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**MIKE COHEN - NEW
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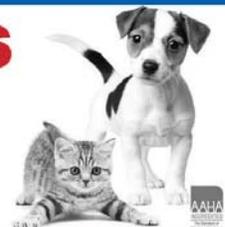
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NEW JERSEY'S WILDWOODS: Dog friendly beaches and aquarium highlight the animal friendly spot

BY MIKE COHEN



WILDWOOD, New Jersey - It is always exciting for my family and I to explore a brand new vacation spot. After experiencing Myrtle Beach, South Carolina for the first time in 2015, we decided to follow this up with the Wildwoods in New Jersey (www.WildwoodsNJ.com). As usual, we get an early start at securing reservations, doing so many months in advance of a July visit.

Home to more than 180 special events and festivals throughout the year, some might consider the Wildwoods the "Events Capital of the East Coast." The events take place at various locations throughout the island's three distinct municipalities: Wildwood, Wildwood Crest and North Wildwood. Visitors can find an event happening nearly every day of the week throughout the summer at locations including the Wildwoods Convention Center, Fox Park, Olde New Jersey Avenue, the beach, and the world-famous Wildwoods Boardwalk. Watch out for the trams, please!

Many families consider their four-legged friends family members and insist on traveling with their pets. The Wildwoods make it possible for the entire "family" to vacation together.

The Wildwoods offers a designated dog-friendly beach on Poplar Avenue, where dogs, along with

their owners, are able to enjoy a fun-filled day at the beach. Tails are always wagging as dogs make their way across the Boardwalk, onto the sand, and past the 25-foot-tall Fire Hydrant Sculpture at the entrance to the Dog Beach. Just to be safe, all dogs must be licensed, must always be leashed and owners are responsible for cleaning up after their four-legged friends.

The block-and-half-long, 190-yard-wide area is open from 6 a.m. until dusk and the beach is well equipped with all furry-amenities, including water stations, signs telling doggy owners to clean up after their loved ones and plastic bags for scooping up after their pets.

From October through May, dogs have full access to the Wildwoods world-famous beaches. But, from May through October, every four-legged friend has a special, designated place to call their own.

There is an awful lot to do here and it all starts at The Wildwoods Boardwalk, often called "two miles of smiles." Here you will find spectacular amusement piers, world-class roller coasters, interactive waterparks, family atmosphere, carnival-style games of chance, shops and irresistible food. Imagine, nearly nine million visitors are attracted here each season. We just loved the atmosphere.

The Boardwalk features Morey's Piers (www.moreyspiers.com), containing three action-packed amusement piers. Service dogs are permitted. Here you can also find the Seaport Aquarium, home to hundreds of fish and sharks, snakes, marmoset monkeys, moray eels, alligators and an interactive touch pool!

We were fortunate to get reservations at The Adventurer Ocean Inn (www.AdventurerInn.com), which I can confidently say is probably the nicest hotel in all of the Wildwoods. This is indeed an oceanfront location, which has everything that your family or group needs to relax and unwind at the beach. You can wake up to the sounds of the ocean, watch the sun rise from an ocean view or oceanfront balcony, enjoy breakfast in their oceanfront restaurant or simply bask in the sun at the beach or at the pool area.

From this location, you can walk to the beach, the Boardwalk, waterparks and the Wildwoods Convention Center, with ease. The latter features a cardio room, convention / meeting rooms, Southern exposure outdoor pool and kiddie pool,



as well as free outdoor and garage parking on the premises.

I would like to recommend two restaurants in particular, which are part of the Big Fish Restaurant Group: the Beach Creek Oyster Bar and Grill (www.beachcreek.net) and The Boathouse (www.boathouseonline.com). Both promise outstanding dining experiences.

We had planned on experiencing the Sightseer Whale & Dolphin Cruises (<http://bigbluesightseer.com>), but time ran out for us. Perhaps next time!

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(ED. NOTE: I have been to the Wildwoods many times, both as a teen and adult, and love it there. Next to Maine, it is my favourite vacation spot... and the water is much warmer, too....)