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VISITING CAPE COD

Falmouth, Cape Cod: Beaches, Historic Villages & Things to Do (Beyond Just the Ferry)

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



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Falmouth is one of the best full-destination towns on Cape Cod — and one of the most underestimated. Most visitors see it through a windshield on the way to the Martha's Vineyard ferry, which means they miss the calm-water beaches, a 10.7-mile paved rail trail along Vineyard Sound, a walkable historic village center, and the globally known oceanographic hub of Woods Hole. Things to do in Falmouth, Cape Cod span calm family swimming, serious cycling, museum visits, coastal hiking, and Vineyard day trips — all within the second-largest town on the Cape.

The Beaches: Old Silver, Surf Drive, and Some of the Best Water on the Upper Cape

Falmouth's beach variety is unusual for a single Cape Cod town. Because the town wraps around a large peninsula touching Buzzards Bay, Vineyard Sound, and Nantucket Sound, you can choose your water temperature, wave height, and crowd level depending on the day.

Old Silver Beach in North Falmouth is the flagship. It sits on Buzzards Bay — the same calm, warm water that makes the bay side reliably warmer than the Atlantic — and the bottom is so shallow that young children can wade out thirty yards without going above their knees. Families with small kids treat it as a home base. The trade-off is that Old Silver is genuinely popular: on summer weekends the parking lot fills before 9am. Non-resident day parking fees apply [VERIFY 2026 fee with Town of Falmouth]; plan to arrive early or walk from street parking nearby. The sunset views here are exceptional — Buzzards Bay faces west, directly into the evening light.

Surf Drive Beach stretches along Vineyard Sound within walking distance of Falmouth Center. It is a longer, wider beach with more room than Old Silver, and the water is still calm relative to ocean-facing beaches on the Cape's Atlantic side. A parking lot is available at the beach end of Surf Drive [VERIFY 2026 fee]. On a crowded August Saturday, Surf Drive often offers more breathing room than the more famous Old Silver.

Chapoquoit Beach in West Falmouth is the quieter local pick — also on Buzzards Bay, same warm and calm water, with a fraction of the crowd. Day passes are available [VERIFY 2026 fee and lot hours].

Menauhant Beach in East Falmouth faces Nantucket Sound. It has two accessible sections [VERIFY ADA facilities] and is popular with locals who want to avoid the Route 28 corridor congestion.

For all town beaches: non-resident fees apply from roughly Memorial Day through Labor Day. Popular lots fill before 10am on weekends. Budget extra time or use the Shining Sea Bikeway to reach Surf Drive without needing a parking spot.

The Shining Sea Bikeway: 10.7 Miles of Flat, Paved, and Genuinely Beautiful Trail

The Shining Sea Bikeway is the single best reason to plan a full day in Falmouth even if you are not going to the beach. The trail runs 10.7 miles on a flat, paved former rail corridor from North Falmouth through Falmouth Center and down to Woods Hole. It passes through open salt marsh, working farmland, and coastal forest before arriving at water views of Vineyard Sound in the final approach to the village of Woods Hole.

The trail is appropriate for all fitness levels and ages. There are no significant grades, the surface is smooth, and the round trip is doable for most families in a half day. The salt marsh section near Falmouth Center is the kind of scenery people from off-Cape specifically plan trips to see — wide sky, tidal grasses, and complete quiet.

Bike rentals are available in Falmouth Center [VERIFY current shop names and 2026 pricing]. Trailhead parking exists in North Falmouth and near Falmouth Center. The Woods Hole end connects directly to the ferry terminal area, making a one-way ride-to-Vineyard day trip possible. Free to use; no trail fee.

Falmouth Center and Falmouth Heights: Two Distinct Villages Worth Knowing

Falmouth Center is a genuine working New England village, not a tourism strip. The historic village green is anchored by First Congregational Church (1796) and surrounded by restaurants, cafes, independent shops, and a public library that actually serve year-round residents. The **Falmouth Historical Society** operates two house museums on the green: the Julia Wood House (circa 1790) and the Conant House, covering Falmouth's maritime and whaling history [VERIFY 2026 hours and admission]. For visitors who want to understand what Cape Cod looked like before the summer economy reshaped it, Falmouth Center is the right neighborhood to walk.

Falmouth Heights is a completely different experience. Perched on a bluff overlooking the water between the village center and the harbor, the Heights is a dense neighborhood of Victorian-era summer cottages — built before the motel era, still maintained in that character. The streets are narrow, the houses are close together, and the neighborhood has an old-money, old-Cape Cod feeling that is specific and authentic. **Falmouth Heights Beach** at the base of the bluff is a walk-in beach; there is no large parking lot, which keeps crowds modest and preserves the neighborhood character.

Woods Hole: One of the World's Great Ocean Science Villages

Most visitors see Woods Hole as the five-minute dash from Route 28 to the Steamship Authority dock. That is a significant mistake. Woods Hole is one of the most concentrated oceanographic research communities in the world. The **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI)** and the **Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL)** are both headquartered here, along with a NOAA National Marine Fisheries Science Center — more serious ocean science per square mile than almost anywhere on Earth.

