

A blue bicycle with a silver basket is parked on a sandy beach. The bicycle is positioned in the lower half of the frame, leaning against a wooden railing. The background features a sandy dune with green vegetation under a blue sky with white clouds.

*Best*

**New England Summer Vacations**

*New England*  
**GUIDES**

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# Best Beaches in New England

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## The 25 Best Beach Towns in New England from Yankee Magazine

Choosing the best beach towns in a region that's blessed with hundreds of miles of coastline and many towns that touch the sea was no easy task. Whether you're looking for waves to ride, long stretches of sand, or lots of family activities, one of our picks for the 25 best beach towns in New England, painstakingly chosen by seasoned travel writer Steve Jermanok, is sure to be the ideal getaway for you. Curious to learn more about how the list was whittled down? Read "How We Picked the Best Beach Towns in New England" at the bottom of the list.

### #1 OGUNQUIT, MAINE

In Ogunquit, folks plan each summer day according to the tides. Halfway between high tide and low tide, when the current of the Ogunquit River flows swiftly out to the Atlantic, people congregate on the flat stretch of sand that rolls down to the riverbank. Soon the mass of beachgoers are in the river—less chilly than the ocean, but still a bracing wake-up call. They carry an assortment of flotation devices: rafts, boogie boards, and inner tubes.

I lie on my back, take my wife's hand, and laugh like a 6-year-old as a fast current carries us around a bend. The ride ends far too quickly, and I wade through the shallow waters back to shore. When the little girl in front of me shouts, "Let's do it again," I echo her enthusiasm.

Though the ocean temperature averages 63 degrees in August—almost 10 degrees lower than the water temperature on Connecticut's Long Island Sound—Ogunquit rates as our top beach town in New England.



Ogunquit's Marginal Way, a lovely mile-and-a-quarter stretch, with memorial benches along the way.  
Photo by Kindra Clineff

Want to plop down your towel? How about a wide swath of sand just east of Ogunquit's lazy river? Ogunquit Beach stretches some three and a half miles from the center of town all the way to more remote sections called Footbridge and North beaches.

No matter where you stay along the Route 1 strip in Ogunquit, it's within easy walking distance to the beach. That's a prerequisite for being a world-class beach town, yet you'd be surprised how few New England communities can boast that beach-town ideal: the ability to walk from your hotel to the beach, and onward to classic seafood shacks and boutiques lined with the wares of local artisans.

I like to stay on the lower portion of Shore Road, which juts out from Route 1, where I can stroll to the main beach, stores, and restaurants in the town center, with the added pleasure of being only steps away from the Marginal Way's mile-long cliff walk.

I book a room at the The Beachmere Inn, where morning yoga on the sprawling lawn rewards me with exquisite beach views; from there, a small gate opens onto the Marginal Way's paved path, accessible to all. As the trail climbs, glorious vistas open up onto a rugged Maine coastline, a scene that Winslow Homer would convey brilliantly a half-hour drive up the road in Prouts Neck.

I smell sweet beach plums as I walk past the twisted branches of a century-old cedar tree, dwarf pines that somehow have survived the brunt of winter gales, and benches atop the bluffs, perfect for watching cormorants and sailboats. Below, small beaches favored by young families are buttressed between jagged rocks. On one of these spits of sand, I meet Al Korman drying off after a swim. "On a hot day, there's nothing like a jump in that water," Korman says. "The ocean breeze is the best kind of air conditioning."

On a drive up to Acadia National Park 17 years ago, Korman had a flat tire in Ogunquit and fell in love with the place. Retired now, he spends winters in Florida but returns to the Maine village every summer. "When I'm in Florida," he adds, "I dream about this place."

Eventually I reach Perkins Cove at the top of the Marginal Way (south of the town center), home to a handful of seafood restaurants, including the beloved lobster-in-the-rough joint Barnacle Billy's. Place your order for clam chowder, lobster rolls, and steamed clams, and grab a table outside overlooking the lobster boats, as you listen for your number. The clam chowder has a thin, milky broth, chock-full of clams and potatoes. The lobster roll is served on a hot buttered bun, full of claw meat.

At night, I wander over to the Ogunquit Playhouse, one of New England's historic summer-stock theaters, where Helen Hayes, Bette Davis, and Anthony Quinn all once graced the stage. Now this spacious building is a blessed retreat for talented Broadway actors who make the shrewd move of leaving Manhattan in the sweltering summer.

There are only two reasons I'd set foot in my car in Ogunquit. The first was to enjoy a meal at Arrows (now closed), the James Beard Foundation Award-winning restaurant two miles from the town center. As you overlook the establishment's expansive vegetable and flower gardens, it's easy to understand how Arrows became one of the first restaurants of the farm-to-fork movement more than two decades ago.

And the second reason? When it rains, I'm not at a loss. I can head 45 minutes north to Portland, to visit the latest exhibition at the Portland Museum of Art and to enjoy my requisite Belgian fries with truffle ketchup at Duckfat. That's a rarity, however. Most of the time, you'll find me riding the tide, laughing, as I watch the clouds roll by and let the sea wash over me.

## #2 PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

Frankly, it was tough choosing between P-town and Ogunquit for top spot. At the tip of Cape Cod, P-town has it all: Cape Cod National Seashore beaches where, if you're willing to walk, you can always find a strip to yourself; stunning sunsets; a vibrant gallery and restaurant scene; popular whale-watching cruises; and the most eclectic (and at times electric) people watching of all. (When rain threatens to put a definite damper on your outdoor activities, check out P-town's shops, too.) Devotees are passionate about Provincetown; an inspired place to visit off-season, its narrow streets can barely hold the cars in midsummer. Don't miss: Province Lands Bike Trail, a paved up-and-down route through beech forest and atop the dunes for spectacular ocean views.

## #3 NANTUCKET, MASSACHUSETTS

This is an incomparable beach town. The restaurants are surprisingly sophisticated for a beach destination, the mix of shops intriguing, and bike paths branch off in every direction to a variety of beaches. Just remember that it takes some organization to get here (but it's worth it). The ferry trip is lovely, and you have options—high-speed or not, six ferries a day—but you can't just show up at the Hyannis terminal and hop on. As for lodging, some of the most spectacular island inns in America call Nantucket home, but they come with prices to match, so plan ahead. Don't miss: The impressive collection of scrimshaw at the Nantucket Whaling Museum, housed in a former spermaceti candle factory, recalling the gritty days when Nantucket whalers roamed the world.



Nantucket Island, just 14 miles long and 3.5 miles wide off the coast of Cape Cod.  
Photo by Aimee Seavey

#### **#4 NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND**

Home to historic mansions, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, and Touro Synagogue (oldest existing synagogue in America), Newport has more than enough diversions for those who want to step away from the shoreline. Add strolling atop the rugged shoreline along the Cliff Walk and sailing on Narragansett Bay, and you've got a world-class summer getaway. One quirk: The area's best beach, Second Beach on Sachuest Bay, is actually in neighboring Middletown. Don't miss: Alloy Gallery, now on Bellevue Avenue, owned by a Rhode Island School of Design-trained jewelry artist who displays contemporary wares created by herself and her peers.

#### **#5 OLD HARBOR, BLOCK ISLAND, RHODE ISLAND**

Veer left (south) in New Shoreham's Old Harbor after the hour-long ferry ride from Galilee, and you soon reach the red-brick Southeast Lighthouse and dramatic Mohegan Bluffs, where sea-gouged cliffs drop precariously to the water 200 feet below. Head to the right (north), across from a small strip of stores, restaurants, and inns, and you arrive at the glorious three-mile-long Crescent Beach, packed with daytrippers in the summer months. Old Harbor is as simple as that—and that's the reason why people make the trip year after year. Don't miss: Rent a bike and take a 13-mile loop around the island, stopping at the many lemonade stands—or hike the Greenway walking trails.

#### **#6 EDGARTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS**

Amble along the sidewalks of this Martha's Vineyard town, laced with whaling captains' homes from the 18th and 19th centuries. Then take your bikes on the two-minute ferry ride over to Chappaquiddick and remote Cape Poge Wildlife Refuge, a long coastal stretch that you can call home for the rest of the day. If you feel like getting even closer to the sea, the Trustees of Reservations offers guided kayaking tours on Cape Poge and Wasque Reservation waterways. Don't miss: A cone at Mad Martha's and the requisite stroll over to the docks.

#### **#7 KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE**

Most people associate Kennebunkport with the shopping at Dock Square. That's a shame, because the true joy of visiting Kennebunkport is driving on backcountry roads to find the lobster traps stocked high on Cape Porpoise, the small strip of sand at Goose Rocks Beach, and the many favorite local eateries in between (like Nunan's Lobster Hut and The Ramp). Don't miss: One of the best meals in New England, the four-course prix-fixe menu at The White Barn Inn, west across the river in neighboring Kennebunk Beach.

#### **#8 ROCKPORT, MASSACHUSETTS**

Neighboring Gloucester boasts two of the finest beaches on Cape Ann, Good Harbor and Wingaersheek, but you'll want to spend most of your evening hours in Rockport. Bearskin Neck, with its collection of boutiques, ice-cream shops, and restaurants, juts out into Sandy Bay, ending at a rock jetty. Front Beach, a two-minute walk from Bearskin Neck, will suffice for sand-castle building and a swim. Don't miss: The new Shalin Liu Performance Center, a classical-music venue whose floor-to-ceiling stage window overlooks the Atlantic.

#### **#9 CHATHAM, MASSACHUSETTS**

You'll find a quintessential village green here, replete with gazebo and bands playing concerts in summer, surrounded by a good selection of restaurants and shops. Note that parking at some of Chatham's fine beaches is limited, so go early. Don't miss: Lodging at Wequassett Resort in nearby Harwich (worth the splurge), where a motorboat shuttle will escort you to a deserted beach (part of Cape Cod National Seashore) that was once connected to the mainland.

## #10 WATCH HILL, RHODE ISLAND

This classic summer retreat offers a town beach, a ride on one of the oldest carousels in the country, long coastline walks, and a nice array of shops and restaurants. An added bonus is that Watch Hill isn't directly off I-95, so you have to earn this slice of beachfront territory. Don't miss: Drinks on the glorious wraparound verandah of Ocean House, where you can watch the croquet pro give lessons on the manicured lawn.



Short Sands Beach is just steps from the bustle of downtown York.  
Photo by Aimee Seavey

## #11 YORK BEACH, MAINE

South of Ogunquit, York Beach shares many of the same attributes as our best-beach-town winner. There's a lovely beach, Short Sands, right in the center of town, on which to leave your footprints, or venture out to Long Sands, true to its name. Both beaches feature nearby metered parking and enough ice-cream eateries, fudge shops, and chowder-in-the-rough joints to satisfy beachside cravings. Don't miss: The Central and South American butterflies at York's Wild Kingdom.

## #12--TIED FALMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

One of the larger communities on Cape Cod, Falmouth has both its busy and its picturesque sides. If you're looking for affordable lodging, restaurants that grill fresh seafood perfectly, a fun town center to stroll, a vast assortment of beaches, the Shining Sea Bikeway trail down to Wood's Hole, and easy accessibility on Route 28 south off the Bourne Bridge, follow the Bostonians who have a second home in Falmouth. Don't miss: The pearly-white sands of Old Silver Beach in North Falmouth, on the shore of Buzzards Bay.

## #12--TIED WELLFLEET, MASSACHUSETTS

If we were judging beach towns solely on variety and quality of beaches, Wellfleet would earn top honors. Its mix of Cape Cod National Seashore beachfront, freshwater ponds, and bayshore and harborside walks is unparalleled. It's all worth the drive from the small town center. Don't miss: A first-run flick at the circa-1957 Wellfleet Drive-In.



### **#13 OAK BLUFFS, MASSACHUSETTS**

Amid those whimsical gingerbread houses are the family-friendly environs of Oak Bluffs, packed with T-shirt shops, restaurants of every stripe, and one of the oldest carousels still in operation. If you feel like a dip, grab a bike and head 3 miles to Joseph Sylvia State Beach, halfway to Edgartown. There, you'll find the famous bridge where the movie *Jaws* was filmed, now popular with kids who make the plunge to the deep water below. Don't miss: Carved in 1876, the mighty steeds of the Flying Horses Carousel have manes and tails of real hair, yet the real joy for children is the chance to lean over and snag a brass ring.

### **#14 NARRAGANSETT, RHODE ISLAND**

In the off-season, the waves at Narragansett's Town Beach provide local surfers with enough action until their next trip to Rincon. In the summer, the beach is a bit milder, attracting families who can walk easily from the lodging and restaurants in town. Don't miss: Point Judith calamari and native littleneck clams on the outdoor deck of Coast Guard House.

### **#15--TIED NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS**

With a five-mile drive to the beach on Plum Island (most of which lies within neighboring Newbury's boundaries), Newburyport isn't normally considered a beach town. Yet it's hard to resist the intriguing collection of bookstores, boutiques, and top-notch restaurants in town after a day at the ocean. Don't miss: Bird Watcher's Supply & Gift carries binoculars so that you can see those piping plovers and other Atlantic Flyway birds at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island.

### **#15--TIED ORLEANS, MASSACHUSETTS**

Spend the morning on Nauset Beach's exquisite length of dune-studded coastline along Cape Cod National Seashore, the afternoon biking in the shade of the Cape Cod Rail Trail north past the ponds of Eastham, and the early evening watching a Cape Cod Baseball League game, with many players who'll soon find their way to the Major Leagues. Long-time lovers of Cape towns are accustomed to summer traffic. Don't miss: An affordable night's stay at the Ship's Knees Inn in East Orleans, the nearest lodging to Nauset Beach.

### **#16 IPSWICH, MASSACHUSETTS**

If all you want is one of Cape Ann's beloved sandy strands, Crane Beach, and arguably the best clam shack in New England, the Clam Box, then you don't have to go father than Ipswich. The rolling country byways outside the town center also offer great road biking past orchards and along creeks. Don't miss: Pick-your-own berries and apples at Russell Orchards.

