

GREATESCAPES

Beach Destinations

Family approved

**A look at the mid-Atlantic coast's
family-friendliest destinations**

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A supplement to

THE DAILY RECORD

APRIL 2011

Family approved

Family-friendly options stretch from Jersey to the Carolinas

BY PATRICIA MINES
Special to The Daily Record



There are lots of options in choosing a beach that's right for each family. Sometimes simply visiting a smaller beach may be a more suitable option.

Shimmering waters, sun-drenched beaches and bustling boardwalks are among the top reasons American families head to our nation's beaches every year.

Popular because of their close proximity to home and their appeal to families wanting to spend quality time together, beach vacations are the mainstay of our culture and ideal for families with multiple interests. While mom and dad relax, the kids can build sand castles, boogie board or hit the boardwalk. But these destinations also offer something even more desirable. As the uncertain economy continues to affect vacation choices, many families are opting to trim costs by hopping in the car and heading for sun and sand.

"The majority of summer vacations will be to beach destinations, with many of them being close to home," said Nancy Schretter, managing editor of the Family Travel Network, citing Travel Industry of America research. "When we conducted our survey on America's best family beaches, we looked at several criteria — great sandy beaches with beautiful vistas, the availability of kid friendly accommodations and restaurants and lots of opportunities for summer fun."

Beach destinations are enticing up and down the East Coast, but planning a family beach vacation at the optimal time is important. Spring break, graduation celebrations and other big events that attract large groups of beachgoers could dampen the best vacation plans, particularly at those times when boardwalks and beaches are swarming with

people who may be drinking heavily or behaving inappropriately. Such problems can be avoided, however, through careful planning. There are lots of options in choosing a beach that's right for each family. Sometimes simply visiting a smaller beach may be a more suitable option. We've highlighted here some of the family-friendliest options in the Mid-Atlantic region.

New Jersey

Heavily branded by the doo-wop era of neon and rock and roll, **Wildwood, N.J.** is a fun family getaway. Voted "Top Ten American boardwalks" by Sherman Travel for two consecutive years, Wildwood has three amusement piers and water parks. Families can enjoy the five-mile stretch of Wildwood's beaches or stroll along its boardwalk to savor the sights, sounds and smells of a place that boasts a wide variety restaurants and eateries. Wildwood beachgoers can take part in surfing, skim boarding, fishing, volleyball, boogie boarding, parasailing, jet skiing, boating and fishing. Beaches at Wildwood are protected by lifeguards.

Ben Rose, director of marketing and public relations at the Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement and Development Authority, attributes Wildwood's popularity as a family destination to the availability of a variety of summer events.

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The two-year, multimillion dollar project will start this fall



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Beach vacations are the mainstay of our culture and ideal for families with multiple interests.

The beach offers several free events, fireworks and laser shows, festivals and concerts each year, and last year saw more than 9 million visitors, he said.

Clean beaches, an alcohol-free environment, several free family events and plenty of lodging top the list of reasons why nearly 100,000 people converge on **Ocean City, N.J.**, each year. Located 15 minutes north of Wildwood, Ocean City's 2 ½-mile long boardwalk includes amusement parks, a ferris wheel, a water park, go-karts, bicycle rentals, family concerts on the music pier and a wide variety of restaurants. If it rains, parents can easily divert the kids to indoor arcades, arts and crafts area or miniature golf courses along the boardwalk.

Voted as the best family beach resort in the nation by The Travel Channel, Ocean City, N.J. specializes in family entertainment for all age groups, like the yearly Weird Contest Week in August, said Michele Gillian, executive director of the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Beach passes for Ocean City, N.J., can be purchased by the day, week or for the entire season. During the summer months, lifeguards protect all beaches. The city also ensures wheelchair-bound visitors enjoy beach access.

Delaware

Due to their compact size and location along a 30-mile shoreline, Delaware's combined public beaches of **Rehoboth, Dewey, Fenwick** and **Bethany** make for a charming, and peaceful, beach vacation. Generally less crowded and more tranquil than more populated beach destinations, Rehoboth's mile-long boardwalk offers bike rentals, arts and crafts, free concerts, water biking and Funland, a popular tourist stop that includes children's rides, games and arcades. There are also plenty of food choices, from fine dining to fast food,

"Delaware is known for its pristine, family-friendly beaches," said Linda Parkowski, director of tourism for the State of Delaware. "Everything is within walking distance at Delaware's beach communities, making vacation visits convenient and affordable."

Sports enthusiasts need only to cross over to Dewey Beach for skim boarding, kayaking, boating and other water sports.

Rehoboth Beach offers plenty of places to stay, fine shops, night life and fine dining options. Delaware's sales tax-free status makes it all the more affordable. All beaches have lifeguards and are free for public use.

Families looking to escape to a more secluded place can snuggle up under a campfire at one of Delaware's oceanfront state parks and beaches. Many offer a wide variety of sporting activities, nature centers and miles of walking/hiking trails. Fenwick Island State Park, Delaware Seashore State Park and Cape Henlopen all are great options for nature lovers.

