



Shore THING!

The Jersey shore is a hot spot
for beach meetings.

BY CAROLEE NOURY

Ocean Place's Tiki Bar brings a taste of the tropics to New Jersey.



The Breakers on the Ocean has a timeless, traditional ambiance.

For

event planning that feels more like a holiday and less like a day at the office, consider a dramatic change in venue. What captures the spirit of getting away better than the sparkling place where land meets ocean? Why not swap the sounds of traffic and ringing phones for the lull of waves lapping the shore? If it has been too long since you've dug your toes into the warm sand, it might be high time to look toward the shore. Home to venues with unique offerings, it's the ideal locale for your next event. From Sandy Hook to Cape May, New Jersey's 130 miles of coastline offer a taste of paradise with gorgeous views and diverse attractions. If you are considering the Jersey shore for your next event, here are five seaside venues to consider. With options spanning from an intimate historical inn to a convention center with innovative layout options, you'll find your fit here.

PHOTOS: BREAKERS ON THE OCEAN;
(OPPOSITE, PREVIOUS PAGE) OCEAN PLACE RESORT & SPA

The Breakers on the Ocean

With 2 miles of white-sand beach and a non-commercial boardwalk, Spring Lake invites you to experience nature. Built in the late 1800s, the full-service Breakers on the Ocean has a lovely balance of historic charm and modern comforts. The ballroom, with a side view of the ocean, offers versatile space for up to 225 to hold trade exhibits, meetings or banquets. Four additional rooms provide flexibility to host events of varying sizes. On-site dining and catering are also available. Shannon DiBenedetto, director of sales, recommends taking advantage of the conference getaway package. It includes meals, snacks, lodging and the meeting for a reasonable per-person rate. "You can't beat the spectacular ocean views, or the warmth and professionalism we pride ourselves on," she says. "Returning guests especially enjoy the familiar faces of longtime staff members."

Normandy Inn

If an intimate and historic gathering a short walk from the beach sounds appealing, the Normandy Inn delivers. The 19th-century inn, carefully renovated to preserve authenticity, invites you back in time. Its Victorian charm shines through past owners' commitment to furnishing the inn with period pieces. The antiques aren't anti-children, though. "Singles, couples, groups and families with children of all ages are welcome," says Christine Valori, manager. "We enjoy being a destination people return to year after year. We've been fortunate enough to see younger generations grow up and return to us with their own children." Another of the Normandy's strengths is a committed team. "Guests have formed lasting friendships with our longtime staff," Valori says.

Valori encourages guests to take advantage of the intimate setting's flexibility. "For events (up to 25 guests), there are no predetermined packages," she says. "Instead, we make a customized plan for our clients. We don't mold their events; instead we support them in bringing their visions to life." Local businesses



Ocean Place brings the beach indoors with large windows framing coastal views.

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CHRISTINE VALORI, manager of Normandy Inn

Wildwoods Convention Center rests right on the famous beach.



Wildwoods Convention Center has floor-to-ceiling views of the Atlantic Ocean.



Relax at the Golden Inn.

PHOTOS: WILDWOODS CONVENTION CENTER; GOLDEN INN HOTEL & RESORT

provide a range of options for after the event, including antiques dealers, specialty shops, a broad range of outdoor activities and the Spring Lake Community House & Theatre, a beloved local performing arts venue.

Ocean Place Resort & Spa

Long Branch's Ocean Place has over 40,000 square feet of meeting space with 38 meeting rooms. With over 53,000 square feet of outdoor space, a wide variety of outdoor events are possible. Planners can even book a team-building exercise on the beach from a range of possibilities including beach Olympics, a live game show and a build-it-yourself golf course. The Digital Media and Business Service Center offers convenient business capabilities. Mary Lou Pollack, director of sales and marketing, says one of the things people love best about staying at Ocean Place Resort & Spa is the landscape. "The resort offers views that are reminiscent of being on a cruise ship," she says. "You can see the whole channel. Any day the sun is out, our location on this lovely promenade is stunningly beautiful. The quality of the colors is something you truly have to see with your own eyes." And the feedback reflects it. "Our guests often say how much they enjoy the tropical atmosphere of Ocean Place," she adds. "They get to escape without all the travel."

If panoramic ocean views and sea-inspired spa treatments don't tempt you, consider the outdoor tiki bar and pool deck. Ocean Place has plenty within its walls to keep you delightfully busy no matter how long you stay. If you choose to leave, nearby Pier Village offers many choices for shopping and dining. During the warm months, guests can choose from water sports, golfing, an amusement park and many other activities without having to travel far.

Golden Inn Hotel & Resort Avalon

This Avalon resort, open year-round, is an excellent place to have your event if you'd like your attendees to stay a while—at the Sandbar for drinks and lighter fare, perhaps—since as Charlotte Haman, director of sales and marketing, says, "All your guests can take the elevator home." With 154 guest rooms, the Golden Inn has event accommodations covered. In the past two years, renovations and new hires have helped shape the inn into what guests requested: more modern rooms and meeting spaces. Repeat customers liken the staff to family. "Part of this is the way we respond to

our guests," says Haman. "If a guest needs something, we take care of it immediately. There's no sense of 'that's not part of my job,' instead, we focus on making our guests' visits as carefree as possible." To this end, the Golden Inn has dedicated event coordinators to oversee the planning from booking until the last guest leaves.

Wildwoods Convention Center

Built right on the beach fronting the Atlantic Ocean, the Wildwoods Convention Center hosts a variety of events throughout the year. The modern facility, completed in 2001, was built with 125,000 square feet of flexible meeting space in mind and can accommodate up to 10,000 event guests. Concerts, expos, trade shows, meetings, banquets basketball tournaments and dance competitions are at home in the same space that also hosts more traditional events. Whether people come for business or pleasure, John Lynch, sales and entertainment director, says his team is committed to making their event feel like a vacation. "My job is to make sure people enjoy themselves," he says. "What is better than being in charge of happiness? Our location is perfect for it, from the beautiful white sand to over 3 miles of boardwalk. The area has every type of attraction imaginable, from first-class amusement park rides to waterparks; world-class dining to the finest pizza and funnel cakes. All the best parts of the Jersey shore are right here."

To help deliver on that vacation spirit, Wildwoods Convention Center invites the beach ambiance in. "One exhibit hall has an entire wall of glass windows looking out onto the ocean. All of our lobby space is perpendicular to the beach. Wherever you are in the building, you know you're right on the shore," says Lynch. In-house event planners help carry the workload with warmth and exceptional service. They coordinate lodging and catering and helpful details like event mailings, welcome packets and specialized information tables for event attendees.

With the welcoming atmosphere of the New Jersey coast, and venues that reflect it, your next event could double as a vacation. After your successful gathering, let the setting work its magic by inviting your guests to unwind and reflect. Whether their perfect end is a peaceful break on the beach, an exciting adventure on water skis or one of the many options in between, the shore has it. Chances are good the change in venue could become your next tradition. 🌊

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