



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

How Many Days Do You Need on Cape Cod? Sample 3-, 5-, and 7-Day Itineraries

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



capecodcertified.com/guides/how-many-days-cape-cod

Search “how long to visit Cape Cod” and every travel blog gives the same useless answer: “a week is ideal, but a weekend will do in a pinch.” That doesn’t help when you’re staring at a calendar with three days off, a \$475-a-night Wellfleet cottage on hold, and a real question about whether the drive from Boston is even worth it.

Here’s the honest version, from people who live here: the right length depends almost entirely on *which part* of the Cape you’re visiting, and most visitors badly underestimate how long it takes to get anywhere in July and August. A 3-day trip can absolutely work — but only if you stop trying to “see the whole Cape.”

The Geography Problem Nobody Warns You About

Cape Cod is 65 miles from the Sagamore Bridge to Provincetown. On a Tuesday in October, that’s a 75-minute drive. On a Friday afternoon in July, with bridge traffic and Route 6 backed up through Orleans, it’s three and a half hours.

The Cape splits into four regions, each with its own personality:

- **Upper Cape** (Bourne, Sandwich, Falmouth, Mashpee): closest to the bridges, Buzzards Bay beaches, family-friendly, Woods Hole ferry to Martha’s Vineyard
- **Mid Cape** (Barnstable, Hyannis, Yarmouth, Dennis): the commercial spine, JFK Museum, Hyannis ferries to Nantucket
- **Lower Cape** (Brewster, Harwich, Chatham, Orleans): Nickerson State Park, Chatham Lighthouse, seal colonies offshore
- **Outer Cape** (Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, Provincetown): Cape Cod National Seashore, oysters, art galleries, dunes

The single biggest mistake first-time visitors make is booking a hotel in Falmouth and planning a “day trip to Provincetown.” That’s 75 miles of summer traffic each way. Don’t.

Drive Times That Will Save Your Vacation

Route	Off-Season	Summer Weekend (Fri PM / Sun AM)
Boston → Sagamore Bridge	60 min	2–3 hrs
Sagamore Bridge → Hyannis	30 min	60–90 min
Hyannis → Chatham	35 min	75 min
Hyannis → Provincetown	70 min	2.5–3 hrs
Sagamore → Provincetown	90 min	3–3.5 hrs
Boston → Provincetown (seasonal ferry)	90 min	90 min

The fast ferry from Boston’s Seaport to Provincetown (\$95 round trip in 2026 via Bay State Cruise Company) is the move if you’re staying on the Outer Cape and don’t need a car at your destination. P-town is walkable; rent a bike when you arrive.

The 3-Day Trip: Pick One Region, Commit Fully

A long weekend on the Cape works beautifully if you accept the constraint. Don’t drive past Route 6 Exit 89 (the new exit numbers as of 2021 — old Exit 12 was Sandwich/Sagamore).

Recommended base: Chatham or Wellfleet. Both give you Atlantic-side beaches, a real downtown, and good food without the P-town traffic burden.

Sample 3-Day Itinerary (Chatham base)

Day 1 (Friday): Arrive late afternoon to dodge the worst of the bridge. Dinner at The Squire on Main Street (skip the wait — go for the bar). Walk to Chatham Lighthouse for sunset.

Day 2 (Saturday): Morning at Lighthouse Beach watching the gray seal colony — 1,000+ seals are visible from shore, which is also why you don't swim past the sandbar. Lunch lobster roll at Chatham Pier Fish Market (\$32 in 2026, worth it). Afternoon at Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge or [kayaking](#) Pleasant Bay. Dinner at Pisces in Chatham, or drive 20 minutes to Brewster Fish House (reservations 60 days out).

Day 3 (Sunday): Hit the Cape Cod Rail Trail in the morning — rent bikes at Idle Times in Brewster (\$45/day), ride 8 miles to Nickerson State Park and back. Leave the Cape by 11 AM or wait until after 7 PM to dodge the Sunday eastbound bridge backup. Anywhere between 2 PM and 6 PM you will sit in traffic. This is not negotiable.

Verdict: 3 days is enough for one region. You will not also see the National Seashore, P-town, the Sandwich glass museum, and Falmouth in three days. Stop trying.

The 5-Day Trip: The Sweet Spot

Five days is where the Cape opens up. You can split between two bases without spending half your trip in a car. The standard local recommendation: **two nights Lower Cape, three nights Outer Cape** (or the reverse).

Sample 5-Day Itinerary (Brewster + Wellfleet split)

Day 1: Arrive afternoon, base in Brewster. Walk Paine's Creek Beach at low tide — the flats go out half a mile and it's surreal. Dinner at Brewster Fish House.