Maryland

Maryland beaches are among some of the more popular family destinations on the East Coast.

The **Ocean City** beach is free and

close enough for most Marylanders to enjoy an impromptu day of fun in the sun. A 2 ½-mile boardwalk offers rides, amusements and games or quick access to swimming, surfing, fishing or beach volleyball.

Hotels in Ocean City are abundant and come in a wide price range, but be sure to make reservations before peak season.

The wild ponies of **Assateague Island National Seashore** are a major draw, but its natural setting also is a good way to explore miles of unspoiled beaches on Maryland's only oceanfront state park. Located just nine miles south of Ocean City, Assateague offers swimming, beachcombing, sunbathing, surfing, fishing and water sports like kayaking and canoeing. Assateague's salt marshes, maritime forests and coastal bays offer great opportunities to see



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Many beaches have professional lifeguards on duty. Check before booking.

deer, water fowl and horses in their natural habitat.

"Families come to Assateague because we're one of the last remaining undeveloped barrier islands along the Mid-Atlantic seashore," said Carl Zimmerman, management assistant with the National Park Service. "The beach is the number one reason that people come. ... It's a natural beach, which is not as crowded."

About two miles of Assateague's beaches are guarded.

Families can opt for a few nights of camping along the secluded beaches, or stroll along the streets of the town of Berlin for a day of antiques. There's no fee for those visiting on foot or bicycle, but those arriving by cars will be charged a nominal entry fee.

See **FAMILIES 4**

For more information on the family-friendly beaches mentioned in this article:

The Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement and Development Authority
www.WildwoodsNJ.com
1-800-992-9732

Ocean City, N.J. Chamber of Commerce
www.oceancitychamber.com
1-800-232-2465

Southern Delaware Tourism
www.visitsoutherndelaware.com
1-866-284-7483

Delaware State Parks
www.destateparks.com
(302) 739-9220

Ocean City, Md. Chamber of Commerce
www.oceancity.org
(410) 213-0552

Assateague Island National Seashore
www.nps.gov/asis
(410) 641-1441

Virginia Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau
www.vbfun.com
1-800-822-3224

The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau
www.outerbanks.org
1-877-629-4386

Jockey's Ridge State Park
www.jockeysridgestatepark.com
(252) 441-2588

Disney's Hilton Head Island Resort
www.disneyworld.disney.go.com/resorts/hilton-head-island-resort
(407) 939-7828

South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism
www.discoverouthcarolina.com
(803) 734-1700



Families >> Family-friendly options abound up and down the East Coast

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Virginia

Many who visit **Virginia Beach** are attracted to the three-mile boardwalk, but there is more to see. Not only can families swim, bike, rollerblade or boogie board at the beach but plenty of hiking also is available. The **First Landing State Park** and **Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge** are two excellent choices for family adventures, especially when compared with the higher costs of visiting the state's aquarium or water park.

Home to **Kiptopeke State Park**, **Cape Charles Beach** and **Assateague/Chincoteague**, Virginia's Eastern Shore is varied, and offers opportunities for everything from bird watching to kayaking. The shallow waters of Cape Charles Beach make it especially suitable for small children while the combined areas of Assateague/Chincoteague are a great choice for hiking and seeing the area's famous wild horses. A stroll along the streets of Chincoteague reveals quaint bed and breakfasts, restaurants, shops, galleries and museums.

North Carolina

The Outer Banks stretch 130 miles along North Carolina's coast, an ideal setting for bird watching, hang gliding, hiking, bicycling, fishing, windsurfing, and simply spending a day on the beach.

Named by Fodor's as the top family beach of 2009, **Coquina Beach** is close to **Nags Head** within the **Cape Hatteras National Seashore**. Its easygoing environment and pristine beaches are definite advantages for families looking to get away from the hustle and bustle, but the area's access to hiking, fishing and boating are family favorites as well. Beaches and parking are free, and there



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“The bulk of our accommodations are rental homes, where families can vacation with friends, siblings or relatives. No matter where you stay, there's always beach access within minutes.”

Aaron Tuell, Outer Bank Visitors Bureau

are many affordable hotel options.

“It's a safe, clean environment with access to the beach, free public parking, no special permits, pet-friendly lodging and beaches and accommodations that are more suited for families,” said Aaron Tuell, public relations director for the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. “The bulk of our accommodations are rental homes, where families can vacation with friends, siblings or relatives. No matter where you stay, there's al-

ways beach access within minutes.”

Kill Devil Hills and neighboring **Jockey's Ridge State Park** offer the chance for children to enjoy go-karts or miniature golf. Older children and adventurous adults can try hang gliding in Jockey's Ridge, which also is home to the tallest living sand dune. The area is not overpopulated with commercial boardwalks but cater instead to families wanting a quieter, more relaxed vacation setting. For families wanting to

stay under one roof, North Carolina has an abundance of vacation home rentals, from two-bedroom up to 10 or more.

South Carolina

One of the more picturesque of all beaches, **Disney's Hilton Head Island Resort** is tucked away along a 15-acre sanctuary of white, powdery sands, five-star accommodations and the kind of family-friendly activities Disney is well known for. Guests can navigate the grounds by foot or bicycle. Either way, the occasional hammock or Adirondack chair beckon the weary travelers to relax.

