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Home & Away: From Montauk to Disney, the North Fork to Costa Rica



A hike at Hither Woods. Lynn Blumenfeld photo

Home: 12 Hours in Montauk

By Gavin Menu

Every New York tourist magazine has written the standard "weekend in

UPCOMING EVENTS

- SEP 12 Tue** 12:00 pm The Watermill Center Study Libra...
- SEP 19 Tue** 6:30 pm Youth Advisory Committee
- SEP 21 Thu** 6:00 pm Act TWO – Teen Community Theater
- SEP 28 Thu** all-day Jeremy Dennis: East Hampton Indi...
- OCT 16 Mon** 6:00 pm Youth Court

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Montauk” column that includes a visit to Gurney’s and a trek around the Montauk Lighthouse. And why wouldn’t they? Both are staples of any leisurely visit to the far East End of Long Island. A day in Montauk can provide a real escape, even for diehard locals. Here’s how we would spend one full day at “The End.”

9 a.m. Fuel Up

As we pull toward the end of Napeague Stretch, we take the “old highway” and instead of stopping at Gurney’s (don’t worry, we will return), we head toward downtown Montauk and just past Gurney’s at the top of the hill enjoy one of the most majestic ocean views on the entire East End. From there, make a quick stop for breakfast at the legendary John’s Pancake House or, for lighter fare, hit up Naturally Good Foods and Café for a smoothie, juice or acai bowl.

10 a.m. A True Hiking Destination

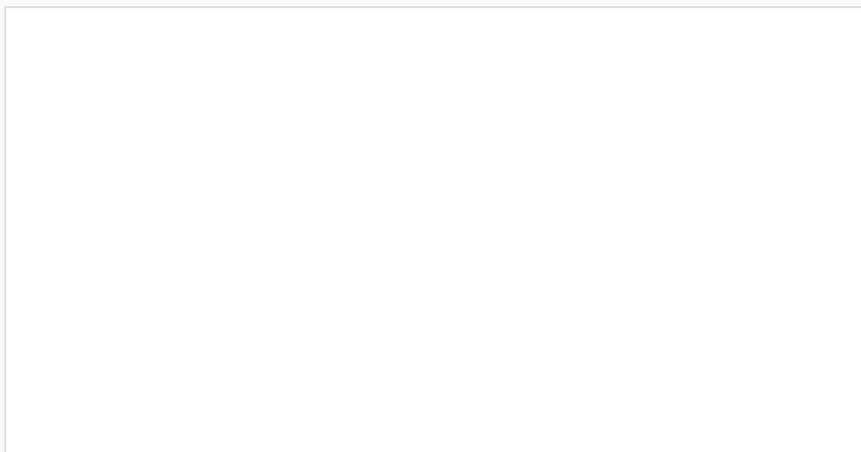
Feeling fueled up, and hopefully bundled up, visit the aforementioned Montauk Point State Park, where an quick right turn leads to Camp Hero and its vast hiking trails and old military base that has launched an army of conspiracy theories, and even inspired the hit TV show, Stranger Things. Montauk is notorious for its preserved lands and almost all of it is filled with hiking, including trails at Shadomoor and Hither Hills State Parks and Hither Woods at Eddie Ecker State Park.

Noon Time for the Seals

As an alternative to traditional hiking, a Montauk seal walk is a must. The walks are organized with guides from the New York State Parks and Recreation Department, and take place on the north side of Montauk Point. Tours are limited (December 2 and 3 at noon are the first, followed by tours on December 16 and 17 and running consistently through March 31). Call Montauk Downs at 631-668-5000 for information or to reserve a tour.

1 p.m. Lunch Time

Lunch is an important topic in Montauk and we can think of no better destination than the waterfront, but that can be challenging during the depths of winter. Old favorites like Gosman’s, Inlet Seafood, The Dock and Joni’s close for at least a few months, so you can’t miss at Swallow East, which is on the water in Montauk Harbor, and Saltbox and Shagwong in town, all of which are open year-round with lunch, at least, on the weekends.