### **#17--TIED MADISON, CONNECTICUT**

From the heart of Madison it's a four-mile drive to one of Connecticut's favorite sandboxes, Hammonasset Beach State Park. That's not a deterrent, however, for the countless beachgoers who visit this delightful three-block village of coffee shops, bookstores, and restaurants after a day of lounging. Don't miss: The country's top authors may be found reading from their latest works at RJ Julia Independent Booksellers.

### **#17--TIED OLD ORCHARD BEACH, MAINE**

This ocean-drenched Maine town, with its collection of arcades, amusement rides, and snow-cone shops, carries

a bit of Coney Island vibe, which may not be for everyone. But for folks who want to saunter over to a seven-mile stretch of beach from their budget-conscious lodging, it's hard to top. Don't miss: A pepperoni-studded slice at Roma Pizza.

#### **#18--TIED LITTLE COMPTON, RHODE ISLAND**

Who'd have thought that Little Comp-ton, best known for its historic village common and centuries-old cemetery, would have a gem of a beach just down the road? Backed by a marsh and salt pond, crescent-shaped Goosewing Beach is managed by The Nature Conservancy as a shorebird preserve and is just as popular with walkers as sunbathers. (Parking is nearby at South Shore Beach.) Don't miss: Quahog chowder, jonnycakes, and lobster rolls at The Commons Lunch after your day of breathing in the salty air.

#### **#18--TIED PLYMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS**

With a thriving town center and historic sites galore, including Plimoth Plantation and the Mayflower II, this community has all the makings of a premier beach town, though you'll do a little driving to get to the beach part. A few miles southeast toward the village of Manomet lie the soft white sands of White Horse Beach; head out there early, as public parking is limited and you might have to grab a spot on a side street. Plymouth Long Beach is closer to town, but a bit rocky. Don't miss: The great symbol of freedom, Plymouth Rock, now housed in a colonnaded building down by the waterfront.

#### **#19 HAMPTON BEACH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Few towns transform in summer like hyperactive Hampton Beach. You'll be hard-pressed to find a day (or an evening) when something special isn't planned: concerts at Hampton Beach State Park's beautifully re-designed Seashell Stage complex (part of the park's newly completed \$14.5 million redevelopment), movies on the beach, fireworks, beach-volleyball tournaments, even beach soccer (who knew?). With all that action come a lot of people and traffic along the road that carries them to the sand. Once you find a parking spot, you'll quickly find a place to plant your towel on this long stretch of beach and sparkling sea. Across the street is everything you always wanted in a beach town when you were 10: soft-serve ice cream, fudge, snow cones, pizza. Don't miss: The fun annual Hampton Beach Master Sand Sculpting Competition, with world-class builders.



Walk Hampton Beach's beautiful stretch of sandy coastline.  
Photo by Brenda Darroch

## #20 HULL, MASSACHUSETTS

The Bay State's favorite seaside "let's go meet and hang out" getaway is Hull's three-mile stretch of Nantasket Beach. Swim to your heart's delight; then walk across the road to the strip of waterfront restaurants, arcades, historic Paragon Carousel, B&Bs, and beach resorts. At the tip of Route 228, Hull is tucked away on a spit of South Shore land jutting into Massachusetts Bay. Don't miss: Fried clams and cedar-plank roasted salmon at Jake's Seafood, in operation since 1949.

## #21 BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Brewster's bayside beaches, including Paine's Creek, have far less surf and are warmer than the Cape's Atlantic-side beaches, thus attracting younger families. Add the Cape Cod Rail Trail, which slices through town, top-tier resorts such as Ocean Edge, and restaurant fare including the acclaimed Chillingsworth's French cuisine, and it's earned a spot on this list. Don't miss: Fried seafood at Cobie's Clam Shack, dishing out the onion rings since 1948.

## HOW WE CHOSE THE BEST BEACH TOWNS IN NEW ENGLAND

Selecting the best beach towns in New England wasn't easy. For the past two decades, I've made my living writing primarily about New England, publishing my first book, *Outside Magazine's Adventure Guide to New England*, in 1996 and a second book, *New England Seacoast Adventures*, in 2002. So I've made my way up and down the New England shoreline countless times. In May 2011, I revisited the entire coastline again for this article.

We created 14 categories to evaluate New England's beach towns, ranking each on a scale of 1 to 10. First was sheer beauty, or the "Picturesque Quality." Chatham, with its Rockwellesque village green, Rockport's Bearskin Neck, and Edgartown's slew of ship captains' homes all earned high marks in this category. Next up was whether the town had a thriving core or "Town Center." My favorite beach in New England is Nauset Light Beach in Eastham, which has many amenities along Route 6, but few around the village green.

A quintessential beach town must also have the requisite ice-cream stands and clam shacks, like Barnacle Billy's in Ogunquit. Then there's the "Rainy Day" factor; islands fared less well here because there's not a whole lot to do when the weather is inclement, but their remoteness boded well for scores in the "Solitude" category. While the "Kid-Friendly" category refers to a bustling locale like Old Orchard, with its bevy of video arcades and rides, "Natural Life" pertains to the availability of nature walks, a nature center, and opportunities to view sealife, such as Provincetown's whalewatching cruises. Also, we received average summer water temperatures from the National Oceanographic Data Center and could distinguish clearly the difference between a swim in Newport (averages 71° in August) and one in southern Maine (63°).

"Public Access" simply means how available the beaches are to visitors; many towns, especially on Cape Cod, require resident stickers in order to access parts of their cherished shorelines. But to me, the most vital category is "Accessibility." Islands, for instance, by their nature aren't easy to get to. More important, how accessible is the beach from the town center? Few New England beaches are actually within walking distance to the town center, but Ogunquit, York Beach, and a few others fared well in this category. Finally, traffic congestion, available parking, a wide range of lodging options from affordable to luxury, and a decent selection of shops all figured into the final score, as well. -S.J.

# Prettiest Beaches in New England

There's no better time and place for swimming, sunning, sailing and happy sighs than summer in our six-state region. Here's our guide to 10 of the prettiest beaches in New England.

## **CRANE BEACH, IPSWICH, MASSACHUSETTS**

More than five miles of trails and boardwalks wind through coastal dunes alongside a pristine shoreline on the Crane Estate. Home to nesting piping plovers, this timeless beach is managed for recreation and conservation by The Trustees of Reservations.



Crane Beach in Ipswich, Massachusetts  
Photo by G. Mylyk

## **EAST BEACH/NINIGRET CONSERVATION AREA, CHARLESTOWN, RHODE ISLAND**

Three miles of unblemished shoreline along this barrier beach separates the wide Atlantic from Ninigret Pond and the nearby Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. Arrive early to snag a coveted spot in the small parking lot.

## **SAND BEACH, MOUNT DESERT ISLAND, MAINE**

Pine tree-topped rocky cliffs and distant granite mountains are a dramatic backdrop for this 290-yard-long beach nestled in Newport Cove in Acadia National Park. Look closely at the sand; it's made of tiny shell fragments.

## **SHERWOOD ISLAND STATE PARK, WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT**

The 235-acre park is home to a 1.5-mile beach of alternating red, tan and black layers of sand – comprised of garnet, quartz and magnetite – offering sweeping views of Long Island Sound. A salt marsh nature trail and seasonally open Nature Center offer learning activities for adults and children.

## **GOOSE ROCKS BEACH, KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE**

Don't be fooled by its name. You'll find nearly three miles of soft white sand along this beach, named for Goose Rocks, an offshore barrier reef that is visible at low tide. Make sure to get a permit to park along Kings Highway before walking through low grass-covered dunes to the beach.

### **AQUINNAH PUBLIC BEACH, MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASSACHUSETTS**

Nestled in the less-traveled southwest corner of the island, this beach is worth the ten-minute trek from the parking lot at the Aquinnah lighthouse, if only for the dramatic sunsets that enliven the nearby colorful and towering clay cliffs.

### **GOOD HARBOR BEACH, GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS**

An expansive white sand crescent overlooking the rocky ledges of Salt Island – accessible by foot at low tide – this beach offers full service amenities including lifeguards, concession stand and restrooms with showers.

### **CRESCENT BEACH STATE PARK, CAPE ELIZABETH, MAINE**

A quintessential New England beach with grassy dunes, light surf, and saltwater coves located eight miles south of busy Portland. Try sea kayaking, fishing or hike the nearby nature trails.

### **WALLIS SANDS STATE BEACH, RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

This wide curve of beach, framed by rock jetties, offers views of the Isles of Shoals and sailboats skittering along the horizon. Amenities include picnic tables in grassy areas, bathhouse and variety store.

### **EAST MATUNUCK STATE BEACH, SOUTH KINGSTON, RHODE ISLAND**

Located along Succotash Road in marsh-dotted South County, this 144-acre kid-friendly beach – with views of distant Block Island – boasts great waves for boogie boarding, picnic tables, and concession stands for hungry visitors.

## **Best Beach in Each New England State**

### **BEST BEACH IN MASSACHUSETTS**

#### **LONGNOOK BEACH, TRURO, MASSACHUSETTS**

I like to arrive at Longnook in the early morning, while the fog still casts a hazy glaze over the water. Joined by surfers and dog walkers, I stroll down the sandy path to the soft, white beach. Then I glance back at the towering tan and red dunes, realizing instantly why JFK wanted this landscape preserved as a National Seashore. As I look to the left, the beach curves toward Provincetown, the dunes melding with sand, sea, and sky, as if the land is going to plummet into the water. Listen to the waves, watch the surfers glide atop the ocean, walk the beach to find an errant lobster trap run ashore, and savor the scene before families start to pour in around 11 a.m.

Getting there:

Longnook Road, Truro, MA. Within Cape Cod National Seashore but town managed. From Route 6, look for the green sign: “to Longnook Road.” Stickers/fees and other information: 508-487-6983; [truro-ma.gov](http://truro-ma.gov)

### **BEST BEACH IN RHODE ISLAND**

#### **SECOND BEACH, MIDDLETOWN, RHODE ISLAND**

Everyone rides the waves at Second Beach, located just outside the Newport town line. Surfers are found to the west, near Purgatory Chasm, a deep cleft in the bedrock rising above Sachuest Bay. Atop the rise is the campus of St. George's School, its limestone chapel tower a dramatic backdrop to the powdery sand. Families grab their boogie boards and head to the center of the beach to try their luck. You'll find singles and college kids to the east, using their bodies to ride the crest. Everyone comes for the surf, pounding the shores with its consistent thump. Rhode Island's waters are warmer than the beaches of Cape Ann and Cape Cod, so Bostonians think nothing of making the hour-long drive south. After swallowing gulps of the Atlantic, the crowds retreat to the spacious shoreline, only to jump back into the ocean when their bodies wilt under the sun.

Getting there:

474 Sachuest Point Road, Middletown, RI. Follow Route 138 east from Newport; over the town line, at the junction of Purgatory Ave., Paradise Road, and Hanging Rock Road. Legal parking only at beach lots. Stickers/fees and other information: 401-846-2119; [middletownri.com](http://middletownri.com)

### **BEST BEACH IN NEW HAMPSHIRE** **ODIORNE POINT, RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The Granite State extends to the rock-littered shoreline of Odiorne Point, southeast of Portsmouth. One sandy stretch here offers a quintessential New England seascape, including a picturesque lighthouse (the circa-1872 granite Whaleback, on the Kittery, Maine, side of the harbor), the historic Wentworth by the Sea hotel in New Castle, and all those sailboats on the dark-blue Atlantic. The hard part is finding this hidden gem. I always park my car at the boat launch and then bike the trail along Route 1A toward the main parking lot. Less than a half-mile later, a wide, grassy dirt road leads through Odiorne's forest all the way to a long breakwater called Frost Point. The dense sand slopes to the water's edge just to the left there: a placid retreat, with fewer than a handful of people in the know reclining on their beach chairs. And you thought all New Hampshire beaches were crowded ...

Getting there:

570 Ocean Blvd., Rye, NH. Don't miss the Seacoast Science Center here. Directions and info: 603-436-8043, [seacoast-sciencecenter.org](http://seacoast-sciencecenter.org); 603-436-7406, [nhstateparks.org](http://nhstateparks.org)

### **BEST BEACH IN VERMONT** **BOULDER BEACH, GROTON, VERMONT**

There's nothing quite as nourishing for both body and soul as a dip in a Vermont swimming hole, where the sylvan surroundings enfold you in a blanket of green. Nestled in one of the largest state forests in the Northeast Kingdom, Lake Groton is actually too large to be called a genuine Vermont swimming hole. There's no waterfall or covered bridge—but in its place is a ring of mountains, with a forest of hemlocks, birches, and maples dropping all the way down to the lake's rim. The sand is nothing special, especially compared with the beaches of its New England neighbors and their oceanfront settings. Ahhh, but there's that cool refreshing lake water ... Try it after a morning climb up 1,958-foot Owl's Head Mountain just north in Peacham, or a bike ride along the abandoned Montpelier/Wells River Railroad bed, and I guarantee that Boulder will be nourishing.

Getting there:

2278 Boulder Beach Road, Groton, VT. From Groton, go 2 miles west on U.S. Route 302, then 6 miles NW on VT Route 232, then 2 miles east on Boulder Beach Road. 802-584-3823; [vtstateparks.com/html/boulder.cfm](http://vtstateparks.com/html/boulder.cfm)

### **BEST BEACH IN CONNECTICUT** **HAMMONASSET BEACH, MADISON, CONNECTICUT**

I'm a sand hog—I admit it. I like to stretch out on my own slice of paradise with beach towels, chairs, books, magazines, and snacks. That's why I savor the space offered by the two-mile-long stretch of shoreline at Hammonasset. I park my car near the East Bathhouse and walk a short way on the soft, white sand toward Meigs



Point. Backed by grassy dunes and wildflowers, this shallow strip is so long it never feels crowded, even on a hot summer weekend day. I read, swim in the blue-green waters of Long Island Sound, peer at the lighthouse off in the distance, read some more, bite into fresh fruit, and always wander over to Meigs Point Nature Center with the kids. We feel the crabs in the touch tank, watch the native snakes and turtles, and walk through the butterfly garden. Then it's back to my towel to stretch out as far as I can.

