

Cape Cod, Nantucket & Martha's Vineyard



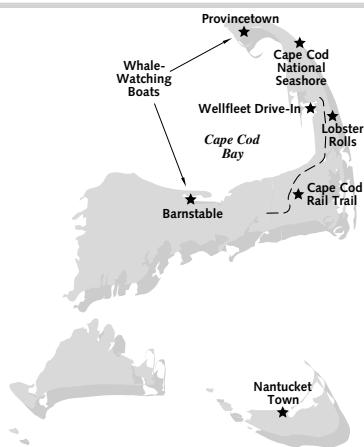
When the weather warms up, all eyes turn toward the Cape and Islands, the top beach destination in the Northeast. Think seaside cottages, children building sandcastles and sailboats at sunset. Cape Cod, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard are ideal places to kick off your shoes and unwind. Once you've battled the traffic to get here, slow down, poke around, stumble into the good stuff. Feel the sand between your toes, dip a paddle into a stream or cool off with an afternoon swim.

Sound too tame? Well, it's not the big city, but there's plenty of action if you know where to look. Never been splashed by a 40-ton leviathan shooting straight up out of the ocean? Whale-watching is a must for you. Hit the waves at Cape Cod National Seashore or party the night away in the carnival streets of Provincetown. For foodies the scene just keeps getting better. Yes, there are great clam shacks, but one needn't live solely on fried food and lobster rolls. Top-notch chefs have been hanging out their shingles all around the region, whipping up innovative masterpieces with fresh-off-the-boat seafood.

Naturally, in this trio of summer vacationlands each destination has its own personality. Nantucket has perfected the art of catering to wealthy urbanites while keeping intact its *Moby Dick*-era village center. Martha's Vineyard revels in diversity from its carousel-bedecked ferryport to its genteel towns. The Cape has something for every taste. The beaches, hiking trails and bike paths in the National Seashore alone could take your whole holiday. Spread the net wider and the possibilities are endless – take in the theater scene, prowl the pubs, get lost in the dunes. You could spend a summer here and just scratch the surface.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pulling up for a double-feature dose of nostalgia at **Wellfleet Drive-In** (see boxed text, p200)
- Ogling breaching humpbacks from the deck of a **whale-watching boat** (p205 and p180)
- Pedaling to your own swimming hole on the **Cape Cod Rail Trail** (see boxed text, p188)
- Clawing your way to the best **lobster roll** (p197)
- Exploring the cobble streets of **Nantucket** (p209)
- Clambering across the dunes at **Cape Cod National Seashore** (see boxed text, p196)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 508

■ POPULATION: 247,000

■ AREA: 544 SQ MILES

Orientation & Information

Cape Cod is separated from the Massachusetts mainland by the Cape Cod Canal. Two bridges span the canal – take the Bourne Bridge if you're going to Falmouth, the Sagamore Bridge to reach most other Cape destinations.

US 6, also known as the Mid-Cape Hwy, is the main west–east route across the Cape and the speediest way to get between towns. It's a four-lane highway between the Sagamore Bridge and Dennis, but peters down to two lanes as it continues on to Provincetown.

MA 28 connects the Bourne Bridge with Falmouth then veers east to run along the Cape's south shore all the way to Chatham. MA 28 is just two lanes and congested with local traffic, stop lights and strip malls. MA 6A, which runs along the north side of the Cape between Sandwich and Orleans, is also just two lanes, but delightfully scenic with lots of antique shops and small villages en route.

On Martha's Vineyard the roads are narrow but major intersections are well marked. On Nantucket, there simply aren't many roads and it would take some effort to get lost!

The **Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce** (☎ 508-362-3225, 888-332-2732; www.capecodchamber.org; US 6 at MA 132, Hyannis; 🕒 8:30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, also 10am–2pm Sun in summer) provides Cape-wide information.

History

At the time of first contact with Europeans, the Cape and islands were inhabited by native people of the Wampanoag tribe. Despite skirmishes with European settlers and the eventual loss of most of their ancestral land, the Wampanoag survived as a tribe and still have a significant presence on Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod.

English explorer Bartholomew Gosnold sailed along the Cape. Impressed by the abundant cod he saw in the surrounding waters, he named the peninsula Cape Cod. He also passed an island with abundant grape vines, which he named after his daughter Martha. In 1620 the *Mayflower* Pilgrims landed on the outer tip of Cape Cod, at what today is Provincetown, and stayed several weeks before heading on to Plymouth.

During the golden age of whaling (1750–1850) Nantucket reigned as the whaling capital of the world. Its whaling fleets and spermaceti oil factories made the island flush

with riches. Nantucket's ships, which voyaged to far corners of the Pacific, were largely captained by men from Martha's Vineyard. The stately old homes that line the streets of Nantucket and Edgartown today are a legacy of that era.

The Culture

People from the Cape and Islands take pride in their regional character. Even on the Cape, people tend to see themselves as separate from other New Englanders. The pace is slower. Folks take the time to chat with neighbors, go fishing and unwind on a quiet trail. The islands take it a step further. Virtual worlds unto themselves, they're inundated with visitors in summer but insular the rest of the year. Nantucketers and Vineyarders have been known to refer to the mainland simply as 'America.' Of course you will notice qualities common with the rest of New England – to see the old Yankee work ethic in action just head down to the port and watch the fishing crews unload their catch.

Land & Climate

Nineteenth-century naturalist Henry David Thoreau referred to the Cape as 'the bared and bended arm of Massachusetts'. That indeed is its shape, with halfway-point Chatham at the elbow and Provincetown, at the end, the balled-up fist. It is surrounded by water on all sides and abounds in sandy beaches. Forget mountains – the Cape and Islands have a few modest hills, but the region is largely flat, and its edges are comprised mainly of sand dunes, salt marshes and tidal flats.

The Cape and Islands are at their peak in summer, and if you want a day at the beach this is the time to come. The weather's generally good, sunny more often than not, but sometimes humid with rainy patches. Spring and fall can also be excellent times to visit, although temperatures can be unpredictable. Winter is generally left to the locals.

Parks & Wildlife

The Cape's shining gem is the Cape Cod National Seashore (see boxed text, p196), 44,600 acres of rolling dunes and magnificent beaches that stretches along the Outer Cape from Eastham all the way to Provincetown. Explore it by foot, bicycle or kayak but whatever you do, don't miss it. Also substantial is Nickerson State Park (p189) in Brewster,