

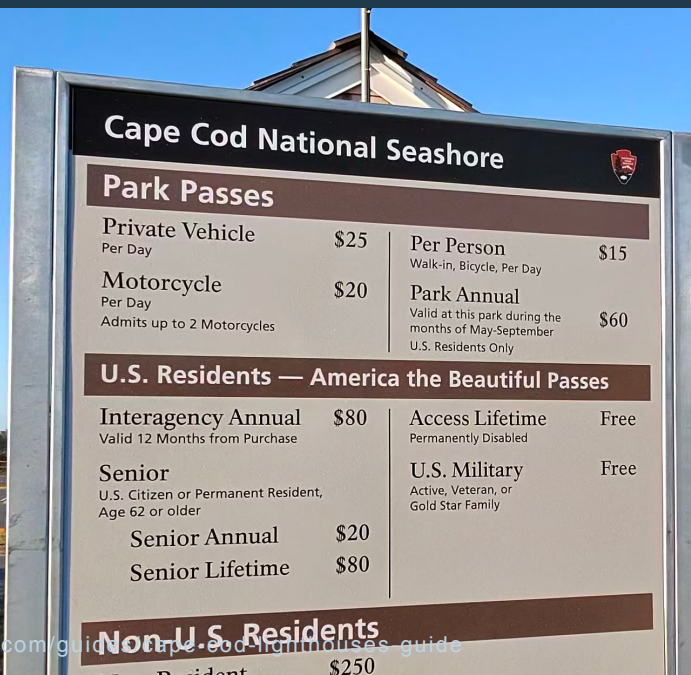


CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Cape Cod Lighthouses: A Complete Guide to All 6 Major Lighthouses & How to Visit Each One

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



capecodcertified.com/guide-to-cape-cod-lighthouses-guide

The six major Cape Cod lighthouses span the entire peninsula from Woods Hole to the very tip of Provincetown, each with its own history, character, and access requirements. Nobska and Chatham are drive-up easy; Race Point and Wood End require a real commitment to reach. Visiting all six in a single day is doable — plan on 5 to 7 hours driving south to north and you will see one of the best lighthouse runs in New England.

The Six Cape Cod Lighthouses at a Glance

Quick orientation before you plan your route: the lighthouses stretch roughly 65 miles from tip to tip along the outer arc of the peninsula. Three of them — Nobska, Chatham, and Nauset — have roadside parking and easy access. Highland Light requires a short walk. Race Point demands a 1.5-mile trek across beach and dune. Wood End Light is at the far end of a 0.75-mile granite breakwater walk. All six are free to view from the outside; some charge a modest fee to climb the towers.

Nobska Light, Falmouth (1876)

Nobska Light sits at the southwestern tip of Cape Cod in Woods Hole, looking directly across Vineyard Sound toward Martha's Vineyard. On a clear day you can pick out the Gay Head cliffs from the lighthouse grounds — that view alone makes the stop worthwhile.

The 40-foot cast iron tower was built in 1876 and still guides vessel traffic through the Vineyard Sound shipping lane. The grounds are open year-round at no charge, and this is one of the most photographed lighthouses in New England — the white tower against blue sky with the Vineyard visible beyond is genuinely spectacular. The Friends of Nobska Light manage the property; guided tower climbs were offered in recent seasons [VERIFY 2026 schedule — restoration work was underway and tour availability may have changed]. Even without a tower climb, the grounds are worth the stop. If you are catching a Steamship Authority ferry from Falmouth Harbor, Nobska is a 10-minute drive and an easy add to any island-bound morning.

Getting there: 233 Nobska Road, Woods Hole. Free parking on-site.

Chatham Light, Chatham

Chatham Light is technically two lighthouses — a pair of white towers built in the 1870s — though only one is active today as an aid to navigation. The active tower stands at the edge of a bluff overlooking the Chatham Break: a dramatic inlet carved through the outer barrier beach by the Blizzard of 1987 that permanently rerouted this stretch of coastline. The break is visible directly from the lighthouse grounds and is one of the most striking pieces of Cape Cod geography you can see from a public road.

