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VISITING CAPE COD

Leaving Cape Cod: How to Beat the Sunday Afternoon Bridge Backup

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



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Every summer Sunday afternoon, roughly the same thing happens: tens of thousands of people decide to leave Cape Cod at exactly the same time. Both bridges back up. Route 6 slows to a crawl. What should be a 90-minute drive to Boston becomes four hours.

You don't have to be in that traffic. Here's exactly how to avoid it.

Why Sunday Afternoon Is So Bad

Cape Cod has two ways off: the Sagamore Bridge (Route 6) and the Bourne Bridge (Route 28/Route 25). Both bridges feed onto the same mainland highway network, and both back up simultaneously on peak Sundays.

The peak outbound window is **3:00–6:00 PM on Sundays** during July and August. Labor Day weekend Sunday is the single worst day of the year — budget four to five hours of extra time or don't drive it.

Holiday weekends amplify everything: Monday holiday = Sunday traffic plus everyone trying to squeeze out by evening.

The Best Windows to Leave

Leave Early: Before Noon

If you can be across the bridge by noon on Sunday, you'll hit almost no traffic. Locals with weekend places routinely leave by 10–11 AM. The roads are clear, the bridges are clear, and you're home before lunch.

Leave Late: After 7:00–7:30 PM

This is the other option. Traffic from both bridges clears dramatically after 7:00 PM. By 7:30 PM on most Sundays, the approach roads are moving freely. You sacrifice the evening but keep your sanity.

The worst thing you can do: Leave at 2:00 PM, hit the backup, sit on Route 6 for 90 minutes, and then arrive home exhausted.

Sagamore vs. Bourne: Which Bridge to Take?

For most destinations north or west (Boston, Providence, Connecticut), **the Sagamore Bridge (Route 6) is faster** in most conditions because Route 6 is a limited-access highway all the way to the bridge.

The Bourne Bridge (Route 28/Route 25) can be better for: - Destinations to the south and west via I-195 (Providence, New Bedford, Fall River, southeastern Mass) - Falmouth and Woods Hole departures heading south

During peak backup: Sometimes one bridge is worse than the other — check Google Maps for both routes in real-time before you commit. The difference can be 20–30 minutes.

What to Do While You Wait It Out

If you're in the 2:00–7:00 PM window and you don't want to sit in traffic, here's how to use the time:

Option 1: Sandwich Village (Route 6A, Exit 2)

Sandwich is the first town over the Sagamore Bridge coming onto the Cape — which means it’s the last town before the bridge on your way out. Exit before the bridge approach and spend 2–3 hours here: - Sandwich Glass Museum (closes at 5:00 PM; confirm hours before visiting) - Heritage Museums & Gardens - Café Chew for lunch or coffee - Boardwalk Beach — a short walk to the Bay-side shore - Marshland Restaurant for an early dinner

Leave Sandwich at 6:30 PM and you’ll cross the Sagamore Bridge in under 10 minutes.

Option 2: Cape Cod Canal Bike Path

The Canal path runs 7 miles on both sides of the Canal and is flat, paved, and accessible. If you have bikes: - Park at the Herring Run Recreation Area off Route 6 near the Bourne Bridge - Ride the Canal path for 1–2 hours - Return, drive over the Bourne Bridge after 7:00 PM

No bikes? The Canal is still worth a walk. Watch for freighters and tall ships transiting — the scale is impressive.

Option 3: Have Dinner in Bourne or Sandwich

Mezza Luna in Bourne is right on the waterfront. A two-hour dinner pushes your departure past the backup window almost automatically.

Holiday Weekend Calendar

Weekend	Worst Outbound Day	Worst Window
Memorial Day (May 25, 2026)	Sunday May 24	2–6 PM
4th of July (Sat July 4, 2026)	Sunday July 5	2–6 PM
Labor Day (Mon Sept 7, 2026)	Sunday Sept 6	1–7 PM (worst of year)

For Labor Day specifically: consider leaving Saturday evening or Monday morning. Sunday outbound Labor Day weekend traffic is in a category by itself.

The Google Maps Trap

Google Maps typically shows the current traffic condition, not where it will be in 30 minutes. On peak Sundays, the backup builds quickly. If the approach looks orange at 2:00 PM, it will be red by 2:30 PM.

Leave when it looks green. If you wait for it to improve from red, you may wait 2–3 hours. The “wait it out” strategy only works if you commit to waiting until 7:00–7:30 PM, not 5:30 PM.

Route 6A as a Pressure Valve

Route 6A is the old King’s Highway along the north shore of the Cape — it runs through Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, and Orleans before reconnecting with Route 6. It’s scenic and slower, but on days when Route 6 is backed up from the bridges all the way to Exit 6 or beyond, 6A can be moving.

6A is not a shortcut — it adds time in normal conditions. It’s a pressure valve when Route 6 is gridlocked from the bridge back into mid-Cape.

Quick Reference: Leaving Timing

Your Location	Best Departure Time	Notes
Lower Cape (Provincetown, Truro)	Before 10 AM	Long drive to bridge; leave early
Mid-Cape (Chatham, Brewster, Orleans)	Before 11 AM or after 7 PM	
Upper Cape (Falmouth, Sandwich, Hyannis)	Before noon or after 6:30 PM	You're close to the bridge — timing matters most
Rental checkout is noon	Have a plan for 4–6 hours in Sandwich or on the Canal	

Outbound Sunday times. For inbound (arriving), see [Beating the Bridge](#).

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