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How to Take the Ferry to Martha's Vineyard from Woods Hole: The Complete Booking Guide

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



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The Steamship Authority ferry from Woods Hole is the definitive way to reach Martha's Vineyard — a 45-minute crossing from the southwestern tip of Falmouth to Vineyard Haven or Oak Bluffs, running year-round and carrying both passengers and cars. Getting a foot passenger ticket is straightforward; getting your car aboard in July or August requires booking months ahead, with reservations that open each January and fill within days for peak weeks.

The Steamship Authority: The Only Ferry That Carries Cars

The Steamship Authority (steamshipauthority.com) operates the only vehicle-carrying ferry service to Martha's Vineyard. This is not a small seasonal shuttle — the SSA runs a fleet of five vessels on a year-round schedule, making it the logistical backbone of island life. Sailings depart from Steamship Wharf in Woods Hole, Falmouth, and arrive at two Vineyard ports:

- **Vineyard Haven** (Tisbury): the primary year-round terminal, walkable to shops, restaurants, and the bike path that continues toward Oak Bluffs
- **Oak Bluffs**: the seasonal summer terminal, steps from the Victorian gingerbread cottage district and the Flying Horses Carousel — the oldest operating carousel in the country

The crossing takes approximately 45 minutes to Vineyard Haven. Oak Bluffs sailings are also approximately 45 minutes [VERIFY exact timing]. Not every trip serves both ports — check the SSA schedule before purchasing, because some departures go only to Vineyard Haven. In peak summer, sailings run as frequently as every 30–60 minutes during morning hours; frequency tapers in the off-season.

Car Reservations: The Hardest Part of the Trip

If there is one thing the Martha's Vineyard ferry is known for among Cape Cod locals, it is the car reservation problem. Demand for vehicle spots in July and August far exceeds capacity, and the reservation system rewards the prepared traveler.

The window opens in January. The SSA reservation system opens for the following summer season in early January. Experienced travelers have calendar reminders set and book the morning the window goes live.

Summer spots vanish fast. Peak weeks in July and August can fill within days of the January opening. Trying to book in May or June leaves you with limited options or standby.

Standby is real, but not a plan. Standby car lines at the Woods Hole terminal form as early as 5:00–6:00am on peak summer days. Cars queue and wait for cancellations or unfilled spots on each departure. There is no guarantee of boarding. Families who drive from Providence or Boston, sit in standby for three hours, and still do not make a ferry are a common summer story. If your trip has any time sensitivity, standby is not a strategy.

The honest local advice: leave the car behind. Martha's Vineyard is well-suited to car-free visits. The VTA (Vineyard Transit Authority) runs bus routes connecting all six island towns — Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah. Bikes and mopeds rent by the hour steps from the ferry dock at both Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs. The car-free traveler skips the reservation gauntlet, saves substantially on vehicle ferry fares, and often moves around the island faster than someone searching for Edgartown parking in July.

Foot Passenger Tickets: The Flexible Option

Walk-on passengers have a far simpler experience. Foot passenger tickets can typically be purchased at the Woods Hole terminal on the day of travel, or in advance at steamshipauthority.com. Booking ahead online is a reasonable precaution during peak summer weeks when departures get crowded.

Round-trip foot passenger fares run approximately \$20–30 per adult [VERIFY 2026 rates]. Children’s fares are reduced; seniors may qualify for a discounted rate [VERIFY]. Bicycles travel on the ferry for a small additional fee per bike [VERIFY current rate] — one of the best investments you can make for a Vineyard visit.

The paved bike path from Vineyard Haven through Oak Bluffs to Edgartown covers the three most-visited island villages in a single flat, scenic ride — approximately 7 miles from the ferry dock to Edgartown, well-marked the entire way. Bring your own bike or rent one at the dock.

Plan to arrive at the Woods Hole terminal at least 30 minutes before your scheduled sailing. In peak July and August, 45–60 minutes is wiser — boarding lines run long on busy weekend mornings.

Parking at Woods Hole: What Actually Works

The terminal does not have unlimited parking, and that limitation becomes acute on summer weekends. Here is how locals handle it:

SSA parking at the dock: The Authority operates a parking facility near the Woods Hole terminal. Rates apply per day; lots fill by mid-morning on peak weekends [VERIFY current rates and lot hours].

Falmouth Park & Ride with SSA shuttle: This is the experienced traveler’s move. The Falmouth Park & Ride lot sits near the town center — parking costs less than dock parking, and the SSA runs a dedicated shuttle bus directly from the lot to the Woods Hole terminal. You park, board the shuttle, ride to the ferry, and skip the Woods Hole parking scramble entirely. Check current shuttle schedules and fares at steamshipauthority.com [VERIFY operating hours and stops].

Falmouth Heights shuttle stop: A secondary shuttle pick-up point operates in Falmouth Heights for travelers based in that part of town [VERIFY current schedule].

