

United States

# A Fork in the road

The Hamptons is New Yorkers’ glam holiday escape, but Alice Wasley prefers the low-key charm of another Long Island retreat

Greenport



## ESCAPE ROUTE GETTING THERE

From New York City, take the train (Long Island Rail Road), bus (Hampton Jitney) or hire a car. [mta.info](https://www.mta.info); [hamptonjitney.com](https://www.hamptonjitney.com)

## STAYING THERE

The Harbor Front Inn is a waterfront hotel with chic, spacious rooms and friendly staff, which is conveniently located in the heart of Greenport. [theharborfrontinn.com](https://www.theharborfrontinn.com)

## PLAYING THERE

Try your hand at oyster shucking at the Little Creek Oyster Farm & Market. [littlecreekoysters.com](https://www.littlecreekoysters.com)

The oyster shack is perched on the water’s edge, near where the ferry travels to and from Greenport to Shelter Island. It’s late afternoon and we’re at Little Creek Oyster Farm & Market, which is in an old bait and tackle shop. We’re rugged up and sitting outside with our bucket filled with ice and local oysters. Fortunately, my companion is something of a professional shucker, so we can take advantage of the “Go Shuck Yourself” option (minus the shucking lesson) and I can kick back with a cocktail. It’s hard to believe that just this morning we were lining up for bagels and coffee in the East Village.

We’ve taken a side trip from Manhattan to the North Fork of Long Island. It’s lesser-known than the South Fork (aka the Hamptons). If the forks were sisters, the North Fork would be Solange to the South’s Beyoncé. Where the Hamptons is glitz, glamour and billionaires’ compounds, the North Fork is wineries, farmstands and low-key charm.

We have hired a car to get here but, unlike the Hamptons, the centuries-old fishing village of Greenport with its quaintly painted clapboard buildings is very walkable. Our hotel, the lovely Harbor Front Inn, is in the middle of the village with views of the harbour and easy access to shops, restaurants, cafes and our new favourite oyster shack. Bikes are available to guests but we are travelling with a two-year-old whose cycling skills lag well behind his enthusiasm so we skip them.

Next day we swing past the Silver Sands Motel, which is just out of town, overlooking Pipes Cove. I have fond memories of staying here when I was living in Manhattan during the tail end of the Obama years. It’s a classic Mid-Century motel that has recently had a thoughtful upgrade. The new owners have retained much of its original character and its famed neon seahorse sign. We’re here for Nookies, the 1950s-inspired diner that is open to visitors as well as guests. It’s a tiny space pumping out diner classics like omelettes, BLTs and short stacks of pancakes. We order tomato soup and grilled cheese for the little guy, which he refuses because the cheese is the wrong colour. It turns out to be his loss because it’s the tomatoey-est tomato soup I’ve ever tasted. The simple menu is elevated by great local produce and everything arriving to the table hot and straight off the griddle.

With our stomachs full, we’re ready to explore the countryside. After driving for about 15 minutes through verdant farmland and rolling vineyards, we pull up at the 8 Hands Farm farmstand, which is stacked with glossy eggplant, broccoli rabe, kale, various varieties of lettuce and fresh eggs from the free-range chickens I can see in the distance, all with the promise of more goodies inside. I head into the classic red barn and pick up some local triple-cream brie and crackers.

Next stop is Harbes Family Farm, where we’ve heard you can pat animals. It’s harder to find a park than in the East Village. Everyone is here to pick pumpkins for Halloween. We’re not in the market for a pumpkin, so say hello to a few friendly goats and hightail it out of there.

The word is that the nearby McCall Wines has the best pinot around, so we drop in for a quick tasting and pick up a bottle to go with the brie later. It’s a pretty spot, where people are enjoying the sunshine at picnic tables outside the cellar door.

A few years ago, an Australian friend and her American husband established Old Sound Vineyard, where they hand-pick grapes and make zippy wines like skin-contact chardonnay, rosé and chillable merlot. We are in the area, so we stop by for a tour and a taste, and stay for some homemade quiche and a chat among the vines.

Before we head back to the hotel, we sneak in a snack at the Sound View hotel. It’s in a spectacular location jutting out over Long Island Sound and as we watch the waves crashing below it feels like the perfect setting to be sharing an overstuffed lobster roll and fat salty fries.

Next morning we take the ferry over to Shelter Island and then a second one to Sag Harbor to check out the windswept beaches and huge estates of the South Fork. On the way home we stop at the roadside Clam Bar, between Montauk and Amagansett, for steamed clams. The ferry delivers us back to Greenport and we’re happy to slide back into the slow rhythms of village life before heading back to Manhattan.

*The writer was a guest of The Harbor Front Inn.*



Alice Wasley is a freelance writer who spends far too long staring out the window. She is currently working on her first novel.

Clockwise from top: The Sound View hotel looks out to Long Island Sound; picnic tables in the pretty garden at McCall Wines; fresh oysters and cocktails at Little Creek Oyster Farm & Market; Nookies at Silver Sands Motel offers diner classics elevated by local produce.