

July 23, 2009

36 Hours on Martha's Vineyard



Matthew Weinstein for The New York Times

Allen's Sheep Farm has been in the same family since 1762.

By DANIELLE PERGAMENT

THE Democrats are back in power, which means Martha's Vineyard is on the political radar again. The Kennedys have been coming since there were actual vineyards, Chelsea Clinton is reportedly tying the knot on the island and — oh, didn't you hear? — the Obamas are on their way. But part of the Vineyard's appeal is how easily it shrugs off snobbery, unlike other fancy playgrounds. (We're looking at you, East Hampton.) Despite its popularity among the presidential set, Martha's Vineyard is still a laid-back island with a lot of mopeds, fish shacks and nice beaches. Folks will tell you that the Vineyard is really just an old fishing community — that is, if you don't get stuck behind a motorcade.

Friday

2 p.m.

1) LIKE A KENNEDY

Martha's Vineyard is prettiest from the water, especially from the deck of a wooden sailboat with an American flag whipping off the stern. If you've ever wanted to know what it feels like to be a Kennedy or star in your own Ralph Lauren ad, you can charter a private sailboat through Book A Boat (508-645-2400; www.bookaboatmv.com). The company will arrange the place, type of boat and all the particulars. For \$55 a person, book a two-hour tour aboard the Liberty, a 40-foot sailboat built in Vineyard Haven that sails out of Vineyard Haven Harbor. And don't be alarmed by the crew's youth. "I've been sailing here since I was a kid," said Christian Cabral, the 19-year-old captain.

6 p.m.

2) LOBSTER WORSHIP

Lobsters are practically a religion on the island, so it's fitting that some of the freshest are served in a church. On summer Fridays from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Grace Church in the tree-lined town of Vineyard Haven (Woodlawn Avenue and Williams Street; 508-693-0332; www.gracechurchmv.com) sets up picnic tables and sells lobster rolls — fresh, meaty cuts tossed lightly with mayonnaise and served on a soft hot dog bun. Judging by the long lines, it might be the best deal in town: \$13 for what seems like the entire crustacean. Sit with fellow worshipers, or take your lobster roll down by the docks for a sunset view of the harbor.

9 p.m.

3) SECRET SWEETS

On summer nights, in a dark parking lot in the busier town of Oak Bluffs, a small crowd lines up at the screen door of the Martha's Vineyard Gourmet Cafe and Bakery (508-693-3688; 5 Post Office Square; www.mvbakery.com), waiting for warm doughnuts right out of the oven. The open secret is known as Back Door Donuts. The doughnuts are soft and sticky and cost just \$1 — though veterans will tell you the apple fritters (\$3.50) are superior.

Saturday

9 a.m.

4) EGG ROLLS AND WOOL

Get to the West Tisbury Farmers' Market (1067 State Road) when they open so you can watch the stalls being set up — and before the best produce is picked over. And bring your camera: it's a colorful scene of wildflowers, organic fruits and vegetables, homemade jams and, in back, somewhat curiously, a stall that sells spicy Vietnamese egg rolls. If you're in the market for a big-ticket item, don't miss the alpaca stall. It sells more than wool — they sell the whole animal for \$900, but there's a catch. "Alpacas are herd animals," said a girl at the counter. "You have to buy at least three." Open 9 a.m. to noon.

10:30 a.m.

5) CRUISE FOR ONE

The nicest beaches on Martha's Vineyard are private; you need a key to get in. But there are quasi-legal ways around those pesky laws. Rent a kayak from Island Spirit Kayak (508-693-9727; www.islandsspirit.com), which will deliver the kayak to you (delivery fees vary; rentals start at \$35 for three hours), and launch at Quitsa Pond, on the island's western side. Paddle to Menemsha Pond, then to Nashaquitsa Pond and Stonewall Pond before ditching the kayak and walking to Squibnocket Beach, a private stretch of sand that's a favorite of surfers. For a more law-abiding tan, paddle over to the quiet little beach on Menemsha Pond. You'll probably have the place to yourself.

2:30 p.m.

6) FRIED GOODNESS

It's a picture-perfect beach shack — without the beach. Housed in a tiny, weathered shingle house on a small side street in Menemsha, the Bite (29 Basin Road; 508-645-9239; www.thebitemenemsha.com) has been serving what many regard as the island's best fried clams, oysters, squid, shrimp and scallops for more than 20 years. There are only two picnic tables, so bring a couple of icy beers, get a small order of clams (\$12.95) and take the paper bag of crispy deliciousness to the dock and watch the fishermen. Bill Clinton, Vernon Jordan and Henry Louis Gates are all regulars, and if the road is blocked off when you go, get your camera ready — word is that the first family is going to pay a visit. Open May through October.

4 p.m.