The lighthouse is an active United States Coast Guard station. The grounds are open to the public at no charge; tower access is limited and depends on Coast Guard scheduling [VERIFY 2026 public climb availability]. The lighthouse keeper's quarters house a museum and gift shop operated by the Chatham Historical Society [VERIFY current hours — typically summer season only]. Parking at the lighthouse lot fills fast in July and August. Arrive before 9am or after 4pm in peak season, or walk up from the Main Street shops a few hundred yards south.

Getting there: 37 Main Street, Chatham. Free parking on-site, limited in summer.

Nauset Light, Eastham (1877)

Nauset Light is the red-and-white striped lighthouse — and if it looks familiar, it appeared on Cape Cod Potato Chips packaging for decades. The lighthouse stands at the edge of the Cape Cod National Seashore overlooking barrier beach that erodes measurably every year. Nauset Light was moved back from the cliff in 1996, the same year the more famous Highland Light relocation happened.

The lighthouse is managed by the Nauset Light Preservation Society. Tower tours run on Sunday afternoons in season [VERIFY 2026 schedule and any admission fee]. The grounds are accessible year-round without charge. Parking is at the Nauset Light Beach lot, which charges the standard National Seashore vehicle fee (\$25, or free with an America the Beautiful pass) — though a smaller free lot exists on Cable Road near the lighthouse itself [VERIFY current parking situation before relying on it].

A short walk inland brings you to the Three Sisters Lighthouses — three small wooden lighthouse towers relocated from the original beach site into a quiet grove of pitch pines. They are a historical oddity completely unique to this stretch of the Cape and worth the five-minute detour [VERIFY current public access].

Getting there: 120 Nauset Light Beach Road, Eastham. National Seashore parking fees apply at the main lot.

Highland Light / Cape Cod Light, Truro (1857)

Highland Light — formally Cape Cod Light — is the tallest lighthouse on Cape Cod and the oldest still standing. The current brick tower dates to 1857, but a lighthouse has stood on this headland since 1797 when the original was commissioned under President George Washington. This tower guided ships around the outer Cape shoals, known historically as the “graveyard of the Atlantic” for the hundreds of vessels lost here over three centuries.

Like Nauset, Highland Light was moved back from the eroding clay cliffs in 1996 in a major engineering relocation. The tower climb rewards visitors with a panoramic view that on a clear day stretches from Provincetown’s tower to the Chatham elbow — the full arc of the Outer Cape visible at once [VERIFY exact step count to the lantern room]. Highland Light is managed by the Truro Historical Society in partnership with the National Park Service. The adjacent Highland House Museum covers Cape Cod maritime and cultural history and is worth 30 to 45 minutes on its own. There is an admission fee to climb the tower [VERIFY 2026 fee — historically around \$5 per adult]. The lighthouse sits at the edge of the Highland Golf Links, the oldest golf course on Cape Cod, which adds an unexpected layer of atmosphere.

Getting there: 27 Highland Light Road, Truro. Small parking lot on-site. Confirm off-season hours before a winter visit.

Race Point Light, Provincetown (1816)

Race Point Light stands at the absolute tip of Cape Cod, at Race Point Beach on the outermost edge of the National Seashore. Getting there requires either a 1.5-mile walk across the beach and sand dunes from the Race Point parking area, or access via oversand vehicle with an ORV permit issued by the Cape Cod National Seashore [VERIFY current ORV permit requirements and any seasonal restrictions for piping plover nesting areas].

The isolation is the whole point. Race Point Light feels genuinely remote in a way the roadside lighthouses cannot match. Whale-watch boats from Provincetown Harbor pass within view of the tower. In late summer, seals and documented white sharks work these waters — the lighthouse keeper’s house is one of the few structures visible from miles of open beach. The original 1816 tower was replaced by the current 45-foot granite structure in 1876. The lighthouse is managed by the American Lighthouse Foundation [VERIFY]. Overnight stays at the keeper’s house are available by reservation and book up early [VERIFY 2026 availability and rates — historically in the \$175–\$250 per night range for the full structure]. Day visitors can walk to the lighthouse grounds at no charge beyond the National Seashore parking fee at Race Point Beach.