The main resort includes two pools, a 70-foot waterslide, large toddlers' pool, a 25-person spa tub, a community hall with big screen TV, shuffleboard, tours of the marsh, bird-watching, horseshoes, fishing and an expansive playground. Guests shuttled to the resort's club house can swim anywhere along its three-mile stretch of beaches, play pool, table games, video games and ping-pong.

Myrtle Beach is an iconic landmark that has earned the reputation as the most visited beach on the East Coast. It offers wide beaches along a scenic stretch of the Atlantic Ocean, fishing piers and a lively boardwalk where daily activities like juggling, acrobatics, stilt walking, face painting and ballooning create a carnival like. Myrtle Beach is free and life guarded during the summer season. Home to a pavilion of over 40 thrill seeking rides, Myrtle Beach offers hundreds of eateries, budget- to five-star accommodations and a wide array of family fun activities. Adding to the excitement this summer is the Skywheel, billed as the largest Ferris wheel to be found east of the Mississippi River. At 18 stories high, the wheel will include 42 glass enclosed gondolas, each able to hold up to six passengers.

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| Blue Water Keyes | Sea Cabins |
| Buena Vista Plaza | Sea Castle |
| Carolina Reef | Sea Marsh Towers I |
| Chateau By The Sea | Sea Pointe |
| Chateau Manor | Sea Winds |
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| North Beach Plantation | Water Pointe II |
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It's a beach buyers' market

Falling prices, low rates mean those who can afford a second home should dive in

BY JEN DEGREGORIO
Special to The Daily Record

Real estate dealers up and down the East Coast are forecasting pleasant weather for anyone interested in buying beachfront property this year.

With 30-year mortgage rates below 5 percent and existing home sales inching slowly upward, a buyers' market has opened for vacation homes in Ocean City, Md., and other tourist hubs from North Carolina to New Jersey.

Sales of vacation homes nationwide rose nearly 8 percent in 2009 to 553,000 homes, according to the National Association of Realtors. That is about half the number of such purchases made in 2005, the height of the real estate bubble's inflation. But last year's bump in vacation sales — along with a nearly 13 percent jump in median price — offers a positive sign for the future of the second-home market. NAR expects similar results for 2010, to be released at the end of March, spokesman Walter Moloney said. Meanwhile, the nation's aging population promises to stabilize the second-home market in the years ahead, according to Lawrence Yun, NAR's chief economist.

"Historically, people become interested in buying a second home in their mid-40s," Yun said in statement. "The large number of people who are now in their 30s and 40s will dominate the second-home market in the coming decade with a strong underlying demand, although sales in a given year will vary depending on the economy."

See MARKET 6



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Market >> In many coastal markets, good buys can be found at good prices

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At the moment, however, home prices are still down significantly from what they were several years ago. In Ocean City, Md., properties are selling at about 25 to 30 percent less than they did in 2006, said Pat Terrill, manager of Prudential Carruthers Realtors. The flip side of depressed pricing is opportunity for potential investors.

“People are getting fantastic buys right now,” Terrill said. “There is some great investment opportunity.”

The news has not escaped buyers, if a glimpse of state sales data proves any indication. Homes in Worcester County — where Ocean City, Md. is located — sold for about 10.5 percent more last month than they did in January 2010, according to median data from NAR. That compares with a 4.5 percent drop in median prices statewide. The number of home sales in Worcester County also rose by about 3 percent from January 2010 to January 2011. Although that figure is a percentage point below statewide sales, the county fared far better than Frederick County, Baltimore City and other jurisdictions that saw home sales fall by more than 10 percent.

“Our conversation to clients right now is that there’s never been a better time to buy,” said Mark Fritschle, owner of the Mark Fritschle Group in Ocean City. “The best time to buy is the worst time to buy, just like stocks.”

The best deals, according to Fritschle, typically come in the form of new condominiums. The construction boom of the early 2000s left building owners holding a lot of debt when the real estate market tanked, and beachfront condos that were projected to sell for more than \$1 million now are priced at about \$500,000, Fritschle said.



What’s available?

For an industrious buyer, buying a vacation or investment property near the beach should require little more than patience and a good credit history.

Real estate prices are inching back upward after crashing in popular vacation spots from Ocean City, Md., to the Outer Banks, but relatively low prices continue to foster a buyers’ market.

Gone are the days when banks will loan cash to anyone looking to flip a house, but credit is available for buyers who are serious about owning a second home.

“At this point, if someone makes an offer, they’re going to buy a house,” said John Atkinson, owner of E.R.A. Atkinson Realty Inc. in Virginia Beach.

Waterfront property is always desirable, so it is difficult to find much overlooking the water for less than \$200,000, Atkinson said. But, he conceded, a savvy buyer often can find out-of-the-way deals by searching a wide variety of listings. Foreclosures have put many bank-owned properties on the market for just a fraction of what they cost a few years ago. Overzealous builders also delivered an oversupply of high-end condos, many of which are now being advertised at discounted rates.

