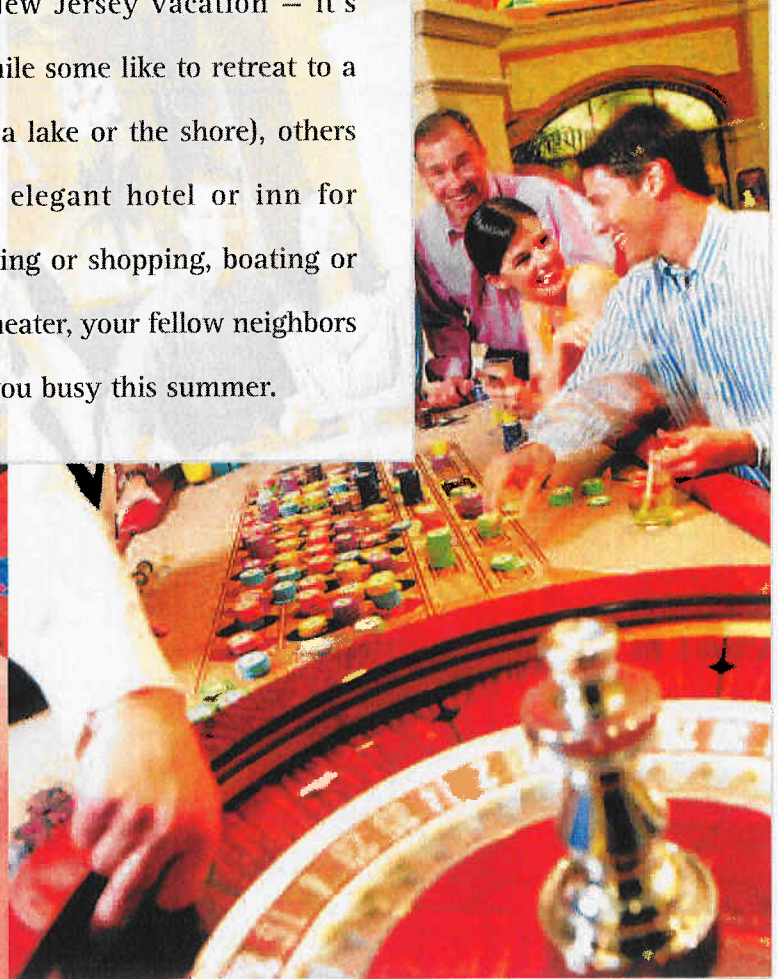
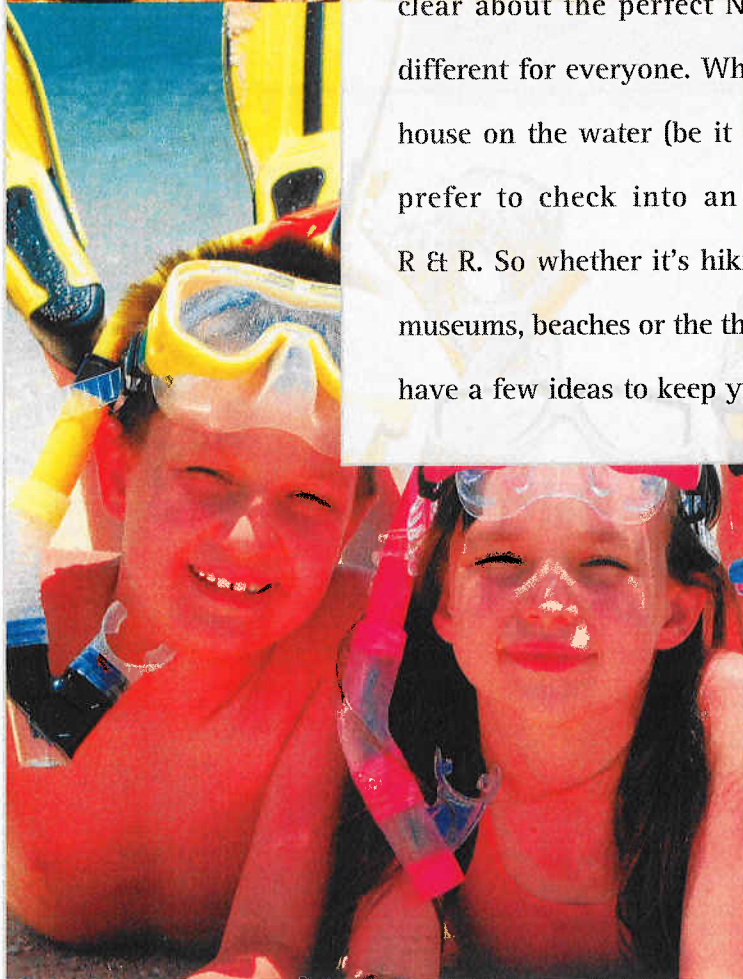
