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Cape Escape

A perfect family resort by the sea in Massachusetts

written by *Ken Schlager*



The relaxation pool at the Spa area is one of the newest attractions at the Chatham Bars Inn. The Spa is for adults only, but the rest of the inn is notable for its family-friendly features.

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The main inn has 40 guest rooms, some with balconies looking out over the impeccably manicured grounds and beyond to the Atlantic Ocean.

If you bond with a family at the Chatham Bars Inn one summer, there's a good chance you'll meet up with them at CBI the next year. And no wonder. For many, this sprawling Cape Cod resort is the perfect family retreat.

CBI is located on 25 waterfront acres in the tony town of Chatham, about midway up the south shore of Cape Cod. Looking at the Cape as an up-bent arm, Chatham is at the point of the elbow. The resort's impeccably manicured grounds are dominated by the main inn, a stately three-story building perched atop a lush rolling lawn. The main inn's wide veranda provides a captivating New England panorama of the Atlantic Ocean, with its procession of fishing boats and pleasure craft heading toward Chatham Inlet. In the distance one can see the sand bars that give CBI its name.

The main inn has 40 guest rooms, a restaurant, tavern, 3,000-bottle wine cellar, elegant lobby, and large, comfortable lounge. Guests can also stay in several newer buildings behind the main inn or in one of the 29 cottages of various sizes (there are 217 rooms altogether). Some of the cottages are located across Shore Road and down the hill from the main inn, directly on the beach. Also across the road are the Beach House Grill, the pool



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spa style: Each of the twelve spacious suites at CBI's Spa features a soaking tub, sauna, steam room, and access to the private relaxation pool.



A highlight of the main inn is the veranda, where breakfast patrons can pass the morning hours watching the fog burn off the Atlantic. At night, cocktails are served by the attentive waitstaff.



The view of the ocean from above the Beach House Grill. In the distance, you can see the sand bars that give the Chatham Bars Inn its name.



ahoy mates: Kids' programs are inventive and engaging, even when the occasional pirate comes ashore.

area, and the tennis center. During the summer, rooms range from \$585 per night to \$2,625 for a master suite accommodating up to six guests.

My family has almost always opted for the ambience and convenience of the main inn—as we did for our 2009 stay. It was our first return to CBI since the sale of the inn for \$165 million in 2006 to Capital Properties, a New York-based real-estate investment group. In the ensuing years, the new owners have invested more than \$30 million in CBI, upgrading many of the existing amenities and adding new features.

As crusty regulars, we gave the thumbs up to most of the changes. All of the guest rooms have been renovated—with no loss of New England charm—and the entire property has been wired for the Internet. Additions to the main inn include a fitness center and an expanded gift shop. At the edge of the property, a former dormitory building has been converted into a luxury spa.

A smart new addition is the breakfast counter in the South Lounge, where guests who don't care for a full breakfast can now purchase yogurt, fruit, muffins, and the like to accompany their morning coffee or tea—still complimentary at a self-service bar.

Alas, the lovely veranda is now considered part of the restaurant. The tables and lounge chairs where we used to start the day leafing through the morning papers, sipping warm beverages, and watching the fog burn off the bay are these days devoted to restaurant patrons. To accommodate those of us who just want to watch the passing scene, the new owners have carved an open-air seating area into the hillside next to the veranda.

One thing that has not changed is the children's program—which is still free—and that's what makes CBI a great deal for families. There are four age-specific programs: Beach Buddies (for ages 4-6); Clam Diggers (7-9); Wash-a-Shores (10-12); and Wave Runners (13-17). The programs for the younger groups have separate morning and afternoon sessions. That means parents and kids can reconnect at lunch—or mom and dad can pay a small fee for lunch-time child-sitting. The programs for the older kids run only in the afternoons. You can also sign up kids of any age for an evening program that includes dinner, again at a reasonable fee.

Over the years, we found the youth staff to be top-quality and attentive to the kids' needs. The activities—like "wacky beach olympics" and outings to the nearby fishing pier—are inventive, engaging, and age-appropriate.

Night-time activities include talent shows, movies, and dances. The kids are never bored—and the parents never have to feel guilty if they want to enjoy a quiet dinner without the youngsters.