The **WHOI Ocean Science Exhibit Center** on School Street offers free public exhibits on deep-sea research, including displays on the Alvin submersible program [VERIFY 2026 hours]. The MBL offers summer public tours [VERIFY 2026 schedule and fee]. The village itself is worth the walk: a handful of good restaurants, a science specialty bookstore, a public dock with views across Vineyard Sound toward Martha's Vineyard, and **Nobska Lighthouse** a short distance up the road at the Falmouth/Woods Hole line.

Nobska, built in 1876, is one of the six major Cape Cod lighthouses and one of the most photogenic. The grounds are publicly accessible and the views across Vineyard Sound to Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands are exceptional on clear days [VERIFY current interior access schedule].

Nature and Hiking: Beebe Woods and Ashumet Holly Sanctuary

Falmouth's interior is more rewarding than visitors expect. **Beebe Woods** is a 400-acre conservation forest accessible from Highfield Drive near Falmouth Center. A network of walking trails moves through coastal inland forest, with enough topographic variation to offer occasional views. It is the kind of low-key hiking that is scarce on the otherwise flat Upper Cape.

Ashumet Holly Wildlife Sanctuary, managed by Mass Audubon, holds one of the most unusual plant collections in New England: a large documented grove of American holly trees, originally cultivated by

horticulturist Wilfred Wheeler starting in the 1920s. The sanctuary is also reliable habitat for year-round bird species [VERIFY 2026 hours and admission].

For a different kind of nature experience, the salt marshes along the Shining Sea Bikeway at low tide are worth stopping to observe — blue herons, egrets, and osprey are common summer sightings from the trail.

Quick Facts: Parking, Timing & Getting to the Vineyard

- **Old Silver Beach parking:** Fills before 9am on summer weekends; non-resident day fee applies [VERIFY 2026 Town of Falmouth fee schedule]
- **Shining Sea Bikeway:** Free to use; 10.7 miles, flat, paved; parking at North Falmouth and Falmouth Center trailheads
- **Ferry options:** Steamship Authority (Woods Hole to Vineyard Haven, year-round, cars and passengers) or the **Island Queen** (Falmouth Harbor to Oak Bluffs, seasonal passenger-only ferry with a shorter crossing and generally easier parking logistics on the Falmouth side) [VERIFY Island Queen 2026 schedule and fares]
- **Nobska Lighthouse:** Publicly accessible grounds year-round; interior open during specific events [VERIFY]
- **WHOI Exhibit Center:** Free admission; closed certain days [VERIFY 2026 hours]
- **Best timing for things to do in Falmouth, Cape Cod:** July–August for full beach season; June and September offer significantly easier parking and smaller crowds at the same beaches

FAQ

What are the best beaches in Falmouth, Cape Cod for families with young children? Old Silver Beach in North Falmouth is the top family choice. The water is Buzzards Bay — warm, calm, and extremely shallow — and children can safely play far from shore. Arrive before 9am on summer weekends. Surf Drive Beach is a good alternative if Old Silver’s parking lot is full; it is longer and less crowded, and is walkable from Falmouth Center.

How long is the Shining Sea Bikeway and is it good for families? The Shining Sea Bikeway is 10.7 miles one way from North Falmouth to Woods Hole. The surface is flat and paved with no significant grades, making it appropriate for most ages. Families typically ride a portion rather than the full length; the salt marsh section between Falmouth Center and the Vineyard Sound views is the most scenic stretch for a shorter out-and-back. Bike rentals are available in Falmouth Center [VERIFY shops and 2026 pricing].

Is it easier to take the Island Queen or the Steamship Authority to Martha’s Vineyard from Falmouth? For a summer day trip without a car, the Island Queen from Falmouth Harbor to Oak Bluffs is often the more practical option — the crossing is shorter, the terminal is less congested than the Steamship Authority’s Woods Hole dock, and parking on the Falmouth Harbor side is generally more manageable. The Steamship Authority is the right choice if you need to bring a vehicle or travel in the off-season when the Island Queen does not operate [VERIFY Island Queen 2026 schedule and reservations].

What is there to do in Falmouth, Cape Cod beyond the beach? Things to do in Falmouth, Cape Cod beyond swimming include cycling the Shining Sea Bikeway, visiting the WHOI Ocean Science Exhibit Center and the village of Woods Hole, hiking Beebe Woods, touring the Falmouth Historical Society house museums, visiting Nobska Lighthouse, and walking the Victorian neighborhood of Falmouth Heights. Falmouth is one of the most complete destinations on the Upper Cape — the beach is one option, not the only one.

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Certified Local Businesses in Falmouth

Cape Cod Certified recommends these verified local spots:

- **Liam Maguire's Irish Pub** — 4.5★ (1175 Google reviews)
- **Maison Villatte** — 4.7★ (1160 Google reviews)

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