A view from the Gurney's salt water pool.

2 p.m. Spa Treatment

After lunch head back to Gurney's for the afternoon to warm up and recharge in the hotel's seawater spa with European amenities that include Roman baths, Finnish rock saunas, Russian steam rooms and Swiss showers. The seawater pool offers stunning panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean.

4 p.m. As the Sun Sets

One of the great things about winter sunsets is they occur at happy hour! Head over to the Montaukett at 88 Firestone Road, which is open year-round and offers spectacular sunsets regardless of the season. In fact, winter skies often make them even more remarkable.

7 p.m. A Winter Repast

Dinner at Harvest on Fort Pond is a Montauk tradition, and while many restaurants shutter their doors for the offseason, The Harvest stays open year-round. The food service is family style, so meet friends or bring the kids, and don't miss the famous calamari salad, served with frisee, white miso and red pepper vinaigrette.



The author with Mickey Mouse.

Away: The Most Magical Place(s) on Earth

By Anita Boyer

Anita Boyer, one of the founders of Our Fabulous Variety Show and a dance teacher at Dancehampton in East Hampton, also happens to be a Disneyphile — offering her wisdom on the Happiest Place on Earth (Disneyland) and the Most Magical Place on Earth (Disneyworld) through her podcast and website, This Is Why I Disney! (thisiswhyidisney.com).

My first trip to Disneyland (for non-obsessers that is the one in California) was when I was about two months old. My parents grew up in Anaheim with Disneyland in their backyard, and we can still see the fireworks from my grandpa's front lawn when we go to visit. Disneyland trips with Grandma and Grandpa Medina are a staple childhood memory. Grandpa retired from the furniture design and upholstery department and to this day there are still pieces in the park that he crafted himself. One of his biggest projects was upholstering the furniture in the VIP caboose of the Disneyland Railroad — the Lilly Belle (named for Walt Disney's wife, Lilly). Guests aren't typically allowed on the caboose but I was able to get a special tour with my grandpa this past February. It was the absolute most magical Disney experience that I've had yet.

That is definitely where my Disney-fanaticism began, and family ties have kept it strong and growing. My cousin, Jeremy Medina, and I began "This Is Why I Disney" after his first trip to Walt Disney World last year. We do live talk shows every Monday ("Case of the Mondays") and answer questions that you might have about trips and all things Disney.

Disney became, for me, the only time in my life when I could turn "off." As a dance teacher and performer, so much of my time in the world is spent with a huge grin on my face, and a sales pitch — whether it's pitching my students on a dance, pitching a story idea to our cast, or procuring audiences for our shows. At Disney, it is the opposite — every cast member (Disney employees are

referred to as “cast members,” and are a part of the “show” that is a day in a Disney park) is there to bring me into their beautifully crafted stories and experiences. Walt Disney instilled a legacy of customer service and attention to detail that has also inspired me in every job, production and class I have been a part of. A trip to the parks not only relaxes and rejuvenates my spirit, but it ignites ideas for how I can bring that magic home into my daily life.

A Dozen Top Tips:

1. First and foremost, do not ever go to Disney World thinking that you must, or even can, do it all. The most magical moments will be those that you stumble upon and couldn't possibly plan for. I like to group my fast passes and one dining reservation close together and at the same park, so the rest of the day I can be free to explore.
2. Resorts at Disney are so cool, and you definitely need to spend some time exploring them. You can enjoy the lobby, shops, restaurants and lounges of any resort, even if you are not staying there. Break up your Magic Kingdom day with a monorail crawl. Hit up cool lobbies and shops for the kiddos, and bars and lounges for grown-ups. Do not miss Trader Sams at the Polynesian!
3. The Magic Kingdom is a nightmare between noon and 8 p.m. Avoid it at all costs. Wake up early and see the opening ceremony and the rope drop, squeeze in a few rides and then beat it.
4. This is not so much a top as a request: the parks are not your dang living room! Throw your trash in the cans (they are cute and themed too! Follow @disneycans on Instagram for a full photo gallery of Disney trash cans!), keep your shoes on (you would not believe the number of people hanging out in line, shoes and socks off, exposing their feet to the world. NO!), and don't act entitled. Everyone paid a lot of money to be there – you don't get special treatment because you are a diva.
5. Lines for the rides are actually really fun! A lot of them are interactive and almost all are air-conditioned, so don't let a 60-minute wait deter you from a fantastic ride.
6. Wake up early, nap, and stay out late.
7. Take advantage of the photo pass photographers! Not only do they know the best angles, but they also can add fun magical effects and they will be happy to take the photos on your camera as well. Especially hit them up for night shots!
8. Wait in line for however long it takes, even three hours, for Flight of Passage in Pandora. #worthit
9. Just sit on a bench and soak it all in. The kids bouncing around with glee, the “streetmosphere” performers interacting with guests, the music and sounds piped through every section of the parks, the scents of the rides and foods from every land. It is a lot, soak it in.
10. Your magic band is your best friend. It is a waterproof bracelet that can be

customized and on it holds everything you possibly need, wallet wise. It is your park ticket, room key, credit card, photo pass, fast passes and they are cute as Mickey Mouse. I have about 137. Gotta collect them all!

11. Speaking of collections, do NOT try to collect everything. Disney banks on people needing to own ALL of a certain item and boy, do they take advantage. Pick one thing and just buy the ones that you like, I do mugs and socks (check it on Instagram @mugs_and_socks).
12. Listen to WDW Radio with Lou Mongello. He is my hero and his knowledge on all things Disney is endless! He was a huge inspiration for "This Is Why I Disney!" I even got to meet him at the D23 expo last July. D 23, for those who don't know, is the ultimate Disney dork convention!



Chocolate Chess at Four & Twenty Blackbirds.

HOME: Winter's Best Kept Secret is the Quiet North Fork

By Rachel Bosworth

After the harvest season, there's a noticeable quiet that descends upon the North Fork. This welcomed, sleepy winter break offers the rare chance to experience the East End like a local, or if you are a local, relish the place you call home. No limos, no crowds, just a simple enjoyment of what the North Fork is about. From Riverhead to Orient, this is the insider's guide to your day on the North Fork this winter.

Hibernation in the winter months is bearable with home cooked meals representing the bounty of the North Fork. While there may be a suspicion that everything closes after the winter solstice, farming for many is a year-round business. Goodale Farms in Riverhead is an expression of North Fork traditional

farming, offering fresh and seasonal produce, dairy, and meat products, grown and raised as their ancestors did. Traveling slightly further east, Sherwood House Vineyards in Jamesport is home to two labels, their own namesake and Hound's Tree wines. Taste and sip in the cozy and intimate tasting room warmed by a fireplace before making your purchases for dinner later.



Red Rooster's escargot.

Move along to the always in-season Love Lane in Mattituck to peruse the assortment of exotic and staple cheeses at Village Cheese Shop while perhaps indulging in the Normandy fondue. Across the lane is Lombardi's Love Lane Market with tried and true Italian specialties including meats, pasta, and homemade sauces.

Tucked away between Main Road and Sound Avenue is Red Rooster Bistro; a French country style spot with heart-warming traditional dishes like Escargot a la Bourguignonne. As the winter months call for all things cozy, the dark and warm atmosphere of Brix and Rye in Greenport is the cocktail stop for old fashions and hot toddies, alongside other craft cocktails.

While in Greenport, the North Fork Audubon Society trails are worth a visit for a tranquil connection with nature, appreciating the sights and sounds of birds and wildlife. It can be easy to miss, making it all the more alluring when sneaking away in the winter.

