

The Big Feature

The Magic of the Castle on the Hill

By Ben Amato
Photos by Christina Eid

The allure of Montauk Point draws thousands each summer but there is a magic to this tip of Long Island that is just as powerful in the cold off season. The lighthouse is as beautiful as ever, even more so this Christmas when it was lit up with three thousand twinkling white lights for the first time. The event drew over five thousand revelers. The tiny town is even more quaint and comfortable in winter. The crowds are gone, empty dinner tables await and the sales at local stores are plentiful. But it is the "Castle on the Hill" that pulls many to "The End" for winter getaways. No matter the season, the Montauk Manor, perched majestically atop Signal Hill, draws back anyone who has even entered their magnificent granite floored lobby or those who have stayed in their beautiful suites and rooms.

It was Carl Fisher's goal to build "the most fabulous summer resort ever imagined in the western world," and when it opened in 1927, the rich and famous of that era witnessed his dream come true. Only 12 of those 10,000 acres still belong to this RCI Gold Crown Resort, but Fisher's dream still is alive in the 140 luxury rooms that the Manor now offers. General Manager Janice Nessel and her staff maintain the English Tudor style castle in accordance with Fisher's dream, welcoming the public into a gigantic lobby that evokes its grand old history yet is warm and comfortable. Soft, inviting couches and easy chairs flank the several roaring fireplaces and set a relaxing tone during check in. The high ceilings and huge walls of windows shut out the winter's gales but let in the light to wash away any weariness a traveler might bring with them.

The Montauk Manor is a unique resort, where each of the studios, one bedroom and larger suites are privately owned condominiums. Some tenants live here year-round, but most visit occasionally and have their rooms rented out by the hotel management. Others own several units and have their real estate investments provide them income. But all owners are responsible for the decorating of their units and that makes every Manor suite unique, beautiful and very homey.

Several one bedroom suites feature working fireplaces and loft bedroom areas. Others have terraces offering breathtaking views of Fort Pond Bay, Gardiner's Bay and the Atlantic. Flat screen TVs, DVD players and wireless Internet will keep you connected and entertained. Most have king sized beds, comfortable living room couches and chairs and a feel that you are both home and away, on a wonderful adventure yet safe, warm and secure. But the one feature that makes the Montauk Manor truly unique is that each room has an efficiency kitchen and dining area, complete with stove, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher, coffee maker, dishes, glassware and utensils.

"People come out here to just get away from things," according to Janice. "Once here you don't have to leave if you don't want to. Most people are here with their families, especially with the way the economy is now. They're able to come out and stop at a grocery store on the way out or shop when they get here. They still go out for maybe one dinner or breakfast...but they don't have to...We accommodate all walks of life. Some people want to cook, some want to go out and bring their dinners back in. You could go down to Gossman's or over to Duryea's and they'll make you a full lobster dinner you can take back to your room. We even have lobster pots and barbeques, with a waiting list so people can take turns using them."

The Manor is an amazing mix of grandeur and the familiar; the air of a Gilded Age gone by yet it is family friendly and up-to-

date, down to the DVDs you can borrow from the main desk for a quiet evening of movie watching. In the warmer months there is the bustle of outdoor activity, where sports-minded guests can sun or swim in their huge outdoor pool or have a ball, well, four types of balls; tennis, bocce, golf and basket. In the cold times there is the exercise room, sauna, the indoor pool and hot tub for those who want a more energetic vacation experience. There is now a Day Spa open for those who want to get rubbed in all of the right ways.

Janice and the Montauk Manor's staff are busy putting together weekend packages in conjunction with Hampton Jitney. They soon will offer weekend getaways that include deluxe bus transportation from Manhattan out to the Manor for the ultimate in a winter escape.

"I'd like to put weekend packages together on maybe certain holidays and offer special rooms and amenities, like a Valentine's Day or a President's Day weekend of three days. And from there maybe we could have a Murder Mystery Weekend or a theme weekend to draw people from the west, from New York City to the east, to here. We have a jitney, a small van that accommodates six at a time and it takes you wherever you need to go within the town of Montauk. So for any local restaurants, local grocery stores or shopping, we can take you to town, drop you off and make arrangements to take you back. We can take you to the lighthouse, to East Lake for the seal walks or wherever you would like to go."

Anyone who has ever visited Montauk has seen the castle on top of the hill. Everyone should take the turn on to Edgemere Street and up to the Manor to experience the grandeur of what Montauk was in its heyday. Stay for the day. Dine in their restaurant, the Breakwater Café or better yet, book a room for the evening. The memories of a weekend in an authentic American castle, a registered National Historic building, will last as long as this manor will stand. It has been here over eighty years and from the looks of this magnificent castle, it will be here for another hundred. ●

Visit www.montaukmanor.com for information about their accommodations, special events and rates. Or call them at 631-668-4400. Come to our website, www.OnTheJitney.com for an in-depth look at the Montauk Manor, including a video tour of their facilities and suites. And keep an eye out for our upcoming editions of *On The Jitney*. There will be news of their Hampton Jitney/Montauk Manor weekend packages and their Murder Mystery Weekend scheduled for January 30th.

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