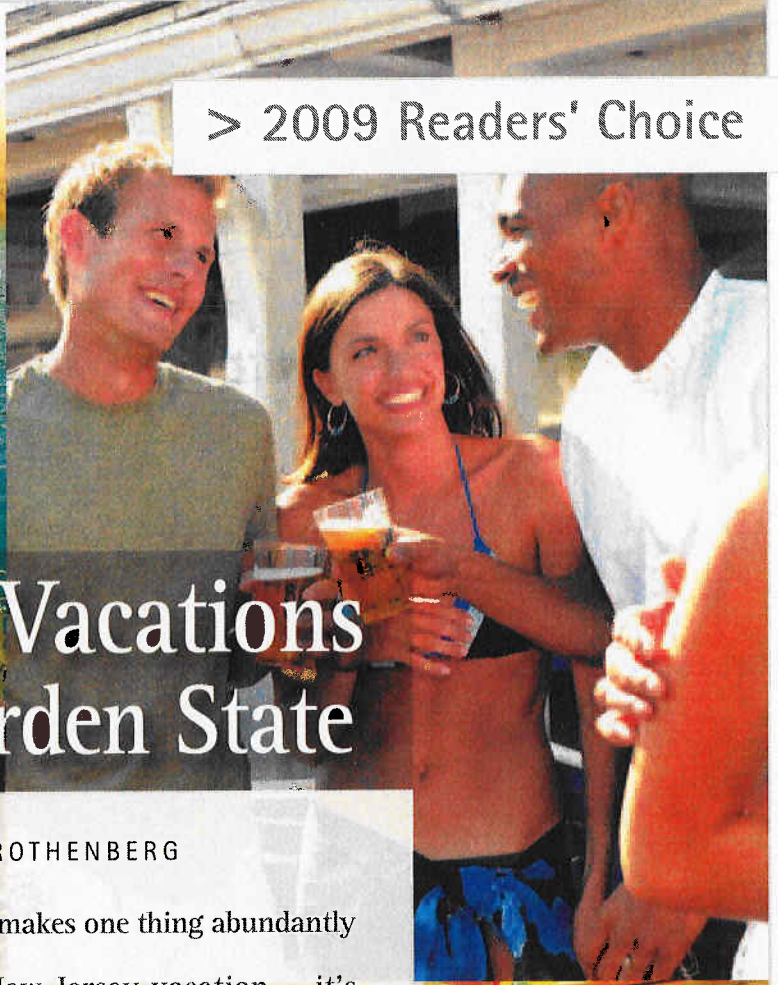
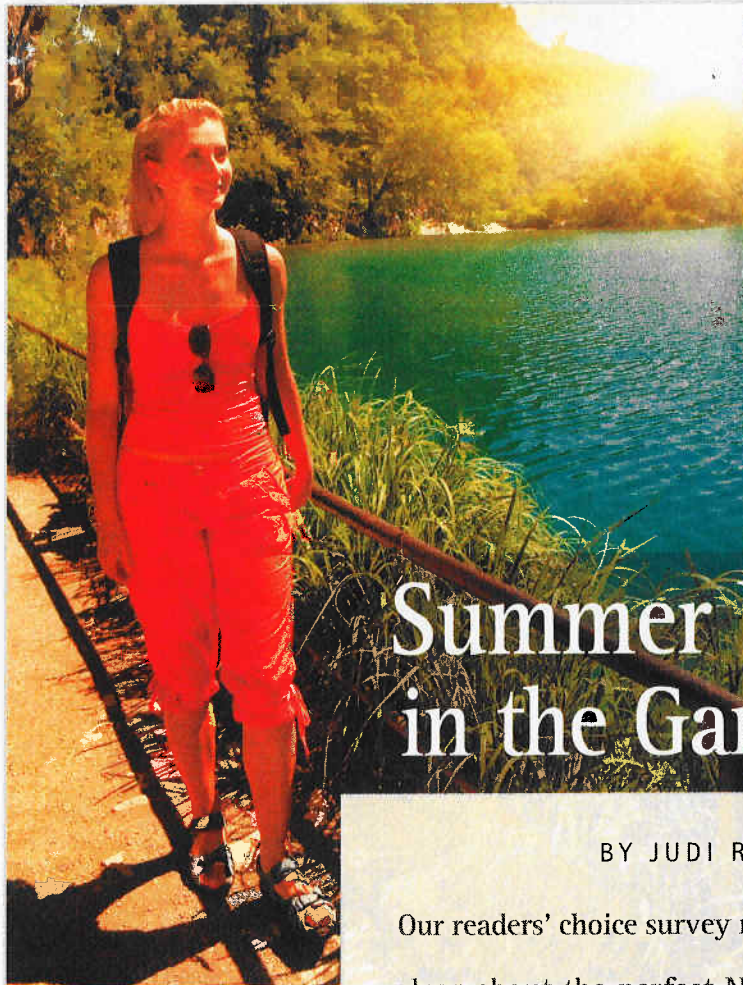


