

# CAPE MAY: NOT JUST A DAY AT THE BEACH

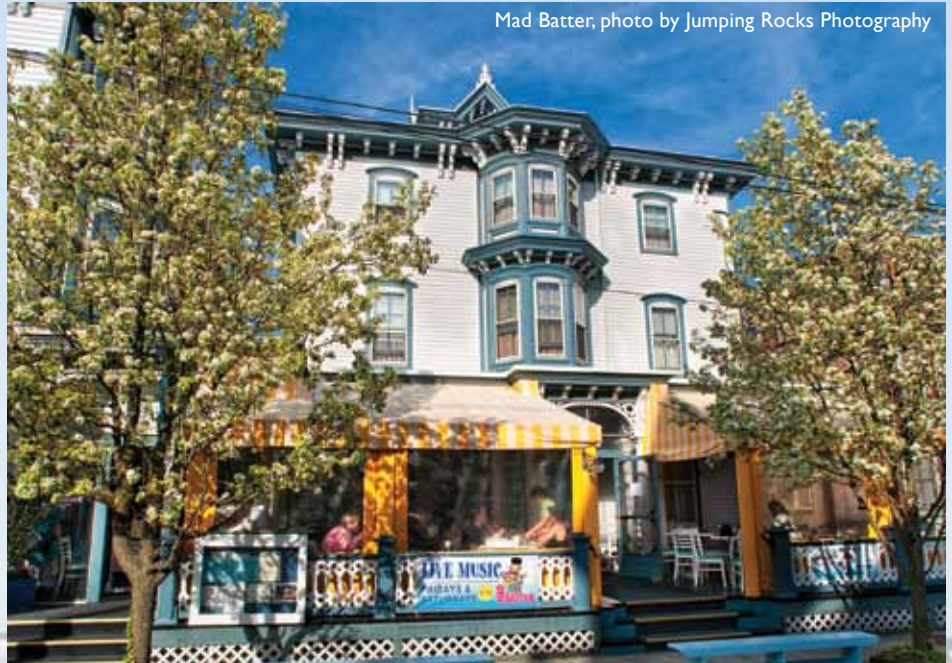
By Demetra M. Pappas.....

Cape May is, as a matter of geography, at the tip of the Jersey Shore (but in all other ways, leaves Snooki and The Situation far behind). Cape May's beaches so routinely make top ten lists of prettiest, cleanest, and nicest that a lovely day at the beach is axiomatic for day, weekend, and vacationing visitors. Feeling the sun on the shoulders, wriggling the toes in the sand, and watching the waves roll in are all important activities, but there is more to Cape May than a "day at the beach."

As the only city in the US to receive the distinction of being repeatedly named by Better Homes & Gardens and Architecture Magazine as "one of the prettiest painted places," there are several house-related activities. In addition to the obvious walks, there are a number of trolley tours that depart from the centrally located information booth of the pedestrian-friendly Washington Street Mall. Historic District Trolley Tours leave several times daily.

For those who enjoy an inside (and insider's) view of a house, the Emlen Physick Estate (1048 Washington Street, www.cape-maymac.com) is a winner. This 1879 estate was rescued from near-certain demolition (for track houses!) and lovingly restored to its original glory. Docents are well-educated on the house, its occupants, its repatriated artifacts, and its back stories; Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts Curator Elan Zingman-Leith continues to acquire period furniture and artifacts, such as a restored dining room formally set for dinner, and library books of the original owner. Tours end in the Carriage House, which shows exhibits, like the current "Remembering South Cape May: The Jersey Shore Town that Vanished into the Sea," created by guest curator Robert Kenselaar. Another way to see the Physick Estate is to attend one of the productions mounted, in situ, by Actors Offstage, such as Ray Crew's *Finding Faith*. For those truly committed to a "ghostly" experience, there is also a Ghosts of Cape May trolley tour (departing from the Washington Street Mall) of haunted properties on Saturdays at 9 pm, which are conducted by Actor Offstage.

The Cape May Stage, housed at the Robert Shackleton Playhouse (corner of Bank and Lafayette Streets, 609-884-1341, www.



Mad Batter, photo by Jumping Rocks Photography

capemaystage.com) is currently producing *Say Goodnight, Gracie*, a multimedia tour-de-force presentation of George Burns' life, focused upon his personal and professional relationship with collaborator-wife Gracie Allen. Joel Rooks becomes, rather than merely plays, George Burns. Tickets for *The Understudy* (June 22-July 30) and *Steel Magnolias* (August 3-September 10) are available individually and by subscription. Fall offerings include *The Woolgatherer*, a revival of Tony winner *Red*, and *This Wonderful Life*, adapted for the Christmas season from the Capra film.