“Pricing really varies at this point,” Atkinson said. “It depends what you’re looking for.”

Jen DeGregorio

A cruise through online listings reveals a similar story at condominiums elsewhere along the East Coast. The Holiday Sands in Myrtle Beach, S.C., a condo development that opened in 2007, recently advertised a closeout sale for remaining units. A two-bedroom condo with an ocean view was on the block for \$175,000 in mid-March, down from the \$340,000 pre-construction price. A one-bedroom unit was advertised for \$99,900, although originally it was priced at more than \$200,000.

“You can get a lot more house for \$200,000 now than you used to,” said Greg Cremia, owner of Shore Realty in North Carolina. “Basically prices are back to what they were in 2002 and 2003, which is still up from where they were in 2001.”

Cremia said his business is doing

much better this year than last, and he reported “plenty of buyers,” despite the nation’s larger economic problems.

There also are deals to be had in the single-family home market.

“The reality (is) striking our sellers,” said John Atkinson, owner of E.R.A. Atkinson Realty Inc. in Virginia Beach. “Sellers are willing to settle for less than they were when they were holding out for what the neighbors got a couple of years ago.”

Some of the swankiest beachfront properties also appear to be down in value, even as homes in the surrounding communities gained or kept value. In New Jersey, shoreline towns saw home prices decline while their home counties fared better, according to a recent report in The New York Times. Home prices held steady in Ocean

County, N.J., for example, while Seaside Heights saw its median home price drop by more than 7.5 percent.

Buyers generally appear conservative, especially when it comes to major luxury purchases like a second home.

Indeed, even as buyers upped their purchases of vacation homes — defined by NAR as homes meant for personal retreat, not to produce income — they made fewer investments. The market share of investment purchases — homes meant to produce incomes for their owners — fell to 17 percent of all home purchases in 2009, down from 21 percent in 2008, while vacation home purchases rose by a percentage point to 10 percent of all purchases. The median investment property sold for \$105,000 last year, down 2.8 percent from \$108,000 in 2008.

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Tiki time out

Daily Record photographer Rich Dennison grew up in Bel Air. His parents and other family members often took him out on their boats when he was growing up, and he still spends a great deal of time on the water today.

Fishing and boating on the Chesapeake Bay are his first loves, and on many of those summer excursions he ends up, at some point in the day, at one of the hundreds of marina or beach cove tiki bars throughout the Maryland and Virginia bay region. For this photo feature, he traveled to three tiki bars through the course of a few weeks in the summer of 2010.

“I wanted to shoot a lot of pictures that were colorful and fun,” he said. “I tried the signature dish at each place. Each place has a different atmosphere,” Dennison said. “Some have actual interior spaces for restaurants; some are completely outdoors with their own beach areas.”

Almost every waterfront town or marina on the bay has its own, or one that operates independently just nearby, catering to sun-burned fishermen or families just out enjoying their boats on a hot summer day.

“Everyone has their favorite. They’re really everywhere. If you talk to anyone in the region, they’ll mention that they go to this one all the time near their house. I was really amazed by how many there really are.”

And despite the fact that most of them serve alcohol, during the day they are family-friendly destinations. Most present live music during the weekends, and many have beaches where families can spread out and take a break while their children — and, frequently, dogs — enjoy the sand and the outdoors.

“When you’re at many of them, you feel as though you could be on a Caribbean island,” Dennison said. “They’re really just a fun escape. They’re a great way for a family to spend the day.”

Tara E. Buck

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICH DENNISON



- 1. Crabs, with plenty of Old Bay, at the Hard Yacht Café at Anchor Bay East Marina, Dundalk.
- 2. A good old fashioned burger and fries at the Calypso Bay Restaurant.
- 3. The tiki bar at Jellyfish Joel's.
- 4. Beach chairs, a kayak and raft at the beach near Jellyfish Joel's.
- 5. Diners can eat a bite, or relax and read, at outdoor tables at the Calypso Bay Restaurant in Tracy's Landing, in southern Anne Arundel County.
- 6. Signs at the Hard Yacht Café.
- 7. Swimmers and boaters head to Jellyfish Joel's.

Roughing it

Camping expands beachgoers' horizons

BY BARBARA PASH
Special to The Daily Record

Connie Yingling grew up camping. Every weekend in the summer, her parents would load up the camper and off the family would go to another Maryland state park. Today, Yingling and her husband, Jack, do the same, and she can't imagine vacationing any other way.

"There's a culture to camping," said Yingling, with the Maryland Office of Tourism. "It's friendly, it's safe and there's the nature aspect."

From state parks to private campgrounds, the mid-Atlantic coast is an ideal destination for those who prefer to camp near the beach. In some states, camping on the beach means choosing a state park. Private campgrounds typically are located further inland, although still within comfortable driving distance.

Camping venues along the ocean shoreline are so popular that they commonly end up booked for the entire summer season.

Breanne Preisen, of the Delaware State Parks System, can attest to that: "We accept reservations seven months in advance, and we fill up pretty quickly once reservations open."



