

Maryland's Eastern Shore

The St. Michaels Area

Story and Photos
by
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Photo courtesy of Inn at Perry Cabin

For a great place to go if you just want to get away for a while, have a nice romantic long weekend, or for a vacation not too far from home, Maryland's Eastern Shore is a superb choice. For those who live in the northern half of the Old Dominion, Maryland's part of the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay is closer than Virginia's portion of this unique real estate.

The Eastern Shore comprises over a third of Maryland's land area, but with only about 450,000 people, it contains less than eight percent of the state's population. The main activities of the region include farming, very large-scale chicken breeding and processing, outdoor water and field sports and tourism. The Chesapeake Bay, with its many tributaries and inlets, is a big draw for boaters, anglers, hunters, bird-watchers, nature lovers, beachgoers and others who are attracted to the water.

The Bay's name comes from a Powhatan (Algonkian) Indian word *Chespiooc*, which means "great shellfish bay." This is an early testament to the rich bounties of oysters, scallops, blue crabs and other sea creatures that were abundant in

the days of the Native Americans, but are diminished today because of pollution, over-harvesting and habitat destruction.

In 1561, the Spanish became the first Europeans on record to enter the Bay, and their attempts to settle the area were frustrated—they left in 1571, never to return. In 1605, the French attempted a settlement near what is now Annapolis, but were not successful in maintaining their foothold. The first Old World settlement of the Chesapeake Bay region was the English colony at Jamestown in Virginia in 1607. In 1634, Lord Baltimore established the first English presence in Maryland in St. Mary's City. And from then on, other villages and towns sprang up, mostly connected with the sea. These places today are tourist destinations that exude history, culture and charm; and they are great places to live and visit—places like St. Michaels, Easton, and Oxford, for example.

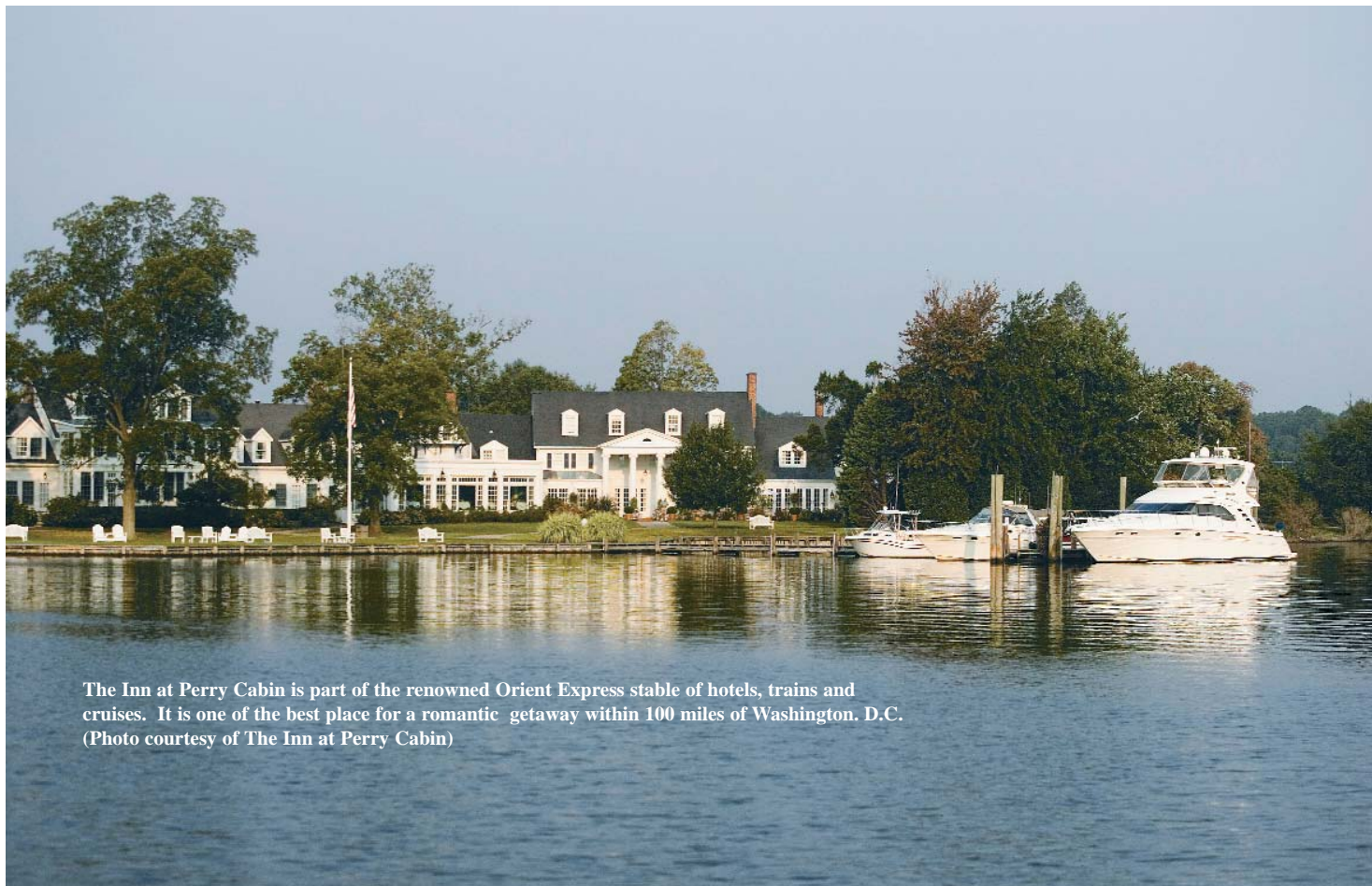
Ben Sheets, who owns Coastal Business Group, LLC, in Oxford, moved onto the Shore over seven years ago. An avid hunter, angler and dedicated family man, he says, "Talbot County is a great

