



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

# Camping on Cape Cod: Nickerson State Park, Paine's Campground & Where to Actually Book

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



[capecodcertified.com/guides/camping-cape-cod-guide](https://capecodcertified.com/guides/camping-cape-cod-guide)

Camping on Cape Cod is one of the best ways to experience the peninsula — waking up in a pitch pine forest, riding the Rail Trail before breakfast, and spending your afternoons at kettle ponds or National Seashore beaches. But Cape Cod camping fills fast, and the booking systems are more competitive than most visitors expect. This guide covers the three main options — Nickerson State Park in Brewster, Paine’s Campground near Wellfleet, and Horton’s Camping Resort in North Truro — along with an honest account of how reservations work and what it actually takes to pull off a summer camping trip here.

---

## Nickerson State Park (Brewster): The Premier Cape Cod Campground

Nickerson State Park is the gold standard for camping on Cape Cod. Located in Brewster on the Mid-Cape, the park sits inside 1,900 acres of pitch pine and oak forest, organized around a chain of glacial kettle ponds. There are approximately 418 sites [VERIFY current count] spread across multiple loops, ranging from tent-only clearings to RV pads with electric hookups [VERIFY hookup availability by loop].

What makes Nickerson genuinely excellent is the setting. Flax Pond and Cliff Pond both have designated swimming areas — clean, freshwater kettle ponds formed by retreating glaciers, perfect for morning swims before ocean crowds arrive. The Cape Cod Rail Trail runs directly through the park, so you can ride to Brewster’s farm stands and restaurants, or pedal all the way to Wellfleet without loading a car. Sites are wooded enough that even at peak occupancy you get reasonable privacy.

What Nickerson does not have: direct beach access. Cape Cod Bay beaches on the north side are a 10–15 minute drive. National Seashore beaches on the Atlantic side — the surf beaches at Eastham and Wellfleet — are about 20 minutes away. This is a campground in a forest, not a beachfront resort. Adjust expectations accordingly, and you’ll find it’s one of the best campgrounds in New England.

**Rates:** \$22–\$35/night [VERIFY 2026 rates] depending on site type and hookups.

**Book through:** [reserveamerica.com](https://reserveamerica.com)

**The reservation reality:** Nickerson opens bookings exactly 6 months in advance to the day, at 10am. Popular summer weekend sites go within minutes of that window. If you want a Friday or Saturday night in July or August, you need to be at the computer at exactly 10am on the date that falls six months prior — ReserveAmerica account pre-loaded, credit card ready, loop preference already decided. Sites genuinely fill in under 10 minutes on peak dates. This is not hyperbole.

Weekday nights (Sunday through Thursday) are substantially easier to secure. Shoulder season — late May through mid-June, or September — has good availability and the park is just as beautiful, often quieter and cooler.

---

## Paine’s Campground (Wellfleet/Eastham Area): Best Private Option on the Outer Cape

Paine’s Campground is the most popular private campground on the Outer Cape, and it serves a different traveler than Nickerson. Located near the Wellfleet–Eastham boundary [VERIFY exact address], it sits close to Cape Cod National Seashore land, putting some of the best Atlantic beaches — Marconi Beach, White Crest, Cahoon Hollow — within a short drive or bike ride.

The campground is more rustic than Nickerson. Think woody and casual rather than polished state park. Sites accommodate both tents and RVs. The crowd skews toward people who want proximity to the National Seashore beaches and the Wellfleet scene — the oyster bars, the art galleries, the Wellfleet Drive-In [VERIFY current operation] — rather than a manicured loop system.

Paine's books through its own website rather than ReserveAmerica [VERIFY current booking URL at [paines-campground.com](https://paines-campground.com)]. Reservations open early in the year, and peak summer weekends fill well before summer arrives. If you're targeting the Wellfleet area, check in January or February for July and August dates.

**Best for:** Travelers who want proximity to National Seashore beaches, easy access to Wellfleet's restaurants and the drive-in, or a more laid-back private campground experience.

