



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

WILD CAPE COD

Shark Alley: Exactly Where (and When) to See Great White Sharks Off Cape Cod

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



capecodcertified.com/guides/shark-alley-great-white-sharks-cape-cod

Search “great white shark tours Cape Cod” and you’ll get a swamp of clickbait travel blogs that either oversell the experience or warn you off the water like it’s *Jaws* re-released. Neither is useful. Here’s the truth: Cape Cod’s Outer Beach has become one of the most reliable great white aggregations on the planet, sightings are common from a beach chair if you know where to sit, and yes — you can get on a boat with the actual researchers who tag these animals. You just have to know where to look, when to go, and which operators are real versus repackaged **whale watch** outfits.

This is the guide locals would write for a visiting cousin.

Why the Cape Became Shark Alley

Great whites didn’t always patrol Cape Cod like this. The current density is a direct consequence of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act, which let the gray seal population on Monomoy and Muskeget recover from near-zero to an estimated 30,000–50,000 animals. Sharks followed the buffet. The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy (AWSC) has now identified more than 700 individual great whites returning to these waters, and the population continues to grow.

The core hunting ground — what biologists informally call “Shark Alley” — is the shallow shelf running from **Monomoy (Chatham)** north to **Head of the Meadow (Truro)**, with most predation events occurring inside the first 100 yards of the surf line. That last detail matters. You don’t need a boat to see one. You need a north-facing dune at the right beach in late August.

The Season, In Plain Numbers

First confirmed detections of the year usually hit AWSC’s Sharktivity app between **late May and mid-June**, but those are typically transient animals. The reliable viewing window is much narrower.

Window	What’s Happening	Sighting Likelihood
May 15 – June 20	First arrivals, mostly offshore	Low
June 21 – July 20	Population building, sporadic inshore predations	Moderate
July 21 – Sept 15	Peak density, daily detections, surface activity	High
Sept 16 – Oct 31	Still strong; biggest mature females typically arrive	High
Nov 1 – Dec 15	Departure migration; offshore only	Low

If you have flexibility, target the last two weeks of August through the second week of September. Water is warm, seal pups are weaned and clumsy, and the AWSC research vessel *M/V Aleutian Dream* is out almost every fair-weather day.

Where to Stand: Beaches That Actually Deliver

Not all Outer Beach sand is equal. The towns most people drive to — Sandwich, Falmouth, Hyannis — get effectively zero confirmed white shark activity. You need the Atlantic-facing shore from Chatham north.

Nauset Beach, Orleans

The gold standard for shore-based sightings. Long, straight beach with elevated dunes behind it — meaning you can see down the surf line. Lifeguards here pull swimmers for white shark sightings more than any other Cape beach. Parking is **\$30/day for non-residents in 2026** (\$25 if you arrive before 9 a.m. via the new shoulder-season rate). Bring binoculars; sit on the dune line, not at the water.

Coast Guard Beach, Eastham

National Seashore beach with a shuttle from the Salt Pond Visitor Center (\$5 round-trip in 2026). Steep drop-off close to shore means predations sometimes happen in waist-deep water. Multiple confirmed near-shore strikes annually.

Newcomb Hollow, Wellfleet

Site of the 2018 fatal attack — the only U.S. great white fatality in over 80 years. That history aside, it remains one of the highest-detection beaches on the Cape. The cliffs offer the best elevated viewpoint on the entire Outer Beach. Lot is small; arrive before 9 a.m. in August or you'll be turned away.

Head of the Meadow, Truro

Low visitor traffic, very high seal density on the bars, consistent daily detections in season. Locals' pick.

Race Point, Provincetown

The wildcard. Sharks here often hunt closer to the surface and are visible from the dune crest. The over-sand vehicle permit (\$150/year resident, \$400/year non-resident in 2026) lets you drive out and watch from your truck bed — arguably the best free-ish shark theater on the East Coast.

Avoid: Craigville, Old Silver, Mayflower, anything inside Cape Cod Bay or on the Sound side. The sharks are not there in meaningful numbers.

Boat Trips: Who's Legitimate, Who's Repackaged

There is no legal baited great white dive operation in Massachusetts. State and federal law prohibit chumming for white sharks. Anyone advertising a "cage dive" on Cape Cod is either lying or operating illegally — walk away.

Legitimate options fall into three categories.

