

Posted on Fri, May. 15, 2009

Just beyond the Jersey Shore

The beach towns of Delaware and Maryland offer lots of free entertainment choices, and other deals.

By Ellen Perlman



Ocean City Department of Tourism

Ocean City, Maryland

For The Inquirer

OCEAN CITY, Md. - Pop open some beach chairs, set them up on cool sand, and then sit back and enjoy an evening concert on the beach - and it's absolutely free.

During this summer of savings, it's nice to know that not only do the sand, surf, and scenery come at no cost along the Delaware and Maryland beaches, but so do many entertainment options.

The beach towns of Bethany, Dewey and Rehoboth Beach, Del., and Ocean City, Md., are within easy driving distance of one another as well as Pennsylvania and New Jersey. If one area is not offering a free concert, movie or bonfire on a particular evening, another community likely is. The same holds true for hotel deals and restaurant specials.

For example, Bethany Beach, billed as the "quiet resort," offers musical acts that begin on the bandstand and the boardwalk at 7:30 p.m. every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.

Ocean City presents an early evening "Sundaes in the Park" family concert series on Sundays.

If concerts aren't for you, Ocean City shows free movies on the beach on Mondays and Fridays throughout the summer. Or, if there's a chill in the evening air, you can opt for a bonfire.

Ocean City's bonfires feature a different speaker each week, while those at Dewey Beach, Del., turn into a marshmallow roast where families dance to the music and glow sticks abound. For those who need more than a roasted marshmallow, the bars are hopping and the music is blaring at night in the little town of Dewey.

And, as always, at all times, entry to all the beaches is free, free, free.

It might seem that there's no such thing as a lodging deal at the beach in the high season, but you won't know until you ask.

"Most people don't realize they can negotiate the price of a room or a condo for a week," says Frank Shuman, owner of Rehoboth.com, a private site that tracks beach specials.

Or, try the Castle in the Sand here in Ocean City, which has rolled back room rates to 2006 levels. If you're willing to take a risk, the hotel takes 50 percent off the rack room rate for your first night if you walk in after 5 p.m. without a reservation.

The Clarion Hotel in Ocean City offers a family-thing package stay. It's three nights in a deluxe guest room with passes to a water park and miniature golf, and \$150 toward food and drink served by establishments on the premises.

A week at the beach might still be too pricey for some, but a two- to three-day stay could be just the ticket. Shuman has seen a rise in this trend. And for those who want to be at the beach come high or low water, the area offers several campgrounds for cheap lodging.

Hotels that aren't cutting rates are trying other enticements. Rehoboth's Boardwalk Plaza Hotel has an optional add-on value package of food and activities to lure families and couples with such things as bike rentals and complimentary beach chairs and umbrellas.

Or choose a hotel with a hot tub under the stars and get an extra indulgence for no extra cost. Both the Avenue Inn and the Boardwalk Plaza Hotel in Rehoboth have outdoor hot tubs for relaxing while stargazing and trying to forget economic woes.

When it comes to dining, it pays to be a digital deal hunter. Restaurants are offering specials in these hard times if you search various Web sites. Sniff around enough, and you could find a deal every night.

For instance, Adriatico Ristorante in Rehoboth offers buy-one-entree-get-a-lesser-one-free on Wednesdays; half-price appetizers until 6:30 p.m. on Fridays; and 10 percent off the check and \$1 pasta for kids before 6 every night. Nage in Rehoboth has free wine tastings on Wednesday nights.

And then there's the tax-free shopping at dozens of outlet stores. The Tangier Outlets in Delaware attract millions of shoppers every year. The outlets are a great fallback on a rainy day - or a welcome, air-conditioned haven on the sunniest of afternoons.

Delaware and Maryland Beaches

The seven-mile long **Bethany Beach** (Delaware) is known as the area's "quiet resort." Visitors can swim, surf, boogie-board and fish by day and go to concerts and performances by night.

Dewey Beach (Delaware) is one mile long, with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and Rehoboth Bay on the other. Dewey is quiet weekdays but quite the social scene for singles on the weekends.

Rehoboth Beach (Delaware) has the french-fry and custard feel along its boardwalk, and an amusements area with a haunted house and carnival games. But along the town streets are unique boutiques, shops and restaurants that make for great window-shopping strolls, day and night.

Ocean City (Maryland) has a three-mile-long boardwalk with vintage kiddie rides, a vintage carousel, roller coasters, and more. Also look for the Ocean City Life Saving Museum, displaying vintage bathing suits and saltwater aquariums with sea horses.

Information

Bethany Beach, www.bethanybeachde.com

Rehoboth Beach, www.rehoboth.com

Rehoboth and Dewey, www.beach-fun.com

Ocean City, www.ococean.com.

Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/philly/travel/shoreguide/20090515_Just_beyond_the_Jersey_Shore.html