Connie Yingling and her husband, Jack, purchased a new RV last year after outgrowing their first pop-up camper model.

Who's roughing it?

Private campgrounds today pride themselves on offering the same amenities as a hotel or condo/resort. "We have everything but the build-

ing," said David Gorin, executive director of the Virginia Campground Association, the trade group for private campgrounds there.

Typical amenities include swimming — at the beach and/or pools — electronic gate access, playgrounds, children's programming, evening activities, tennis and basketball courts, golf courses, game rooms, mini-food marts and Internet access.

"People are looking for those things. Wi-fi is a big draw, particularly if they'll be here for a few days," Gorin said, adding that many private campgrounds also offer cabins, for people who want to join the family camping trip but don't want to rough it themselves.

two] is age," said Jay Otto, executive director of the New Jersey Campground Owners Association. "You reach a certain age, you don't want to sleep on the ground anymore. You may start with a pop-up camper, move up to a travel trailer and then, perhaps, a motor home."

Deb Carter, executive director of the Maryland Association of Campgrounds, offered a different opinion: "Tenters feel they are the actual campers, the true campers. Often, they are 'green' people," or vacationers who are environmentally conscious, and involved.

"It's a totally different environment than you find in a hotel."

David Gorin, executive director
Virginia Campground Association

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In a tent... down by the sea

An insiders' guide to the best beaches for campers

Once your family has decided to venture down the camping route, there are many options to consider, from just where you want to spend your camping vacation, to what activities you want to enjoy. We've compiled a short guide to some of the Mid-Atlantic's more popular beach camping destinations.



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New Jersey

There are no private campgrounds on the Jersey shore. "There's no land left to establish them," said Jay Otto, executive director of the New Jersey Campground Owners Association.

Cape May is the region's most popular destination. Besides Cape May Point State Park, at least 35 private campgrounds are located within one to five miles of the beach.

"People call all the time asking, 'Where can I camp on the beach?'" Otto said. "We tell them, the closest we can get you is one mile and you can ride a bike to the beach."

North of Cape May, from Atlantic City down to Long Beach Island, private campgrounds are typically found about 10 to 15 miles inland.

Camping at a New Jersey state park runs \$15 to \$20 per night for tent sites. Private campgrounds can cost from \$35 to \$65 per night, depending on the location and amenities chosen. Because of the lack of electric and water hook-ups, state parks attract tenters. Private campgrounds cater to RV owners, although tent sites are available, too.

"All the private campgrounds in New Jersey usually sell out during the summer because of the market area," Otto said, referring to vacationers heading "down shore" from New York City and Philadelphia, not to mention those hailing from densely populated New Jersey itself.

Delaware

There are no public or private campgrounds on the Delaware shore. But two state parks are located less than one mile from the beach.

"You can hear the ocean," Breanne Preisen, of the Delaware State Parks System, said of Delaware Seashore State Park, in Rehoboth Beach, and Cape Henlopen State Park, in nearby Lewes.

In-state fees range from \$26 per night for tenters to \$34 per night for RVers.

Private campgrounds in this beach resort area are located about 10 to 20 miles inland.

"It's a busy, tourist-y area," Preisen said. "Most of our campground users are from out of state."

Maryland

Assateague Island offers Maryland's only campground on the beach. Located south of Ocean City, the barrier island is split between Assateague State Park and Assateague Island National Seashore, a federal facility.

State parks take reservations up to one year and one day in advance, and Assateague fills up quickly in the summer. Last year, the federal facility opened a new visitors' center.

Assateague State Park has 350 sites for tents and RVs, but has limited hookups for electricity. Fees range from \$30 per night for campers to \$40 per night for campers with electricity.

Two private campgrounds can be found within five miles of Ocean City — Frontier Town and Castaways. Typical summer rates for Frontier Town, which provides free shuttle service to the beach, are \$48 per night for primitive sites, and \$82 per night for sites that include water and electricity.

Deb Carter, executive director of the Maryland Association of Campgrounds, said the two private campgrounds are so popular with out-of-state visitors that they're marketed with the Ocean City Tourism Bureau.

"Because of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and the Harbor Tunnel, they get visitors from Virginia," said Carter, owner of Buttonwood Beach RV Resort, a 537-site campground on the Chesapeake Bay that receives most of its visitors from Philadelphia, New Jersey and Delaware.

Virginia

Virginia Beach is a top destination for beach campers, said David Gorin, executive director of the Virginia Campground Association. Located in the southeast corner of Virginia, in the Hampton Roads area, Virginia Beach is home to two state parks — First Landing State Park and False Cape State Park.

When it comes to private campgrounds, "there's not a big selection, but some of them are quite large, with lots of space," Gorin said. Holiday Trav-L Park, about 1 1/2 miles from the beach, has 1,000 campsites. Another is the Virginia Beach KOA, which offers everything but the kitchen sink in the way of amenities, as well as cabin/cottage lodging.

North Carolina

The Outer Banks are barrier islands only about as wide as two to three miles at their widest points. They are home to more than 22 campgrounds, according to Susan Dosier, of the North Carolina Tourism office.

