

Destinations



MARYLAND

THE BELLE OF ST. MICHAELS

More than just providing an elegant view of sailboats, Maryland's remote Inn at Perry Cabin gives guests the cruise-ship treatment. By Cristina Velocci

In the movie *Wedding Crashers*, Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn invade a nuptials celebration held on the lawn of a sprawling white colonial mansion set on acres of waterfront property. The guests mingle in their black-tie best as, behind them, yachts and sailboats glide on a sparkling river. Taking it all in, Wilson declares, “Class — first-class all the way.” | From the brick driveway lined with rows of Linden trees up to the stately manor and beyond, the Inn at Perry Cabin, where this scene was filmed, exudes elegance without pretense. Its casual, easygoing attitude is much in sync with St. Michaels, Maryland, the tranquil Victorian hamlet the Inn calls home.

Once a busy port and shipbuilding center, this yachting community dates to the 1670s, making it one of the oldest towns in America. It retains its Old World charm, with antique and specialty shops — a number of them housed in their original buildings from the early 1700s — clustered on Talbot Street, the main thoroughfare. The nearest traffic light, by the way, is nine miles away.

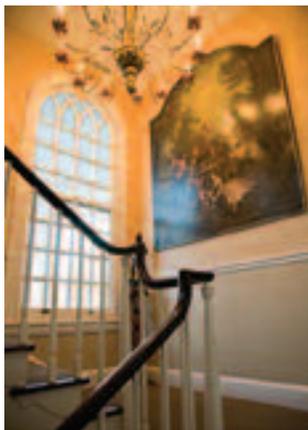
Though the traditional way to get here is by boat (most homes’ main entrances face the water for this reason), the preferred conveyance is a private plane. Fly into Easton Airport — where the FBO Maryland Air can service and hangar your wings — and you’ll avoid

the Chesapeake Bay Bridge’s four-mile traffic jams. Better yet, those with a helicopter can land directly on the Inn’s lawn, Dick Cheney permitting (the vice president recently moved into the neighborhood, bringing with him a restricted no-fly zone). I fly in on an eight-passenger Hawker 800 business jet, one of six planes available for charter by East Coast Flight Services. A 15-minute drive down Route 33 later, I’m standing in the hotel’s lobby.

Since its less-than-humble beginnings (it was a private home, farm and riding academy until 1920), the property has changed hands several times, most recently from Sir Bernard Ashley (husband of the late designer Laura) to its current

owner, upscale hotel chain Orient Express. Gone are the floral prints synonymous with the Ashley brand, replaced with a more muted palette of taupe, soft blues and off-whites that evoke the Inn’s nautical surroundings.

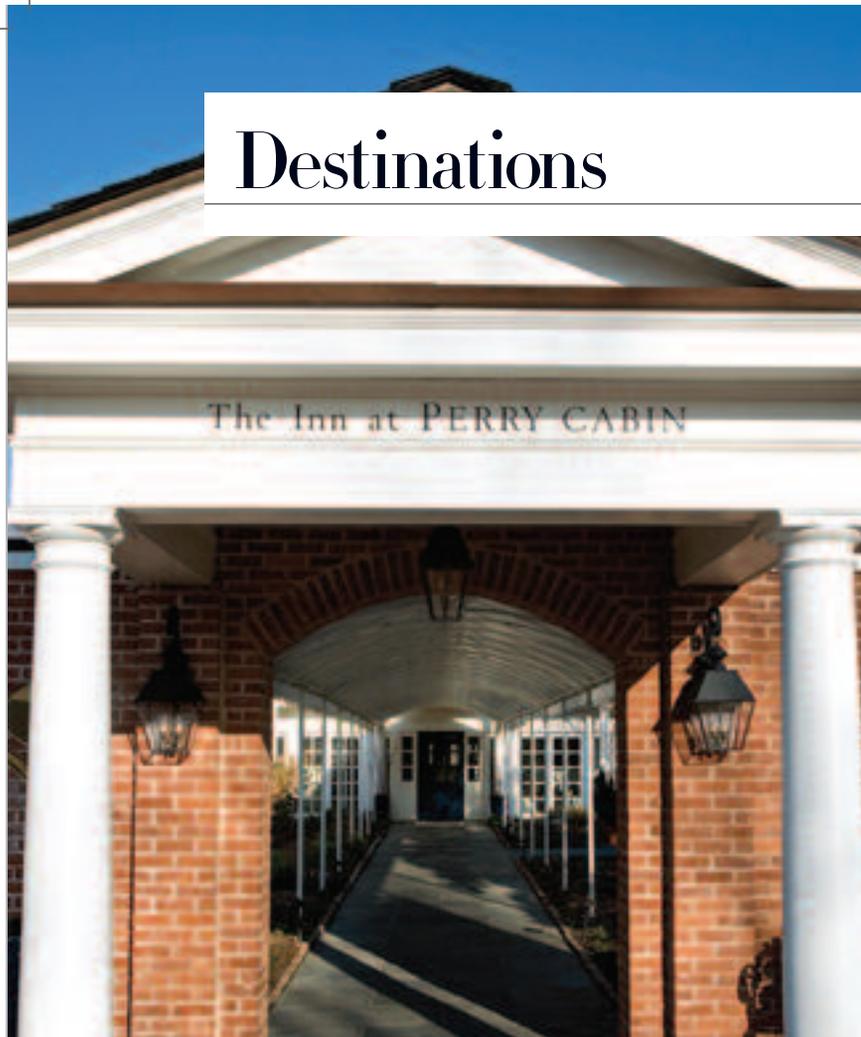
The 81-room hotel spreads through three adjacent buildings, with the dining and meeting rooms at the heart of the Inn in the historic main house. As a chipper hotel staffer leads me to my Crescent Wing Suite — past seahorse-patterned rugs, framed black-and-white seascape photos and dozens of antique model sailboats stationed in a series of winding corridors — I wonder if I might need a compass to navigate back.