Getting there:

1288 Boston Post Road, Madison, CT. From I-95 take exit 62 and follow signs to the park (about a mile). 203-245-2785; [ct.gov](http://ct.gov)

## **BEST BEACH IN MAINE**

### **POPHAM BEACH, PHIPPSBURG, MAINE**

At the end of one of those fingers of land that dangles off the Maine coast into the Atlantic, Popham is hopelessly exposed to all the elements. There's nothing manicured about this rare spit of sand sandwiched between rocky shores. Pieces of driftwood lie on the beach, backed by dwarf pines and uprooted trees. Come at low tide, and the grooved sand leads to a tiny island where seagulls have picked over unfortunate crabs, and mussels lie exposed on the kelp. When the water rolls in, kids swim in the warm (yes, warm) waters of the tidal pool as parents take long beach walks, watching three-masted schooners and lobstermen cruise past pine-studded islands and lighthouses. Let the cool breeze blow through your hair and breathe in the salty air. This is the raw, genuine Maine coast you've yearned for.

Getting there:

Route 209, Phippsburg, ME. 14 miles from downtown Bath. 207-389-1335; [maine.gov](http://maine.gov)

## **Best Beachside Lodging in New England**

There's nothing so pleasing as stepping out your door onto the beach and into the shimmering waves. Here's our guide to the best beachside lodging in New England.

Like waves, every beach has its own distinct rhythm. It widens or shrinks with the tides and changes subtly with each hour, from dawn to dusk, and beyond, as you glimpse the immensity of the night sky shining on the water. Those of us who love the sea know that sleeping beside a great beach is the ultimate luxury.

Last summer we prowled the New England coast and islands searching for "sandcastles," our name for the best beachside places to stay. We looked for reasonably priced motels, B&Bs, and campgrounds as well as luxury resorts. Years ago, our quest would have been easier. In the era of steamboats, trains, and trolleys, New England beaches were lined with seasonal lodging, from basic to grand. Most vintage venues have disappeared, many taken by fire or storms, others claimed by soaring coastal property values. A fraction, however, have survived, some to become today's version of "grand," while others, tucked between lines of cookie-cutter motels and pricey beachside rentals and condos, remain affordable "sandcastles" to which people return summer after summer.

What has remained unchanged through the decades is the sand, the water—and our urge to get as close to them as possible.

### **BEST BEACHSIDE LODGING IN MAINE**

By the 1930s, "motor courts" had mushroomed along the Maine coast, among them The Dunes on the Waterfront on the tidal Ogunquit River. An open pasture in 1936 when Aaron Perkins' grand-father began building

here, the 12 acres are now landscaped lawns and flowerbeds, salted with well-spaced vintage cottages with wood-burning fireplaces and screened porches. There are now also several multiunit buildings in matching white clapboard and green shutters, and the former barn is a spacious lobby/living room with coffee, breakfast muffins, and a corner filled with books and board games for rainy days. There's a pool and playground as well as shuffleboard, plus a dock with available rowboats. Guests are handed a tide chart at check-in, their key to the beach.

At low tide, walkers can easily cross the riverbed. At midtide there's enough sun-warmed water for a toddler to learn to swim, as I once did. From the opposite side of the river, a boardwalk path through the dunes puts guests smack in the uncrowded middle of three-mile-long Ogunquit Beach. The sand by the water is firmly packed, good for jogging and strolling, and still there's plenty of soft sand back by the dunes to stake out your umbrellas and supplies for the day. "This is a hidden oasis," Ginette Belanger confided, after we'd met several times coming and going between The Dunes and the beach. "When I was a child, my family rented a house near the beach, and now this is my paradise, the place I come with my son and his children."

In Scarborough, farther up Maine's southern coast, I heard an uncannily similar story about a very different beach and its sandcastle. "I love this beach, the way it slopes gently to the water," Marisa Rondina told me, adding, "If there's a room for me at The Breakers, I come." Marissa and I were seated on the sea wall above Higgins Beach, a half-mile long and backed by summer cottages. I'd spotted her coffee cup from our B&B, The Breakers Inn. Marissa has been coming here off and on for more than 30 years and now usually stays more than a week at a time with her husband. It's easy to understand why.

I woke here to the thrum of waves and the slant of the early-morning sun through the blinds. I slipped into shorts, a T-shirt, and rubber Crocs, and padded down the stairs and out onto the sunporch, with its fragrant pot of freshly brewed coffee. Stepping across Bayview Avenue to the beach, I found a few surfers already skimming gracefully on sizable breakers.

Higgins Beach changes more than most in the course of a day. Surfers and dog walkers are permitted only before



Hermit Island Campground on Maine's Casco Bay  
Photo by Sara Grey



and after certain hours; the exposed sand itself shrinks almost to its rocky seawall at high tide and stretches out expansively at low. Because this is a residential neighborhood and parking is limited, it's a bit of a local secret: relatively uncrowded at midday but a spectacle later in the afternoon as surfers and standup paddleboarders converge from all directions.

Built in 1900 as a family home, The Breakers opened as an inn in 1932 and has been owned since 1956 by the Laughton family. It's the kind of place that regulars book in January. Our first crack at it came only after Labor Day, when we lucked into corner room #1 with its picture window framing the beach and the Atlantic. The B&B's 15 guestrooms (with private baths) vary widely in size and shape, but all boast water views and cost roughly the same. (Regulars feel as though they've won the lottery if they score one of the tower rooms, #2 or #10.) The actual room is incidental to the hospitable feel of this place, though, thanks to its shared spaces, including a comfortable living room and wraparound dining room/sunporch. Rodney Laughton orchestrates made-to-order breakfasts here, and the inn also offers a picnic lunch during the high season.

In Cape Elizabeth, just around a bend in the rocky coast from Higgins Beach, Inn by the Sea is our most luxurious Maine sandcastle. This low-slung, shingled resort with ocean views is set above spreading lawns. A 200-yard boardwalk leads past a salt pond to a gently curving mile of soft sand. Early one June morning, this wooden path was edged with wildflowers and cattails, shaded by trees full of chirping birds. Piping plovers darted out from the edge of the dunes, leading tiny chicks. Gulls congregated by the marsh, terns swooped up and down along the shore, and a raft of eider ducks bobbed along on the swells just beyond the gentle waves. The entire beach is part of Crescent Beach State Park, but daytrippers gather by the bathhouse some way down the sand; because it's protected by off-shore Richmond Island, it appeals primarily to families with small children.

At Inn by the Sea rooms range from "traditional" doubles with gas fireplaces to family-size family-gear units to two-bedroom cottages with full kitchens; most have balconies or patios with water views. Amenities include a pool, a full spa, and the popular Sea Glass restaurant. Dogs and children are enthusiastically welcomed.

Of course, not all sandcastles need walls. Hermit Island is a 255-acre, sand-fringed neck of land not far from Popham Beach (south of Bath). A campground on its southern end offers 270 sites, well spaced and secluded, with more than 50 of them facing directly onto sandy stretches along the shore. Beyond the camping area are acres of private beach and hiking trails through woods and meadows.

There's no electrical power or running water, but drinking water, hot showers, and flush toilets are conveniently located. Rates begin at \$37 per night. Only tents, small to medium-size pop-ups, and small pickup campers are permitted. Visitors and pets aren't allowed. Guests register at the Kelp Shed, also a gathering place with a fireplace, a pool table, and video games, as well as coffee, snacks, and rainy-day games.

Hermit Island was purchased in 1948 by Sumner Sewall, a former Maine governor. It's maintained by Sumner's son Nick, who worries about the rising tide of taxes that threaten this place—a summer paradise for generations of beach-loving families who return year after year to sleep enveloped by sea breezes in one of -Maine's most iconic places, where summer memories are made and endure.

## **BEST BEACHSIDE LODGING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE**

No-frills beach access has long been the draw for families at Seaside Village Resort on North Hampton State Beach. Billing itself as "New Hampshire's only resort directly on the sand," this low-key complex consists of several mismatched buildings ranging from basic 1930s motel units through a family-size apartment and cottage (formerly a teahouse) to a row of shingled 1980s "townhouses." While "resort" may be a misnomer, the venue's 20 units and welcoming check-in area are tasteful, clean, and literally steps from a glorious stretch of sand. Now wedged among multimillion-dollar beach homes, Seaside Village is a throwback to a quieter, more relaxed time.



Ashworth by the Sea, Hampton, New Hampshire  
Photo by Joseph St. Pierre

By contrast, nearby Hampton Beach—by far the most famous one and a half miles of sand along New Hampshire’s 18-mile coastline—draws action-loving beachcombers with frequent free concerts on the Seashell Stage, big-name performers at the Casino Ballroom, and mega events such as the annual June sand-sculpting contest and August Children’s Week. Arcades and fried dough evoke this resort town’s era as a trolley destination (see p. 140 in this issue for more Hampton history), and Hampton Beach State Park is rated one of the cleanest in the country.

The sand is backed by a seawall and busy Ocean Boulevard, so technically no lodging is right on the beach, but Ashworth by the Sea comes close, sited at a major crosswalk and beach entrance. Dating from 1912, this iconic 106-room hotel features a ballroom, a popular restaurant, a breakfast café, and a lounge, and boasts its own multi-generational following. “It’s all about the beach,” staffer Eileen Menard told us. “Guests park [a luxury here], drop their stuff, and head out in bathing suits. They don’t get back in their cars until they leave.”

## **BEST BEACHSIDE LODGING IN MASSACHUSETTS**

Resort towns on Boston’s North and South shores, once studded with beachside seasonal lodging places, have long since morphed into suburbs. Cape Cod, by contrast, was a quiet back-water until the decades after World War II, when long strips of sand along Nantucket Sound were carved into private fiefdoms, prompting creation of the National Seashore in 1961 to preserve the 40-mile Outer Beach.

Today Cape Cod offers by far New England’s largest number of beachside places to stay. We checked every town on the Cape for beachside lodging with a genuinely welcoming feel and access to sand. The following is a sampling of places that fill the bill.

The vintage 1914 Chatham Bars Inn has changed gracefully with the times and is the Cape’s sole surviving (now year-round) grand beachside resort. Facilities include a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, a secluded spa with its own pool far from the family-gear pool, a boathouse, and a fleet of sailing, fishing, and tour vessels—plus four restaurants, 40 guestrooms, and imposing public spaces in the inn itself. Another 150 guestrooms and suites

are divided among 35 scattered “cottages,” including 17 separated only by beach plums from a stretch of sand along Chatham Harbor.

On the midsummer night when we checked in, the inn’s Beach House Grill was featuring a midweek buffet-style lobsterbake. We settled into a sandside table, our plates heaped with seafood and fixings, and feasted on the view. Fishing boats were moored offshore, and boys were playing sand soccer while girls competed on the sidelines with hula hoops. We watched the neon sunset until it totally faded.

At breakfast, the picture windows in the inn’s dining room framed the water view, and the tables were draped in linen. Outside on the less-formal terrace, tables were filled with families, the kids outfitted for morning programs such as standup paddleboarding. Down on the beach, fishing boats were heading out from neighboring Chatham Fish Pier, as a dozen or so seals eerily serenaded the sun from an offshore sandbar. We caught the Bar Tender, a 1930s-style launch, across the narrow harbor to North Beach, an endless barrier beach backed only by dunes. We sunned, swam, strolled, and sunned some more.

Just down Shore Road from the Chatham Bars, The Hawthorne, a handsome seasonal motel that has been owned by the same family since the 1960s, offers sweeping water views and a path to its own private beach. The comfortable rooms and suites include several with cooking facilities. Across town on Nantucket Sound, the Chatham Tides is another beachfront motel still in the same family who built it in the ’60s; there are efficiency units with patios on the beach, and more units are stepped up a hill, with large “townhouses” overlooking the water.



Chatham Bars Inn on Cape Cod's Chatham Harbor  
Photo by Christopher Churchill

“You could never build this close to the beach today,” Margaret Hagberg told us at the Beach House at Bass River, explaining that her husband built this shingled, 26-unit two-story motel in 1976 on family-owned property. It faces a private stretch of beach flanked on both sides by sand stretching a total of two miles. “We attract people who like to walk,” she added. With its patios and balconies, this is the kind of place where you never really leave the expansive view. Each room is different: uncluttered, but fitted with air conditioning, a fridge, and books; some are furnished with antiques. There’s coffee and homemade granola in the common room.

“We want our guests to have that warm, relaxed feeling,” Helen Kossifos told us at By the Sea Guests in Dennis-port. This airy, three-story, beachside house was built originally as an annex to the vast but vanished Belmont Hotel and has been run by Helen’s family for more than 50 years. A classic guesthouse with one bath to a floor, it’s since been renovated and now offers a dozen comfortable rooms and several condo-style units. Life here centers on the glassed-in sunporch, where guests gather for breakfast and plan their days—which frequently entail moving no farther than the few steps down the front porch to the hotel’s private piece of beach.

A ferry ride away on Martha’s Vineyard, Winnetu Oceanside Resort is about as good as it gets for families. The 11-acre property includes two heated pools and a spa and fitness center, as well as huge outdoor chess pieces to move around. Organized activities, ranging from a toddler program and antique-firetruck rides to yoga on the lawn and kayak tours, are included in the accommodations, which range from studios to fully equipped homes, all furnished with an eye toward easy access to magnificent three-mile-long South Beach.

On Nantucket, The Wauwinet, nestled between two beaches, represents the ultimate in low-key luxury amenities and access. Dating to the 1870s as a destination for shore dining and from the 1880s as a modest inn, it was renovated decades ago by the Karp family, who maintain the 32 rooms and four cottages, plus the new three-bedroom shingled Anchorage House, as an elite resort. It’s open only from mid-May to mid-October; amenities include a spa and fine dining.