Camping is allowed behind most beaches' dunes, not on the beaches themselves.

"You walk over the dunes and you're at the water," said Charlene Barbour, executive director of the Carolinas Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.

Two state offices cover camping in the Outer Banks. The Outer Banks Tourism Bureau extends from Duck south to Ocracoke Island. The Crystal Coast Tourism Authority covers the region known as the Southern Outer Banks, which picks up at the Cape Lookout National Seashore and extends all the way south to Emerald Isle, off Carteret County (a fisherman's paradise).

The Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Cape Lookout National Seashore are national parks. A third federal facility, Croatan National Forest, has a campground on the Bogue Sound, not on the ocean-side. Hammocks Beach State Park also is located on the Crystal Coast.

Several private campgrounds can be found in the Outer Banks region, many only a mile or so from the beach, although some do offer ocean views. Camp Hatteras Resort, located in historic Rodanthe on Hatteras Island, near the Camp Hatteras National Seashore, has 50 acres of ocean-front to sound-front camping. A Cape Hatteras KOA also is close by.

South Carolina

Four state parks can be found along South Carolina's coastal area. All may be reserved up to a year in advance, and all four are fully booked during the summer, according to Marion Edmonds, of the South Carolina Department of Parks and Tourism. Rates are from \$25 to \$30 per night with electricity and water.

Two state parks are located in the Myrtle Beach area, a popular camping destination. Myrtle Beach State Park includes 302 sites — the smallest of the state camping parks with electricity and water. Huntington Beach State Park is larger in size, but includes only 131 sites with electricity and water.

The town has grown around Myrtle Beach State Park, which now finds itself practically in the center of the hustle and bustle. Huntington Beach State Park is 10 miles farther south, a bit more isolated from the activity.

Two other coastal campgrounds are Edisto Beach State Park, located south of Charleston, and Hunting Island State Park, east of Beaufort. The latter is the busiest park in the state, receiving more than 1 million visitors annually. It also is the largest state park, consisting of 5,000 acres, the entire island.

Several private campgrounds, including a Myrtle Beach KOA, can be found along the coast, but none near Hunting Island.

In the Myrtle Beach area, "some of the large private campgrounds closed because the property had gotten so valuable," Edmonds said.

Barbara Pash

kids. Now they are coming with their kids and grandkids," said Marion Edmonds, of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

Campers can choose to take advantage, or not, of the campgrounds' amenities, while still taking time out to enjoy the boardwalks, visit amusement parks and fill up on cotton candy.

"Typically, people who stay at a

campground near the beach go to the beach during the day. They may do the campground activities at night," said New Jersey's Otto.

Camping is convenient. Whatever the family needs is all packed and ready to go in a camper. At private campgrounds, Otto said some RV owners will rent a site and park their vehicles for the entire summer, returning on weekends and holidays.

"It pays if you live in a city and have to pay storage" for a camper, he said.

Getting out to enjoy nature is another part of the allure of camping, Edmonds said.

Campers "like being close to nature but in a safe, controlled environment," he said. "They like that [the state park] is not developed but they have conveniences like electricity

and water."

Yingling said she and her husband started out as tenters, but have since bought a camper. Last fall, they stayed at Pocomoke State Park in Worcester County, about 20 miles outside of Ocean City, to attend a classic car show at the beach town.

"It's less expensive than renting a hotel room and you can do all the sightseeing you want," she said.

Everything old will be . *new again*



Maryland's Ocean City to tackle first boardwalk renovation since 1962

BY RACHEL BERNSTEIN

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Alaska Stand was started in 1933 by Bob Givarz's grandfather, and stand workers have been feeding burgers and grilled cheese sandwiches to Ocean City, Md. visitors ever since.

Ocean City, and its iconic all-wood boardwalk, set the scene for a summer full of people watching, bike riding, eating Fisher's caramel popcorn and taking in the Atlantic Ocean from a small distance. Its array of shops, eateries and seaside hotels evokes memories that never get stale and scarcely change over generations.

"I've been on the boardwalk since I was a little boy," Givarz said. "You and I can go barefoot, and having that tactile feel under your feet of the boards, and the smells that ground into the boardwalk: pizza, popcorn, caramel corn, that tar aroma on a hot summer day. To me, I flash back on those memories as a kid. I just think it's sort of the whole atmosphere."

Keeping the atmosphere of an all-wood boardwalk was important to Givarz, whose stand sits on Atlantic Avenue, when city officials opened up an online poll for the fate of the boardwalk's renovation. The city will update its boardwalk starting later this year.

Rest easy: Its old-fashioned, all-wood



RICH DENNISON

Ocean City this fall will begin a two-year, multimillion dollar renovation of its famed wooden boardwalk. An online poll found that visitors overwhelmingly preferred maintaining its all-wood surface, a costly proposition.

look will be maintained.

In January, the city asked members of the public for input on the type of surface that should be used on the popular promenade. The online poll was available Jan. 24 until Feb. 28 through the town's municipal and tourism websites. Voters were able to choose either an all-wood surface, a concrete train lane or boards with a stamped concrete train lane.