> 2009 Readers' Choice

# Summer Vacations in the Garden State

BY JUDI ROTHENBERG

Our readers' choice survey makes one thing abundantly clear about the perfect New Jersey vacation – it's different for everyone. While some like to retreat to a house on the water (be it a lake or the shore), others prefer to check into an elegant hotel or inn for R & R. So whether it's hiking or shopping, boating or museums, beaches or the theater, your fellow neighbors have a few ideas to keep you busy this summer.



## > 2009 Readers' Choice

# COSMOPOLITAN CAPERS



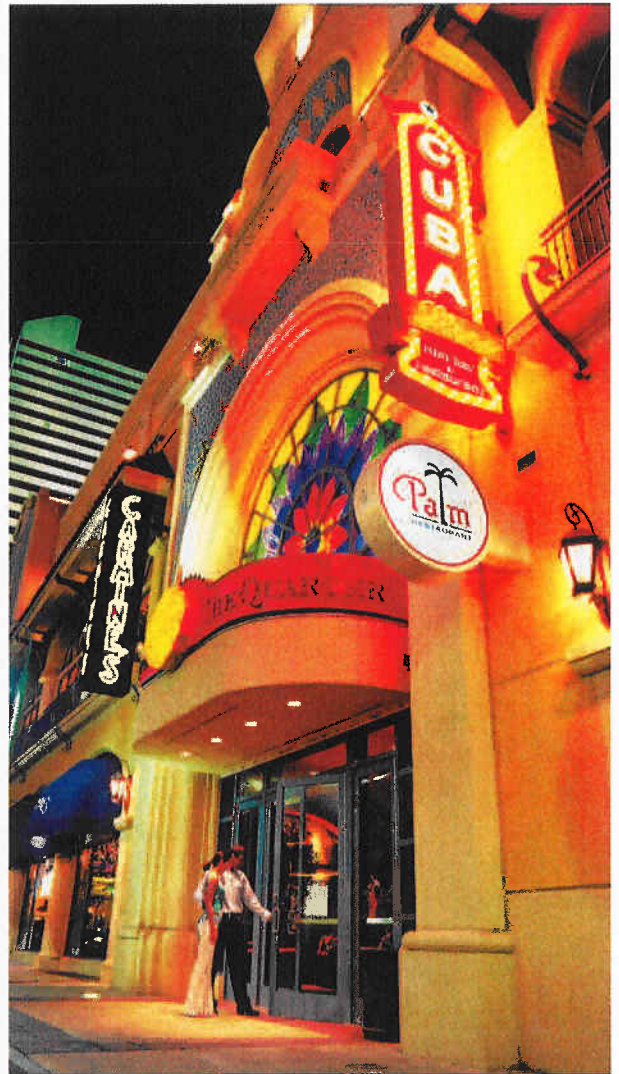
Courtesy of Spa Chakra

Short Hills and Summit, two of New Jersey's tony suburbs, are perfect places to spoil yourself with luxurious accommodations, pampering, fine dining and designer shopping. Both are close to Morristown's cultural and historic sites. Catch Huey Lewis and the News (June 16) or country great Randy Travis (July 25) at the Mayo Center for the Performing Arts and visit the Morris Museum for "Invitations to a Wedding: Bridal Gowns from 1812 to the Present," opening June 9. [mayoarts.org](http://mayoarts.org), [morrismuseum.org](http://morrismuseum.org)