## **BEST BEACHSIDE LODGING IN CONNECTICUT**

The Connecticut shoreline isn’t known for its public sand; there are just four saltwater state beaches. By far the longest and most appealing is Hammon-asset in Madison, a town that also draws well-heeled summer residents to several town and private beaches. Visitors have access to the sands at West Wharf thanks to the Madison Beach Hotel, replacing its modest predecessor, adding the requisite spa and ballroom to fill beds year-round. It’s still just 32 rooms, each with a private piece of the balcony, which stretches the length of the upper floors; pet-friendly rooms have ground-level patios.

Hurricane Arthur was due to strike on the July afternoon we arrived. Down in the hotel’s Wharf Restaurant, the porch tables were filled with patrons watching the surf. After dinner we retreated to our balcony as the rain came, the darkness defining the coast with its lights, lengthening it almost beyond the horizon, with a dim glow emanating all the way from Long Island. The beam from Faulkner Light, a few miles offshore, regularly swept the water. People with umbrellas and rain jackets drifted down to the pier and out onto the sand.

This beach isn’t big, but it has character, curving to a rocky point with tidepools, abutting the stone jetty at West Wharf. In the morning we were roused by the insistent cry of a gull; we had turned off the air conditioning in preference to the breeze through the room’s wide-slatted floor-to-ceiling shutters. Already, early risers were out, ignored by a heron poking in the seaweed and rabbits scurrying around in the beach grass.

Again I was reminded of what constitutes true luxury for a beachlover: putting your feet up, weatherproofed from sun or rain, yet still right there, with a view of sand and surf and the option to walk down and plunge in.

## BEST BEACHSIDE LODGING IN RHODE ISLAND

Despite its small size, the Ocean State boasts 400 miles of shoreline, including three dozen beaches and several of New England's most luxurious sandcastles. The Ocean House, set high above the beach in Watch Hill, replicates the grand hotel opened here in 1868; it's been rebuilt from scratch with fewer rooms and added amenities. Its sister property, the Weekapaug Inn in Westerly, has been renovated down to its 1930s studs and reopened as another luxurious, year-round beach resort. In Newport, the Castle Hill Inn, built in 1874 atop an oceanside bluff as a private summer home for Harvard biologist Alexander Agassiz, is now another elite retreat and includes several cottages on its private beach.

Block Island, 12 miles off Point Judith, retains an unusual number of Victorian-era hotels, but most are set high on hills or bluffs to catch the breeze. The exception is The Surf Hotel, a rambling, tower-topped 1870s classic with steep gables and a long verandah, sited on the edge of Old Harbor, handy to the village and ferry, and at the beginning of three-mile-long Crescent Beach. It's been owned by the Cyr family for almost 60 years; its 34 rooms and public spaces, including a restaurant with terrace dining, were recently renovated. Baths remain shared (there are basins in the rooms), and so rates remain unusually affordable.

Top ratings for creature comforts combined with beach access, however, go to the neighboring Avonlea, Jewel of the Sea. This truly beachside B&B offers great charm, plus air conditioning, a generous buffet breakfast, afternoon cookies, and wine with hors d'oeuvres. Nine nicely decorated rooms offer private baths (some with jetted tubs); there's also an expansive wraparound porch from which guests step onto sand.



Castle Hill Inn, Newport, Rhode Island  
Photo by Bob Packert

## WHEN YOU GO...

Rates and seasonal schedules vary throughout the year. For the latest information, call or check venue websites.

### MAINE

The Dunes on the Waterfront: Ogunquit. 207-646-2616; [dunesonthewaterfront.com](http://dunesonthewaterfront.com)

The Breakers Inn: Scarborough. 207-883-4820; [thebreakersinn.com](http://thebreakersinn.com)

Inn by the Sea: Cape Elizabeth. 207-799-3134; [innbythesea.com](http://innbythesea.com)

Hermit Island: Phippsburg. 207-443-2101; [hermitisland.com](http://hermitisland.com)

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

Seaside Village Resort: North Hampton. 603-964-8204; [seasidevillageresort.com](http://seasidevillageresort.com)

Ashworth by the Sea: Hampton Beach. 603-926-6762; [ashworthhotel.com](http://ashworthhotel.com)

### MASSACHUSETTS

Chatham Bars Inn: Chatham. 800-527-4884; [chathambarsinn.com](http://chathambarsinn.com)

The Hawthorne: Chatham. 866-217-9818, 508-945-0372; [thehawthorne.com](http://thehawthorne.com)

Chatham Tides: Chatham. 508-432-0379; [chathamtides.com](http://chathamtides.com)

Beach House at Bass River: South Yarmouth. 508-394-6501; [beachhousecapecod.com](http://beachhousecapecod.com)

By the Sea Guests: Dennisport. 508-398-8685; [bytheseaguests.com](http://bytheseaguests.com)

Winnetu Oceanside Resort: Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard. 508-627-4747; [winnetu.com](http://winnetu.com)

The Wauwinet: Nantucket Island. 508-228-0145; [wauwinet.com](http://wauwinet.com)

### RHODE ISLAND

The Ocean House: Watch Hill. 401-584-7000; [oceanhouseri.com](http://oceanhouseri.com)

Weekapaug inn: Westerly. 401-637-7600; [weekapauginn.com](http://weekapauginn.com)

Castle Hill Inn: Newport. 401-849-3800; [castlehillinn.com](http://castlehillinn.com)

The Surf Hotel: Block Island. 401-466-2241; [thesurfhotelbi.com](http://thesurfhotelbi.com)

Avonlea, Jewel of the Sea: Block Island. 401-466-5891; [blockislandinns.com/accommodation-type/avonlea](http://blockislandinns.com/accommodation-type/avonlea)

### CONNECTICUT

Madison Beach Hotel: Madison. 203-245-1404; [madisonbeachhotel.com](http://madisonbeachhotel.com)

## 10 Best Beachside Inns in New England

Summer and seaside inns go together like lobsters and melted butter. In other words, now is the time to pick your summer escape, grab your sunglasses, sunscreen, and the novel you're dying to finish, and book a getaway. These are 10 of the very best seaside inns in New England, from Cape Cod to Down East.

### THE TIDES BEACH CLUB, KENNEBUNKPORT, ME

It's hard to decide what to love most at this upscale/casual boutique inn: the broad, breeze-loving porch, the view of Goose Rocks Beach right across the road, great local catch at TBC's house restaurant, or an in-house stand-up-paddling instructor (who also teaches beach fitness). The best part? You've got all weekend to debate it.

254 Kings Hwy. (207) 967-3757; [tidesbeachclubmaine.com](http://tidesbeachclubmaine.com)

### THE RED INN, PROVINCETOWN, MA

Painted sassy red and set right on the water (the slender beach disappears at high tide), this outpost on the far end of Cape Cod has hosted presidents, celebrities, and lucky pilgrims since 1915. Upscale but very friendly, and not-to-miss sunsets from those bleached white Adirondack chairs dotting the deck.

15 Commercial St. 508-487-7334; [theredinn.com](http://theredinn.com)

### **THE BEACH PLUM INN AND RESTAURANT, MENEMSHA, MA**

What may recommend this gorgeous little inn with just 11 rooms overlooking Menemsha Harbor on Martha's Vineyard is that it's likely you can't get cell service here. Let the romance begin, with private patios, cozy hammocks, country-French décor and a stunning destination restaurant.

50 Beach Plum Ln. 508-645-9454; [beachpluminn.com](http://beachpluminn.com)

### **THE WHITE ELEPHANT INN, NANTUCKET, MA**

Sophisticated, impeccably designed, and an easy stroll to the bustling fun of Nantucket Harbor, the rooms and suites in the Hotel building or any of the Village residences are pure luxury. Don't miss the afternoon port and cheese tastings, and cocktails at the property's Brant Point Grill are a seaside must.

50 Easton St. 508-228-2500; [whiteelephanthotel.com](http://whiteelephanthotel.com)

### **BASS ROCKS OCEAN INN, GLOUCESTER, MA**

An easy reach from Boston, the rugged shores of Cape Ann feel surprisingly distant. Face the bracing Atlantic and Thacher Island's twin lighthouses from all 51 rooms of this classic seaside inn (the 1897 Stacy House's king suites crown them all). A billiards table, darts, and warm cookies every afternoon are old-fashioned delights.

107 Atlantic Rd. 978-283-7600; [bassrocksoceaninn.com](http://bassrocksoceaninn.com)

### **OCEAN HOUSE, WATCH HILL, RI**

A resplendent Victorian grande dame that got considerably grander with its 2010 renovation, Ocean House is peak luxury in Rhode Island's laid-back but nonetheless exclusive summer enclave. There's a resident croquet pro (book a lesson), and the resort's OH! Spa is world-class.

1 Bluff Ave. 401-584-7000; [oceanhouseri.com](http://oceanhouseri.com)



Ocean House, Watch Hill, Rhode Island  
Photo courtesy of Ocean House

**BLUE, THE INN ON THE BEACH, PLUM ISLAND, NEWBURY, MA**

This stylish getaway on Massachusetts's North Shore is set among sand dunes and sparkles like a lapis lazuli gemstone. With a quiet South Beach vibe and nautical look, rooms and cottages include fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, and Jacuzzis. Ask the staff to cater a clambake for you on the beach.

20 Fordham Way. 978-465-7171; [blueinn.com](http://blueinn.com)

**BLACK POINT INN, SCARBOROUGH, ME**

This historic grey-shingled inn set on Winslow Homer's beloved Prouts Neck is a deluxe getaway from May through October, and pulls out all the stops with a summer special for four-night stays that includes either a complimentary sail on a vintage, Maine-built schooner or lobstering expedition on Casco Bay.

510 Black Point Rd. 207-883-2500; [blackpointinn.com](http://blackpointinn.com)

**THE CLAREMONT HOTEL, SOUTHWEST HARBOR, ME**

At the mouth of the only fjord on the East Coast (Somes Sound), this historic retreat in its 131st season has retained the charms of bygone days: a clay tennis court and two tournament-class croquet courts, rowboats, rush-seated rockers on the porch, and a serenading pianist at cocktail hour. Come for August's Croquet Classic.

22 Claremont Rd. 800-244-5036; [thclaremonthotel.com](http://thclaremonthotel.com)

**INN AT STONINGTON, STONINGTON BOROUGH, CT**

Historic and romantic in equal measure, this 18-room inn occupies a charming Connecticut colonial village full of great antiques, gallery-hopping, and dining. Watch for the only fishing fleet left in the state to pass by your waterfront-view windows, with the freshest catch of the day.

60 Water St., 860-535-2000, [theinnatstonington.com](http://theinnatstonington.com)



# Summer Day Trips

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## Best Island Daytrips

A daytrip to any of these six islands will create memories that last forever.

### BLOCK ISLAND DAYTRIP | BLOCK ISLAND, RHODE ISLAND

You won't want to leave one of the most beautiful islands in the world for walking, biking, or simply looking out to sea.

MORNING: "Close to home, a world away ..." With the Block Island Tourism Council's tagline in mind, how do we tackle a Block Island daytrip to the place the Narragansett Indians called Manisses (Island of the Little God), with limited time and many options?



The Spring House Hotel catches salty sea breezes.  
Photo by Nat Rea

For instance, to cross the approximately 13-mile stretch of the Atlantic to visit what has also been called "the Bermuda of the North," do we take Interstate Navigation's high-speed ferry or the traditional ferry from Point Judith? A half-hour joyride, or an hour-long meditative journey set to the rhythm of the swells? Since our mission is to get "a world away," let's opt for the 8:00 a.m. slow ferry. The passage is integral to the journey, as ideally it will promote reflection and perspective. (Try to sit outside, as TV screens with continuously running news are now mounted inside: precisely, I'd argue, what we're leaving behind.)

As the island's contours emerge above the southern horizon, we first spy North Light, built in 1867 near the island's northern terminus. "Cow Cove," where the original European settlers are said to have pushed their livestock overboard upon arrival in 1661, forms a sweeping arc before the lighthouse.

Next is Clay Head, a bluff on the island's northeastern side, often mistaken for the even more majestic Mohegan Bluffs on the island's southern side. Speaking of perspective, as you pass Clay Head, note that just an island's-length to the east --7 miles--a World War II-era German submarine lies on the ocean floor, sunk with all hands mere days before war's end.

As we enter Old Harbor and behold its facade of Victorian-era hotels, we do indeed seem a world away. Choices: Walk, or splurge for a bike or Smart Car rental at Old Harbor Bike Shop? (Note that hills are steep, and the roads can be congested on busy in-season weekends.) Or hail one of 34 cabs?

First we'll head south on Spring Street to Southeast Light. Built in 1874, this National Historic Landmark has been visited by both Ulysses Grant and Bill Clinton. It would have fallen off an eroding cliff if not for a grass-roots effort to move it back from the edge nearly 20 years ago.

Working our way west, we stop at Payne Overlook for a view from the Mohegan Bluffs. Anticipating company, one option is to continue west to an unmarked entrance just south of Pilot Hill Road. The view from this vantage point is worth the walk, and it's where the cabdrivers usually go.

**AFTERNOON:** Before heading for the ultimate Block Island activity--playing in the ocean blue--lunch is in order. We can choose between the porch of the Spring House Hotel, the 19th-century wonder that commands a beguiling view of the eastern sea, or we can saunter along the island's only commercial stretch, Water Street, to the Three Sisters sandwich shop near Bridgegate Square. (It's a four-way stop, the closest the island comes to a busy intersection; there are no traffic lights.) Tuck into a "Molly's Meatloaf" or "Twisted Sister," among many other local favorites.

Just down Corn Neck Road from Three Sisters is the entrance to the truly incomparable Crescent Beach. Extending north for about two miles, this strand is open to anyone and everyone, no key or fee required. Collapse on your own patch of sand, or take a long walk to the ramparts of Clay Head, where a series of Greenway trails called "the Maze" are hidden. Careful ... you could be there longer than planned. Other options include renting a paddleboard from Diamond Blue Surf Shop and taking a kayak tour of Great Salt Pond, replete with herons and oyster catchers, with Pond & Beyond.

