincoteague (3649 Willow St.; 757-336-1575; libertinolanes.com) for \$4.50 a person.

WITH THE KIDS

At the **Chincoteague Pony Centre** (Chicken City Rd.; 757-336-2776; chincoteague.com/ponycentre), families can visit with the ponies descended from the original Misty and take pony rides and lessons.

In the summer, park rangers at **Assateague Island National Seashore Visitor Center** host beach campfires. Roast marshmallows as you listen to stories about the island, including some about Blackbeard and his lost treasure. Call 410-641-1441 or visit nps.gov/asis.

FOR MORE ACTION

If you'd like to see the unspoiled beaches of Assateague Island but staying on Chincoteague Island sounds too tame, you could make Ocean City, Maryland, your base for a day trip. The northern entrance to the state park is 20 minutes from Ocean City.

All the rooms at **Dunes Manor Hotel** (2800 Baltimore Ave., Ocean City; 800-523-2888; dunesmanor.com) are oceanfront. Located a block from the boardwalk, it has a heated pool, a sundeck, and rocking chairs on the veranda. Rooms in summer start at \$244.

Rooms at the **Princess Bayside** (48th St. and Coastal Hwy., Ocean City; 888-622-9743; princessbayside.com) have refrigerators and microwaves. In addition to a bayside beach, there's a rooftop pool and bar with a magnificent view of the bay. Rooms start at \$189 in summer.