

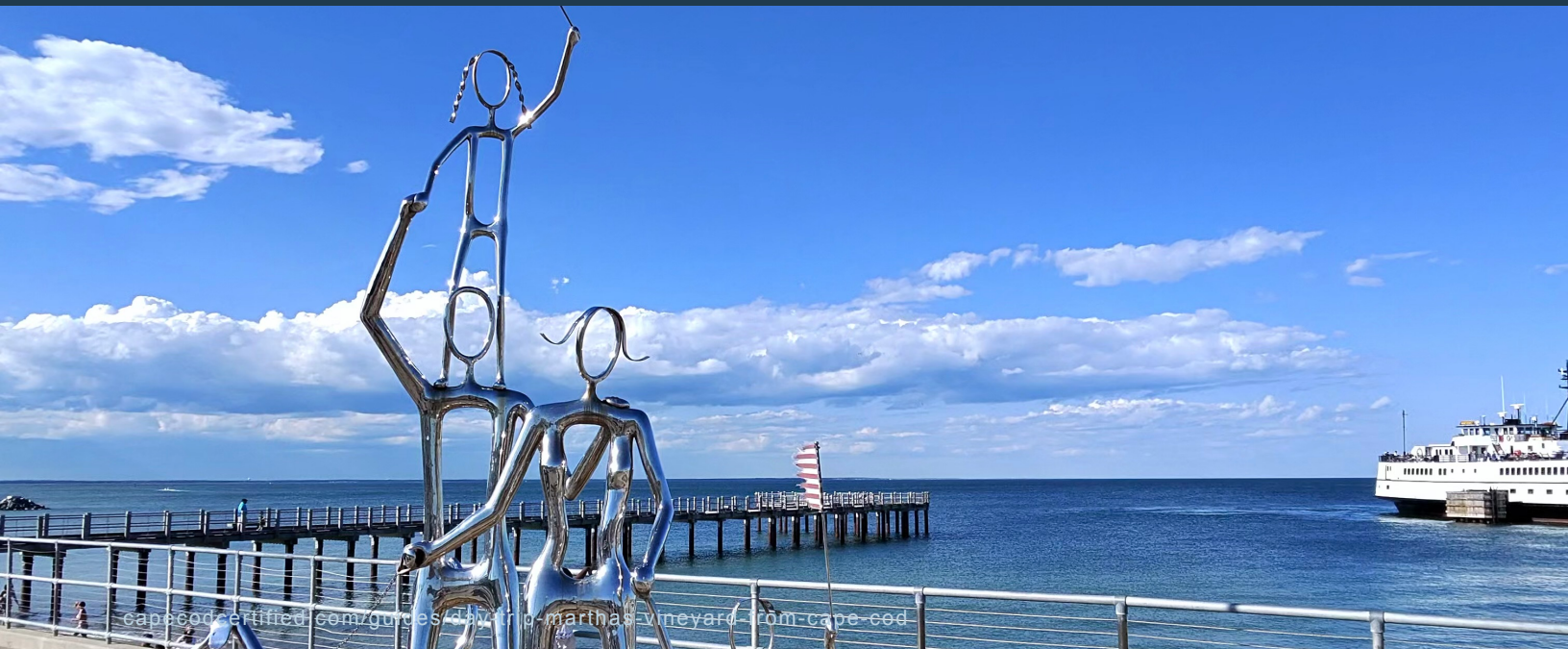


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VISITING CAPE COD

Day Trip to Marthas Vineyard from Cape Cod: Ferries, What to Do & How to Make It Worth It

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



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Martha Vineyard sits just seven miles off the southwestern tip of Cape Cod, close enough to see on a clear day from the Falmouth shore, yet genuinely different in character from anything on the Cape. It rewards a full day.

Why Martha Vineyard Is Worth a Full Day

The Vineyard is roughly 100 square miles, and no two corners feel the same. The northeastern shore holds three distinct port towns — Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown — each with its own personality and walkable historic core. Push further west and the landscape shifts: farmland and stone walls replace beach cottages, the towns thin out, and the road eventually ends at the Aquinnah Cliffs, multicolored clay bluffs rising above the Atlantic that have been sacred Wampanoag land for thousands of years.

Getting There: Your Ferry Options

Steamship Authority from Woods Hole (Falmouth) — The Main Route. The 45-minute car-and-passenger ferry from Woods Hole to Vineyard Haven. Runs frequently all summer. Round-trip passenger ticket approximately \$20 per adult. **Leave your car in Falmouth and foot it** — car ferry reservations must be made months ahead and cost well over \$100 round trip. The island has buses, taxis, and bike rentals.