Getting there: Race Point Beach parking area, Provincetown. National Seashore fees apply. Allow 3 miles round trip on foot.

Wood End Light, Provincetown (1872)

Wood End Light is for committed lighthouse hunters. It sits at the far end of the Provincetown breakwater — a 0.75-mile walk across large, irregular granite blocks with no guardrails, no shade, and complete exposure to wind off Cape Cod Bay. The breakwater starts at the west end of Commercial Street in Provincetown near the Herring Cove parking area.

The walk is an experience entirely separate from the lighthouse itself. You cross open water on boulders, looking back at Provincetown's distinctive skyline and the dunes of the National Seashore on either side. A round trip to Wood End and back takes roughly 90 minutes at a comfortable pace. There are no facilities at the lighthouse, no interior access, and no services of any kind. Wear closed-toe shoes with real soles — sandals on the granite rocks are a bad idea. Do not attempt the breakwater in fog, high wind, or after dark.

Wood End Light has been automated since 1961. The reward is the getting there: the isolation, the view, and the knowledge that very few visitors on any given day will have made the walk.

Getting there: West end of Commercial Street, Provincetown, near Herring Cove Beach. No fee. Allow 90 minutes round trip.

Practical Info: Planning Your Cape Cod Lighthouses Road Trip

Full-day south-to-north route: Nobska Light → Chatham Light → Nauset Light → Highland Light → Race Point Light → Wood End Light. Budget 5 to 7 hours including drive time, stops, and the Race Point walk. Skip Wood End if time is short — the breakwater alone adds 90 minutes.

Best season for tower climbs: Tower climb programs are seasonal, generally Memorial Day through Columbus Day [VERIFY specific open dates per lighthouse before planning a shoulder-season trip]. Grounds at all six are accessible year-round.

Parking strategy: Arrive before 9am at Chatham and Nauset in July and August. National Seashore lots at Race Point and Nauset fill by mid-morning on summer weekends.

What to bring: Water (no facilities at Race Point or Wood End), sunscreen, the America the Beautiful pass if you plan to use Seashore beaches, and sturdy walking shoes if Race Point or Wood End are on your list.

Kid-friendly ratings: Nobska, Chatham, and Nauset are easy family stops. Highland Light tower climb works for older kids with energy. Race Point requires a 3-mile round-trip walk in soft sand. Wood End breakwater is not recommended for young children.

FAQ

How many lighthouses are on Cape Cod? There are six major historic lighthouses on Cape Cod: Nobska Light (Falmouth), Chatham Light, Nauset Light (Eastham), Highland Light (Truro), Race Point Light (Provincetown), and Wood End Light (Provincetown). Several smaller range lights and private structures exist, but these six are the significant historic towers accessible to the public.

Which Cape Cod lighthouses can you climb? Nauset Light, Highland Light, and Nobska Light have tower climb programs run by local preservation societies [VERIFY 2026 schedules and admission fees]. Highland Light is

the most celebrated climb for its panoramic Outer Cape view. Race Point and Wood End are not open for tower access. Chatham Light tower access depends on Coast Guard scheduling.

Can you visit Cape Cod lighthouses in winter? All six lighthouse grounds are accessible year-round at no charge. Tower climb programs are seasonal — generally Memorial Day through Columbus Day. Highland Light and the Highland House Museum may have limited winter hours. Confirm before making a winter trip specifically to climb a tower.

Can you stay overnight at a Cape Cod lighthouse? Yes. Race Point Light in Provincetown offers overnight stays at the keeper's house through the American Lighthouse Foundation [VERIFY 2026 availability and current booking process]. It accommodates small groups and books up early in summer — plan several months ahead for a July or August stay.

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