1. AWSC Shark Research Trips

The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy runs paid passenger trips on the *M/V Aleutian Dream* out of **Chatham Fish Pier**. You ride along with Dr. Greg Skomal's research team during actual tagging operations. No guarantees — it's science, not a tour — but the encounter rate during peak season is approximately 85%. **Cost: \$295 per person in 2026, 6-hour trip, max 6 passengers, books out by April.** This is the only way to be on the water with confirmed researchers and the surface-photography platform.

2. Monomoy Eco-Charter Trips

Smaller boats out of Chatham (Beachcomber, Monomoy Island Excursions, and a few six-pack charters) run "seal and shark" trips that loop Monomoy and South Beach. You'll see seals guaranteed and sharks roughly 40–60% of trips in August. **Cost: \$65–\$95 per adult, 90 minutes to 2 hours.** Best value if you can't get on AWSC.

3. Spotter Plane Charters

Less advertised, increasingly popular. A Cessna out of **Chatham Municipal Airport (CQX)** at 500 feet over the bars gives you sighting probability above 90% in season. Try Cape Cod Flying Club or a private charter. **Cost: \$200–\$280 per person for a 45-minute flight with 2-3 passengers.** This is what I recommend to anyone who actually wants to *see* a great white, not just hope.

Operator Type	2026 Cost	Sighting Rate	Books Out
AWSC research trip	\$295/pp	~85%	March–April
Monomoy eco-charter	\$65–\$95/pp	40–60%	1–2 weeks ahead
Spotter plane	\$200–\$280/pp	90%+	3–5 days ahead
Shore viewing (Nauset/Newcomb)	Parking only	20–35% per visit	N/A

The Sharktivity App — Use It Right

Download the **Atlantic White Shark Conservancy’s Sharktivity app** before you leave the parking lot. It logs every acoustic-tag detection in near real-time and every confirmed visual sighting. Two things people miss:

- **Filter by the last 24 hours, not the season.** A pin from June 3 tells you nothing about today.
- **Detections cluster.** If three pings hit the same buoy between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m., a shark is patrolling that bar. Park at that beach.

The app also pushes alerts when a beach is closed for an in-water sighting. Take those seriously — closures average 45–60 minutes after a confirmed visual, and lifeguards in Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, and Truro carry the same Stop the Bleed kits that EMS uses.

What You’ll Actually See

Manage expectations. A great white surface strike — the *Planet Earth* shot with the seal mid-air — happens, but rarely close to shore on Cape Cod (the shelf is too shallow for the deep-water vertical ambush). What you’re more likely to witness:

- A dorsal fin moving parallel to the surf line, often within 30–80 yards of swimmers
- A boil and red water in the wash after a strike on a juvenile seal
- A pectoral fin breaking the surface as a shark turns on a sandbar
- From the air: the full silhouette in clear water, often a 12–16 foot animal

The average size of tagged Cape Cod whites is around 11 feet, with mature females exceeding 16 feet appearing more frequently in late September.

Don’t-Miss Tips

Tip: The two-hour window after low tide on a sunny day produces more shore sightings than any other condition. Seals haul out on exposed bars at low tide, then have to swim back to the colony as the tide comes in — that swim is when they get eaten. Check the **Chatham tide chart**, add two hours past low, and be on the dune.

Warning: If you swim on the Outer Beach between July 15 and October 15, you are swimming in active hunting territory. The Cape’s beach safety rules — stay shallow (knee to waist deep at most), avoid swimming at dawn or dusk, never swim near seals, leave the water immediately if you see one — are not theater. The 2018 fatality involved a man in roughly 10 feet of water about 30 yards from shore. Respect the rules and you’ll be fine; ignore them and you become a statistic the Cape doesn’t want.

Great whites are not the reason to skip Cape Cod. They’re a reason to come — and now you know where to stand.

◆ THINGS TO DO

Make a day of it

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

BOOK · FROM \$135

Porgy / Seabass / Blackfish Private 6 Pass Charter

Bounty Hunter Fisheries LLC · Yarmouth

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



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$500/PERSON

Atlantic White Shark Conservancy — Shark Research Cruise

Atlantic White Shark Conservancy · Chatham

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



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$135

Nantucket Shoals Fluke

Bounty Hunter Fisheries LLC · Yarmouth

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 Cape Cod Experiences →](#)



Cape Cod Certified · capecodcertified.com/guides/shark-alley-great-white-sharks-cape-cod · 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