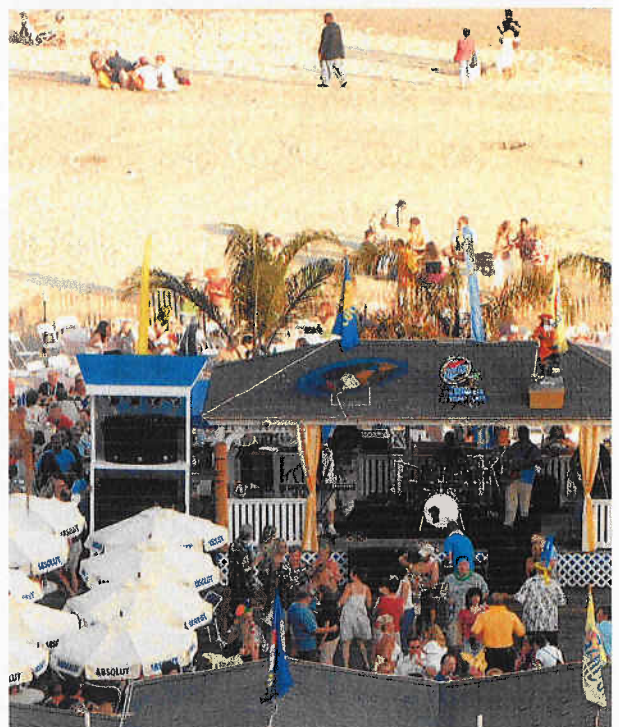
The Short Hills Hilton, situated across the highway from the high-end designer shops at the Mall at Short Hills, is a great bet for a girlfriends' getaway. Weary shoppers can rejuvenate with a massage, facial or body treatment at the Hilton's newly created spa, Spa Chakra. All services use the botanical products from the June Jacobs Spa Collection and are preservative and paraben free. Handsome private "cabins" serve as both your changing and treatment room where after after donning a fluffy robe, you'll receive a complimentary peppermint foot bath. The spa includes an indoor and outdoor pool, fitness center and ongoing exercise classes.

From here it's a short drive to Madison and Chatham, where you can visit the Museum of Early Crafts and Trades, leisurely walk the town and savor culinary perfection at the consistently high-rated Restaurant Serenade. [hiltonshorthills.com](http://hiltonshorthills.com), [spachakra.com](http://spachakra.com), [restaurantserenade.com](http://restaurantserenade.com)

Meanwhile in Summit, the charm of a bygone era and easy strolling distance to shops and restaurants make the Grand Summit Hotel a superb base for a weekend. Popular local destinations include the multi-dealer Summit Antiques Center for vintage jewelry, furniture, collectibles and artwork, the Reeves Reed Arboretum for garden lovers and the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey for workshops and gallery exhibitions. [grandsummit.com](http://grandsummit.com), [reeves-reedarboretum.org](http://reeves-reedarboretum.org), [artcenternj.com](http://artcenternj.com)



The Quarter, courtesy of the Tropicana



Courtesy of Beach Bar at Trump Plaza

Vibrant nightlife, lazy beach days, spas, top-notch entertainment and of course, gambling, were just some of the reasons our readers gave for naming Atlantic City a favorite vacation spot. **The Borgata** ruled for luxury but others preferred the convenience of being on the boardwalk at the **Trump** hotels, **Caesars** and the **Tropicana**.

Sun seekers head to the **Beach Bar at Trump Plaza** for tropical drinks and socializing, then stay as the sun sets for live bands and dancing. Trump guests can reserve a private cabana or rent the "Party Pit" for a group gathering.

Nightlife lovers hang out at **The Quarter**, Tropicana's dining, shopping and entertainment complex that replicates 1940s Havana. Patrons can take in a movie at the **Imax Theater**, dine casually at **Carmine's**, sample Cuban fare at **Cuba Libre** or indulge in a juicy steak at the **Palm**. After dinner, there's comic relief at the **Comedy Stop**, dancing at **Providence** and vodka tastings at **Red Square**.

**The Borgata** ranked number one for catching a concert, with this summer's headliners including **Chicago** with **Earth, Wind and Fire** (June 12 and 13), **Diana Krall** (June 20) and **Il Divo** (July 3).

Looking to cool off and be pampered? Escape to **Caesars Qua Baths and Spa** and try out the "Arctic Ice" room, replete with falling snow or visit the tea room where a tea sommelier will find a tea to complement your treatment.

## BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG (ATLANTIC) CITY



## > 2009 Readers' Choice

# CAPE MAY — A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Cape May was overwhelmingly one of our readers' most cited spots; some describe it as an ideal family destination while others claim it is a gourmet getaway for adults.