Day 2: Cape Cod Rail Trail. The Brewster-to-Wellfleet stretch is the best section. Stop at Nickerson State Park for the kettle ponds — Cliff Pond is the standout for swimming. Dinner at the Old Manse Inn or takeout from Chillingsworth.

Day 3: Move bases to Wellfleet. Morning at Coast Guard Beach in Eastham (National Seashore — parking \$25/day, or \$80 for an annual pass that pays for itself in four visits). Lunch at PB Boulangerie Bistro in South Wellfleet. Afternoon oysters at Wellfleet Harbor — Mac's Shack or The Beachcomber.

Day 4: Provincetown day. Drive up by 9 AM — parking gets brutal after 11. MacMillan Pier [whale watch](#) with Dolphin Fleet (\$75 in 2026, 4 hours, near-guaranteed humpback sightings May–October). Lunch at The Canteen. Afternoon climbing the Pilgrim Monument (\$18) or walking Commercial Street. Drive back to Wellfleet for the Wellfleet Drive-In (\$14 — yes, still operating, double features all summer).

Day 5: Slow morning. Walk the Atlantic White Cedar Swamp Trail at Marconi Beach (45 minutes, completely empty by 9 AM). Final lobster roll at Mac's Seafood. Leave the Outer Cape before 10 AM or after 6 PM.

The 7-Day Trip: For When You Actually Have the Time

A full week justifies a third base or a deep stay in one region. If you have kids, anchor the week in one cottage on a kettle pond and do day trips. If you're a couple, split the week three ways: **two nights Sandwich or Falmouth, two nights Chatham, three nights Outer Cape**.

Sample 7-Day Itinerary

Days 1–2 (Upper Cape — Sandwich/Falmouth): Heritage Museums & Gardens in Sandwich is worth a full half-day, especially the antique car collection and the working windmill. Sandwich Boardwalk at sunset. Day 2: Shining Sea Bikeway from North Falmouth to Woods Hole (10 miles one way, gorgeous, ends at the WHOI campus). Lunch at Pie in the Sky in Woods Hole.

Days 3–4 (Lower Cape — Chatham): Chatham Lighthouse, the seal colony, the Friday night band concert at Kate Gould Park (free, summer only, 8 PM — bring a chair). Day 4: Day trip to Nantucket via Hy-Line ferry from Hyannis (\$95 round trip high-speed in 2026, 60 minutes each way). Rent bikes on-island; it's the only sane way to get around.

Days 5–7 (Outer Cape — Wellfleet/Truro): Coast Guard Beach, Nauset Light Beach, Race Point Beach — the only Atlantic-facing beach where you can watch the sun *set* over the ocean, a Cape geography quirk. Whale watch from P-town. Oysters at Wellfleet. The Province Lands bike trail in Truro. Sunset at Herring Cove.

What to Book Now (Even for 2026)

Cape Cod's high season runs June 20 to Labor Day. Cottages inside the National Seashore book out by February. As of June 2026, you can still find shoulder-season dates (mid-September to mid-October), which most locals consider the best time on the Cape — water still warm enough to swim, no traffic, restaurants open, and lodging at 40–60% of August rates.

Two Things You Should Not Skip — And One You Should

Don't miss: A ride on the Cape Cod Rail Trail. Flat, paved, 25 miles of converted railbed running from South Yarmouth to Wellfleet, and it removes traffic from the equation entirely. Rent at Idle Times (Brewster) or Little Capistrano (Eastham) for \$45–55/day.

Don't miss: An oyster on the half shell at the source. Wellfleet oysters command premium prices in Manhattan (\$4 each); at Mac's Shack or PB Boulangerie they're \$2.50–\$3 and were in the water that morning.

Skip: Driving down Route 28 through Hyannis to “see the JFK stuff” unless you specifically care about the Kennedys. The JFK Hyannis Museum is fine but small (\$15), the actual Kennedy compound is private and barely visible from the road, and the traffic plus strip-mall scenery aren't worth it as a casual stop. For maritime history, the Sandwich Glass Museum or the Cape Cod Maritime Museum in Hyannis are better uses of two hours.

The Real Answer

- **3 days:** Enough for one region. Pick Chatham or Wellfleet, don't try to see the whole Cape.
- **5 days:** The minimum for a “real” Cape Cod trip. Split between two bases.
- **7 days:** Lets you see Upper, Lower, and Outer Cape without rushing a single day.

Whatever you choose, build your itinerary around the bridges, not against them. The Cape rewards visitors who slow down — and punishes the ones who don't.

◆ THINGS TO DO

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