**EVENING:** We have a little time between the beach and the 9:00 p.m. boat (summer weekend schedule) on which we'll depart Block Island. As the sun approaches the yardarm, we're drawn to higher ground: specifically, to the lawn of The Atlantic Inn, arguably the premier sunset-cocktail vantage point on the island. It's best to return to "America" (a.k.a. the mainland) with a full belly. Perhaps some lobster mac-and-cheese at Winfield's bar, or pad Thai at Harry's, just around the corner. As you head back to the ferry landing, remind yourself gently that you should get "a world away" more often.

## **MARTHA'S VINEYARD DAYTRIP | MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASSACHUSETTS**

If only the day were endless ...

**MORNING:** Your journey begins on a boat. Catch the 9:30 a.m. Steamship Authority ferry out of Woods Hole. Across Vineyard Sound you'll go for a 45-minute ride on open water and under a full sun to Oak Bluffs. When you arrive, bypass the downtown for a short moment and swing a left onto the appropriately named Seaview Avenue. On one side there's the Atlantic; on the other, the equally magnificent Ocean Park and the homes of Gingerbread Square, which pay, in grand, lush style, artistic homage to the almighty shingle. From here, head a few blocks in-town for a little pre-lunch calorie splurge on a doughnut or apple fritter at M. V. Gourmet Cafe & Bakery--then walk off some of that treat with a jaunt down nearby Circuit Avenue, the town's shopping center. (Chocolate! Dog treats! Clothing!)

Your real destination is something more whimsical: the Flying Horses Carousel, a National Historic Landmark and the oldest operating merry-go-round in the country. For the princely sum of \$2 you can feel like a kid again, or watch actual kids try to grab the coveted brass ring. Keep peeling back those years by renting a Jeep at Adventure Rentals; then hop back on Seaview Avenue, toward Edgartown. Packed with views of the ocean and some of the island's most beloved ponds, this six-mile trek is a favorite among drivers and cyclists. If the moment grabs you, park at Joseph A. Syliva State Beach (called locally simply "State Beach"), put on your bathing suit, and make the short jump into the water from "Jaws Bridge." On a hot summer day you won't be alone.



"Jaws Bridge" was made famous by Steven Spielberg in 1975.  
Photo by Jesse Burke

**AFTERNOON:** Edgartown is for strolling. Settled in 1642, this eastern-shore town packs an upscale, Old World feel. Head down North Water Street, a tight two-lane road marked by gracious homes and multimillion-dollar views. Dream a bit about a stay at the grand Harbor View Hotel; then follow the beachside path just across the road. The walk cuts between rows of beach rose and across a small peninsula to Edgartown Light, a stubby cast-iron structure offering a clear vista of nearby Chappaquiddick island and Edgartown Harbor.

Back in town, sit down for lunch at Atlantic Fish & ChopHouse. The water views are as delectable as the menu, where the lunch offerings include a lobster reuben, wild salmon, and the "jumbo lump" crab cake. It's a vacation day, so finish with ice cream at Mad Martha's.

When you're ready for the water, you've got options. For the full beach experience, take your talents to Edgartown's South Beach, the island's most popular sandy destination. Or, if you want something more active, wheel back around to State Beach and rent a kayak from Island Spirit to explore the Vineyard's north shore and inland harbors. (Tours are also offered.) For a different kind of nature, jump back into your Jeep and head up-island to West Tisbury, the island's agricultural center and home to Polly Hill Arboretum, a 60-acre preserve named for

its late founder; it's a treasure trove of different plants, trees, and pathways. Polly's Play Pen, with its sweet mix of English yew, lilac daphne, and many other woodland shrubs and perennials, is a particular favorite.

**EVENING:** The Vineyard is an island suited to meandering, either on foot or by car. In your Jeep, take Middle Road from West Tisbury into Chilmark. This twisting, turning jaunt cuts past sweeping farmland and a prized pit stop in the form of Chilmark Chocolates. In Chilmark, pick up State Road and continue your southwestern trajectory, slicing between Squibnocket and Menemsha ponds to Aquinnah and its famous beachside cliffs. Watch the endless ocean roll in, until it's time for a final stop: Menemsha Fish Market, for a lobster roll and a seat by the harbor to watch the sunset.

Finally, make your way back to Oak Bluffs to catch the 8:30 ferry back to Woods Hole. Have some paper and pen ready for the boat ride. You're going to want to take notes for a longer visit. You've only scratched the surface.

## **NANTUCKET DAYTRIP | NANTUCKET, MASSACHUSETTS**

Take it slow, look around, and savor the island's flavor.

**MORNING:** Nantucket is one of the most bike-friendly islands in New England, and you can access the entire span on pedal power alone. Of course, a bike isn't mandatory. You can make a day of walking around Nantucket Town and then take a taxi to Siasconset or Madaket. But going by bike lets you really feel the island.

Your first Nantucket daytrip decision is the ferry. The Steamship Authority's Fast Ferry boats depart at 8:00 a.m. and will have you to the island in an hour. Hy-Line Cruises also runs a fast boat; 6:30 a.m. is the early one, with another at 9:10. Both sail out of Hyannis Harbor, and you'll pay for parking. Alternatively, if you're willing to spend 20 more minutes onboard, you can park for free on Freedom Cruise Line's boat out of Saquatucket Harbor in Harwich Port (leaves at 8:00 a.m.).

You'll arrive at Nantucket Harbor, conveniently sited in the heart of town. If you haven't brought your own bike, head over to Cook's Cycle Shop on nearby South Beach Street, where rentals are considerably less expensive than those on Steamboat Wharf. You can also rent mopeds or Jeeps, if that's more your speed.

However you choose to explore, you'll need energy, so start your day at Black-Eyed Susan's, where locals line up for Pennsylvania Dutch cakes and sourdough French toast. After breakfast, it's a 10-minute walk over to the lighthouse on Brant Point at the end of Easton Street to wave at the ships coming and going. If you have small children in tow, Children's Beach is another popular gathering place for young island families for its calm waters, playground, and picnic areas. Also near town: Jetties Beach off Hulbert Avenue has tennis courts, a snack bar, a bar, bathrooms, and a gift shop.

If you're not up for the beach, head to town and learn about the island's boom-bust-boom economy at the Whaling Museum (see "Memory Etched in Tooth and Bone," this issue's "Local Treasure,"). Pay a few dollars more for your ticket and you'll also gain access to several historic properties, including the 1686 Oldest House and the 1746 Old Mill (the oldest functioning mill in the country). The Nantucket Historical Association, which manages these sites, also offers walking tours in town. History buffs will also want to visit the old African Meeting House, once the central gathering spot for the African American community of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Shoppers will have a field day in town, though prepare for sticker shock if you're not a member of the .05 percent. Murray's Toggery, the closest thing to a department store, has more-reasonable prices and all the Nantucket Red pants you'll ever need. Erica Wilson and In the Pink nail the island-socialite look. John Rugge Antiques Shop outfits the beach house of your dreams. And Nantucket Bookworks is the Platonic ideal of a small-town bookstore, with a well-curated selection and lots of cozy nooks.

Stop for lunch at CRU, a newish place at the very end of Straight Wharf, where open windows catch island breezes and the seafood is fresh and sophisticated, as are the wines. For inexpensive local flavor, you can't beat the fish sandwich at Easy Street Cantina. Satisfy your sweet tooth at Petticoat Row Bakery (folks there make a mean whoopie pie).

**AFTERNOON:** The journey is the destination. It may be a cliché, but it's entirely true on Nantucket. The island is crisscrossed by bike paths that keep you safely off the main roads and amid stunning scenery. To take in the full sweep of meadows, bogs, ponds, and ocean vistas, ride Polpis Road to the tiny fishing village of Siasconset, which feels like a trip to a simpler, quainter time. (Tip: Look for the 'Sconset Bluff Walk, which begins at Front Street, and takes you past stunning estates with gorgeous views.)

Alternatively, ride southwest out to Madaket for a beach afternoon followed by a spectacular sunset. On your way there, take a detour south to enjoy the tour at Cisco Brewery and its adjacent distillery and winery. Expect samples and bring your own snacks.

**EVENING:** Head back to town for dinner so that you don't fret about making the ferry. Straight Wharf is just steps from the harbor, with a menu of pristine fish. (Tip: The food in the barroom is fantastic and less expensive.) A few blocks away, American Seasons takes a culinary tour of America that will renew your love of country. And families will appreciate the something-for-everyone menu at The Boarding House.

And thus ends your day in paradise. Last ferry leaves at 10:00 p.m. (on Hy-Line). Bon voyage!

## STAR ISLAND DAYTRIP | STAR ISLAND, NEW HAMPSHIRE

A porch-rocking, photo-snapping kind of day...

**MORNING & AFTERNOON:** The Isles of Shoals are a group of nine islands, most of them privately owned, four



The beach at Star Island is a favorite stop for summer visitors.  
Photo by Aimee Seavey

in New Hampshire and five in Maine. Star Island is the more accessible of the two that permit visitors. (Appledore, belonging to Maine, is the other. It was home to famed poet Celia Thaxter, and visitors can tour her famous garden through excursions arranged by the Isles of Shoals Marine Laboratory, departing from New Castle, New Hampshire. Limited tours sell out quickly, so reserve early.)

With the more frequent ferry service departing from Portsmouth, let your morning begin here, just before the city's fully awake: That means a stop for specialty coffee and a flaky pastry at Breaking New Grounds. Then head down Market Street, home to the Isles of Shoals Steamship Company, and board the M/V Thomas Loughton (named for the 19th-century Isles of Shoals hotel builder, who was Celia Thaxter's father), bound for Star Island. This triple-deck ferry seems small and stubby given its stated capacity

(more than 300 passengers). But sure enough, once everyone's jostled aboard, there's sufficient room to stake out your own gazing space.

The seven-mile cruise to Star takes just over an hour. As you chart your course down the Piscataqua River toward the open ocean, the captain begins his narration, pointing out the bustling Naval Shipyard, in sharp contrast to the Portsmouth Naval Prison, empty since 1974. Local lore suggests that Walt Disney actually served some time there, but our captain assures us that that's not factual (though the building does rather resemble Disney's Tower of Terror). If the day is clear, you may well see all five lighthouses along your journey's way; Boon Island Light is the tough one to spy, set off in the distance. Star Island is easy to spot as you draw closer, for looming large is the substantial, wood-clad, and weathered Oceanic House (owned and operated by the nonprofit Star Island Corporation), with its covered front porch lined with rockers, inviting you to climb its steep stairs and sit a spell.

Your time on the island will vary depending on whether you've selected the "Walkabout" or the "Stopover" cruise (one and four hours, respectively). With the shorter cruise, there's just time to peek inside the Oceanic for a glimpse into its grand past, stop at the bookstore, and stroll along the worn dirt pathways lined with blooming beach roses before heading back to Portsmouth for lunch. The more leisurely timeframe allows for the possibility of a meal in the Oceanic's classic dining room (reservations required). Or just grab a bagel or an ice cream from the snack bar, before putting those porch rockers to use. Star's best for exploration on foot, and for snapping photos, given its picture-perfect rocky shoreline. A lightly pebbled access point to the ocean sits dockside, irresistible to kids sporting water shoes and coated in coconut-scented sunscreen. It leads into a narrow seaweed-free path, providing just enough room for dabbling under a parent's watchful eye.

Whichever excursion you choose, settle into island time while you can. All too soon, that gangplank will be lifted, the ferry's engines rumbling back to life, readying to chug on back to mainland reality.

## **PEAKS ISLAND DAYTRIP | PEAKS ISLAND, MAINE**

Just pedal or stroll and breathe in the salt air, with views to tempt a sea captain.

**MORNING:** Chances are you won't be alone on the 20-minute Casco Bay Lines ferry ride over to Peaks Island; the nearly hourly departures are pretty full, at least on weekends. But once you land, in the five minutes or so it takes to walk up the hill, buy a 25-cent drink at Bailey's shady lemonade stand, and head down Island Avenue toward Brad's Island Bike Rentals & Repairs, the crowd will have melted into the island like water into sand.

Here's what you'll be left with: a lingering taste of lemonade, sparkling air, and a sudden feeling of orientation. The island is only a mile wide and two miles long. You're at the crossroads of the busiest area. Turn right on Island Avenue and you'll pass the grandly shingled Inn on Peaks Island, and a little farther, Peaks Island House, with dining views to Casco Bay. Turn left and you'll find a diverting assortment of shops and galleries, such as the Umbrella Cover Museum, GEM Gallery, and Take a Peak home and gift shop.

But here's Brad's tangle of bikes, spread out in front of his shop like a crazy metal fishing net. Rates are beyond reasonable: \$15 for four hours ("but the basket'll cost you \$100," he deadpans). According to Brad, it takes 40 minutes to pedal the four-mile perimeter, but you can take as little or long as you choose.

The route is mostly flat, with views to tempt a sea captain: of Portland and other small islands; of white sails skimming the water like gulls; sandy beaches or flat stones tumbling to meet the water, with an occasional wader here and there. Along the way there's a roadside stand for Peaks Island Honey, with a jar for your \$4. Streets and unpaved lanes meander into leafy tunnels, with gardens and blue hydrangeas that surely must be mandatory. On the "backshore" side of the island, the open Atlantic stretches itself; Seashore Avenue hugs its every curve.

It's a bike ride unlike any I've ever imagined on an island: plenty of other bikes on the road, the pattering golf cart or two (popular with many of the year-round residents and summer inhabitants), but almost completely car-free. And thus, worry-free.

**AFTERNOON:** What makes this the perfect island daytrip is simply that you don't have to do too much here. Just pedal or stroll and breathe. And at some point pick out a table on the Peaks Island House veranda overlooking the sea, spread out with the *New York Times*, tuck into a Caesar-salad wrap, and watch the water lap.

**EVENING:** Later, you'll want to duck into a few shops along Island Avenue. Then slouch on down to the gazebo behind Peaks Island House, with a view to Portland, where you can watch your ferry come in. You might decide to stay and watch the sunset, or linger over an evening bowl of saffron seafood chowder at the Cockeyed Gull; on summer weekends the last ferry leaves at 11:55 p.m.

