

## Beaching it on the bay

Jewels of the Chesapeake attract [beach](#) lovers

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By Krista Thomas

When Maryland vacationers think beach, it starts with the drive over the Bay Bridge to the Eastern Shore. This summer, save a little gas and make a southward turn to Calvert County on Route 2 to Route 260 instead. Here lie Maryland's furlough-friendly "twin beaches," just minutes away from Washington.

Situated on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay, North Beach and Chesapeake Beach are fast becoming a beachcomber's best-kept vacation secret. Quiet, hidden, unpretentious and affordable, the North Beach area eagerly awaits tourists of all tastes: families, couples, friends, anglers and history buffs.

A taste of salty air on North Beach will fool you into thinking you're on the shores of Maryland's Atlantic Ocean. Cottages, boutiques, thinned out crowds, a half-mile boardwalk and sandy seaside areas will prove you've escaped to a quiet and charming beach destination just two hours from Frederick.

"A lot of people will have problems with summer vacations because of the cost," said Kitty Lusby, area realtor and vacation property [owner](#). "North Beach is a lot less expensive. You can control your costs better. You can spend a week here and take the kids to the local waterpark, beach, boardwalk, Six Flags, and other historic sites in Southern Maryland, like Solomon's Island and St. Mary's City. You can even charter a boat and go fishing with the kids. The state park in Lusby has a beautiful place to hike for a half or full day. You just plan it yourself to control the cost of your vacation."

In the midst of spiking gas costs, the sister cities introduced their quarter-ride transportation system this summer. Managed by Virginia Regional Transit, the Beach Trolley Association raised funds, driving the project to fruition. A hop on the trolley brings back the charm of yesteryear's public transportation with low-cost trolley rides. The trolley makes a round trip every two hours, looping through North Beach, Chesapeake Beach and Deale.

Marilyn Vanwagner, vice president and acting liaison for the Beach Trolley Association, said oftentimes there is standing room only on the trolley. "We believe everyone has a fun time on board. Our ridership has increased by 49 percent, comparing the last results from one weekend to the next. We feel it has been very successful and are happy with the results."

Over one hundred years ago, North Beach was a success story. Back then, the bustling resort town -- much like its sister-city, Chesapeake Beach, located a half-mile south -- brought folks from miles around. Through the 1920s, these resort cities attracted part-time residents from Washington and Baltimore for weekend retreats and summer-long vacations.

The Great Depression, Bay Bridge construction and a halt to legalized gambling took the crowds away from these popular destinations -- convenient destinations that boasted a race track, casinos, beaches, boardwalks and a railroad station.

Today, the twin cities are gearing up for a comeback. Returning vacationers are finding plenty to do in the area, with activities geared for just about any age. Although spending a day at the beach is a must for all visitors, options are plentiful when seeking amusement from the area's various museums and water excursions.--

In Chesapeake Beach, entertainment is abundant. The former Chesapeake Beach Railroad Station is home to today's Railway Museum. At no cost, the exhibitions capture the nostalgia of yesteryear, telling how the first passengers arrived in June 1900, why the station struggled, and when the station closed its doors in 1935.

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Photo by *courtesyPhoto*

The marina at the Chesapeake Resort & Spa attracts many seeking refuge on and off the waters of the Chesapeake Bay.



For natural recreation, fishing excursions off the dock at the marina behind the famed Rod N Reel Restaurant do reel in experienced watermen and novices. Choose a half-day or full-day fishing trip to fit your schedule. Charter companies supply the equipment, helping anglers make the most of their bay fishing experience.

Across the street, and as a diversion from bay swimming, the Chesapeake Beach Water Park boasts recreational fun for local residents and vacationers alike. Local citizens own and operate the water park facility, taking care of its numerous water slides, fountains, waterfalls, lagoon, kids' activity pool and water volleyball area.--

Just a half-mile north, North Beach's amenities are more relaxed, but on par with Chesapeake Beach's refined slice of life. North Beach's half-mile boardwalk with adjacent bike path allows for stunning views and ample ocean breezes off the bay, from sunrise to sunset. Those views keep folks coming back -- even fishermen.

The city controls beach use by charging a nominal fee to fish from the public pier or to gain access to its naturally beautiful beaches for bay swimming. Out-of-county fishermen and beachcombers can purchase a beach pass from the Welcome Center; beach chairs and umbrellas are also available for rent. At various times throughout the summer, the city hosts free summer concerts on the second Saturday of the month through August, and hosts Bayfest, a popular craft show held every year on the fourth weekend in August.

Local talents are also the pride and joy of North Beach, as attested by works of artisans displayed in many antique shops, boutiques and galleries. If pampering is on the to-do list, spas aim to please with makeover services from head to toe.

And for a little bit of history, North Beach's own Bayside History Museum gives ample information on the town's interesting annals of its popular resort-oriented past. Plot a course for this museum on its only open day of the week: Sundays from 1-4 p.m.

With few lodging options available in the area, plan any overnight trip in advance for guaranteed accommodations. Guests are welcome in area inns, bed and breakfast establishments, resorts, campgrounds and privately-owned cottages.

Beachfront spa resorts are a very popular choice for first-class lodging. Harrington Harbour Inn, with its Caribbean flair in well-appointed surroundings, and Chesapeake Beach Resort & Spa's full-service luxurious accommodations are the only two resort spas in the area. Harrington Harbour is North Beach's claim to exceptional accommodations in nearby Rose Haven and caters to the "weary traveler."

You'll find a top-notch casual dining experience at Mangos Bar & Grill overlooking the resort's 600-plus slip marina. Chesapeake Beach Resort & Spa is located right on the marina.

The freshest seafood is located on site at the Famous Rod 'N' Reel Restaurant, family-owned and operated for three generations. Or choose casual dining at Smokey Joe's Grill next door. Anglers, novice or pro, can schedule charter fishing expeditions from either resort.

Of course, more affordable accommodations lure those with camping inclinations, especially at nearby Breezy Point Beach & Campground, positioned right off the sparkling shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

Local real estate agencies have the scoop on private house rentals and can assist with booking weekly or weekend stays.

When shoring up accommodations, one thing is for certain. Locals call North Beach the "Jewel of the Chesapeake," and a simple stay in Maryland's nearby private oasis could be the next gem of all beach vacations.

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