Discover the last of your locally sourced, home cooked meal needs at the Orient Country Store and neighboring pie shop Four and Twenty Blackbirds for a sweet finale - the Salty Honey pie or Chocolate Chess are a must. Not that they need any explanation, but any beach is worth a stroll any time of year. It's the North Fork, after all.



Winemaker Eric Fry's passion for his craft translates to the vintages he has been producing for nearly three decades at The Lenz Winery. Along with assistant winemaker and oenologist Thomas Spotteck, who joined the winery in 2016, Fry bottles whites, reds, rosés, cuvées, and dessert wines from the vineyard's harvest offered in the rustic barn turned tasting room in Peconic. Honor the harvest and North Fork bounty by joining them for their Winter Dinner featuring a soon-to-be announced guest chef from a New York State restaurant. The holiday season celebration will feature a multi-course menu paired with the winery's different vintages for an evening in the tasting room.

Save the Date: Saturday, December 2 at 6 p.m.



Friends and family of the Castillos in Costa Rica.

Family Time (with Multiple Families) in Costa Rica

By Gavin Menu

Traveling thousands of miles from home, with young children, to remote beaches in a foreign country where they speak a different language can be intimidating. Making friends, meeting new people or just finding your way around can be a challenge.

Which is why when Mauricio Castillo, a native of Costa Rica who grew up in East Hampton, decided to invite friends and their families along on a group vacation, the trip morphed into an instant party.

Five families, including 11 young children, traveled a few winters back to the beach community of Santa Teresa on the Nicoya Peninsula, which faces the Pacific Ocean in Costa Rica. Since they were a large group of friends — a total of 21 people who grew up together, and whose kids are now growing up together — they were able to rent out an entire compound on the beach, with three separate houses in a gated community.

“Mauricio and I had gone there and stayed in one of the houses before,” said Nicole Castillo, Mauricio’s wife. “We thought it would be super cool if we had the whole compound, so we floated the idea if anyone wanted to go. It’s a little challenging to get there, but it’s worth it. Everyone hopped on board and collectively we planned the dates.”

Santa Teresa is about 90 miles west of the capital city of San Jose, but this is not like traveling on the LIE. The Castillos had checked-in before the other families, and the nervous phone calls began shortly before the others arrived.

“I remember them calling us and telling us ‘We’ve been on this dirt road for so long, and gone through rivers,’” Nicole explained. “Mauricio said ‘Just keep going and you’ll get here. I know it is a stressful drive but I promise you it will all be worth it in the morning.’”

The gathering was “an instant party” and the children had “built-in buddies,” Nicole said, which made life easier on the parents. There was horseback riding and zip-lining, two activities Costa Rica is known for, and then there was the benefit of having a native of Costa Rica along for the ride.

“Going out to eat with everyone was a little challenging, but we didn’t always do every meal together,” Nicole said. “It’s pretty rustic. Mauricio’s favorite place to eat was literally a woman’s house. And because we were such a big group, he would call up the lady in the morning so she could start the rice and beans early.”

Mauricio and Nicole’s Top 5 for Visiting Costa Rica

- **Arenal Volcano** - One of the most active volcanoes in Costa Rica that if you are lucky and get a clear view you can see lava percolating! There are also amazing hot springs throughout the surrounding town, La Fortuna, and an amazing waterfall. What’s a great way to visit? Take a horseback ride from town up to the waterfall and then hike down to the bottom.
- **Ziplining** - This is a must in Costa Rica and what better way to see the rainforest than above the trees! Zipline in Mal Pais, where the guides are awesome!

- Monteverde Cloud Forest - A great spot to take in some wildlife and amazing flora
- Manuel Antonio - A national park with wildlife, flora, landscape and beautiful beaches. A great place to see monkeys, sloths, birds and much more.
- Beaches - Costa Rica has some of the most beautiful beaches with great surfing, beachcombing and snorkeling. A favorite is Santa Teresa, but some other great ones are Nosara, Flamingo and Conchal.

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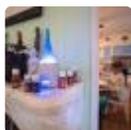
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