At our backs, there's an entire little island world, licked by the frothy sea. How easy it is to pick out your own cottage here—shingled, or weathered, or gingerbread-ornamented—and dream.

## **MONHEGAN ISLAND DAYTRIP | MONHEGAN ISLAND, MAINE**

Take a walk on the wild side, with nature all around.

**MORNING:** If the idea of high-end art, village charm, and a hike along wind-scoured cliffs appeals to you, then Monhegan Island—a whale-shaped bit of rock some 10 miles out to sea—may be your island. To get there, the



After touring Monhegan's 19th-century lighthouse, a couple watches the sun setting over Manana Island.  
Photo by Winky Lewis

Monhegan Boat Line in Port Clyde, Maine, offers daytrippers the most flexibility. The ferry departs as early as 7:00 a.m., with a last return at 4:30 p.m. On board the Laura B or the Elizabeth Ann, keep an eye out for seals as you make the one-hour crossing. (Or, if you choose to depart from Boothbay Harbor, make a reservation with Balmy Days Cruises for a spot on the Balmy Days II.)

When you land, stay starboard for a view of Manana, inhabited for decades by Ray Phillips, the so-called “Hermit of Manana,” and later by the Bates family, whose children were long the subjects of painter Jamie Wyeth.

It’s best to hike Monhegan—and it is hiking, so bring proper footwear— before the day heats up. More than 17 miles of trails crisscross 480 protected acres, about two-thirds of the island. Get a map at the wharfside Barnacle café (operated by The Island Inn just up the hill), where you can also score a cappuccino and a homemade blueberry muffin.

No matter which trail you choose, you’ll first climb a spur to a gravel road through the heart of the village. Monhegan has no cars; the only motorized traffic you’ll encounter is the occasional freight truck on its way to the wharf. Instead you’ll pass island kids selling cookies alongside hedges redolent of beach roses, and women on their way to buy milk. Watch for the tiny-but-lovely library on the northern end of town and, on the southern, an old wooden church where sing-a-longs are held on many a Sunday night.

Moderate hikes include those to White Head and Burnt Head, both of which level out after initially steep ascents. After walking for 30 minutes through the island’s lush interior, you’ll be rewarded with cliff-top views. On your way back, look for tiny “fairy houses” constructed of twigs, moss, and stones, nestled at the feet of conifers. (To protect the habitat, visitors are asked not to build new houses.) For more-experienced hikers, the Cliff Walk offers a series of dazzling ocean vistas as you circumambulate the island. You’ll come across coves with pools filled to the brim with periwinkles and, when the trail veers inland, blackberries galore. Do allow several hours if you choose this trail: The going can be steep and the footing rough.

**AFTERNOON:** Back in town, it’s time for lunch. Mid-village behind The Island Inn, Carina offers a variety of gourmet groceries and sandwiches. At nearby Fish House Fish Market, you’ll find lobster rolls and homemade chowder—as well as picnic tables on a small beach from which you can watch kids rowing visitors across to Manana. The Novelty, at the base of Horn’s Hill and operated by The Monhegan House inn, serves pizza, wraps, salads, and (very good) ice cream. If you’re up for more trekking, carry your food out to sunny Lobster Cove to picnic adjacent to a shipwreck.

Now you’re ready to explore Monhegan’s flourishing arts colony. For more than a century, artists have been making pilgrimages here (see “Drawn to Islands”). As you make your way around, you’ll likely see a few folks set up with easel and paint, rendering an overturned skiff or an old shingled cottage. Many artists hold viewing hours in their studios; locations and times are posted on bulletin boards around the village. At the top of Wharf Hill Road, the Lupine Gallery sells original works by Monheganers, as well as reproductions, cards, and art supplies. A few doors down, the Winter Works cooperative offers a variety of island handcrafts. Keep an eye out for knitwear in vibrant summer hues.

If you want to stay outdoors, or if you need to cool off, head to Swim Beach in the center of town. Be forewarned, though: The water is frigid, and the tide runs hard. But if you dare, a bracing dip won’t soon be forgotten. When finally you’ve had your fill of walking, eating, viewing, and swimming, stretch out on a west-facing rock for a seaside nap before your boat departs. You’ve earned it.



## 10 Best Summer Road Trips

New England was made for summer road trips. We've got great back roads, fascinating small towns, endless natural splendor, and the ability to hit several states in one day (if that's your thing). Grab your sunglasses, buckle up, and check out these ten tremendous rambles that we think qualify as the best summer road trips in New England.

### **RANGELY LAKES SCENIC BYWAY, MAINE**

You're going to go from Mexico to Madrid, Maine-style, on ME routes 17 and 4 as they traverse the pristine lakes and mountains of this wild section of northern New England. Don't miss the panorama at the Height of Land pullout, and keep an eye peeled the whole way for moose, bear, and bobcats. Distance: 50 miles.

### **MOUNT DESERT ISLAND LOOP, ACADIA NATIONAL PARK, MAINE**



Park Loop Road in Acadia National Park, Maine.

Make charming Bar Harbor your base, and take a relaxed circumnavigation via the island's Loop Road of this rugged, spectacular island that is the second-largest in the New England. Bring a picnic, and make time for the Hulls Cove Visitors Center. Distance: 27 miles round-trip.

### **COASTAL CROSSING, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Here's a short, summer delight—take in the length of the New Hampshire coastline, from Seabrook Beach to Portsmouth in a breezy half-day. It's only 18 miles, but full of great places to stop, including funky Hampton Beach, Fort Constitution, and charming New Castle, home of the elegant Wentworth by the Sea Hotel. Distance: 18 miles.

### **GREEN MOUNTAIN RIBBON, VERMONT**

Vermont's Route 100 is a road-tripper's dream: long, straight, and flanked the entire way by the beautiful Green Mountains. While the road runs the entire north-south length of the state, a great section begins in Ludlow and ends in Waterbury. Must-stop: the charming villages of neighboring Warren and Waitsfield. Distance: 90 miles.

### **ALPINE DRAMA, VERMONT**

You'll think you're in the Alps, as VT108 climbs steeply from Stowe toward Smugglers' Notch in the Green Mountains, tightening into a blacktop corkscrew past boulders and cliffs. Get ready to have your breath taken, and Instagram all those photos on the other side, over a meal in tiny Jeffersonville. Distance: 18 miles.

### **MOHAWK TRAIL, MASSACHUSETTS**

Famous at foliage time, but equally splendid in the summer, this historic scenic highway winds along northern Massachusetts via MA2, among the rolling hills of the Berkshires, combining art museums with classic roadside Americana and great vistas. Distance: 63 miles.

### **HOUSATONIC VALLEY, CONNECTICUT**

Following Route 7 along the Housatonic River from New Milford to Canaan reveals the green beauty of Western Connecticut. There's a covered bridge and waterfalls. Distance: 35 miles.

### **THE QUIET CORNER, CONNECTICUT**

Travel back in history for bucolic tranquility on quiet CT169 from Old Norwich to Woodstock, meandering past colonial homesteads and stone walls, farmers' fields and quaint town greens. Don't miss The Golden Lamb Buttery in Brooklyn for lunch or dinner. Distance: 40 miles.

### **SHORE OF DREAMS, RHODE ISLAND**

The perfect road trip for beach lovers, this route follows US 1 from RI's funky surf town of Narragansett along Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean to historic Westerly (and veranda cocktails at Ocean House). With beaches this good, this might take you a week. Distance: 25 miles.

### **KINGLY CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS**

Winding, historic, green and dotted with extraordinary vistas out to Cape Cod Bay, this glorious trip along MA6A, or the Old King's Highway, is a showcase of New England village life from Sandwich to Orleans. Plus, great book shopping and antiques. Distance: 34 miles.

## **Concord, Massachusetts Summer Trip**

Have you ever been to Concord, MA? Believe it or not, I hadn't. So, with the 4th of July just a few days away, I figured, when could be a better time to visit one of Massachusetts' most picturesque and historical areas – perfect for a New England summer day trip.

We arrived just as the Minute Man National Historical Park's preservation crew was mowing the lawn in preparation for the holiday sightseers. They could be Minutemen themselves, I thought, the way they looked like a small but efficient army. The atmosphere was so quiet and peaceful. It was hard to imagine this sleepy field as the sight of such a monumental rebellion just a little over 240 years ago.

The Minute Man National Historical Park's Battle Road Trail covers five miles of Revolutionary History. Helpful park rangers are on-site and ready to offer interesting stories about the events of that fateful day, April 19, 1775. It sounds as if they were there when the Minutemen, known as such because of their ability to be ready with a minute's notice, met the British "regulars" at the Old North Bridge.

It sounds like they heard the call of General John Buttrick, who was the first colonist to command rebellion with the words “Fire! For God’s Sake, Fire!”

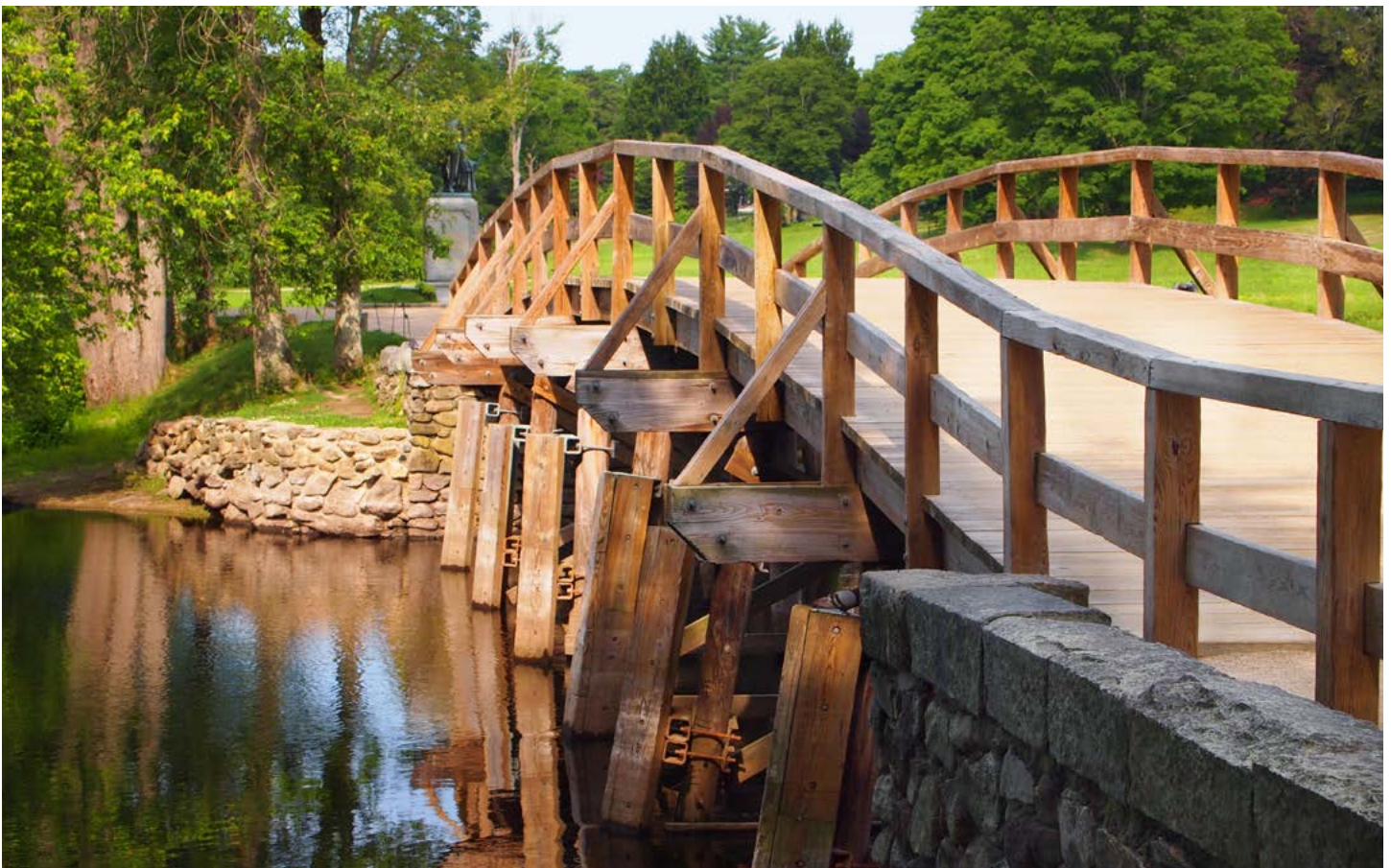
It sounds as if they could feel the passion of the rebels, who, after spending all night hiding war supplies from the Regulars, caught wind of the deaths of their fellow Americans and chose courage over complacency.

While exploring the museum-like North Bridge Visitor Center, we found fascinating exhibits and watched an 8-minute video presentation that helped connect the stories to the structures. The elegant building that houses the center was donated to the park by descendants of General Buttrick, who are still active in the Concord community.

Across the street from the visitor center is the home of General John Buttrick. The stately house is depicted in right corner of the battle’s famous engraving.

Across the road from the bridge, heading away from the visitor center and towards the center of town, we encountered the Robbins House. This beautifully preserved little home is packed with history – it housed first-generation free African Americans and their descendants for years. Not only were Concord’s freed slaves able to support themselves in Colonial America, but they played active roles in the anti-slavery movement. The mission of the Robbins House is to educate the public about Concord’s little-known African American history.

Heading towards Concord’s Cultural District, we found the Old Manse, which over the years has been home to generations of Emersons, Alcotts, and Hawthornes. “Old Manse” is a Scottish nickname for a minister’s house – the Reverend Emerson was, after all, the home’s first resident. The residents of the house in 1775 were able to see the battle from outside their window.



Old North Bridge in Concord, MA, where the colonists met the British in the first battle of the American Revolution.  
Photo by Bethany Bourgault

After exploring that area a bit more, we decided it was time for a lunch break at the Main Streets Market and Cafe. It seemed to be a hot-spot for locals and visitors, and we soon found out why. The cheerful atmosphere, colonial feel and delicious, homey-yet-gourmet comfort food could easily delight anyone. It certainly delighted us!