PERRY NICE:
(Clockwise from top left) A gazebo overlooks the Miles River; the wine cabinet outside Sherwood’s Landing; the Crescent Wing; the historic center



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SEA AND BE SEEN:

(Clockwise from left)
The entryway;
a skipjack in progress
at the Maritime
Museum; St. Michaels
town; a restored boat
at the museum



In my Master Suite, I find a cushy linen sofa and matching chairs offset by dark cedar floors and a remote-controlled, gas-powered fireplace. I won't need this amenity today; from my veranda overlooking the Chesapeake, I can hardly imagine spending time cooped up in front of the hearth. The lawn, dotted with Adirondack chairs and two gazebos, looks just as inviting as the water it reaches out to meet. As I let my mind wander, thinking of boating trips along the Miles River for a picnic lunch or sunset cruise, I realize for the first time since I've arrived that I'm hearing the most wonderful thing: nothing. If I strain my ears, I can pick up the faint sound of sails flapping and birds chirping — but that's it.

I head back inside and make my way to the cooking

demonstration room — food is entertainment here. British master chef Mark Salter has been at the helm of the Inn's cuisine since 1993, dazzling the palates of Margaret Thatcher, Diane Sawyer and Jane Seymour, among others. Tonight, in his Viking demonstration kitchen, he whips up a tempest, frantically chopping bok choy to create his signature dish: Maryland crab spring roll on a bed of pink grapefruit, avocado and toasted almonds. One bite and I understand why one Inn client flew Salter to Barbados to have him make this dish for a week.

Yet this is a taste of more good things to come. I file past a row of unique basket lights modeled after crabbing cages and a wicker wine cabinet holding several of the Inn's 10,000 bottles. In the main dining

room, a wall of windows offers unobstructed views of the Miles, but my eyes fixate on the menu, filled with fresh seafood and local ingredients from the nearby farmers' market.

I begin to see a pattern: Between the water-driven activities, the nautical décor and the sumptuous food, I feel like I'm aboard a ship from the grand days of cruising. For those who would actually like to captain a vessel, Olympic sailor Steve Colgate opens his Offshore Sailing School at the Inn in June, offering beginner-to-intermediate sailing lessons for those wishing to earn Basic Keelboat Certification.

Those who would rather contemplate the water than play in it can walk around the corner to the Maritime Museum, an 18-acre waterfront campus home to a working boatyard, where you can watch (or help) experienced shipwrights restore historic vessels and build skipjacks. For landlubbers, the Inn can book tee times at six local golf courses, guide you to nearby tennis, horseback riding and trap shooting or set you up on complimentary single or tandem bicycles to survey the flat terrain of St. Michaels. Also opening in June is the plush 6,000-square-foot Linden Spa, which in addition to the standard treatments and amenities features remedies made of herbs harvested from the Inn's surrounding woodlands and cutting gardens.

Alternately, you can simply relax. I shamelessly request a *Wedding Crashers* DVD from the front desk, sink into my bed and watch on a TV that pops up from a leather chest just beyond my feet. Although Hollywood can do a lot for a place, this one is much better experienced in person. Class — first-class all the way. ■