

REASON'S WHY BARNEGAT LIGHT DESERVES TO BE America's Coolest Small Town

A finalist in Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine Contest

Less than three-quarters of a mile square with little more than 800 year round residents, Barnegat Light, found on the northern tip of Long Beach Island in Ocean County, New Jersey, is a tiny seashore town with a great nautical heritage and packed with things to see and do. Only 30 blocks long and two to three blocks wide, it is a sliver of sugar sand nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and Barnegat Bay and bordering the Barnegat Inlet.

Here are some reasons it is a really cool small town:

1. Climb to the state's iconic red & white Barnegat Lighthouse (200+ steps) for a magnificent view of the nine-mile long Island Beach State Park. Visit the Barnegat Lighthouse State Park Interpretive Center and attend one of the free programs offered by the Friends of Barnegat Lighthouse.
2. Stroll to the ocean on the concrete quarter-mile walkway that borders Barnegat Inlet, a prime spot for birding, fishing and, in the winter, spotting an occasional seal who has hauled out of the ocean to sun on the jetty. The colorful Harlequin ducks love to hang out here in the fall.

Like to fish? Let me count the ways you can do it in this town:

3. Charter your sport fishing boat and go deep-sea fishing. Jump aboard a party boat and make new friends with the same interest. Opt for the solitude of surf fishing from the beach for those feisty blues. Or enjoy a great view of Old Barney on a jetty along the inlet while waiting for a bite.

How about water sports?

4. Try stand up paddling (SUPing), go parasailing, try kayaking , windsurfing or kite sailing.
5. Rent some equipment and SCUBA
6. Dock or rent a boat at the marinas

Into food?

7. Dine on the freshest seafood you'll ever eat on land, fresh from the commercial fishing docks at Off the Hook take-out restaurant or take some home to cook with your favorite recipe.
8. Have breakfast at Mustache Bill's, one of only two recipients in the state to be named a James Beard Foundation American Classic
9. Enjoy an ice cream cone in the outdoor deck of Poppy's Ice Cream Parlour or have a gourmet coffee experience at "How You Brewing?" coffee bar.
10. Stop at Frank's Produce for gourmet cheeses and fresh baked bread.
11. Rent a boat to go crabbing and catch your own.
12. Buy seafood fresh from the docks.

Spare time?

13. Visit the docks and see if you can catch our local movie and TV “stars.
The Lindsay L played the Hannah Bodin, Captain Linda Greenlaw’s boat in the George Clooney movie, “The Perfect Storm. The Bjorn, F/V Frances Anne, F/V Monia are in Discovery Channel’s series, “Swords” Life on the Line.”
Captain Linda Greenlaw will be at Viking Village on June 19 to participate in the benefit JAZZY SEAFOOD FESTIVAL and will be doing a book signing.
14. Take a behind the scenes dock tour at Viking Village, then follow ReClam the Bay volunteers to visit their clam nursery and learn how important it is not to put things on the ground that will wash into storm drains and pollute the fragile bay.
15. Stop in at the Barnegat Light Museum, a former one-room schoolhouse, with its 1,000-plate original first order Fresnel lens from the lighthouse. Stroll though the Edith Duff Gwinn gardens that surround it and are maintained by the Ladies Garden Club of Long Beach Island.
16. Walk through the rare maritime forest at the north end of town or along the Beach between 12th and 13th streets where you can see the oceanfront while you stroll the self-guided nature trail.
17. Check out the still-standing mast on the beach between 10th and 11th street and know that it marks the remains of the Sea King that ran around in a storm and is buried underneath.
18. Take the Bed and Breakfast tour and savor the experience of elegant living with great water views.
19. Join in the monthly sandcastle-building contest. This tiny town has a big beach and a little tram ride to the ocean side.
20. Pack a picnic lunch and dine on a jetty watching boats go out the challenging Barnegat Inlet.
21. Taken an evening sunset cruise aboard Miss Barnegat Light or hang out with the locals at Ricks’ American Cafe.
22. Shop at one the boutique specialty shops or antique stores that dot the landscape or attend the three fine Arts and Crafts shows and the two antique shows held each summer at Viking Village where there are shops housed in antique fishermen’s shacks built in the 1920’s.
23. Rent a bicycle from Ives Five Seasons and ride a surrey pass the sandcastle homes in Loveladies. What’s the fifth season? It is September and October when the crowds are gone, but summer is still trying to hang around.
24. Charter a boat with a captain for a guided water eco-tour.
25. Pay tribute to “Sinbad,” a canine of questionable heritage, but great heart who actually was a member of the US Coast Guard with his own medical record, uniform and battle station. Buried with a full military funeral, he rests at the base of the flag at the US Coast Guard Station where a plaque marks his contribution to the spirit of those who fought for this country in WWII. There’s 1940’s newsreel about him in the Barnegat Light museum.

And a bonus special event: Come visit in June and participate in the “Blessing of the Fleet” when the local commercial and leisure fishing boats are blessed for the season. Come early and enjoy the fabulous fish fry sponsored by the local fire company the night before.