



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Girls Trip to Cape Cod: Best Towns, Sunset Bars & What Locals Actually Do on a Weekend Without Kids

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



THE MAYFLOWER STORY

A group of Separatists from the Church of England, later named Pilgrims, left England for Holland in 1608 and settled in Leiden in 1609. After staying there for eleven years, the group sailed back to England on the ship Speedwell, where they were joined by more emigrants along with a larger ship, the Mayflower. Although both ships set out together, the Speedwell was unable to continue, but the Mayflower left from Plymouth, England, for America on September 6th, 1620 with 102 passengers. After a voyage of 66 days, they sighted the coast of Cape Cod on November 9th, turned south and sailed past this spot in an attempt to reach their original destination of the Hudson River. About nine miles south east of here the shoals of Pollack Rip forced the Mayflower to turn back and head north, passing this spot again. The ship continued north in search of a safe harbor and on November 11th came to land the tip of Cape Cod and anchored in what is now Provincetown Harbor.

Because the Pilgrims decided to settle outside the limits of their charter, they believed a written document was needed for self government of the new colony. Thus, the Mayflower Compact was written. After staying in Provincetown Harbor for five weeks, the Pilgrims sailed across Cape Cod Bay and made a permanent settlement in Plymouth in December, 1620.

Chatham profoundly shaped Pilgrim history because of its dangerous waters offshore. Had the Mayflower been able to continue to the Hudson River area, there would be no Cape Cod, Plymouth or New England Pilgrim story. Nor would there have been a Mayflower Compact, the first self governing document written in the New World.

The story the Mayflower voyage and Cape Cod Pilgrim history is told at the Pilgrim Monument and Museum in Provincetown.

Arrival from England

A girls trip to Cape Cod works best when you build the weekend around three very different vibes: Provincetown for spectacle and energy, Chatham for elegance and ease, and Wellfleet for the local-artist crowd that actually lives here. The ideal window is early June before school lets out or the first two weeks of September after Labor Day — restaurants are fully staffed, reservations are easier to get, and you won't be dodging strollers on every sidewalk.

Provincetown: The Girls Trip Standard

Provincetown is not like other Cape Cod towns. It's walkable from end to end, car-optional if you stay near Commercial Street, and has a density of good restaurants, bars, galleries, and entertainment that nothing else on the Cape can match. The ferry from Boston makes the arrival itself part of the trip.

Getting there by ferry: Both Bay State Cruise Company and Boston Harbor Cruises run seasonal high-speed ferry service from Boston's World Trade Center pier to MacMillan Wharf in Provincetown [VERIFY current schedules, pricing, and operating dates — service has historically run roughly Memorial Day through Columbus Day, approximately 90 minutes each way]. The slow ferry (about 3 hours) is a cheaper option on weekends. Book tickets well ahead for summer and shoulder weekends. Pulling into the harbor with the Pilgrim Monument rising above the rooflines is a legitimate arrival moment.

Commercial Street: Walk it twice — once in the afternoon for galleries, boutiques, and people-watching, and again after dinner when it shifts gears entirely. The drag and cabaret scene at venues like Crown & Anchor on Commercial Street [VERIFY current shows, cover charges, and weekly schedule] and The Paramount [VERIFY current venue name, location, and event calendar] runs Thursday through Sunday in summer and is genuinely well-produced, not a tourist trap.

Women's Week in October is a specific event worth planning a trip around — Provincetown hosts one of the largest women's gatherings in the country [VERIFY exact dates, typically early-to-mid October]. Off-season pricing, smaller crowds, and the same restaurants make it a completely different experience from August.

Where to eat: For a group dinner reservation, make it the moment your dates are confirmed — P'town restaurants fill weeks out. Local 186 [VERIFY current hours and status] has been consistent for sit-down dinners. The Commons [VERIFY] works for a more casual evening. Stay on or within two blocks of Commercial Street and you never need a car.

Chatham: The Elegant, Quieter Alternative

If half your group would rather have a long dinner on a porch than a cabaret show, Chatham is the answer. It's Lower Cape, south-facing on Nantucket Sound, less crowded than Provincetown, and built around one of the better Main Streets in New England.

The fish pier at 3pm: This is the move no guidebook emphasizes enough. The commercial fishing fleet returns to the Chatham Fish Pier in the mid-afternoon, and you can watch the catch being offloaded from the public viewing platform above the dock. It's loud, it smells like the ocean, and it's free. Bring something cold from one of the Main Street shops.

Lighthouse Beach at golden hour: Chatham Lighthouse sits at the end of Main Street on a bluff overlooking the Chatham bars — the sand bars, not the drinking establishments. Park at the lighthouse lot (free, fills early in July and August) and walk down to the beach below the bluff. This is Atlantic-facing, so it's morning light, not sunset —

but the late-afternoon angle on the barrier beach and the boats in the channel is worth the walk. For actual bay-side sunset, drive to Oyster Pond Beach or the landing at the end of Bridge Street.

Dinner and drinks: Chatham Bars Inn allows non-guests for dinner and drinks at the main dining room and the Beach House Grill [VERIFY current non-guest reservation policy — this has historically been available but confirm]. It is genuinely worth the price for one dinner if your group can get a water-view table. Del Mar Bar & Bistro on Main Street [VERIFY current operating status and hours] has been a reliable locals' choice for dinner at a more accessible price point. The Chatham Squire on Main Street is the casual counterpart — a year-round bar where fishermen and summer visitors mix, better for drinks than dinner, and always open late by Cape standards [VERIFY current hours].