Satisfied and rejuvenated, it was time to explore some more. Several of America's most influential writers called Concord home, and luckily for visitors, their homes are beautifully preserved. Tours of most are available on-site.

Louisa May Alcott, author of "Little Women," wrote her stories based on this house and its inhabitants. When her father bought the property, he called it the "Orchard House" because of the 40 apple trees (his favorite fruit) that grew in the yard.

A little while down the road in either direction, we found Nathaniel Hawthorne's home, also called "The Wayside," and Ralph Waldo Emerson's home.

Throughout the day, we were delighted by Concord's quintessential New England beauty. Flowers were in full bloom, and flags flew proudly over historic buildings. It was the perfect way to kick off the 4th of July weekend.

History lessons done for the day, it was time to explore Concord's Cultural District – a quaint downtown area full of little shops, galleries, and restaurants.

One of the first places we went was, naturally, the bookshop. Perhaps they had an unfair advantage with Emerson, the Alcotts, and Hawthorne living in the area, but The Concord Bookshop had one of the most impressive displays of "Local Authors" I've ever seen.

We meandered next door into The Dotted I stationary and gifts store. Cards, gifts, and notebooks for every occasion lined the walls and charmed all who ventured through the door.

We saw shops for clothes, art, supplies for almost any craft, coffee shops and bakeries. The Concord Shop, specializing in cookware and utensils, had one of the largest collections of cookie cutters I've ever seen. We moseyed over to The Concord Cheese Shop and Priscilla's Candy Shop, both must-see's for anyone heading out to Concord.

Priscilla's Candy is famous for its chocolate. Different confections, truffles, bonbons, and fudges lined display cases near the counter, and other wonderful-looking treats lined the walls and shelves. As for me, I brought home a box of their delicious homemade fudge. Helps with the writing process, you know?

# ...and More

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## 10 Prettiest Coastal Towns in New England

Were postcards invented with New England in mind? Given how gorgeous these coastal towns are, it's a good bet. We picked the 10 prettiest coastal towns, from Down East harbors to Victorian island resorts.

### **KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE**

The Kennebunk River adds even more waterline charm to the small shops, elegant ship captains' homes, and fishing ports of this vibrant Southern Maine town of 3,474.

Unique view: The quintessential fishing village of Cape Porpoise.

See more: From the river and harbor on Rugosa Lobster Tours.

### **BAR HARBOR, MAINE**

Perched on Mount Desert Island at the gateway to Acadia National Park, this historic resort town still resonates with the Victorian splendor of bygone days, not to mention the backdrop of Cadillac Mountain.

Unique view: From Bar Island, which you can walk to at low tide (plan ahead).

See more: Lighthouse and National Park Tour via catamaran.

### **NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND**

Spectacular at every turn, from broad, sandy beaches to deep harbors bristling with schooners, racing yachts, and pleasure craft; from cozy Colonial taverns to opulent Gilded Age mansions.

Unique view: The twinkling span of the Pell Bridge just after twilight.

See more: From a historical point of view, with Newport History Tours.



Newport, Rhode Island  
Photo by Onne van der Wal

### **NEW CASTLE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

This town of 968 residents at the mouth of the Piscataqua River is made up entirely of islands. The Victorian charm of the Wentworth by the Sea Hotel makes the setting even lovelier.

Unique view: Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse.

See more: From the water with Portsmouth Kayak Adventures' tour of Little Harbor.

### **CAMDEN, MAINE**

The self-dubbed "Jewel of the Coast" is a well-deserved moniker, and this Mid-Coast harbor town of 4,823 on Penobscot Bay is tucked where mountains reach down to the sea.

Unique view: Three windjammers making this narrow harbor their home.

See more: From the water, on the Schooner Surprise.

### **NEW SHOREHAM, RHODE ISLAND**

All of verdant, windswept Block Island, just 13 miles off Rhode Island's southern coast, is technically New Shoreham, but it's the Victorian harbor-front that makes landing here forever captivating.

Unique view: Granite-blocked Southeast Lighthouse, perched at on one of the island's iconic bluffs.

See more: From the water on trimaran Ruling Passion.

### **ROCKPORT, MASSACHUSETTS**

Painters turned this fishing village into an art colony for a reason—it's an inspiration. Perched at the tip of Cape Ann, there are rugged shorelines, hidden coves, and a bustling, historic village.

Unique view: Motif No. 1, the most painted building in the world.

See more: By jeep, in personalized tours from Sweet Shots Secret Spots.

### **STONINGTON BOROUGH, CONNECTICUT**

This delightful village of fewer than 1,000 residents boasts a wealth of 18th-19th-century buildings on its own narrow peninsula that juts into Fisher's Island Sound and Little Narragansett Bay, with views in all directions.

Unique view: From "The Point," a view of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York.

See more: On foot, with a self-guided walking tour available at the Old Lighthouse Museum.

### **OAK BLUFFS, MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASSACHUSETTS**

The brightly colored gingerbread Victorian cottages make this laid-back enclave on Martha's Vineyard a true New England confection. And on one night each summer, the cottages lights up with Chinese lanterns, making it likely the loveliest place on earth.

Unique view: The nation's oldest platform carousel.

See more: Of the historic cottages on the Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association Tours.

### **PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS**

Set at the outermost tip of Cape Cod, surrounded by water on three sides and backed by vast sand dunes on the fourth, Provincetown is a colorful gem that's drawn artists and writers for generations.

Unique view: A bird's eye, from the top of the Pilgrim Monument.

See more: By jeep, of Provincetown's famous sand dunes, with Art's Dune Tours.

## **10 Prettiest Lakes in New England**

Crystal clear freshwater lakes are tucked throughout the verdant landscape of our region. Some are small enough to hike around, while others stretch to the horizon. Here are ten of the prettiest lakes in New England that are definitely worth a visit.

### **NEWFOUND LAKE (AT WELLINGTON STATE PARK), BRISTOL, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Set amidst fresh-scented, hemlock-covered mountains in the center of the state's Lakes Region, this deep-water glacial lake – approximately two and a half miles wide and seven miles in length – boasts the largest freshwater swimming beach in the New Hampshire State Park system

### **KEZAR LAKE, LOVELL, MAINE**

Tucked into the foothills of the White Mountains in western Maine, this deep and crystal-clear lake twists through the landscape for approximately ten miles, creating a series of bays and coves that attract nesting loons and thirsty moose. Visitors enjoy boating, swimming, and fishing for bass, lake trout and salmon.

### **LAKE WARAMAUG, KENT, CONNECTICUT**

Named after an Indian chief of the Wyantenock tribe and known for its sandy beaches and pristine water, this S-shaped lake is located in the rolling forested hills of rural Litchfield County. Visitors today enjoy a peaceful retreat for swimming, fishing, boating, and camping at Lake Waramaug State Park.

### **SQUAM LAKE, ASHLAND/HOLDERNESS/SANDWICH/CENTER HARBOR/MOULTONBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The picturesque setting for the 1981 film *On Golden Pond*, the second largest lake in the state—boasting 61 miles of rocky shoreline—oozes low-key charm for those who love kayaking, canoeing, or lolling on docks in the sun.



Squam Lake  
Photo by NHDTTD/ Dale Lary

### **LAKE WILLOUGHBY, WESTMORE, VERMONT**

For breathtakingly stunning vistas, get thee to Vermont's Northeast Kingdom where the deep glacial waters of Lake Willoughby are framed by the soaring granite cliffs of Mount Hor and Mount Pisgah. Enjoy boating, fishing, and public beaches (for an icy-cold swim) at the north and south shores.

### **LAKE ST. CATHERINE, POULTNEY, VERMONT**

Set in the gently rolling, green hills of western Vermont, close to the New York State border, the five-mile-long waterway is easily accessed at Lake St. Catherine State Park. In addition to a popular camping area, visitors can picnic, swim, rent boats and fish at this idyllic lake.

### **WATCHAUG POND, CHARLESTOWN, RHODE ISLAND**

A scenic 1,000-acre kettle pond surrounded by acres of rocky woodlands in Burlingame State Park, abutting the Audubon Society's Kimball Wildlife Refuge. A popular spot for swimming, fishing, camping, picnicking, and hiking an extensive network of trails.

### **BENEDICT POND, MONTEREY, MASSACHUSETTS**

Nestled in the bucolic forests of the southern Berkshire mountains, the 35-acre Benedict Pond offers stunning views in the heart of Beartown State Forest. Nature lovers enjoy swimming, boating, fishing and walking the 1.7 mile trail circling the pond.

### **WALDEN POND, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

Who doesn't love Walden Pond? Made immortal by the 19th-century writings of Henry David Thoreau, the pond today is enjoyed by visitors who flock to swim the 102-foot deep glacial kettle-hole pond located within 335 acres of protected open space on the Walden Pond State Reservation.

## **Explore Cape Porpoise, Maine**

We were still a few weeks shy of the summer solstice, but our late-spring weather was bordering on balmy as we headed to Cape Porpoise, Maine — a small fishing village on the southern coast — earlier this month. Although I grew up in neighboring Kennebunk, we would be exploring Kennebunkport as tourists, courtesy of the Kennebunkport Resort Collection, which had graciously offered to host us for the weekend.

“Where exactly is Cape Porpoise?” you may be wondering. Wend your way along Route 9 East for approximately two miles beyond Kennebunkport's bustling Dock Square, and you'll land in this scenic little hamlet. This area is considered the quiet side of town, but travel past the village and through the gates of Hidden Pond — located in a 60-acre wood — and peaceful seclusion takes on a whole new meaning. So much thought has been put into infusing the guest experience with a sense of serenity that even the bungalow we were to call home for the next two nights had been aptly dubbed “Tranquility.”

How to describe the Hidden Pond bungalow experience? The brainchild of visionary real-estate-development duo Tim Harrington and Deb Lennon, it's like a rustic summer camp wrapped in stress-melting layers of modern luxury. Private outdoor showers, two pools, complimentary beach cruiser bikes, and nightly bonfires — complete with s'mores — are but a few of the amenities that induce that home-away-from-home vacation feeling.

We could have happily lolled the day away at Hidden Pond, lounging poolside or exploring the roads that twist through the resort, but before we knew it, Schuyler was at our door to shuttle us to lunch at the Tides Beach Club. Situated just a stone's skip from Goose Rocks Beach, TBC offers an array of fresh, local seafood that will delight any palate. With ocean breezes drifting through the open windows, Jim and I debated over what to order; we both craved the seared shrimp and Maine scallops, but ended up combining that entrée with the roasted lobster. A delectable start to our weekend of indulgence.

Once lunch was over, we were back in the shuttle being zipped down to the docks of Arundel Wharf in the Port to board the schooner Eleanor for a two-hour sail along Kennebunkport's craggy shoreline. Captain Rich and his crew pointed out local landmarks as Eleanor carried us toward the tip of Cape Porpoise for an oceanside view of



Goat Island Light. Gliding past the mansions that dot Ocean Avenue, it's easy to envision this area as a rich man's playground, but the lobster buoys bobbing on the waves tell the story of the hardworking Mainers who make their living harvesting the sea.

A big lunch and a two-hour tour of the coast could only be followed up by one thing: a nap on the daybed built for two on our bungalow's screened in porch. While others in our group took advantage of the many guest amenities offered at Hidden Pond, we dozed to a chorus of frogs calling to one another from across the pond.

With our stomachs rumbling once again, we prepared for dinner. Had it not been booked for a wedding reception, Earth, Hidden Pond's farm to table restaurant, would have topped our list for dining options. Next time we're in town, we'll be sure to make reservations.

You can't visit Maine without ordering a lobster dinner, and no trip to Cape Porpoise would be complete without stopping at Nunan's Lobster Hut. This family-run restaurant has earned myriad accolades for its no-frills, lobster-in-the-rough dinners.

The Wayfarer Restaurant has long been a favorite breakfast joint with locals and visitors alike. The food is good, prices are reasonable, and this place may have the most personable wait staff in all of Kennebunkport. (Full disclosure: My niece and her best friend are both working there this summer.) The Wayfarer is also open for lunch and dinner, but if you want to indulge in an evening cocktail, be sure to bring your own.

With a few hours to spare, we decided to stroll from the center of Cape Porpoise along Pier Road to the town wharf. It's an enjoyable jaunt, filled with fishing boats nodding on their moorings or running aground on a mud-flat, depending on the level of the tide; scores of hydrangea blossoms pushing against garden gates; and clap-board Capes bordered by impeccably maintained lawns.



The lobster rolls at the Ramp did not disappoint.  
Photo by Brenda Darroch

The pier anchors Bickford Island, which connects to Cape Porpoise by a causeway. Those in the know head here to grab a bite to eat, dig for clams, or enjoy the scenic vista. There's a clear view of Goat Island Lighthouse, and plenty of benches on which to perch as you breathe in the scent of beach roses and gaze out at the sea.

Of course, the ocean air is notorious for stimulating the appetite, so we headed to The Ramp, casual counterpart to Pier 77, to sate our hunger. Had we arrived earlier, we would have found seating inside, totally missing out on the al fresco dining experience. The patio, which overlooks the harbor, is outfitted with Adirondack chairs with arms wide enough to accommodate a bevy of plates, and that's where we chose to enjoy our lobster rolls.

Our weekend in Cape Porpoise, Maine, wrapped up far too soon for our liking, but we left feeling relaxed and rejuvenated.

## Visit Vermont's Champlain Islands

One thing's for sure: There's weather here. Enfolded in the bright white clouds that scud like sails across the sky, casting shadows over Lake Champlain. In the heavy sunlight penetrating this year's peonies, burnishing them from within. And in the rain that's been pelting nonstop as we edge our way north past Burlington, Vermont, on I-89 and veer west onto Route 2, that slender byway stringing the Champlain Islands together like fishing wire.

Where does it come from?

Here at the upper part of the lake, a weather front might slide off the Adirondacks on one side, or Vermont's Green Mountains on the other. It might steal down from Canada, crossing the border without papers, in the middle of the night. Maybe it starts deeper in New England, at the southern tip of this 120-mile-long body of water, building momentum as it pushes along the surface of the largest lake east of the Great Lakes and the sixth-largest freshwater lake in the country.