Parking in Falmouth: Steamship Authority operates paid lots in Woods Hole but they fill fast on summer mornings. Park in Falmouth center and take the WHOOSH shuttle down to the ferry terminal — runs frequently during peak season.

Booking: Passenger tickets do not sell out like car slots, but buying in advance online still makes sense. It speeds up boarding and guarantees your spot on the crossing you want.

Hy-Line Cruises from Hyannis (Barnstable). Passenger-only ferry from Hyannis Harbor to Oak Bluffs. Crossing takes about 90 minutes — roughly twice as long as the Woods Hole route — but useful for visitors already in the mid-Cape area. Factor extra travel time into your day.

Getting Around the Island

Rent a bike. Multiple rental shops cluster near each ferry dock. Paved bike paths connecting Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown are well-maintained and scenic. Budget around \$30 for a full-day rental. Eastern end manageable on a casual bike; up-island toward Chilmark and Aquinnah gets hilly and distances increase.

VTa buses. The Vineyard Transit Authority runs island-wide routes all summer, including service to Aquinnah. A day pass is inexpensive. The bus to Aquinnah takes about an hour from Vineyard Haven or Oak Bluffs.

Taxis and rideshare. Available, especially in port towns. The short run from Vineyard Haven or Oak Bluffs to Edgartown typically costs \$10–\$15.

The Three Port Towns: What Each One Is

Vineyard Haven (Tisbury). Where the Steamship Authority docks. Most practical and least showy — a working harbor, local shops, quieter character. A starting point more than a destination. Good spot to grab coffee and reorient before heading onward.

Oak Bluffs. Stops people in their tracks. The Martha Vineyard Camp Meeting Association — a community of tiny Victorian gingerbread cottages arranged in tight rows around a central park — sits just a short walk from the ferry dock. The cottages are pastel-painted, ornate, and unlike anything else in New England. Trinity Park and its open-air tabernacle anchor the community. Circuit Avenue is the island liveliest commercial strip. The Flying Horses Carousel — built in 1876 and the oldest platform carousel in the country — is worth a ride if traveling with children.

Edgartown. A few miles south and east, feels like a different world. Immaculate white captain houses, manicured harbor lined with yachts, compact historic district that rewards slow walking. The Edgartown lighthouse is photogenic from the footbridge. South Beach (Katama Beach), a spectacular three-mile barrier beach, is about three miles south of town — get there by bike or shuttle.

What to Do in a Day

If you arrive at Vineyard Haven: Go straight to Edgartown while you have energy. Taxi or shuttle takes 15–20 minutes. Spend a couple of hours in the historic district, grab lunch, then bike or shuttle to South Beach before working back toward Oak Bluffs for the afternoon — the gingerbread cottages and Circuit Avenue are a perfect late-afternoon wander before your return ferry.

If you arrive at Oak Bluffs: Start where you land. The gingerbread cottages are steps from the dock. Walk through the rows, find the tabernacle, let the architecture register. Then work east toward Edgartown, or set aside the whole afternoon for the up-island run to Aquinnah.

Aquinnah Cliffs (Gay Head). Dramatic multicolored clay cliffs at the island western tip, a site of deep cultural significance to the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head. The views from the overlook are genuinely stunning. Wampanoag-owned shops sell wampum jewelry and handmade goods at the top. Getting here takes about an hour from the port towns by bus — if you go, plan it as your primary destination for the day.

Budget for a Day Trip

Item	Estimated Cost
Ferry round trip (passenger from Woods Hole)	~\$20
Parking or shuttle in Falmouth	\$10–\$20
Bike rental	~\$30
Food	\$50–100+ per person
Activities	Mostly free

Expect \$120–\$200 per person for a full day. The Vineyard is not inexpensive — lunch at a sit-down in Edgartown runs \$20–\$35 per person without drinks. Most sightseeing — gingerbread cottages, harbor walk, Aquinnah overlook — costs nothing.

Practical Notes

Check your last ferry time before you leave home and set a phone alarm. Missing the last boat means an unplanned overnight. Allow 20 minutes to walk from anywhere in town to the ferry dock.

Summer crowds are real. Arrive on an early morning ferry and head to Aquinnah or South Beach before noon to get ahead of most of the crowd.

It is hotter than the Cape. The Vineyard tends to run a few degrees warmer on humid summer days. Bring sunscreen and water, especially if biking.

This is a full-day commitment. Door to door — parking in Falmouth, boarding, crossing, exploring, returning — plan accordingly. Do not try to squeeze it into a half day.

If you have one day free this summer and you have not been to the Vineyard, book your ferry, leave the car in Falmouth, and go.

◆ THINGS TO DO

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