



A Mystical Experience

by jack macaleavy

As the Emerald Coast thermometer exceeds 95° and the humidity level is not far behind, it's not unusual for one to seek an escape to a more temperate environment. Just 90 miles south of Boston on Long Island Sound lies the historical seaport of Mystic, Connecticut. It is indeed a mystical destination whose name is derived from the Algonquian word "missitoic," meaning great tidal river, and Mystic has been renowned as a ship-building center since the 1650s.

During the 1800s, hundreds of sloops, brigs and steamers were built and launched from Mystic, including famous ships such as the whaling sloop Shaw Perkins (1840) and the clipper David Crockett (1853). In addition, the U.S. Navy's first ironclad gunboat, the USS Galena, was launched into the Mystic River in 1862.

The area abounds with museums, shops, galleries and a plethora of outdoor recreation options such as hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking, tennis, boating, golf and more. One could spend the entire day exploring The Mystic Seaport, America's largest maritime museum and guardian of the largest collection of boats and nautical photography in the world. A 19th century whaling village has been created to demonstrate the tradition and history of this lifestyle. You can walk on the Amistad, the freedom schooner made famous by the movie, or see the largest and last-built 19th century whaling ship in the world, the Charles Morgan, or Sabino, one of the last coal-fired passenger steamers. In addition you can visit a planetarium or explore and experience 17 riverfront acres filled with galleries, museum displays and active demonstrations of the many facets of life in a seaport town. You also can rent sailboats or power-

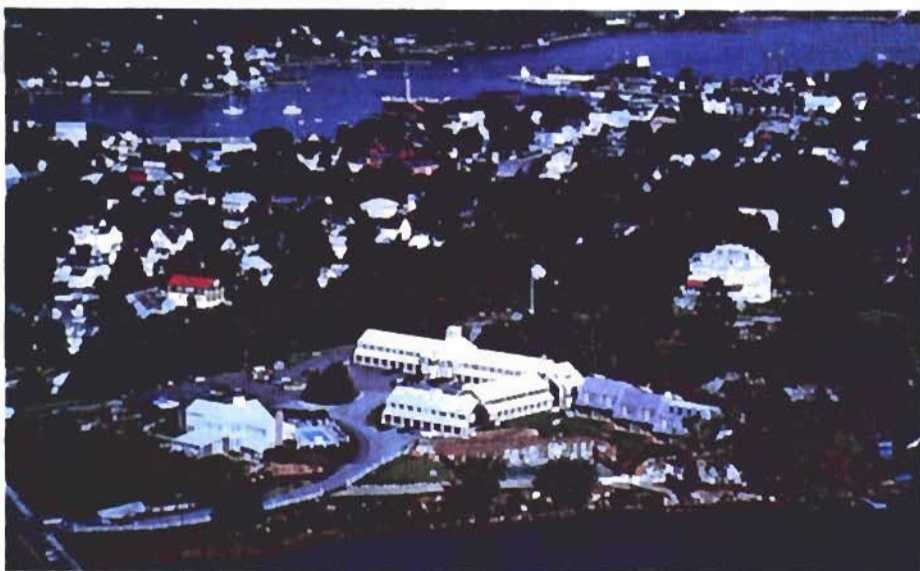
THE INN AT MYSTIC, BUILT IN 1904, CONSISTS OF FIVE VINTAGE BUILDINGS ... INCLUDING THE GATE HOUSE, WHERE HUMPHREY BOGART AND LAUREN BACALL HONEYMOONED IN 1945.

boats to get away and explore the river and Long Island Sound on your own.

'Challenges of the Deep'

Another destination would be the Mystic Aquarium, a state-of-the-art facility that is home to a collection of sea life, penguins, dolphins, sea lions, sharks and more. From an educational perspective, in "Challenges of the Deep" one can experience what it may feel like to go thousands of feet below the surface in search of lost ocean liners, exotic sea life or old shipwrecks. This exciting exhibit was designed by Robert Ballard, who discovered the Titanic. The aquarium recently underwent a \$52-million renovation and is the East Coast's only marine animal rehabilitation center. Beached whales and injured dolphins are shipped to the Mystic Aquarium for health care and eventual reintroduction back to nature. You can see a pair of pure white beluga whales from above or through a Plexiglas window where they playfully come just inches away.

If you desire experiences that are more hands-on, then there are many options available. You can:



- Sail on the Angia, an 81-foot replica of a three-masted schooner.
- Rent a 16-foot skiff and captain your own boat around the harbor area.
- Enjoy a riverboat ride on the Connecticut River.
- Experience Enviro-Lab, a 2 1/2-hour ocean expedition that includes pulling a trawling net, collecting plankton and other marine species.

- Watch for bald eagles, harbor seals and whales on Sunbeams Fleet of cruise options.

(above) Built in 1904, the Inn at Mystic overlooks Long Island Sound and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (previous page) The Gate House, a secluded building overlooking a small orchard and the grounds at the Inn, offers a luxurious setting for a vacation.