Of course, there is plenty for adults to do, including organized activities like morning power walks to the nearby Chatham lighthouse or yoga classes on the beach. You can also sign up for a lobster cruise, a seal watch, or a

pirate cruise (each about \$40 for adults). Or take a quick ride on the resort's boat launch out to the sand bars, where you can picnic, gather shells, or swim in the tide pools—which are typically warmer than the bone-chilling water at CBI's beach.

The boat launch, fitness center, and bicycle rentals are included in the resort fee, which is charged daily to each room whether or not you use these facilities (\$18 for a single or double; \$28 for three or more). The bike rentals are a real plus. Chatham is ideal for bicycling. It's generally flat and you can follow marked

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trails where there is little traffic. If you are really ambitious, you can catch the southern end of the Cape Cod Rail Trail at the edge of Chatham and cruise all or part of its 22 miles. The paved two-lane trail takes you past inland lakes, cranberry bogs, and piney woodlands. It's a scenic treasure and great for family rides.

The newest attraction at CBI is the Spa. There are twelve spacious spa suites, each with soaking tub, sauna, steam room, and access to the private relaxation pool. This is a little adults-only world unto itself, but the long list of spa treatments and therapies are open to the public.

There are plenty of options for dining. The formal main dining room is renowned for its elaborate Grand Buffet, offered for brunch every Sunday (\$88 for adults; \$38 for children). For cozier meals, choose the newly expanded Tavern. Lunch is served at the Beach House Grill, just steps from the pool area. There are also weekly clambakes on the beach.

In-town dining options abound (see sidebar). It's easy to stroll into downtown Chatham, or you can use the hotel shuttle. Main Street is lined with shops and galleries. During the summer, you can enjoy an open-air band concert every Friday evening at the gazebo in Kate Gould Park or catch a Cape Cod League baseball game under the lights at Veterans Field, home of the Chatham Anglers.

Then again, you might just want to spend the evening back at the inn. Cocktails on the veranda? Board games by the fire in the South Lounge? It's all perfect.

Bring your Clubs:

Golf is everywhere on Cape Cod, including right across the road from the Chatham Bars Inn. That's where you'll find Chatham Seaside Links, a hilly 9-hole layout that's great for a quick round. Don't be fooled: The changing terrain makes this course tougher than it looks.

For a more ambitious round, choose the Captains Golf Course, a 36-hole facility in nearby Brewster. The town of Dennis also operates two excellent public courses—the wide-open Dennis Highlands and the more challenging Dennis Pines. Other well-maintained nearby choices include Bayberry Hills in West Yarmouth and Cranberry Valley in Harwich. Call ahead for afternoon bargain rates at all these courses.

Then there is Blue Rock, perhaps the prettiest par-3 course you'll ever play. It's a good destination for intermediate golfers and families to experience a country club atmosphere at reasonable prices.

Lobsters & More:



Dinner on the outdoor deck at Wild Goose Tavern in Chatham.

Seafood—and especially lobster—is the main attraction, but all kinds of dining, from elegant to family style, awaits on Cape Cod.

Family-friendly options in the town of Chatham include the Wild Goose Tavern, where you can enjoy your meal on an outdoor deck along Main Street, and the Chatham Squire, with its sports-bar atmosphere and modestly priced, but excellent fare. More upscale choices include the Impudent Oyster, an old-standby that is consistently packed, and a relative newcomer, the bistro-style Del Mar.

In the town of Orleans, within a short drive of Chatham, worthy dinner options include the Orleans Inn (call ahead for a table on the deck overlooking Town Cove) and Joe's Beach House Bar & Grille, with its

endless and varied menu. For a change of pace, check out Campari's, a reliable and moderately priced northern Italian eatery in North Chatham.

Looking for lobsters? The Orleans Lobster Pound lets you pick your own from an old oar boat in the lobby. It's informal and fun. Or take a drive out to Wellfleet for dinner at Moby Dick's, a classic Cape Cod experience. There always seems to be a wait at Moby, but don't be dismayed—the line moves quickly and the fresh-cooked seafood and sea-shanty atmosphere are unbeatable.



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