

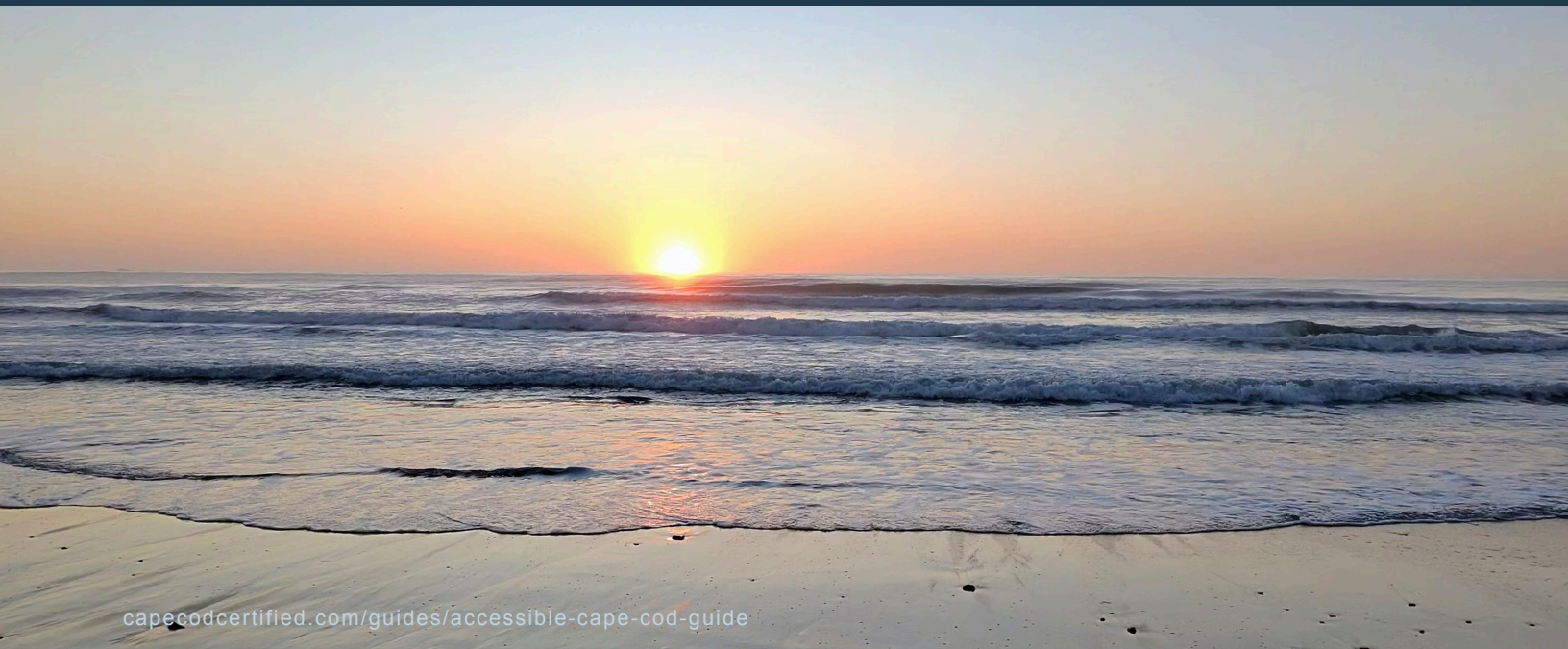


CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Accessible Cape Cod: Beaches, Trails & Experiences for All Abilities

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



capecodcertified.com/guides/accessible-cape-cod-guide

Cape Cod is a beach destination, which means sand, which historically has meant limited accessibility. That has changed substantially. The National Park Service, several towns, and individual businesses have invested in beach wheelchairs, accessible boardwalks, and paved trail surfaces that make the Cape's best experiences available to a much wider range of visitors. This guide is specific — named locations, real equipment, and practical logistics — because vague “accessible” language does not help anyone plan an actual trip.

Beach Wheelchairs at Cape Cod National Seashore Beaches

The Cape Cod National Seashore loans beach wheelchairs at no charge at several of its beaches. These are not standard wheelchairs. They have wide balloon tires specifically designed to roll on soft sand without sinking, and they allow wheelchair users and individuals with limited mobility to reach the water's edge with minimal assistance.

Where beach wheelchairs are available [VERIFY current availability by location before visiting]:

- **Coast Guard Beach (Eastham):** The Seashore's most iconic Atlantic beach. Accessible parking is available at the Doane Area lot; in summer a shuttle runs to the beach (the shuttle is ADA-accessible [VERIFY]). Beach wheelchair loans available at the beach.
- **Race Point Beach (Provincetown):** Wide-open Atlantic beach at the tip of the Cape, with Province Lands dunes and the Race Point Lighthouse in view. Beach wheelchair loans available.
- **Herring Cove Beach (Provincetown):** Bay-side beach with calm water and sunset views over the water. More sheltered than Race Point, with gentler surf — the better option for visitors who want calmer conditions. Beach wheelchair loans available.