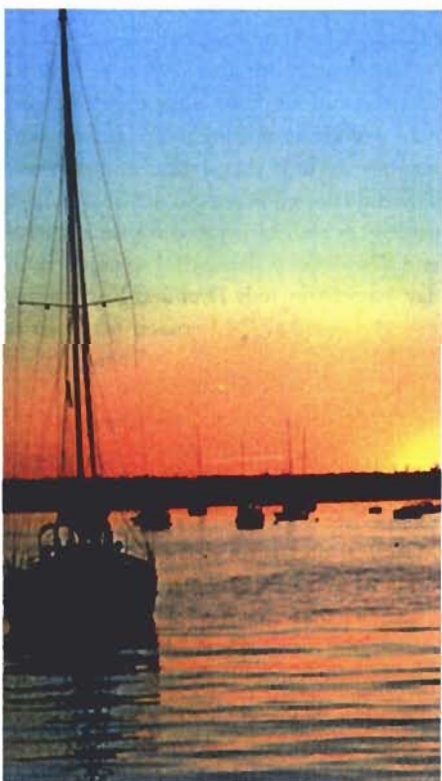
- Board the Cross Sound Ferry for a day trip to Long Island or ferry to Block Island, 12 miles out into the Atlantic. Block Island has miles of public beaches and recreational options such as biking, horseback riding, shopping, bird watching or dining at one of its many fine restaurants.

Most everything is within walking distance, and only a few require a short drive. There are four separate, quaint shopping villages and museums offering entertainment and educational opportunities for young and old alike.

Welcome to Stonington

Just 10 minutes down U.S. 1 lies the 18th century fishing village, Stonington. With only a couple of bed and breakfast inns available, it offers the visitor a rare glimpse of what day-to-day life is like in a quaint New England town. From atop the restored lighthouse, on a clear day one can see the tip of Long Island and the shore of Rhode Island. Stroll the streets and see up close the classic New England homes and browse the antique shops in the heart of town. Also just a short drive down I-95 is the Foxwoods Resort Casino which bills itself as the largest casino in the world

(below) Breathtaking sunsets over the harbor are a highlight of any Mystic vacation.



and the nation's first self-contained, smoke-free casino.

Now – where to stay? The only place to be is the Inn at Mystic built in 1904 by Katherine Haley, the widow of the founder of the Fulton Street Fish Market. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and consists of five vintage buildings on 15 landscaped acres overlooking Long Island Sound. This is where Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall honeymooned in 1945, and Julia Roberts appeared there in "Mystic Pizza." The Kennedy family also reserved the entire property for a family function and Walter Cronkite has used it for a getaway. Many rooms are luxuriously appointed with period antiques, canopy beds, fireplaces and other amenities that will re-create a bygone era of fine living. If available, ask for Bogart and Bacall's room, Number 8 in the Gate House, a secluded building overlooking a small orchard and the grounds.

The property offers an outdoor pool, heated whirlpool for those chilly evenings, outdoor tennis, two putting greens and complementary use of kayaks, canoes and sailboats. There are flower, vegetable and English herb gardens as well as apple and pear orchards and a beautiful walking trail to enjoy. Each day, proprietors Jody Dyer and Nancy Gray offer complimentary afternoon tea, pastries and hors d'oeuvres from 4 to 5 p.m.

Enjoy Some Fine Dining

The Flood Tide Restaurant, rated one of the "16 exceptional restaurants in Connecticut" in the May 2000 *Gourmet Magazine*, also is located on the property. Situated in a cozy Colonial-style house, the restaurant has the feel of a sea captain's home and offers spectacular views of the Long Island Sound and Mystic Harbor. Its chef, Bill Hall, graduated from Florida's Culinary Institute and trained in France, Switzerland and Italy. His cooking style is

defined by the use of lighter ingredients and more vegetable-based dishes. He gets many of his ingredients from the property's vegetable and herb gardens, and the seaport ferries fresh fish daily to his back door.

One could easily describe any meal of the day at the Flood Tide Restaurant as fine dining. Each plate is prepared and served like a piece of gourmet artwork to please the eye even before it tantalizes the taste. There is very little that the chef or his staff will not do to ensure that you are completely satisfied with your meal. Hall is often seen in the dining room discussing the evening choice or, in some cases, providing tableside cooking, bonding with his guests and explaining his style of cooking. *Travel & Leisure Magazine* has described the experience as "an uncommon pleasure."

A three- to four-day weekend respite at the Inn at Mystic will provide everything your heart could desire and more as you escape the oppressive Florida heat this summer. The Inn is no secret in the Northeast, and I highly recommend ample advance reservations for both room and food alike. Enjoy.

For more information on a Mystic vacation, call the Inn at Mystic (860) 536-9604 or visit www.innatmystic.com.

(left) Visitors to Mystic can enjoy a sailing excursion aboard a schooner like this one. (below) The Inn at Mystic, also known as the Haley Mansion, was built in 1904 by Katherine Haley, widow of the founder of the Fulton Street Fish Market.