A different kind of arts experience awaits visitors to Congress Hall's Sea Spa (205 Perry Street, 609-884-6543, www.congresshall.com), across from the oceanfront. The shellac manicure (also known as a uv gel manicure) and shellac pedicure promise (and deliver) nails that last over two weeks with narry a chip, even on those most hard on their mani-pedis. Facials have whimsical names such as "the long weekend," "the change of scenery," and the bi-partisan "running for Congress." One particularly nice feature of the treatments is that facialists customize and explain the treatments and then allow recipients to choose between the standard treatment and a customized version. *Continued on Page 87*



Emlen Physick Estate, photo courtesy of Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts & Humanities (MAC)





Carriage House Tearoom & Cafe,  
courtesy of Mid-Atlantic Center for  
the Arts & Humanities (MAC)

Perhaps the most prominent activity, on or off the beach, is enjoying life as a culinary tourist in Cape May, a destination dining location. The Washington Inn (801 Washington Street, 609-884-5697, [washingtoninn.com](http://washingtoninn.com)), in the heart of the Cape May Historic District, was originally built in 1840 as a plantation home. The Washington Inn's five unique dining rooms range from summer patio dining to fireside tables.

Dining at the Washington Inn is an experience, as well as a meal. Appetizers include bright and beautiful salads, and there are stand outs, such as the rock shrimp and lobster bisque, replete with both, and enhanced by more than a drop of brandy. Salads are bright and colorful, with creative dressings (such as buttermilk blue for the field green salad with beets, red onions and toasted pecans). Entrees quite reasonably focus on seafood, with one diner, a self-proclaimed salmon expert, pronouncing the planca salmon (served with spring vegetables, hand mashed creamer potatoes, and a dill beurre blanc) the best salmon she had ever eaten. Featured dishes such as the pan-seared tuna steak with "fennel pollen," tender caramelized fennel risotto and a sundried tomato vinaigrette lure diners from the splendid seafood, meat, and fowl offerings (the duck cassoulet works a treat). Consider inviting Mario, the wine steward, to make a selection from the superb cellar (the pinot noir marimar Torres Sonoma 08 was a lovely introduction to this richly flavored wine). Have at least one bite of dessert – and listen attentively to seasonal delights, such as strawberry shortcake (actually a biscuit) with lightly fluffy whipped cream.

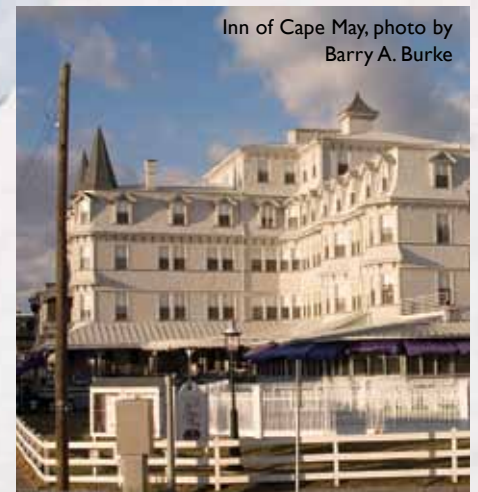
Union Park Dining Room (727 Beach

Avenue, 609-884-8811, [www.unionpark-diningroom.com](http://www.unionpark-diningroom.com)) in the historic Hotel Macomber is literally across the road from the Atlantic Ocean. Its elegant dining rooms (try to get a table in the library!) set a lovely stage for Chef John Schatz' cuisine. Appetizers focus on the ocean's offerings, with mixed Cape May Salts and Beau Soleil Oysters (accompanied by a chili lime sauce and a cocktail sauce), and may be accompanied by a genial wait staff tutorial upon request. The new American menu also has daily specials, such as arctic char over lobster and ricotta gnocchi, with sautéed edamame, finished with basil oil, which bring out the subtleties of the palate.

Oyster fans might also want to visit Althea's at the Inn of Cape May (7 Ocean Street, 609-884-5555, [www.innofcapemay.com](http://www.innofcapemay.com)). This casual American oceanfront space offers a special spa menu for those who may want to balance the namesake oysters (baked with spinach, white wine, garlic, black pepper, and pecorino Romano cheese) with a light entrée and also has a "first seating" menu that offers smaller portions for diners concerned about reducing larger waistlines (or maintaining smaller ones). There are a number of nice touches at Althea's, but the single most fun one is that bread comes with a twice-baked head of garlic, as well as olive oil, inviting diners to make their own garlic bread to taste.

Whether you spend your time on or off the beach at Cape May, a great bed and breakfast is the perfect way to anchor a visit. Pam Huber and Mark Kulkowitz run the delightful Carroll Villa Hotel (19 Jackson Street, 609-884-9719, [www.carrollvilla.com](http://www.carrollvilla.com)), a National Landmark (circa 1882) with a

green approach to renovations. Originally built in 1882 as a seaside family escape, the hotel gives a new meaning to the phrase "bed and breakfast," with the sumptuous offerings at the Mad Batter. The impeccably fresh individual fruit bowl could easily grace a breakfast nook for a family of four, and the namesake batters result in pancake servings that look like a three-story building, yet are fluffy throughout. The porch, popular with locals as well as hotel guests, has a thriving social scene and also has a rotating display of local art (currently Debbie Campaniello's whimsical offerings), available for purchase. For those who want their morning to start off at the beach, breakfast at Harry's Ocean Bar and Grille (1025 Beach Avenue, 609-88HARRY, [www.harryscapemay.com](http://www.harryscapemay.com)) is a family-run neighborhood place that has large portions of comfort food served by incredibly friendly wait staff, in the dining room or along the beach-front terrace.



Inn of Cape May, photo by  
Barry A. Burke