7) SAY BAAAH

Martha's Vineyard is like a miniature Ireland — roads wind among sheep, horses and cattle grazing in bright green pastures, and many of the farms welcome visitors. The Allen Farm Sheep & Wool Company in the bucolic town of Chilmark (421 South Road; 508-645-9064) has been run by the same family since 1762. Wander the rolling fields. Buy lamb chops or try on a handmade wool sweater in the gift shop. Those things in the front paddock? They're not stuffed animals — they're orphaned lambs and they're very friendly.

8 p.m.

8) STATE DINNER

It may not be as famous as the vegetable garden on Pennsylvania Avenue, but the herb and vegetable patch at the new State Road restaurant (688 State Road; 508-693-8582; www.stateroadmv.com) has its admirers. Opened in June in the dry town of West Tisbury (yes, B.Y.O.B.), State Road features American cuisine using local ingredients. Inside, the place is simple and sleek — hardwood floors, high ceilings and Edison bulb chandeliers. Favorites include the Island Farm to Table Plate (\$13), a selection of fingerling potatoes, radishes and asparagus — some from its garden — and pan-roasted sea scallops (\$16), locally caught, of course.

11 p.m.

9) NIGHT AT THE RITZ

The island isn't known for night life, but your best bet for a nightcap is in the town of Oak Bluffs, where wealthy African-American families have been vacationing for decades. There is a handful of lively bars along Circuit Avenue — stop by the Ritz Café (4 Circuit Avenue; 508-693-9851), which attracts locals and has live music. Don't be fooled by the name — it's more of a draft beer than an appletini kind of joint.

Sunday

10 a.m.

10) STORES BY THE SEASHORE

There's a lot of good shopping between all those seagull paintings and dancing lobster napkins. In Vineyard Haven, drop by Carly Simon's Midnight Farm (18 Water-Cromwell Lane; 508-693-1997; www.midnightfarm.net) for its eclectic mix of gauzy sundresses, home

furnishings and, at times, signed copies of Ms. Simon's CDs. Up the street is Nochi (29 Main Street; 508-693-9074; www.nochimv.com), which sells robes, blankets and all things cozy. And down the street is LeRoux at Home (62 Main Street; 508-693-0030; www.lerouxkitchen.com), a housewares store with a great selection of kitchen supplies including those dancing lobster napkins.

1 p.m.

11) TAKE A HIKE

Yes, the Vineyard looks great from the water. But for a less-photographed view of the island's natural beauty, drive inland to Waskosim's Rock Reservation (www.mvlandbank.com). The nature reserve offers 185 acres of open fields, wooded trails and marshes. A modest, milelong hike takes you to Waskosim's Rock, the boulder that divided the island between the English and Native American Wampanoag tribe 350 years ago. Tempting though it may be, resist climbing the rock — Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Commission wants to make sure it's around for another 350.

THE BASICS

US Airways flies nonstop between New York and Martha's Vineyard. Round-trip fares for travel in August start at \$367, according to a recent Web search. Or make the 250-mile drive to Woods Hole, Mass., and take the ferry (\$135 for a round-trip ticket for a car). For reservations, call the Steamship Authority (508-477-8600; www.steamshipauthority.com).

The **1720 House** (152 Main Street; 508-693-6407; www.1720house.com) in Vineyard Haven was appropriately enough built in 1720 and has the low ceilings to prove it. It's cute and cheerful, has only six rooms, and is conveniently located. Rates start at \$150 during the summer.

Menemsha Inn and Cottages (508-645-2521; www.menemshainn.com) includes a guesthouse and collection of cottages tucked into the less-trafficked western part of the island — the woody area of Menemsha. It has lots of flowers, stone walls and privacy, and is a short walk to Menemsha beach. Double rooms start at \$355 a night; in the summer, private cottages start at \$3,700 a week.

Each room at **Lambert's Cove Inn** (90 Manaquayak Road, West Tisbury; 508-693-2298; www.lambertscoveinn.com) is individually decorated, which makes it feel like a

really, really nice house instead of a hotel. There's also a pool, tennis court and private beach. Summer rates start at \$225.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: August 9, 2009

The 36 Hours column on July 26, about Martha's Vineyard, misspelled the name of a village on Cape Cod where visitors can pick up a ferry for the Vineyard and misstated the town on the Vineyard where State Road restaurant is located. The village is Woods Hole, not Wood's Hole, and the restaurant is in West Tisbury; there is no North Tisbury. The column also gave incomplete directions for getting to Squibnocket Beach from Quitsa Pond by kayak and on foot. You would launch at Quitsa Pond and paddle to Menemsha Pond, but then would have to paddle to Nashaquitsa Pond and Stonewall Pond before ditching the kayak and walking to Squibnocket Beach. You cannot paddle from Quitsa Pond to Menemsha Pond and walk to the beach from there.