place to live and raise a family. There's a real sense of community. It is safe; crime is relatively low. The schools enjoy a good reputation. There are numerous athletic outlets every season of the year for area children to take advantage of and enjoy. Winters are relatively short, and because of the proximity to the Chesapeake Bay, mild. This means there's just about enough time to change gears between hunting season and fishing season."

Whenever we visit the Eastern Shore of Maryland, we usually go to St. Michaels, about 90 minutes from our home in Northern Virginia. And we always stay at the elegant Inn at Perry Cabin, one of the exotic Orient Express Hotels and Resorts and an ideal base for exploring the area or fishing nearby waters.

St. Michaels

St. Michaels is a quaint, nicely preserved waterfront village on the Miles River, just west of Easton. It is home to scenic churches and colonial federal and Victorian homes. Its marinas bristle with sail and power boats and restaurants.



The Inn at Perry Cabin is part of the renowned Orient Express stable of hotels, trains and cruises. It is one of the best place for a romantic getaway within 100 miles of Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy of The Inn at Perry Cabin)

Although many specialize in fresh seafood, there is something for everyone's taste and pocketbook. St. Michaels' name is derived from the Episcopal parish established there in 1677.

The village has excellent shopping, with boutiques and shops offering antiques, gifts, crafts, art, clothing; and most are located in historically preserved buildings dating to earlier times. There are no malls, high rises, or big neon signs here.

St. Michaels' main attraction is the marvelous Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, which sits on 18 waterfront acres next to the Inn at Perry Cabin. The museum celebrates the maritime history of the Bay with indoor and outdoor exhibits covering commerce and trade, navigation, fisheries (both commercial and sport) and water-fowling through the ages. The campus is dominated by the impressive Hooper Strait Lighthouse, moved here in 1966 from about 60 miles away. The wonderful collection of sail, power, and rowboats on display or under restoration is the largest and most significant of its kind in the world.

St. Michaels is fondly known as the town that fooled the British during the War of 1812. In the summer of 1813, residents were warned of an impending British night naval attack. They hoisted lanterns high on the masts of their ships in harbor and up the nearby trees, tricking the English gunners into believing these were the lights of the town. The ensuing cannon fire overshot the town, and only one building, known today as Cannonball House, was hit. The structure now is privately owned and home to a proud family.

One of the world-renowned Orient Express chain of properties, the Inn at Perry Cabin serves well as base camp when visiting this part of Maryland's Eastern Shore for a romantic getaway or some angling on the Miles River and Chesapeake Bay. Less than 90 minutes by car from Northern Virginia, the Inn can also be a self-contained destination with fine dining, a full-service Linden Spa, an old fashioned



St. Michaels on the Miles River is a mecca for shopping and good food.

The historic Tidewater Inn in the heart of Easton has roots to the early 18th century and has been recently renovated.



parlor room that serves afternoon tea. Originally built in 1816 by Purser Samuel Hambleton to resemble the cabin of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's ship, the inn has grown to 81 rooms with conference facilities and is now a luxurious resort that exudes elegance and a serenity brought about by the quiet, the beauty of the grounds and the tranquil, ever-healing waters.