Beach wheelchairs are issued on a first-come, first-served basis at no charge. Demand peaks in July and August. Call the specific beach or the Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham ahead of your visit to confirm current availability. The NPS website at nps.gov/caco [VERIFY that accessibility information is clearly posted on the current site] lists contact information for each beach facility.

Beach Access Mats (Mobi-Mats)

Several Seashore beaches have installed mobi-mats — firm, non-slip surface strips that create a continuous path from the accessible parking area to the waterline. The mat surface is stable enough for manual wheelchairs, walkers, and visitors who struggle with soft sand but do not require a dedicated beach wheelchair. You roll, walk, or wheel directly from the car to the water without navigating loose sand.

This combination — mobi-mat to the waterline, plus a loaner beach wheelchair — represents the most complete accessible beach solution the Seashore currently offers. Check nps.gov/caco for current mat locations, as the program expands year to year [VERIFY which beaches have mobi-mats in place for the current season].

The Buttonbush Trail at Salt Pond Visitor Center (Eastham)

The 0.4-mile paved loop trail [VERIFY distance] at the Salt Pond Visitor Center was designed specifically with accessibility in mind. Guide ropes assist visitors with visual impairments, audio description posts explain the natural

landscape at points along the route, and the plantings were chosen partly for their fragrance — an unusual and thoughtful detail. For visitors using wheelchairs or walkers, the entire loop is fully navigable.

The Salt Pond Visitor Center itself is fully accessible: accessible parking, accessible restrooms, and a fully accessible main building with exhibits about the National Seashore’s ecology and history. The orientation film has open captioning [VERIFY]. Salt Pond is adjacent to the trailhead, and the view from the accessible overlook area is excellent — osprey are a reliable summer sighting from the platform.

If your group includes someone with accessibility needs and you are visiting the National Seashore, the Salt Pond Visitor Center and Buttonbush Trail are the most reliable starting point on the Cape.

Heritage Museums & Gardens, Sandwich

Heritage Museums & Gardens in Sandwich is the single most accessible outdoor attraction on the Cape. The 100-acre property has paved paths throughout the gardens, allowing full navigation by wheelchair or mobility scooter through one of the finest garden collections in New England — rhododendrons, hydrangeas, American elms, and specialty collections spread across a rolling landscape.

What is accessible at Heritage: - All main garden paths: paved and wheelchair-navigable throughout - The carousel: accessible [VERIFY — confirm ramp or lift access for wheelchair users] - The Automobile Museum building: accessible entrance and exhibits - Restrooms: accessible facilities on property - Parking: accessible parking at the main entrance

Heritage is a reliable full-day destination. For families traveling with someone who uses a wheelchair or has mobility limitations, it resolves the common Cape question of what everyone can do together when the beach is not the right answer. Admission applies; check heritagemuseumsandgardens.org for current hours and pricing [VERIFY].

Fort Hill, Eastham

Fort Hill is partially accessible, and the honest breakdown matters. The paved area immediately around the Captain Penniman House (a restored 19th-century sea captain’s home) and the adjacent parking area is fully navigable by wheelchair. The view from this area — overlooking the salt marsh, red cedar trees, and Nauset Bay — is one of the most beautiful pastoral vistas on the Cape and is worth the visit entirely on its own.

The boardwalk trail begins near the house and runs through the salt marsh before transitioning to packed dirt and gravel as it enters the woods. The wooden boardwalk portion is generally accessible; the unpaved section that follows makes completing the full loop challenging for standard manual wheelchairs. A wider-tired chair handles more of it.

If you are visiting with someone in a standard manual wheelchair, plan on the paved area near the house and the first section of the boardwalk, then return the same way. You will see the marsh, the osprey nests, and the sweeping view. That portion alone justifies the stop.

Town Beach Accessibility Programs

Town-run beaches outside the National Seashore have their own programs, and availability varies considerably from one town to the next and from year to year.

- **Harwich:** Offers beach wheelchair loans at select town beaches [VERIFY current program — contact the Harwich Recreation Department before visiting]
- **Orleans:** Has accessibility programs at some town beaches [VERIFY current availability and contact]
- **Brewster:** The tidal flats at low tide expose a vast, naturally hard-packed sand surface that many visitors with limited mobility find more navigable than soft beach — though the flats are wet and require awareness of the tide

schedule

The consistent advice: call the town’s Beach Department or Recreation Department at least one week before your visit. Ask specifically about beach wheelchair loans, mobi-mat installations, and accessible parking proximity to beach entrances. Town staff are generally forthcoming, and programs improve each year as ADA compliance standards advance.

