

# Long Island's Perfect Driving Loop

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With the passing of Labor Day, summer is “officially” over. Still, Long Island’s beaches, parkways and vineyards—and all those former family estates dedicated as public arboretums, parks, mansions and museums—spur the spirit to get in the car and go. So I did.

For my Long Island loop, I transformed the usual fish-shaped land mass to a fish-on-a-platter form, the way it looks after the fishmonger lops off the head (Queens and Brooklyn) and tail (Montauk and Greenport/Orient Point). This itinerary travels east on Rte. 27A, onto the South Shore, west on Rte. 25A and onto the North Shore, with occasional stops on their strip-mall-sided siblings, rtes. 27 and 25).

Starting south on Meadowbrook State Pkwy., a sense of space expands near wetlands, low bridges and on Ocean Parkway, where miles of pine trees, brush, dunes, bay and ocean pay homage to nature. This playground boasts beaches to walk (Jones Beach), a lighthouse to climb (Robert Moses State Park) and charter fishing boats to admire (Fishing Station at Captree State Park).

Robert Moses Causeway floats so near the Great South Bay that cars and clambers are almost eye-to-eye. The 27A East exit (aka Montauk Hwy. or Main St.) leads to Bay Shore and a series of South Shore estates that have become public parklands. Gardiner County Park welcomes leashed pets on a path to the bay, and Sagtikos Manor, where George Washington slept in 1790, dates to the 17th century. Formerly, they belonged to the Gardiner family as a land grant from King Charles I. Heckscher State Park in East Islip is vast and offers options to walk, cycle or drive along the bay. The Bayard Cutting Arboretum in Great River was developed from Frederick Law Olmstead’s plan (c. 1887), with

old oaks soaring over holly trees and azalea and rhododendron bordering riverfront paths. From the mansion’s café, the view across Connetquot River is of Oakdale’s Idle Hour, a former Vanderbilt Estate. Now, it’s Dowling College and a residential neighborhood with bridges over narrow canals, a tower, chicken coops turned into living spaces and waterfront homes. Nearby, the Connetquot River State Park Preserve, formerly an exclusive sportsmen’s club, offers permit holders 3,473 acres of bird and animal life for hiking, fishing and kayaking. All three parks are integral to the 34-mile Long Island Greenbelt Trail linking South Shore Estuary Reserve with Long Island Sound. In West Sayville,

the Long Island Maritime Museum showcases the oyster sloop *Priscilla*, a working vessel from 1888 to 1963.

There’s theatrical culture on this stretch of the South Shore, too. Boulton Center is in Bay Shore, and the Gateway Playhouse attracts theater-lovers to Patchogue and Bellport. The Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center draws top talent, and Pizzetteria Brunetti lures those who appreciate homemade dough and mozzarella along with Italian beer and wine.

My journey then leaves Westhampton via county roads 31 (north) to 104 (left) to 105 (right), a pleasant drive passing golf courses, woodlands and a bridge over the Peconic River. At Rte. 25 (Main Rd.) the



*Above Left: Captree fishing boat; Above: Fresh lobster at Jordan’s Lobster Farm; Opposite Page: Jamesport’s Tasting Room.*



“Welcome to Long Island Wine Country” sign signals arrival in the North Fork and tasting rooms such as Paumonok (Aquebogue), Tasting Room (Jamesport) and Shinn Estate and Sherwood Vineyard (Mattituck). Mattituck is also home to block-long Love Lane and the inventive food and welcoming hospitality at Love Lane Kitchen. Heading west, Main Rd. reaches Tanger Outlet, where the newly opened Empire State Cellars & Tasting Room, just before the entrance to the Long Island Expwy, pours and sells New York State wines.

My loop then passes Rte. 25 and goes north where, after a pie-buying stop at Briermere Farms, Sound Ave. (Rte. 25A) wiggles west between rural farms, the beach and campgrounds at Wildwood State Park, Sound Beach and Miller Place, ending in Port Jefferson. Also called North Country Rd., 25A is bordered by tree-covered hillsides, historic clapboard houses and steeple-topped churches as it edges past a pond and waterside park and arrives at the stunning Stony Brook Village Center. Its stately post office and storefront boutiques across from the Three Village Inn (Mirabelle Tavern) all face the harbor.

Back on 25A, the Long Island Museum houses 220 historic carriages and 40,000 American artifacts, some dating from the 18th century. Through Smithtown and Kings Park the drive passes hiking paths in the Makamah Nature Preserve, and at Mill Pond House, the dining room faces Centerport

Harbor, as do houses perched on steep hillside borders.

The North Shore is famous for its historic Gilded Age mansions and a road sign on 25A directs drivers to one of the most beautiful: the Vanderbilt Museum, Mansion & Planetarium (planetarium is currently closed for renovations). In nearby Huntington, the Heckscher Museum may not be an official mansion, but it features permanent and changing exhibits. In Cold Spring Harbor, there's a 17th-century seafaring village and the Whaling Museum, which includes an authentic 19th-century whaleboat and an impressive scrimshaw collection. Just south (Rte. 108 to Rte. 25), Oheka Castle is



an exquisitely restored, historic mansion, which operates as an event venue and hotel with tours and monthly prix-fixe dinners. And,

perhaps the most popular among them all, Old Westbury Gardens, the former Phipps mansion, has a spectacular 200-acre garden, with lilac, wisteria and rhododendron enhancing paths, ponds and lakes. Tours showcase original architectural details, English antiques and noteworthy art within 44 rooms open to the public.

Roslyn Harbor, a village with its own style, is our final destination, just a couple of miles from Meadowbrook State Pkwy. Here, the Nassau County Museum of Art features an impressive sculpture garden and changing exhibits.

**For more information:**  
[discoverlongisland.com](http://discoverlongisland.com);  
[AAA.com/Travel](http://AAA.com/Travel)

*Top: Oakdale's Bayard Cutting Arboretum; Bottom: Former Phipps mansion, now Old Westbury Gardens.*



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*Autumn on Long Island.  
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Come out and savor award-winning wines. Stroll along miles of nearly deserted beaches. Uncover bargains at Hamptons boutiques. Pick up fresh seafood and wholesome veggies at roadside stands. Once you get a look at our "summer's over" restaurant and hotel prices, you'll surely want to extend your stay.



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