Cycling from Falmouth center to the ferry terminal is also viable for fit travelers and sidesteps parking completely. The route is manageable and the terminal is easy to find at the end of Water Street in Woods Hole.

Other Ferry Routes to Martha’s Vineyard

Woods Hole is the main artery, but it is not the only crossing depending on where you are based on the Cape.

Hy-Line Cruises from Hyannis: If you are staying in the Mid-Cape area, Hy-Line Cruises runs a seasonal, passenger-only high-speed ferry from Hyannis to Oak Bluffs. The crossing takes approximately 1 hour 10 minutes [VERIFY]. Fares are generally higher than SSA walk-on rates, but Hyannis is a genuine alternative that avoids the drive to Falmouth. Book at hylinecruises.com.

Falmouth Harbor to Edgartown: A smaller seasonal passenger ferry operates from Falmouth Harbor — on the east side of town, distinct from Woods Hole — directly to Edgartown on the Vineyard [VERIFY operator name and current schedule; typically Patriot Party Boats or a similar regional carrier]. Edgartown is the Vineyard’s most historic and architecturally preserved village, and arriving there directly saves the bus ride from Vineyard Haven. Worth checking if Edgartown or the south side of the island is your destination.

Neither Hy-Line nor the Falmouth Harbor ferry carries vehicles. The SSA from Woods Hole is the only car ferry to Martha’s Vineyard.

Woods Hole Is Worth an Hour of Your Time

If you arrive early — and you should — do not spend the wait in your car. Woods Hole is one of the most intellectually substantive villages on the Cape, and everything worth seeing is a short walk from the dock.

WHOI Exhibit Center: The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution is world-famous for deep-sea research and was the institution that located the Titanic. Their free public exhibit center on Water Street covers ocean exploration, climate science, and the technology behind discovery. Open seasonally [VERIFY current hours at whoi.edu].

NOAA Science Aquarium: Established in 1875, this is the oldest public aquarium in the United States. Small, free, and genuinely worthwhile — harbor seals, local fish species, and touch tanks. Located on Water Street, five minutes on foot from the terminal [VERIFY current operating name and hours; formerly known as the National Marine Fisheries Service Aquarium].

The drawbridge: The canal drawbridge at the center of the village opens periodically for boat traffic, letting you watch the tidal current rush through the passage between Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay. No schedule required — it happens when it happens, and it is worth catching.

Quick Facts: Martha’s Vineyard Ferry from Woods Hole

Operator	Steamship Authority — steamshipauthority.com
Departure point	Steamship Wharf, Woods Hole, Falmouth
Destinations	Vineyard Haven (year-round) · Oak Bluffs (seasonal)
Crossing time	~45 minutes
Car reservations	Book when January window opens; peak summer fills within days
Standby lines	Form by 5–6am peak summer; no boarding guarantee
Walk-on fare	~\$20–30 round trip per adult [VERIFY 2026 rates]
Bike fee	Small additional charge per bike [VERIFY]
Parking	SSA lot at dock (fills fast) or Falmouth Park & Ride + shuttle
Alternate operators	Hy-Line (Hyannis → Oak Bluffs) · seasonal Falmouth Harbor → Edgartown

Exploring the Upper Cape while you are in Falmouth before or after your crossing? The [Cape Cod Certified local directory](#) has certified local picks for restaurants, experiences, and services across every town on the Cape.

FAQ

How far in advance do I need to book a car reservation for the Martha’s Vineyard ferry?

For summer travel — especially July and August — car reservations should be secured as soon as the SSA opens its reservation system in January. Peak weeks fill within days of opening. If you have not reserved vehicle space by late spring, plan to travel car-free or accept the standby line on your own terms.

Can I take the Martha’s Vineyard ferry as a walk-on passenger without a reservation?

Yes. Foot passenger tickets can usually be purchased at the Woods Hole terminal on the day of travel, though buying online in advance is recommended during peak summer weeks. Walk-on travel is dramatically more flexible than car reservations and is how most experienced visitors handle a Vineyard day trip.

Where should I park if I’m taking the ferry without a car reservation?

The Falmouth Park & Ride lot, paired with the SSA shuttle to the dock, is the easiest and least stressful option. Parking at the Woods Hole terminal itself is limited and fills fast on summer weekends. Verify current shuttle schedules and rates at steamshipauthority.com before your trip [VERIFY].

Is there a ferry to Martha's Vineyard that doesn't leave from Woods Hole?

Yes. Hy-Line Cruises runs a seasonal passenger-only high-speed ferry from Hyannis to Oak Bluffs (approximately 1 hour 10 minutes [VERIFY]), and a smaller seasonal passenger ferry operates from Falmouth Harbor to Edgartown [VERIFY operator name and schedule]. Neither carries vehicles. The Steamship Authority from Woods Hole is the only car ferry to the Vineyard.

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