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OFF DUTY TRAVEL

A Weekend Getaway That Outshines the Hamptons

Seven reasons why Long Island's North Fork isn't the Hamptons—and why it just might be better. Plus, where to eat, drink, stargaze and shuck your own oysters

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New Suffolk Beach NICO SCHINCO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

22 of 22

DON'T LISTEN to the old-timers who live on the North Fork when they grouch about their humble turf becoming the New Hamptons. The 20-mile strip at the east end of New York's Long Island sits just across the Peconic Bay from the South Fork, which includes the Hamptons proper, a much wealthier universe. "What are all those fancy hotels and restaurants doing over here," North Forkers argue, "if we aren't the New Hamptons yet?" Those places are

indeed popping up all over the village of Greenport, the pulsing hub of the North Fork. But the Greenport phenomenon has more to do with migrating hipsters from Brooklyn than any imagined, decades-old invasion from across the water. The rest of the area, mostly farmland, vineyards and unostentatious country homes, hums along as usual. Here, seven reasons this still-more mellow patch isn't you-know-where.

1. You can shuck your own oysters.

Set in what was a 19th-century bait-and-tackle shop, right on Greenport Harbor, Little Creek Oyster Farm & Market encourages you to pry open your own Peconic Golds and Fire Island



SOUND CHOICE Sound View hotel just outside the village of Greenport, the North Fork's main town. PHOTO: NICO SCHINCO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Blues. If you don't want to, owners Ian Wile and Rosalie Rung are happy to oblige (*littlecreekoysters.com*).

Locally farmed Peconic Escargot served at Paw Paw in Greenport. PHOTO: NICO SCHINCO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



2. Escargot grows on farms.

Chef Taylor Knapp got into foraging while working at Noma, the famed Copenhagen restaurant that relies on the forest to fill its larder. He started Peconic Escargot six years ago in the hamlet of Cutchogue, in a greenhouse built from a mail-order kit, getting a rare certification from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. “I couldn’t believe [American] chefs were opening up dusty cans of snails imported from Europe,” he said. Mr. Knapp sells to individuals (order online or pick them up at the farm) and to local restaurants (*peconicescargot.com*). He also puts escargot in dishes at Paw Paw, his Saturday night pop-up at Bruce & Son in Greenport, itself a daytime go-to for lemon-ricotta pancakes and sourdough BLTs (*208 Main St., bruceandsongreenport.com*).



3. Star-studded parties are open to one and all.

In 1927, an amateur astronomer, married to the grand niece of General George Armstrong Custer, established the Custer Institute with a scientist friend. Twenty years later, they added the observatory, which squats like an old lighthouse but with a heavenly dome instead of a beacon. Every Saturday evening, weather permitting, guests gather outside the building for guided tours of the skies above (*1115 Main Bayview Rd., custerobservatory.org*). To the amusement of locals, Custer lives peacefully across from Southold Indian Museum, which tells the story of Long Island's first inhabitants (*1080 Main Bayview Rd., southoldindianmuseum.org*).

4. You can still get that old-time religion.

A roadside marquee, a holdover from the old drive-in movie theater where St. Peter's Lutheran Church now stands, provides as much traveling entertainment as P.T. Barnum once did: "Life without faith is like an unsharpened pencil—no point" and "Do you spell man's best friend DOG or GOD?" Look for it—actually, you can't miss it—on the way in or out of Greenport on Route 25.

5. Sailboats have replaced submarines.

America's first submarine base, in tiny New Suffolk, is marked by a simple plaque noting that our country's first sub, the USS Holland, was housed there from 1899 until 1905, when the base itself moved to New London, Conn. Summer Girl, a small shop across the street, sells T-shirts and clothing with a logo of the Holland (*775 First St., mysummergirl.com*). Every Wednesday evening, around 6 p.m., and running into the fall, an informal regatta organizes offshore of New Suffolk Beach. North Forkers set up blankets on the sand and pop open bottles of wine as sailboats make their way around nearby Robins Island.



Summer Girl beach boutique in New Suffolk. PHOTO: NICO SCHINCO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

6. One of the best new restaurants is all over the map.

Kon Tiki strikes a tropical note with neon palm trees and frond-covered fixtures. The name hints at the trans-Pacific nature of the menu, as well as the culinary

‘Every Wednesday evening an informal regatta organizes offshore of New Suffolk Beach.’

preferences of the multinational, 20-something staff. The oldest cook, 31-year-old Cheo Avila, who hails from Venezuela and doesn’t like to be called “chef,” put kimchi fried rice on the menu last year but really stopped the show with his grandmother’s recipe for fish cakes, set vertically like sails in a pool of guacamole. Back for its third summer in Greenport’s Gallery Hotel, Kon Tiki will be “heavy on Peru, especially ceviche, with Asian accents,” said Mr. Avila, who once worked under José Andrés in Washington, D.C. (*437 Main St.*). He’ll also be doing small plates, across the street, at 314, brand new this season. It’s a cocktail lounge on the main floor of a large old house, furnished with flea-market treasures (*314 Main St.*).

7. You can still book a dreamy hotel this summer.

Greenport has three designer-chic hotels competing for your weekend getaway. The Menhaden, just-opened in the spring, houses 16 rooms, the cheapest of which costs \$519 a night on a summer weekday, \$549 for a weekend. What do you get? A luxury, minimalist aesthetic—be sure you love white—with the feel of a private club and a roof deck open only to guests (*themenhaden.com*). For more of a social scene, Sound View Greenport is a revamped motel from the 1950s facing the Long Island Sound. Two miles from the center of Greenport, each of the 55 rooms comes with direct beach access. The style is lean and nautical, and the new chef for the Halyard restaurant, Stephan Bogardus, has a devoted local following (*from \$385 a night, soundviewgreenport.com*). With less than a dozen rooms, some exuding a Nantucket aesthetic,



The roof top at the Menhaden. PHOTO: NICO SCHINCO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

others in bright South Beach colors, American Beech shares space with shops and restaurants in Greenport's Stirling Square. A charming renovation of historic buildings, the square itself surrounds a sprawling beech tree, twinkle-lighted after dark and ringed by the hotel's bar. A smaller, more luxurious spinoff, Aqua, opened this summer, with suites on Peconic Bay, 20 miles west of Greenport, in Aquebogue (*American Beech*, from \$295 a night; *Aqua*, from \$299; americanbeech.com).

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