The windshield wipers beat a steady rhythm. We splash over the first causeway, onto South Hero Island. That's the thing about rain: You have to slow down.

And, at the same time, something is rising.

Out there, where we can't quite see them yet, islands lift out of the gray water, like ancient, lumbering sea turtles. The names of the Champlain Islands intermingle with those of their towns: South Hero, Grand Isle, North Hero, Isle La Motte, and Alburgh (technically a peninsula, but always counted nonetheless). Silhouettes of barn silos emerge and retreat as we slice through mist, and green humps of hills grow and recede. Small twisters spiral off the tires of a pickup truck barreling by. It's positively antediluvian. The sort of day when you might see Champ--Lake Champlain's version of the Loch Ness monster--raise its head and turn to stare.

We're somewhere mysterious--anything can happen.

The waters swirling around the Champlain Islands can be deep--up to 400 feet in some places, deeper than a regulation football field is long. Thousands of years ago, the lake was part of the Champlain Sea, which was in turn connected to the Atlantic. Champ may be mythological, but Chazy Fossil Reef, on one of these islands, is not. It's a time-traveling map, set in stone, filled with evidence of creatures that existed 480 million years ago. The ground you're standing on literally started out in Zimbabwe, before it up and migrated to Vermont.

Ahead, the fields of South Hero spread out, broad and wide, like picnic blankets placed end to end. More-recent history weaves into the story, too, sometimes with a bit of Colonial ego. Legend has it that in the late 1700s,



Lake Champlain

North and South Hero were named for Vermont's famous Green Mountain Boys, Ethan and Ira Allen--by request of Ethan.

Meanwhile, it's centuries later, coming up on noontime. Farms glide by, and a bright blue-metal roof gleams in the distance--St. Joseph's Church. Suddenly the darkness seems less dark. Tents rise up around the base of the church, and it looks like a medieval fair, but it's actually the weekly Saturday Farmers' Market in Grand Isle. These folks have grit, as well as products that highlight the islands' abundance of diversity: Slowfire Bakery bread, Thistle Meadows jam, fresh veggies from Savage Gardens, and Grand Isle Pasta. I swear the clouds are lifting.

"Try the maple walnut--better known as Vermont's vanilla," suggests Island Homemade Ice Cream owner Gary Sundberg, a former Verizon engineer. Like Ben and Jerry, those two other well-known Vermonters, Gary took the Penn State "Cow to Cone" ice-cream manufacturing course. Working closely with neighboring farmers, he recalls the day when one of them had a surplus of extra-large cantaloupes. "We made an awesome cantaloupe sorbet and sold it to all of the island restaurants," he says gleefully. "Sometimes it works out; sometimes it's a giveaway."

The day brightens even more with a stop at Grand Isle Art Works. When Ellen Thompson and her husband, Jim Holzschuh, took over the ramshackle building just off Route 2, even the farmhouse doors were missing. Today, the gallery/café overflows with Vermont arts and crafts, including Anne Zolotas' haunting driftwood horse sculptures, colorful fish flying against an orange wall, and yarn from Ellen's Angora goats. "The only way you make a living here is through ingenuity," Ellen observes. "Anne, the driftwood artist, cooks at Pan's Pizza [on South Hero], teaches riding, and is on the local rescue squad. She's a force of nature. But everyone here does more than one thing."

As the day winds down, we speed toward Canada, stopping short of the border at the northernmost B&B in the Champlain Islands, Ransom Bay Inn & Restaurant in Alburgh. Our plan is to start at the top of the islands and work our way south for the next few days. On this rainy night, Loraine and Richard Walker, both former IBMers, infuse their 1795 stone inn with a warmth reserved for soapstone. Homemade strawberry-rhubarb pie helps ease the chill, too. Although "the croissants give me goose bumps," comments a guest from Montreal, as she turns to her companion to translate. "How do you say 'croissants' in English?" Fortunately, we know exactly what she means. The next morning we have French toast made with Loraine's croissants dipped in cornflakes, topped with a wallop of fresh creme and local syrup, which sets a high bar for comfort food. La French radio plays in the background.

This far north, it's a waste of a passport not to follow pastoral Route 225 and cross into Quebec, 5 miles away. For the thrill of a border crossing, you can drive away with the best slice of cheese this side of France. "Take your first right turn," the border guard directs us, down a rural lane to Fromagerie Kaiser, in Noyan. Set amid pastures and silos, this destination hops with fromage aficionados. There's a deliciously smelly L'Empereur Léger ... And then, miraculously, on Sunday, the land is washed clean.

Under blue sky and fluffy clouds, water sparkles on either side of the causeway to Isle La Motte. This least inhabited of the Champlain Islands is favored by cyclists--though all of the islands abound in quiet roads, farms, and fields to the horizon. You're never far from the lake, with views that make it hard to keep your eyes on the road.

It's certainly true now, as we pass a marker for Vermont's oldest settlement, Fort Sainte-Anne, built near the water in 1666 by Captain Pierre La Motte. Directly across the street is St. Anne's Shrine, an open-air, turn-of-the-20th-century chapel overlooking Lake Champlain. The priest's words boom out over the loudspeaker, drifting toward the water: "Who is God?"

A lone cyclist flies by, and at that moment it's hard to imagine a better place to ask that question--although metaphysical questions of a related nature might rear up a mile or so down the road at Fisk Farm, which is certainly a place where dreams come true. Or, in this case, where one determined woman makes dreams come true. A former psychotherapist, Linda Fitch splits her time between Princeton, New Jersey, and Isle La Motte. "It's not for everyone," she says, as she gestures around the Fisk Farm property, which includes the ruins of Fisk Mansion, along with a resurrected wooden barn, two guest cottages that rent by the week, and a handful of outbuildings. A typical guest, according to Linda, is "someone who wants to come and write the Great American Novel. This isn't exactly a Madison Avenue location."

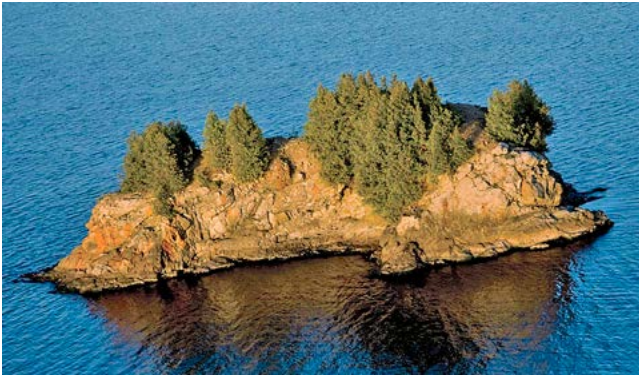
It's also for art lovers. In the summer months, the barn brims over with art and music. "We have incredible musicians who come from Montreal," Linda says. "Move over, Carnegie Hall." In July and August, Sunday tea is served on the lawn with scones and white tablecloths. It's insanely beautiful.

And it looks effortless, too, which couldn't be further from the truth. Following a massive restoration of the collapsing barn, Linda opened the tea garden in 1995. A week later, she was engaged in an eco battle that would last for the next three years, as she tried to prevent Fisk Quarry, practically in her back yard, from reopening. Hidden within the quarry was geological treasure: remnants of the 480-million-year-old Chazy Fossil Reef.

In the past, Isle La Motte's elegant black-and-gray limestone, with its unique whorls and designs, had graced Radio City Music Hall, the National Gallery of Art, and the floors of the Vermont State House. Homes all over the Champlain Islands feature these quarried stones, too, whose embedded gastropods are a reminder of the once-living reef.

"It's the best and only geological formation of this kind in the world," Linda states flatly. "We gathered a grass-roots team, and we kept winning." And at the end of the day, with state geologists speaking in defense of the ancient, entombed reef, funds were raised; the site, now Fisk Quarry Preserve, was acquired by the Isle La Motte Preservation Trust, and the reef was designated a National Natural Landmark.

A blip in the life of the reef, but a monumental effort that maybe ensures its survival for another 480 million years. Without intervention, "it would be a big hole in the ground, with machinery, no water, flattened and stripped," Linda says. Instead, it's a serene, otherworldly architectural monument alive with 108 species of birds, five kinds of fish, plus fox, otter, and beaver. "My biggest gift is finding wildly talented people," she grins. "The universe plunked me into this area where I just wanted to preserve the beauty." So how can she bear to leave it for six months of the year? She smiles: "I never leave it. I take Isle La Motte with me wherever I go." And we do, too, as we skim southward, following the western shoreline, taking in the vast water views to New York.



Carleton's Prize, in Crescent Bay  
Photo by Kindra Clineff

Thankfully there's still time: Time to stop at the South End Café and meet owners Steve and Carol Hall Stata, whose Hall Home Place Ice Cider is produced at her family's historic 1828 homestead. "We joke that Dad would be very pleased," Carol says. "We're selling food out of one end of the house and booze out of the other, and making money."

Time, too, in a few hours, to sling myself into a hammock on the porch of an elegant room at North Hero House, facing the water like a spyglass looking out to sea. To eat a dreamy dinner of delicate salmon dusted in chive blossom, and fall asleep to the sound of rolling waves. And in

the morning, the inn's genial owner, Walter Blasberg, who's been coming to the islands since he was a child, will show us a rookery where great blue herons' nests teeter in a primordial swamp. There will be time to rent a bike next door at Hero's Welcome, an all-purpose general store/café/marina/emporium run by yet another corporate refugee, Bob Camp, the ex-CEO of Pier 1.

And, of course, time to zip around Butler Island with Captain Holly Poulin, whose Driftwood Tours, leaving from North Hero House, offer fishing, sightseeing, or daytrips into Burlington. It's the watery side of the Champlain Islands story, told by someone who grew up here, got her captain's license, and has been in business for 13 years.

"This is one of the best bass fisheries in the country," she says matter-of-factly. Waves slap against the side of the boat as we pick up speed and lean into a turn. "It's different out here, not crazy like the Burlington area," she shouts into the wind. "There are so many islands around here to get out of the weather."

It's also far from the madding crowd, although Burlington is only about a half-hour's drive. "We're off Broad Lake [the main section]," she explains, "in an area called the Inland Sea [the northeast arm]. It borders northwest Vermont and ends in Quebec. That's part of what makes it so special. A lot of days I'm the only one out here. It's just so peaceful."

"What about Champ?" I can't resist asking.

"That's one of the first things most people ask when they get on the boat," she finally says, after a pause. "Last summer I saw something for the first time, something long and very, very large on the water, about 40 feet away. Just lying on top of the water, moving around." She shrugs. "It was something, and it was big." Who doesn't love the mystery of water--what it hides, what it reveals, and the way it weaves in and around the lives of island folk?

But all of this is still to come in the days ahead, plus a final night at the lovely Ferry Watch Inn, on the west shore of Grand Isle, with views to the Adirondacks. Unlivable when Troy and Janet Wert first bought the place in 1997, the proof of their hard work is everywhere: in the soaring barn they restored, beam by beam; in Janet's gardens that hide fossils or trail along the water. The story of their labor, and love, is one we'll hear over and over on these islands.

The sparkling B&B sits on a spectacular bluff overlooking the ferry, which crosses about every 15 minutes at this time of year. We'll ride it, in a day or two, across this deep and unknowable Lake Champlain, simply for the thrill of turning around and chugging back. The wind behind us, the islands ahead of us, and fathoms of water below.

#### WHEN YOU GO:

Visit [champlainislands.com](http://champlainislands.com) for an overview of dining and lodging, attractions, events, and activities.

## Experience the Cape Cod Wellfleet Drive-In

It was a good hour before dusk when we rolled into the Wellfleet Drive-In Theatre in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. It was a sticky July evening and like so many of the other families vacationing on the Cape that were around us, we took our time selecting the perfect spot. This one's too far. This one's a bit too far on the left. This one's too close to the snack stand. On and on it went until we nestled our SUV into a space close to the front, finally deciding that being near an open area in front of the screen to toss a Frisbee or throw a Wiffle ball offered the best advantages.

Others soon settled in around us. Big cars, small trucks, short vehicles—they all paraded into the lot; mothers and dads pouring out of those cars and setting up shop for the evening. Out came the beach chairs. Then the coolers of cold drinks. Kids collected small wads of dollar bills to buy candy at the snack shack. If you've been to a drive-in, you know the scene. It's been like this ever since the Wellfleet first opened its doors in 1957.

By then, the drive-in movie concept was already an integral part of the American landscape. In fact, in case you missed it, the drive-in celebrated its 80th birthday in 2013. The very first one launched on June 6, 1933, when a Camden, New Jersey, businessman named Richard Hollingshead Jr. opened the Automobile Movie Theatre. By the late 1950s, around the time the Wellfleet came into existence, some 4,000 screens had popped up throughout the country. But, you know, times changed. Technology and costs have taken their toll on the drive-ins in the years since. By 2011, only some 200 working screens still remained.



The Wellfleet Drive-in Theatre  
Photo by Ian Aldrich

Which means the ones that have weathered the times have become these cherished time capsules; icons of an era when first-run movies didn't stream into your living room. You actually had to leave your house to go see them. The Wellfleet certainly qualifies as a gem, as does the scene it inspires. As I perused the lot prior to the start of the first movie, Planes 2, I saw the kind of drive-in stuff that's occupied movie parking lots for generations. Families carefully marking out their picnic spots, teenage boys chucking a football around, and teenage girls trying hard not to admire some of those same boys. Little kids gorged on candy, while parents did their best not to finish off the entire large bucket of popcorn. (I failed miserably on that front.)

Then dusk descended, the big screen lit up and for the next couple of hours a community of tourists were entertained by a cartoon plane. Was the film all that good? Yeah, sort of. Frankly, though, I didn't care. My young son loved the idea of watching a movie in a car. He talked about it for days afterwards. A next generation drive-in fan had been created.

For more on the Wellfleet Drive-In Theatre, visit: [wellfleetcinemas.com](http://wellfleetcinemas.com).

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