

## WINTER GETAWAY

# Saybrook Point Inn & Spa a balm for sagging spirits

By Phyllis A.S. Boros  
STAFF WRITER

Want to feel as though you're a million miles from home without spending a dime on airfare?

Just as Frank Sinatra and other "Rat Packers" learned decades ago, comfort and calm awaits up the coast at a waterside inn, about 60 miles from Bridgeport.

With seemingly endless pewter-gray skies and cold-weather predictions still in the offing, a balm for sagging spirits and cabin fever might well be found in a weekend getaway that provides a retreat from the work-a-day world in grand style — without breaking the bank. A type of getaway that's offered at Saybrook Point Inn & Spa, where the surroundings are elegant, but not stuffy, and the pace can be as relaxing as desired. And the inn's "backyard" — at the mouth of the Connecticut River, where it flows into Long Island Sound — is hard to top.

On a recent press trip to the Saybrook Point Inn, we were surprised — and delighted — to find that a Saturday-through-Monday getaway felt like such an expansive amount of time, perhaps because our destination was so close to home yet so far removed from the bustle (and occasional craziness) of Fairfield County life.

At first sight, the inn looks like a rather large humble condominium complex — well-kept, but unremarkable.

But as grandmothers and sages of all ages remind us: Don't judge a book by its cover.

So true at Saybrook Point Inn. Walk through its front doors and discover an 18th century English-manoor setting, where guest rooms and public spaces alike exude a gracious charm and the staff appears eager to please.

"Approachable elegance" is the way General Manager Andy Abels describes the inn. "Absolutely no haughtiness ... with appropriate friendliness."

A grand fireplace is surrounded by antiques and comfortable overstuffed chairs and sofas in the inn's inviting first-floor great room. Another attractive setting is to be found in the Wine Room, designed with mahogany paneled walls, a stone floor, leather chairs, a fireplace with stone mantle and a long dining table crafted from wood recovered from aging Tuscan churches. A tiny climate-controlled space off the main room houses an



ample selection of wines.

Guest rooms feature English mahogany furnishings and damask draperies, all in richly hued colors. A concern for details is evinced in such touches as Italian bathroom tiles, plush towels and soft Merino wool throws draped over beds.

The inn's 82 rooms are non-smoking and all but 10 have balconies (seemingly a refuge even on chilly nights for smokers); 59 of the guest rooms have wood-burning fireplaces.

A telephone call to the front desk results in logs being quickly delivered to the room by a staff member, who is responsible for preparing and lighting a fire. The service is complimentary. About 20 rooms have whirlpool baths.

"We want this to be a place where guests can come to relax, but not where you feel that you have to whisper. Of course, we feel that the star of the show is our natural surroundings. It's an inherently peaceful location that's conducive to connecting" — whether it be for couples, families or friends.

"For some, this is the most romantic of places. And it's also very popular with groups of friends, for women, who come here to enjoy our spa," he adds.

Depending on the season and room type, rates range from \$199 to a high of \$525 for a suite in summer. And unlike many East Coast waterside inns that (jokingly?) rely on "a constant breeze" in summer to cool things off, guests here can be assured that the facility is totally air-conditioned. An array of discounted package plans also is offered.

Privately owned by members of the Tagliatela family, the inn traces its heritage to the Pease House, a coun-

### WHEN YOU GO

Saybrook Point Inn & Spa is at 2 Bridge St. (Route 154 South) in Old Saybrook (Exit 67 off Interstate 95). For additional information, visit [www.saybrook.com](http://www.saybrook.com) or call toll free, 800-243-0212. Numerous discounted seasonal packages and regular rates are posted on the hotel's Web site. For Sunday brunch reservations, call 860-388-1111.

try hotel built by William H. Pease that operated from 1870 to 1956.

That facility was razed in the late 1950s to make way for an opulent "Great Gatsby-like" resort hotel across the street, called the Terra Mar. This hotel attracted a motley assemblage of the rich and famous — Sinatra, singer Tom Jones, and actress Jayne Mansfield among them. And according to the inn's official history fact sheet, a few gangsters also were known to have enjoyed the hospitality.

So renowned was this hotel that "Parrish" — a Warner Bros. drama that focused on the conflict between a young man and his stepfather, a ruthless Connecticut tobacco tycoon — was partially filmed here in 1960 starring Troy Donahue, Connie Stevens, Claudette Colbert and Karl Malden.

But "a police raid, a parade of owners and other factors contributed to the decline" of the Terra Mar in the 1970s, according to inn literature. Enter the Tagliatela family, which purchased the site in the spring of 1980, subsequently demolishing the old hotel and building a new one in virtually the same spot. The new facility opened in September 1989, featuring a rebuilt marina with the ad-

dition of floating docks.

The resort's history is celebrated at the inn's Terra Mar Grille, a AAA Four Diamond Connecticut restaurant overlooking the marina that offers American cuisine with Italian and French touches. Old photographs and other memorabilia pay tribute to Sinatra and his pals, giving Terra Mar a warm and distinctive ambience.

Sunday brunch, served buffet-style from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., is a stand-out here, with the accent apparently on both quality and quantity. Among the specialties are made-to-order omelets, Belgian waffles, poached and smoked salmon, pasta dishes and seafood, chicken and beef entrees, along with an array of roasted meats (served at a carving station). Those with a sweet tooth will not be disappointed: Dessert selections fill an entire room. Cost is \$29.95 for adults, \$19.95 for children 5 to 12 years of age, free for those under 5.

Although we have spent many getaways in nearby Mystic, this was our first in Old Saybrook.

As it turns out, the location, like the inn, suited us perfectly, conveniently close to some of our favorite Connecticut destinations. Travelers will find a plethora to do in the immediate area — even in winter. There is much to explore in the quaint towns of Chester, Essex and Old Lyme, with their many museums, shops, art galleries and pubs. Bargain hunters can head for the factory outlet villages in

and a fitness club with exercise equipment including treadmills and free weights. For an extra fee guests may also participate in classes in aqua-therapy, Pilates, yoga and T'ai Chi.



DAVID W. KEYES/STAFF PHOTOS

At left is the wine room at the Saybrook Point Inn & Spa. Its long dining table is crafted from wood recovered from aging Tuscan churches. A tiny climate-controlled space off the main room houses an ample selection of wines. Top is the view from the inn's "backyard."

Clinton and Westbrook. And for those seeking gambling thrills, Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville also is nearby.

And although we felt far, far removed from reality on this wonderful getaway, it took only 55 minutes to drive home.

### DID YOU KNOW?

"Saybrook" is the oldest permanent English town name in Connecticut to be assigned by settlers; the area was purchased in 1623 from the Pequots by the Dutch; about a dozen years later, it would become an English colony.

In 1701, a group of Congregational ministers founded Collegiate School at Saybrook Point; in 1718, the school moved to New Haven ... and became known as Yale University.

The State Seal of Connecticut is a modified version of a seal brought from England by Col. George Fenwick, Saybrook's military protector from 1639 to the mid-1640s and owner of land and fort at Saybrook Point.

— Courtesy of Saybrook Point Inn & Spa's historical research, and the Old Saybrook Historical Society.

Accommodations for this trip were provided by the Saybrook Point Inn & Spa.