Main Street boutiques: A morning walk down Chatham's Main Street takes about 90 minutes and hits real shops — not the typical fudge-and-T-shirt corridor.

Wellfleet: The Artsy, Oyster-Obsessed Weekend

Wellfleet is Outer Cape, and it feels like it. Fewer tourists, more galleries per capita than almost any comparably sized town, and oysters that chefs in Boston specifically request because the tidal salinity in Wellfleet's waters produces an exceptionally clean brine. If your group leans toward “we want to feel like we actually live here,” this is the weekend.

Wellfleet oysters: Order them everywhere. Mac's Shack [VERIFY current hours and address on Commercial Street] does them well and has a full bar. The Wellfleet OysterFest lands on the third weekend of October and draws roughly 20,000 people to a town of 3,000 — plan around it or specifically plan for it, but know that lodging books out months in advance.

The drive-in: Wellfleet Drive-In on Route 6 is a functioning mid-century drive-in that shows double features on summer weekends [VERIFY current schedule, pricing, and opening dates — historically runs late spring through early fall]. It's one of the better summer nights on the Cape: tune the car radio to the broadcast frequency, bring a blanket, stay for both films.

Bay beaches at sunset: Duck Harbor Beach and Mayo Beach both face west across Cape Cod Bay. Mayo Beach has easy parking and a quiet Outer Cape stillness at low tide. The light in September is exceptional — lower angle, warmer tones, and the tidal flats at Duck Harbor catch it well.

Best Sunset Bars with Bay Views

West-facing is the only direction that matters for sunset drinks. Atlantic-side beaches face east and catch sunrise, not sunset.

- **The Chart Room, Cataumet (Bourne):** Upper Cape, right on Red Brook Harbor with docks full of boats — a reliable late-afternoon drink spot [VERIFY current hours and seasonal schedule]
- **Baxter's Boathouse, Hyannis:** On the water, informal, loud with boats alongside — a Mid Cape institution [VERIFY current operating status and hours]
- **The Naked Oyster, Hyannis:** Harbor-adjacent and a local standby [VERIFY bay-view seating and current hours]
- **Land Ho!, Orleans:** Not technically a sunset bar, but the closest thing on the Lower Cape to a genuine Cape Cod tavern — dark wood, bumper stickers on the ceiling, excellent fish chowder, largely unchanged since the 1970s [VERIFY current hours]

Spa Days and Wind-Down Options

A girls trip that doesn’t include at least one afternoon of intentional nothing is a missed opportunity.

Sanara Wellbeing in Falmouth [VERIFY current address, hours, and service menu — located in the Upper Cape area] has been recommended for massage and wellness services. Falmouth itself rewards a morning: the Village Green, boutiques on Main Street, and the Shining Sea Bikeway — a paved trail along the Sound from Falmouth to Woods Hole, about 3.5 miles each way, flat and scenic.

For additional spa options, Hyannis and Provincetown both have higher service density than smaller towns [VERIFY specific providers before booking rather than relying on listings that may have changed].

When to Go: The Two Windows That Actually Work

Early June (before roughly June 20): Restaurants are at full summer staffing, hotels are open and not yet sold out, and beaches are uncrowded on weekdays. Daytime temperatures run 65–72°F [VERIFY average June range] — comfortable for walking and dining outdoors without August heat. This is the window locals quietly prefer.

First two weeks of September: The families leave after Labor Day weekend. Restaurants still run full summer menus. The water is warmest — it peaks in late August and stays warm through mid-September. Hotel rates drop 20–30% after Labor Day. September light on the Cape is different from summer light: lower angle, golden, and what every local photographer waits for.

Quick Facts

Best towns for a group	Provincetown, Chatham, Wellfleet
Ferry to P’town from Boston	~90 min fast ferry, seasonal [VERIFY Bay State Cruise / Boston Harbor Cruises schedules]
Best group size	4–6; book lodging and restaurants early
Best timing	Early June OR first two weeks of September
Sunset side	Bay/west-facing only — Atlantic side = sunrise, east-facing
P’town tip	Skip the car; arrive by ferry or use the MacMillan Wharf lot for day trips
Chatham tip	Municipal lots on Main Street, free, fill by 10am July–August
Dinner dress	Chatham Bars Inn: business casual. P’town: anything goes

FAQ

When is the best time for a girls trip to Cape Cod without the family crowds? Early June before schools let out (roughly before June 20) and the first two weeks of September after Labor Day are both significantly calmer than July and August. September has the warmest water and the best light. Both windows offer fully operating restaurants with easier reservations and noticeably lower hotel rates than peak summer.

Do you need a car for a girls trip to Provincetown? No. If you stay on or near Commercial Street and arrive by ferry from Boston, you can walk the entire town — restaurants, bars, galleries, the beach, and evening entertainment. Rent bikes if you want to explore the National Seashore trails beyond the town itself.

Is Provincetown safe for a women’s group weekend? Yes. Provincetown has been one of the most welcoming communities in New England for decades. The town is small, extremely walkable, and well-accustomed to visitors. The overall environment is notably relaxed and inclusive.

What needs to be booked in advance? Lodging in Provincetown and Chatham should be reserved weeks to months ahead for summer and October weekends. Ferry tickets from Boston fill quickly for summer weekends. Dinner reservations at top Provincetown restaurants should be made when lodging is confirmed. Most other decisions can wait until you arrive.

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