

Life on the Eastern Shore of Maryland

Most historians agree that Giovanni da Verrazano sailed past it on the Atlantic side around 1524. Spanish explorers followed, navigating a course up the Chesapeake in 1526. In 1608, Captain John Smith of Virginia was thought to be the first European to visit, and 23 years later William Clairborne's fur trading business is widely regarded as the founding European settlement.

A lot has changed since then on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. However, what led Clairborne to set up shop on Kent Island (just east of the current Chesapeake Bay Bridge) almost 400 years ago still attracts "modern day" settlers and tourists by the hundreds of thousands each summer weekend.

Location, location, location!

Registered nurse Patti Serkes grew up in the Washington, DC area but has called the Eastern Shore home now for nearly 30 years. "I really love it because it's more relaxed, not as intense, a great place to raise a family and provides that small town environment and feel," she said. "A major traffic jam here is sitting at a light for more than one cycle."

The Eastern Shore of Maryland has the great fortune of being part of the Delmarva Peninsula—a land mass bordered on three sides by water and made up of various portions of the states of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. It's that strip of land on your favorite atlas that features the historic and nostalgic Chesapeake Bay to its west and the aquatic playground known as the Atlantic Ocean to its east. The Eastern Shore is Maryland's chunk of that prime real estate. "It's a short, two hour commute to DC, Baltimore and Philadelphia but still far enough away from the city to be able to lay low and enjoy life," added Serkes.

Now that we've established where, let's talk why. Ask any local and you'll get pretty near the same answer every time. People here love—and not necessarily in this order—the beach, the seafood, the region's history and the friendly folks who make you feel at home, even if you're just hanging around Ocean City, Maryland for a summer vacation. And that's a great place to start. "Down the Ocean" as our friends say on "other side" of the Bay. Translated for the rest of us, that's the beach at Assateague Island or Ocean City, Maryland, the Eastern Shore's main drawing card.

Ocean City, founded in 1875, bills itself as the "East Coast's #1 Family Resort" and features 10 miles of free, white sandy beaches. You can outlet shop, jet ski, kayak or fish on both Atlantic and the Assawoman Bay, play golf on 17 nearby championship courses or stroll a world famous boardwalk with hundreds of stores, gift and t-shirt shops, restaurants and amusement rides. The Travel Channel

recently voted the Ocean City Boardwalk one of the "Best In America." Quick tip, whatever you do, don't pass up the Thrasher's Fries with vinegar (and don't even think about asking for ketchup), Fisher's or Dolle's Caramel Corn or a spin on the Trimper carousel, still making riders of all ages smile exactly as it has since first introduced in 1902.

Love the beach just at a slower, more relaxed pace? Try the Assateague Island National Seashore, just south and across the inlet from Ocean City. Assateague is an undeveloped barrier island most famous for its herd of wild ponies who roam the island like their ancestors have since the 17th century. With its wind swept dunes and sea grasses it's as far east in the state as you can go, and at its most unspoiled.

Let's Eat

If the quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach, then the fastest way to fall in love with Maryland's Eastern Shore is through its abundant seafood. The ocean and bay provide unlimited fishing, crabbing and clamming opportunities, but it's the Maryland Blue Crab that is the staple for this region. For generations, the watermen (commercial fisherman, clam and crab harvesters) of Crisfield, Deal Island and Smith Island, to name a few locations, have been making their living off the Chesapeake Bay's seafood bounty.

Best advice is to sample everything, at least twice. All across the Eastern Shore—from bayside or seaside mom and pop eateries to the bigger restaurants and crab houses—you can't go wrong. For a real taste of the Eastern Shore, try the all-you-can-eat crab deal at the Red Roost in Quantico, Maryland. This local favorite is situated, in of all places, in an old converted chicken coop. It's a little tough to find, but worth the effort and best experienced "up to your elbows" in Old Bay seasoning.

On the subject of chicken, it also rules the roost. Perdue Farms is headquartered in Salisbury, and they and a number of other companies contract with local growers to rank the Eastern Shore as one of the nation's top broiler producing areas. In the summer, the locally grown, "fresh from the garden," fruits and vegetables available at any of the hundreds of roadside stands is always a treat.



Being Seen

You can also experience birds of a different feather on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The Delmarva Shorebirds, the Class A South Atlantic League affiliate of the Baltimore Orioles, play their home baseball games in Salisbury. The Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art is also located in Salisbury and dedicated to intricate and delicate talent of wildfowl carving and shore themed artwork. The Salisbury Zoo has also been voted one of the Best Small Zoos in America.

Still, some of the greatest times you'll ever have on Maryland's Eastern Shore are those weekends when you pack up the car and just explore. There are terrific little (and not so little) towns dotting the map with wonderful downtowns and attractions.

If you've seen the "Runaway Bride," you already know Berlin, Maryland. Much of the movie was filmed there in its historic downtown. Don't pass up taking the Segway scooter tour. Another don't miss is the quaint waterfront village of St. Michaels in Talbot County. And while you're in the neighborhood, visit Tilghman Island, Easton or Oxford. All are nearby and splendid. In Cambridge, you can spend a day at the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge or catch an outdoor concert along the Choptank River at Sailwinds Park. If you choose, you can navigate the same stretch of water aboard an old fashioned paddle boat departing from the Suicide Bridge Restaurant in Secretary, Maryland.

History buffs will want to visit the birthplace of Harriet Tubman, also in Cambridge, and learn more about this remarkable woman and her Underground Railroad to Freedom. Learn what led to the demise of historic Furnace Town outside Snow Hill or step back in time at Pemberton Hall in Salisbury or the Teakle Mansion in Princess Anne, both living museum homes dating back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Higher Education

Those looking to advance their education may do so at Salisbury University or the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne. Both are award-winning four year institutions accredited by the University System of Maryland. Also offering excellent community college opportunities and curriculums are Wor Wic Community College in Salisbury and Chesapeake College in Wye Mills.

The elementary and secondary schools-both public and otherwise-are outstanding, boasting "Maryland Teacher of the Year" candidates and winners, championship athletic teams, a much more productive student to teacher ratio than the big cities and most importantly a quality educational opportunity for every student. "Maryland's public school system is among the nation's best, ranking near the top in Advanced Placement, SAT, and ACT scores for its graduates," said Dr. Nancy Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools. "The state's Eastern Shore benefits from a strong, vibrant system of schools, with substantial progress being made in every county."

Putting Down Roots

The Eastern Shore offers plenty of choices for homes and a wide variety of prices throughout the region. "Nice and affordable homes, town homes, and apartments are abundant with purchase prices below \$200,000 and rents from \$800 per month, and even less in some locations," stated Susan Megargee, a local real estate associate broker/branch manager. The area also offers high end, multi hundred thousand or multi million dollar homes on the waterfront, oceanfront, in upscale neighborhoods and everything in between.

But it's that Eastern Shore "toes in the sand" approach to enjoying life that has prompted many in the medical profession to put down some very long reaching roots here. "I have been a nurse for almost 28 years and I've worked in a variety of health care settings across the United States. The majority of my nursing career has been spent living and working on the Eastern Shore of Maryland," said registered nurse Carol Moore. "It truly is the best of all worlds. I like the 'small town' atmosphere and the sense of pride and the emphasis on community service that is a part of the Medical Center where I work. For me, the Eastern Shore is the place I call home. I have raised my family here and I'm now enjoying watching my grand daughter also enjoy this beautiful area."



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