Our families like to stay at the La Mer Beachfront Inn, an oceanfront hotel with a private pool and spacious rooms tucked into a quiet end of town. Book the "B" series of rooms furnished with granite wet bar, small fridge, microwave and updated decor. Kids will be comfortable at the on-site restaurant, The Pier House (dine inside or on the waterfront patio), and parents can enjoy sophisticated seafood dishes like grilled octopus with lemon and oregano and spicy seared tuna with wonton crisps and wasabi crema. [capemaylamer.com](http://capemaylamer.com)

For adults, there are many quaint inns to choose from and most rooms come with a delicious homemade breakfast. The Peter Shields Inn, a 1907 Georgian revival mansion that sits on the waterfront, delights couples with well-appointed guest rooms that may include a whirlpool bath or fireplace. The inn's restaurant serves new American cuisine in five distinctive dining rooms. [petershieldsinn.com](http://petershieldsinn.com)

An across-the-board favorite for families, couples and singles was Congress Hall. This grande-dame has its own pool, ringed with luscious grass and rocking chairs. Guest services include a fitness center, kids' camp, full-service spa and beach cabanas with food service. The Blue Pig Tavern, one of Cape May's most celebrated eateries, is on the premises and serves up comfort food in a pub atmosphere. [congresshall.com](http://congresshall.com)

Obviously, the ocean is a major draw for hot summer days, but there are plenty of other ways to keep busy. Carriage rides, ghost tours, birding expeditions, live theater and just strolling past the Victorian jewels in town are all part of the fun. [capemay.com](http://capemay.com), [birdcapemay.org](http://birdcapemay.org)

Other preferred places to eat were the Lobster House for its raw bar and fresh seafood and 410 Bank for its clever fusion of Cajun, French and Caribbean Island cuisine. [capemayrestaurantguide.com](http://capemayrestaurantguide.com)



Rat's Restaurant/Photo: David Steele

## THE ARTFUL LODGER

Intellectual pursuits also figure in the mix of favorite summer pastimes. Our readers say the charming town of **Princeton** is ideal for exploring all types of art, music and culture. Situate yourself at the [The Nassau Inn](#), located in the center of town at [Palmer Square](#), and you're within walking distance from the art museum of [Princeton University](#) and [McCarter Theatre](#), the on-campus performing arts center. The upscale shops and restaurants of **Palmer Square** are a popular way to while away the days and the square also hosts a slew of free outside events including opera, swing, and jazz. [visitprinceton.org](http://visitprinceton.org), [nassauinn.com](http://nassauinn.com), [palmer-square.com](http://palmer-square.com)

Those who love gardens, sculpture and fine dining should take the 20-minute drive south to Hamilton and the **Grounds for Sculpture**. Roam among more than 200 contemporary sculptures in a gorgeous 35-acre park featuring bridges, ponds, flowering shrubs and 2,000+ rose bushes. Top off your visit with a meal at **Rat's Restaurant**, where gourmet cuisine is artfully presented in an eclectic setting. [groundsforsculpture.org](http://groundsforsculpture.org), [www.ratsrestaurant.org](http://www.ratsrestaurant.org)



Left, the Queen Victoria B&B; right, the Emlen Physick Estate, Cape May's only Victorian house museum

Fishing, hiking, biking, and body surfing in the Atlantic topped the list of favorite summer pastimes. The ideal way to enjoy the summer is to rent a house for the season by the water.

Anglers enjoy catching “muskies” on **Lake Hopatcong** and reeling in striped bass on **Union Lake**. The state’s Division of Fish and Wildlife can point you to other fishing locales on ponds, streams and rivers. ([www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/fishing.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/fishing.htm))

Casual two-wheeled enthusiasts love to ride the flat streets of **Long Beach Island** and the towpath along the **Delaware River** canal, while mountain bikers challenge themselves with the steep ascents and descents at **High Point State Park** in Sussex. [dandrcanal.com](http://dandrcanal.com), [stateparks.com/high\\_point.html](http://stateparks.com/high_point.html)

## COMMUNING



## WITH NATURE

Hikers enjoy all types of trails and scenery in three national parks and 42 state parks. Many enjoy accessing the Appalachian Trail in the **Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Center** while others like to trace the steps of the Continental Army in **Morristown National Historical Park**. [njparksand-forests.org](http://njparksand-forests.org)

Body surfers, wave runners, and sun worshipers prefer the picturesque coastal towns that line 127 miles of the Jersey shore. Popular choices were two B & Bs in Spring Lake, the **Blue Bay Inn**, a boutique hotel in Atlantic Highlands (be sure to try the in-house southwestern restaurant, **Copper Canyon**, and hang out at the Tequila Bar) and the **White Sands Resort & Spa** in Point Pleasant. [springlake.org](http://springlake.org), [bluebayinn.com](http://bluebayinn.com), [coppercanyon.com](http://coppercanyon.com) and [thewhitesands.com](http://thewhitesands.com)