The two-year, multimillion-dollar renovation will be done in phases, during the fall and winter months so as to not affect Ocean City's peak tourist season.

The all-wood surface was the most popular and favored choice. The supporting structures of the boardwalk

might be built with different materials; however, it will look the same as it does today. The option is the most traditional, yet most expensive to build and maintain, costing between \$6.5 million and \$9.5 million, depending on the type of materials used, Ocean City Engineer Terry McGean said.

Replacing boards with a plain concrete train lane was the second option. From 4th to 27th streets, the boardwalk would be replaced with a combination of wood board and concrete. The boardwalk would have been divided into three lanes — the least expensive option to build and maintain.

The last option was to have boards with a stamped concrete train lane, which would have replaced the boardwalk from 4th to 27th streets with two outer lanes surfaced with boards and an inner concrete train lane. The concrete would have been colored and stamped to look like wood boards.

Options for concrete were considered given the boardwalk trains' impact and wear and tear. The reconstructed boardwalk still will have a concrete substructure to accommodate heavy trams, fire trucks and other vehicles that shortened the life of the existing wood deck and pilings, McGean said.

The last time Ocean City's boardwalk was thoroughly renovated was in 1962, in the wake of a damaging storm. Major repairs were done to the decking after Hurricane Gloria ripped through the boardwalk in 1985. The deck materials have a lifespan of about eight to 10 years, but the city had never performed such an extensive renovation before.

"The decking is all very worn out," McGean said. "We don't have much choice on it. If we let it go another few years, it would become a safety concern."

McGean said the city is now in the process of evaluating different types of wood and wood treatments. Options will be presented to the mayor and city council to select one, then the city will move

forward with bidding out the project and the construction.

The Ocean City Council voted to renovate the boardwalk after a public hearing on the project in March. The city's mayor and council were presented with results from the online poll, in which 19,307 people voted. The all-wood surface option won, taking slightly more than 50 percent of the vote. The stamped concrete train lane was the second highest vote-getter, with about 34 percent of the vote. Votes were cast from 2,000 locations, even outside the country, town spokeswoman Donna Abbott said.

"I think there's a lot of passion," Abbott said. "With people's experiences in visiting the boardwalk, I think it struck a chord."

While the all-wood option was the most expensive of the three options, the majority of council members felt that preserving the tradition and heritage of the wooden boardwalk outweighed the additional costs.

Several boardwalk business owners also praised the council's decision.

Glenn Irwin, executive director of the Ocean City Development Corp., said that his organization usually doesn't get involved in boardwalk matters, but this time he felt the agency should speak up.

"Whatever was going to be effective, it was important to get that wood plank as a visible portion of the boardwalk," Irwin said. "Looking over the 50-year life cycle of the boardwalk, the changes in cost savings with the two other options were very nominal."

The idea of keeping a genuine wood boardwalk also was important, since many boardwalks are becoming an asphalt or concrete mixture when they are renovated, he said.

Givarz agreed the renovation was necessary, even if visitors can't visibly tell from the surface.

"It looked like Swiss cheese on these boards. There's not much to nail the deck on to," he said.

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Southwest opens up S.C.'s Upstate

Greenville offers an inland alternative for weary beachgoers

BY BEN MOOK

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Heading to the beaches near Charleston, S.C., this summer?

With Southwest Airlines' addition of a new direct route to Greenville, S.C., it has never been easier for visitors to make the trip to the picturesque area known as "Upstate."

Located between Atlanta, Ga., and Charlotte, N.C., Greenville is set among the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains — only a three-and-a-half hour drive from Charleston. The city of 62,000 boasts attractions ranging from a 60-foot waterfall running through downtown, a thriving arts culture and recreational offerings from golf and baseball to taking laps in a BMW at the automaker's Performance Center.

"We have a lot of great things to offer travelers," said Diane Wilson, director of information services at the Greenville Convention & Visitors Bureau. "And, we're pretty excited about the new route and making it easier for people to come see all that Greenville has to offer."

Starting March 12, Southwest became the first carrier at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport to offer non-stop flights to Greenville. The carrier added the route the same day it added another new route to Charleston, S.C. When it came time to choose the route, Southwest spokesman Chris Mainz said BWI was a logical choice.

"BWI has been a major focus for us, so when we open up a new market it's natural for us look there," Mainz said. "So far, the flights are full and demand has been high. We're very happy."

Southwest now offers two daily roundtrips to Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport — Roger Milliken Field. GSP serves more than 1.5 million passengers a year and is served by 17 airlines offering nearly 80 non-stop daily departures to 19 major cities throughout the country. The Greenville visitors' bureau is hopeful the new non-stop route between BWI and Greenville will help to grow the city's meeting and tourism business.

"This new route is critical for us in

terms of vacation and convention and meeting business," said Todd A. Bertka, vice president of sales at the Greenville Convention & Visitors Bureau. "There are lots of opportunities with the D.C.-Baltimore community and being able to tap into that market is critically important for us."

For those making the trip, one of Greenville's biggest draws is the downtown itself.

