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Asbury Park, New Jersey

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By Amber Benham

Need to escape the bustle of city life, but want to stay close to home? From tranquil beaches to chic restaurants, Asbury Park is a must-see on your next getaway.

Sample the dazzling creations of **Taka** (632 Mattison Ave., 732-775-1020), where Bill Kessler and Taka Hirai blend Japanese and American cuisine, with a dash of Chinese flavor. BYOB. Family-run **Sister Sue’s** (311 Bond St., 732-502-8383) serves up heaping portions of savory Trinidadian fare. Vegan/Vegetarian-friendly. **Bistro Olé** (230 Main St., 732-897-0048) dishes out topnotch Spanish and Portuguese cuisine with Latin flair. Visit **Carmine’s** (162 Main St., 732-774-7834) for a taste of Southern Italy and an extensive wine list. A perfect lunch spot, **Be Green** (609 Cookman Ave., 732-775-2633, begreenjuicebar.com) offers salads, soups, smoothies and organic vegan pastries. After the clubs, stop by **The Chat & Nibble** (932 Asbury Ave., 732-775-5100) for classic diner basics. Open all night Fridays and Saturdays.

Don’t miss the shopping on **Cookman Avenue**. Pick up the latest fashions at trendy **Ciao Bella Boutique** (608 Cookman Ave., 732-774-6507) or the perfect gift at **Moxie** (708 Cookman Ave., 732-776-5433, asburymoxie.com). Admire contemporary art at **Apex Gallery** (611 Cookman Ave., 732-776-7746, apexgalleryasburypark.com) and **Rock Paper Scissors Gallery** (716 Cookman Ave., 732-897-1111, gorockpaperscissors.com). For weekend fun, join in gay volleyball on the **5th Avenue beach**. Visit **ladies2000.com** for the latest on summer’s hottest parties for women.

Lodging in Asbury Park ranges from a cozy B&B to a hotel pumping with rhythms from the in-house club below. For R&R, try the **6th Avenue House** (305 6th Ave., 732-361-6609). Nestled in a newly renovated Victorian cottage, this B&B sits two blocks from the beach, featuring ocean views and a wraparound porch. Weekend rates range from $150-$225, breakfast included. Opens Memorial Day weekend. Travelers will delight in the **Empress Hotel** (101 Asbury Ave., 732-774-0100, asburyempress.com), where rooms come standard with private balconies (pool and ocean views available). Summer rates begin at $169 weekdays/$239 weekends, including entrance for two to **Paradise** (hotel lobby, 732-988-6663, paradisenj.com), dance club & home of Asbury Park’s thriving late-night drag scene.

A dynamic club/bar duo, **Cruisin’** and the **Circuit** (911 Kingsley St., 732-776-7661, cruisinthecircuit.com) reel in ladies on Friday nights. **The Stone Pony** (913 Ocean Ave., 732-502-0600, stoneponyonline.com) serves up live rock and roll. Visit **Georgie’s** (812 5th Ave., 732-988-1220, georgiesbar.com), a mellow venue, for pool or karaoke. For seaside ambience head to the **Tiki Bar** (South Boardwalk Balcony of Convention Hall), offering drinks and appetizers.