---

## Horton's Camping Resort (North Truro): Gateway to the Province Lands

Horton's Camping Resort in North Truro is the campground closest to Provincetown and the Province Lands — the wild, dune-swept northern tip of the Cape where National Seashore beaches including Race Point and Herring Cove are located [VERIFY current operation, amenities, and pool status]. It is a family-friendly private campground with reported amenities including a pool [VERIFY].

If your trip centers on Provincetown — the whale watches, the drag bars and late-night scene on Commercial Street, the Race Point sunset — Horton's is your base. You get the camping experience while being 5–10 minutes from P'town by car.

Note that North Truro is far from Mid-Cape amenities. You will not be popping over to Nickerson's Rail Trail from here. But the Outer Cape has its own rhythm, and waking up near the Province Lands dunes is a genuinely special thing that no Mid-Cape campground can replicate.

---

## The Critical Point: There Is No Camping Inside the National Seashore

This is the single biggest misconception among first-time Cape Cod campers: **there is no camping within Cape Cod National Seashore itself**. The Seashore's 43,000 acres of protected land include no campgrounds. The entire Seashore is day-use only. Visitors who picture pitching a tent near Coast Guard Beach or Marconi Beach are going to be surprised.

The campgrounds closest to each Seashore section:

- **Nickerson State Park (Brewster)** — roughly 20 minutes from the Eastham and Wellfleet Seashore beaches; best for families who want state park infrastructure
- **Paine's Campground (Wellfleet area)** — the closest private option to the Wellfleet and Truro Seashore beaches
- **Horton's (North Truro)** — closest to Race Point, Herring Cove, and the Province Lands beaches

---

## Booking Strategy: How to Actually Secure a Site

The honest timeline for summer camping on Cape Cod:

**Nickerson State Park (ReserveAmerica):** 6 months to the day, at 10am. Create your account before that date. Decide in advance which loop and site type you want. Have payment ready — good sites disappear in under 10 minutes.

**Paine’s Campground:** Check the campground website in January or February for July and August weekends. Weekdays have better availability.

**Last-minute options:** Check ReserveAmerica the day before your desired Nickerson date — cancellations do appear, especially on weekdays. Some private campgrounds hold walk-up sites. September is the most reliable month for last-minute availability anywhere on the Cape.

If you are reading this in June planning a July Fourth weekend camping trip and you have no reservation: the odds are strongly against you for a peak-summer weekend site at any of these campgrounds. Consider a cottage rental or inn for this trip, and schedule the camping for Labor Day weekend or September — when the weather is often better anyway.

## What to Pack for Cape Cod Camping

Cape Cod summer weather is pleasant but not always cooperative. What matters:

- A quality tent.** Coastal fog is real and consistent, and afternoon thunderstorms roll through in summer. A cheap tent will leave you in a wet sleeping bag by midnight. Bring something with a full rainfly and solid seam sealing.
- Bug repellent.** Mosquitoes appear at dusk, and ticks are present year-round in brush and tall grass. Check yourself and your kids after any walk through vegetation — use repellent on ankles and lower legs and do a full tick check at the end of each day.

**Sun protection.** Even in a wooded campground, your beach and pond time will be significant.

**Food storage discipline.** All food goes in the car overnight, not in the tent. This is standard practice at Cape Cod campgrounds and the right call.

**Firewood:** Some campgrounds sell firewood on-site [VERIFY current availability at Nickerson]. Bringing wood from off-Cape may be restricted due to invasive pest regulations — check the current rules before you arrive.

**Nearby supplies:** Multiple farm stands along Route 6A in Brewster sell fresh produce. Mac’s Seafood in Wellfleet is excellent for takeout between beach and campsite. Most Nickerson campers make daily bike or car runs to Brewster’s Route 6A corridor for groceries, ice cream, and coffee.

