

May 22, 2009



#72 LONG BRANCH, NEW JERSEY

NEW-LOOK SHORE

TRAVEL TIME 1 hour 30 minutes by train

WHY? This once nothing-special town has reinvented itself as an upscale oceanfront resort.

MUST DO What makes this Jersey Shore town different from so many others is **Pier Village**, a massive complex of hotels, stores, restaurants and rental apartments along the ocean. Since its opening in 2005, Pier Village has become the unofficial town center, with an attractive boardwalk that more resembles South Beach than the Shore. Get gussied up at Pier Village's sleek **AquaMedica Salon and Spa**, voted best day spa in the state. Start off the evening with a glass of **Chardonnay** at the upscale wine bar the **Wine Loft** (32 Laird St.; [732] 222-7770), then enjoy a fancy Manhattan-style dinner (at Manhattan prices) at **Sirena Ristorante**, a nouveau Italian seafood spot overlooking the ocean (27 Ocean Ave.; [732] 222-1119). For an après dinner drink and dancing, the groovy **Avenue Nuit**, designed by renowned London architect David Collins, is the place to see and



On the beachfront at Pier Village.

be seen--at least on the Jersey Shore (23 Ocean Ave.; [732] 759-6700). Escape the "Village" and dial things down a notch in old-school Long Branch -- **Tuzzio's** has been around since the mid-'60s; three courses run as little as \$9.95 and there's live music on Fridays and Saturdays (224 Westwood Ave.; [732] 222-9614).

STAY HERE The just-opened **Bungalow at Pier Village** is billed as the Jersey Shore's "first authentic boutique luxury-lifestyle hotel." We don't know what most of those words mean, and why they're being used together in a sentence, but the hotel is mod and fab, with a champagne bar. Guests have access to the members-only Le Club, a beach club complete with cabanas, a roof deck bar, lounge and pool (from \$339, two-night minimum; [800] 889-4361). On the boardwalk and just north of Pier Village, the 254-room **Ocean Place Resort & Spa** has a private beach and indoor and outdoor pools (from \$169; [800] 411-6493).

HAPPENINGS Opening day of the **Monmouth Park Racetrack** is May 9, but the **Haskell Invitational** is the racing and drinking event of the summer (August 2). **Oceanfest**, the city's annual Independence Day celebration, takes over the promenade with food, entertainment, arts and crafts and a fireworks display (July 4). September 5 is the **Long Branch Jazz & Blues Festival**, an all-day event with music and fireworks. Pier Village hosts concerts and outdoor movies throughout the summer.

HOT TIP Just three miles from the beach, **Monmouth University's** 156-acre campus has great classic and modern buildings. Check out Woodrow Wilson Hall, a National Historic Landmark, where Wilson ran his campaign in 1916. It was used as Daddy Warbucks's mansion in the film version of "Annie."

LEARN MORE www.visitlongbranch.com



Pier Village has transformed Long Branch.



Stay at the new Bungalow at Pier Village hotel.



Everything's right on the beach.