

Insider's Guide to The Hamptons

Pack your bags:
this is the
East End like only
locals know it.
**Laura Begley
Bloom** opens her
little black book.
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Photographed by Theo Morrison



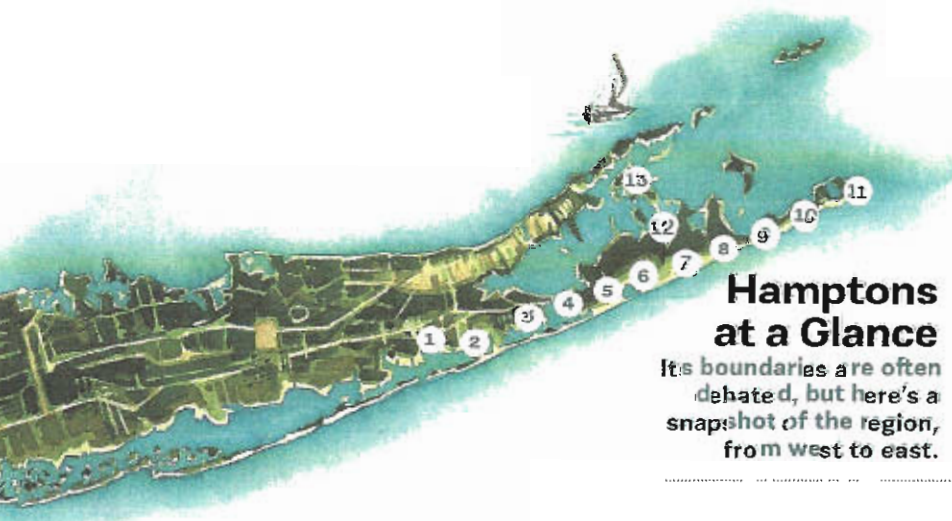
Dining in front of a painting by Marco La Villa at Ruschmeyer's, in Montauk, New York. Opposite: Montauk's Hither Hills State Park Beach.

On my first visit to the Hamptons some 20 years ago, I stayed with friends at a sprawling rental in Southampton. We hired a now-defunct taxi service (Mercedes-Benzes, of course) to take us to overpriced restaurants and red-rope clubs. It was exactly how I'd pictured Long Island's South Fork—a bit pretentious for my tastes.

But there was something about this beachy New York destination that spoke to me: the dramatic dunes; the shingled windmills; and that famous light that has attracted artists as varied as Jackson Pollock and Winslow Homer. So I kept coming back, renting houses with friends and staying at inns from Amagansett to Sag Harbor, East Hampton to Montauk. Eventually, I bought a cottage in Amagansett with my husband (whom I met at a bonfire on Atlantic Beach).

Over the years, I've discovered a very different side to this coastal getaway. My Hamptons is all about low-key seafood shacks, quirky antiques shops, and placid bays that are perfect for beachcombing. Sure, you might run into Paul McCartney at the local café or spot Gwyneth Paltrow's kids selling lemonade at a makeshift stand—but that is just evidence of the Hamptons' many faces.

Read on for my highly selective guide.



Hamptons at a Glance

Its boundaries are often debated, but here's a snapshot of the region, from west to east.

1 Westhampton

The gateway to the region, with a quaint town center and miles of beaches.

2 Quogue

A quiet, blink-and-you'll-miss-it village; gracious old houses line the tree-shaded streets.

3 Hampton Bays

Has a distinctly nautical feel; boats almost outnumber residents.

4 Southampton

Manicured lawns and mansions behind hedges. Old money is never far away.

5 Water Mill

A small town that's really big on food. I've nicknamed it Water Meal.

6 Bridgehampton

Antiques shops and summer polo tournaments—need I say more?

7 Sagaponack

Rolling dunes and plenty of farm stands for locavores.

8 Wainscott

Barely a blip on the map, with some of the most expensive real estate in the nation.

9 East Hampton

The town that has it all: shops, restaurants, beaches, celebs.

10 Amagansett

Best of the beach and bay: some pretty good live music, too.

11 Montauk

Newly hip fishing town at the tip of the South Fork that still retains its old-fashioned charms.

12 Sag Harbor

Onetime whaling port turned artists' enclave with year-round appeal.

13 Shelter Island

A secluded retreat accessible by ferry or boat.