## Campground Quick Reference

|                        | Nickerson SP             | Paine’s Campground      | Horton’s (N. Truro)  |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Location               | Brewster                 | Wellfleet/Eastham area  | North Truro          |
| Type                   | State Park               | Private                 | Private              |
| Sites                  | ~418 [VERIFY]            | Tent + RV               | Tent + RV            |
| Book via               | reserveamerica.com       | Campground website      | Campground website   |
| Rail Trail             | Yes — through the park   | No                      | No                   |
| Pond swimming          | Yes (Flax + Cliff Ponds) | No                      | No                   |
| Pool                   | No                       | No                      | Yes [VERIFY]         |
| Nearest Seashore beach | ~20 min (Eastham)        | Short drive (Wellfleet) | ~10 min (Race Point) |
| Nearest town           | Brewster                 | Wellfleet               | Provincetown         |
| Peak rate              | \$22–\$35/night [VERIFY] | [VERIFY]                | [VERIFY]             |

# FAQ

**Can you camp inside Cape Cod National Seashore?** No. Cape Cod National Seashore is a day-use-only area — there are no campgrounds on Seashore land. The closest options are Nickerson State Park in Brewster (about 20 minutes from Eastham Seashore beaches), Paine’s Campground near the Wellfleet–Eastham line, and Horton’s Camping Resort in North Truro near the Province Lands.

**How far in advance do I need to book Nickerson State Park?** Exactly 6 months to the day before your desired arrival date, at 10am, through [reserveamerica.com](https://reserveamerica.com). Create your account before that date, know which site type you want, and have your payment ready. Popular July and August weekend sites sell out within minutes of the booking window opening. Weekday stays and shoulder-season dates are much easier.

**Is camping on Cape Cod good for families?** Nickerson State Park is one of the best family campgrounds in New England. The kettle ponds — Flax Pond and Cliff Pond — are ideal for kids: calm, clear, swimmable freshwater with sandy shores. The Rail Trail runs through the park for bike rides. Sites have fire rings and picnic tables, and the whole Mid-Cape is accessible for day trips. Horton’s in North Truro also works well for families who want to base near Provincetown.

**What is the best campground near Provincetown?** Horton’s Camping Resort in North Truro is the closest campground to Provincetown, roughly 5–10 minutes from Commercial Street by car and 10–15 minutes from Race Point Beach. Nickerson State Park is approximately an hour’s drive from P’town — too far for a daily commute.

---

Camping on Cape Cod rewards the people who plan ahead. Book the moment your reservation window opens, pack a real tent, and you will wake up in the pitch pines with a freshwater pond swim and a Rail Trail ride waiting before you even think about the beach.

**Planning the rest of your Cape Cod trip?** Browse beaches, restaurants, local experiences, and services across every town at [capecodcertified.com/directory](https://capecodcertified.com/directory).

## ◆ THINGS TO DO

### Make a day of it

Bookable experiences that pair perfectly with this guide. Scan any code to reserve.

BOOK · ~\$8–\$10

#### Early Bird Guided Birding Walk

Mass Audubon Wellfleet Bay · Wellfleet

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · \$100–\$125

#### Surf Lessons at Marconi & White Crest

Sugar Surf Cape Cod · Wellfleet

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · VARIES

#### Rail Trail Bike & Kayak Rentals

Rail Trail Bike & Kayak · Brewster

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book



## Headed to the Cape with friends? Share this guide.

Every share helps a real local business get found — and keeps Cape Cod guides free. Scan to send it along.

[Explore the Cape Cod Directory →](#)



Cape Cod Certified · [capecodcertified.com/guides/camping-cape-cod-guide](https://capecodcertified.com/guides/camping-cape-cod-guide) · Real guides, real local knowledge. Verify seasonal details before you go.



FOR CAPE COD BUSINESSES

# This is what being Cape Cod Certified looks like.

You just read a guide that travelers and locals download, keep, and share. The businesses inside it were chosen on merit — real vetting, real local knowledge, never pay-to-play.

Own a Cape Cod business? Get Certified and earn your place in guides like this one — in front of the exact people planning their trip and their spend.



Get Certified → [capecodcertified.com/join](https://capecodcertified.com/join)