Accessible Lodging on Cape Cod

Vacation rentals on Cape Cod vary enormously in actual accessibility. The “wheelchair accessible” category on VRBO and Airbnb is self-reported by hosts, inconsistently applied, and often means only that there is a ramp to the front door — not that the bathroom has grab bars, a roll-in shower, or adequate turning radius.

Practical approach before booking any rental: send the host specific questions in writing. Ask about bathroom configuration (tub-only vs. walk-in shower, grab bars present or absent, threshold height), interior door widths, any steps inside the home, and the driveway surface (crushed shell driveways are common on Cape Cod and can be difficult to navigate with a wheelchair). Request photos of the bathroom before committing.

For guaranteed ADA compliance, established hotels and motels in the Mid-Cape corridor — Hyannis, Falmouth, and the Route 28 area in Mashpee — apply ADA standards consistently. The trade-off is that you’re in the more commercial stretch of the Cape rather than a quiet cottage setting, but the reliability is real.

Getting Around: The CCRTA Bus System

The Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority’s fixed-route buses are ADA-compliant with ramps and wheelchair securement systems on all vehicles [VERIFY current fleet accessibility features at capecodrta.org]. For visitors without a car, the bus network connects Hyannis, Falmouth, Barnstable, and Orleans. Coverage is strongest in the Mid-Cape; service to the Outer Cape is thinner, though a seasonal route connects Provincetown.

Provincetown is also reachable by high-speed ferry from Boston (Bay State Cruise Company and Boston Harbor Cruises). MacMillan Pier in Provincetown is accessible, and Commercial Street is generally navigable by wheelchair, though it is narrow and crowded in peak summer weeks [VERIFY current ferry accessibility and pier conditions before traveling].

Quick Facts

Feature	Details
Beach wheelchair loans	Free at several Cape Cod National Seashore beaches; first-come, first-served
Salt Pond Visitor Center phone	(508) 255-3421 [VERIFY current number]
Most accessible outdoor attraction	Heritage Museums & Gardens, Sandwich
Best fully accessible trail	Buttonbush Trail, Salt Pond Visitor Center, Eastham (0.4 mi paved) [VERIFY]
Town beach programs	Call town Recreation or Beach Departments; programs vary by year
Transit	CCRTA buses are ADA-compliant; capecodrta.org
NPS accessibility info	nps.gov/caco

Frequently Asked Questions

Are Cape Cod beaches accessible for wheelchairs? The Cape Cod National Seashore beaches — Coast Guard Beach in Eastham, Race Point, and Herring Cove in Provincetown — loan beach wheelchairs (wide-tired chairs built for sand) at no charge on a first-come, first-served basis. Mobi-mats provide firm-surface paths from accessible parking to the waterline at select beaches. Some town beaches have their own programs; call the town’s Beach Department to confirm. Sand is never as straightforward as pavement, but the gap has narrowed considerably with the Seashore’s investment in adaptive equipment.

Where can I get a beach wheelchair on Cape Cod? The National Seashore loans beach wheelchairs at no charge at Coast Guard Beach (Eastham), Race Point Beach (Provincetown), and Herring Cove Beach (Provincetown) [VERIFY — availability is subject to change each season]. Contact the Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham at (508) 255-3421 [VERIFY] or check nps.gov/caco before your visit. Arrive early in peak season — the chairs are in high demand in July and August and are issued on a first-come, first-served basis.

What is the most accessible beach on Cape Cod? Herring Cove Beach in Provincetown is a strong choice for visitors with mobility limitations: it is a Bay-side beach with calmer surf than the Atlantic-facing beaches, the National Seashore loans beach wheelchairs there, and the parking area is relatively close to the water. Coast Guard Beach in Eastham is also excellent and arguably more scenic, but the shuttle system from the Doane Area lot adds a logistical step. For visitors who want accessible water-adjacent nature without navigating sand at all, the Buttonbush Trail at Salt Pond (Eastham) and the Heritage Museums garden paths (Sandwich) are the most reliable options on the Cape.

Is the Cape Cod Rail Trail accessible? Yes, for most uses. The Cape Cod Rail Trail is a paved, multi-use path running 22 miles from Dennis to Wellfleet. The surface is maintained asphalt — largely flat, fully navigable by manual wheelchair, power wheelchair, handcycle, or adaptive bike. Several trailheads have accessible parking and restroom facilities [VERIFY by specific trailhead, as facilities vary]. The trail does not provide beach or water access, but the natural scenery through Nickerson State Park in Brewster is excellent, and the surface is significantly more manageable than any beach environment.

Explore accessible lodging, tours, and local businesses at capecodcertified.com/directory — organized by town and category so you can find what you need without the noise.

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