The city has plenty to offer whether the visitor is on foot, on bike or aboard the city's free trolley service. One of the most striking features is Liberty Bridge, a \$4.5 million, 355-foot pedestrian walkway right in the heart of downtown. The curved suspension bridge crosses over, and provides a panoramic view of, the 28-foot Reedy River Falls.

The city is home to Michelin North America and recently made the Men's Journal's 2011 "Best Places to Live 2011" list alongside New Orleans, Frisco, Texas and Durango, Colo. The magazine cited Greenville's pedestrian-friendly downtown as one of its

main draws, along with its five-year-old baseball stadium, a scaled-down version of the famous Fenway Park in Boston.

Fluor Field at the West End is home to the Greenville Drive, the city's minor league baseball team and a Red Sox affiliate. Fluor is a 5,700-seat stadium that features a version of the Green Monster. The 30-foot-high wall in left field also houses a manual scoreboard.

Another corporate citizen of the Greenville area is Bayerische Motoren Werke AG (or BMW). Fans and admirers of all things BMW can make the short trip to Greer, S.C., just north of Greenville and about halfway to Spartanburg. The company's only manufacturing plant in the U.S. is located in Greer, where BMW's X3, X5 and X6 sport utility models are built. The plant employs more than 7,000 people.

Greer also is home to the Zentrum, the only BMW museum in the U.S., next door to the BMW manufacturing plant. Visitors can tour the plant or step it up a notch and head to the BMW Performance Center for the "Ultimate BMW

Experience." For a fee, visitors can venture out on the track with a certified BMW instructor and put the cars through their paces.

For something a little different there are options aplenty for art lovers in Greenville, including the Greenville County Museum of Art, home to "Andrew Wyeth: The Greenville Collection," which includes 35 paintings covering every period of the artist's career.

The museum's "Contemporary Collection" is made up of examples spanning every major movement in American art. It features work by artists including Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Leon Golub.

For symphony and ballet enthusiasts, The Peace Center for the Performing Arts — home to the Greenville Symphony, Greenville Chorale, Carolina Ballet Theatre, South Carolina Children's Theatre and International Ballet — also can be found downtown.

"Greenville is really the kind of place that catches you by surprise," Bertka said. "It's the kind of place that has a small-town feel, but you won't want for shopping and dining and attractions."



GREENVILLE, SC CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

A 60-ft. waterfall can be found in the heart of Greenville, S.C.'s downtown. The city's proximity to most of the state's beaches, and its many amenities, might make it an attractive day trip option for sun-weary travelers.





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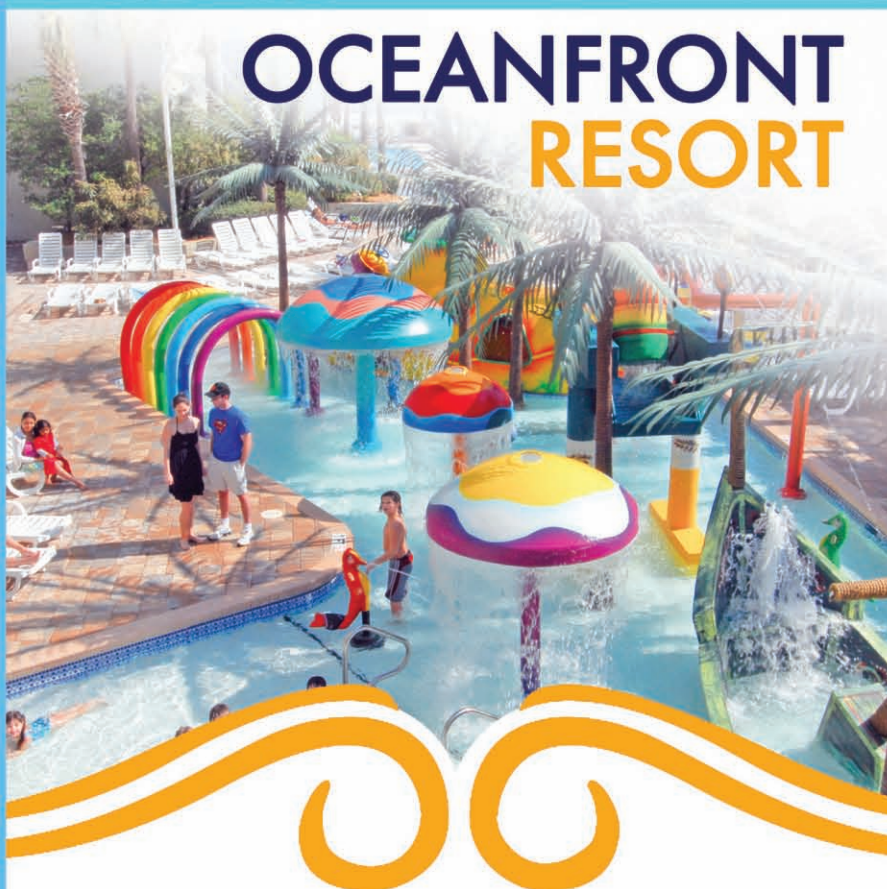
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