Easton

The best way to see this charming town of 15,000 people is to take a self-guided walking tour with a map provided by the Historical Society of Talbot County. Easton has historical sights, offers good shopping, casual and gourmet dining, and hotels and B & Bs, including the historic, recently renovated Tidewater Inn across the



The head of Town Creek in Oxford's historic district is home port to working boats and pleasure craft.

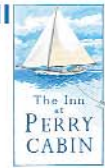
The Chesapeake Maritime Museum in St. Michaels is home to the former Hooper Strait Lighthouse. The once-condemned lighthouse was barged 60 miles to its current location in 1966.



street from Albright's Gun Shop.

On the second full weekend of November, at about the time migratory waterfowl arrive in good numbers, the city hosts the popular Easton Waterfowl

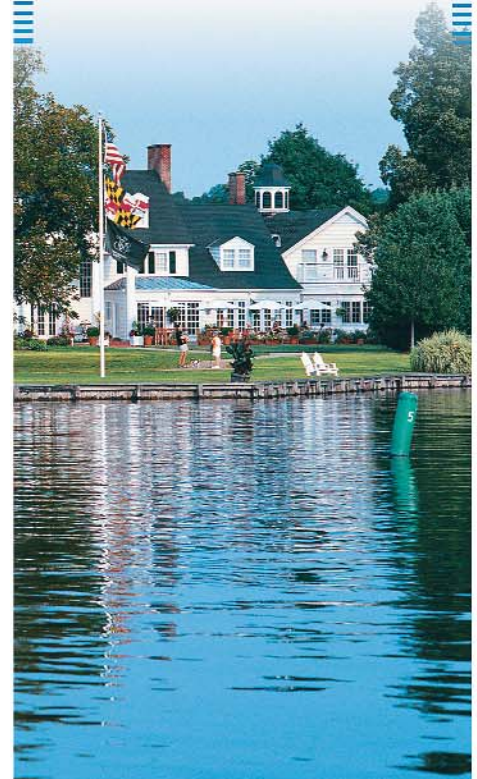
Festival. The festival features outdoor art including sculpture, hand-carved decoys and other carvings, paintings of wildlife and water scenes. Children's activities, great food, and a variety of live music add



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Dog with goose and a hunter silhouetted on the Chesapeake Bay



Chesapeake Bay striped bass, called rockfish in Maryland, readily take a well-presented fly.

to the event's festive atmosphere. This year's Waterfowl Festival is November 13–15, rain or shine.

In Easton, as in St. Michaels, Oxford, and other villages on the Eastern Shore, you can sail, canoe, kayak, fish, and go crabbing. If you like the waterfront outdoors, these are the places for you.

Oxford

This is the smallest of the three

destinations mentioned here, with a population of about 1,600. Oxford, founded in 1683, is one of the oldest towns in Maryland. The Oxford-Bellevue Ferry, commissioned in the 1680s, is thought to be the oldest privately operated ferry in the country. It crosses the Tred Avon River to the village of Bellevue, about seven road miles from St. Michaels, every 25 minutes except from December through February, when it is closed. The small-car-and-

pedestrian ferry offers wonderful views of the local area from the water.

The Oxford Inn, a nice bed-and-breakfast near the water, dates to the 1880s. The renovated inn also is home to Pope's Tavern, a gourmet bistro offering fine food at reasonable prices. The head of Town Creek in Oxford's historic district is home to working Bay boats and pleasure craft, a nice mix of different ways to enjoy the offerings of the Chesapeake Bay.



A beautiful sunrise over the Miles River from the lawn of The Inn at Perry Cabin



Kai Ohana (foreground) at anchorage at Marina Cay

(L to R) Tracy, Lauren, Alexis, Craig, Sara, and Preston Bach



torrid seven-days-a-week pace, often putting in twelve-hour days during a seven-year period.

Then in 1993 he realized the grind was producing little of what he was really interested in. He said he hardly remembered his children's names or what his wife looked like. He made the decision to take two years off to let Lauren explore her own career opportunities, while he took on the cooking and the various aspects of interacting with his children and their activities.

By 2006, the decision to sell their two businesses and their farm had been reached, and the purchase of the Italian-designed and built wooden staysail schooner called *Saudade* (Portuguese for "longing," as for an old friend or home), had been consummated. The Italian Minister of Transportation had initially commissioned her. It is believed he sold her to a group who fitted her out as a charter vessel, specializing in amateur treasure