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VISITING CAPE COD

A Perfect Day Trip to Nantucket from Cape Cod

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



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Thirty miles offshore, Nantucket operates on its own logic. There are no chain restaurants, no traffic lights on the main roads, and no building downtown that looks like it was built after the whaling boom ended. One day here feels like three days somewhere else.

Morning: Arrive by Ferry, Walk Straight into History

The Hy-Line high-speed ferry from Hyannis puts you on Nantucket in about an hour. For a day trip, the high-speed is the right call. Book early, especially in July and August.

When you step off at Straight Wharf, you are already in the historic district. Walk up Main Street. Every building in this town center was constructed before 1850, and the entire area is protected. The cobblestones are real and original. The federal-style mansions lining Upper Main Street were built by whaling captains.

Spend the first hour on foot. Pick up coffee and something to eat before your first stop.

Midday: The Whaling Museum

The [Nantucket Whaling Museum](#) on Broad Street is one of the best maritime museums in the country. The centerpiece is a full sperm whale skeleton suspended from the ceiling. Budget 90 minutes to two hours.

After the museum, grab lunch somewhere in town. Nantucket has no fast food — it has a dense concentration of good independent restaurants and cafes.

Afternoon: Rent a Bike and Ride to ‘Sconset

Bike rental shops are clustered right near the ferry docks. Milestone Road runs east from town straight to Siasconset, known as ‘Sconset. It’s about eight miles, mostly flat, and takes 30 to 40 minutes at an easy pace.

When you arrive in ‘Sconset, you’ll understand why people talk about it differently than the rest of the island. The village has a cluster of tiny historic cottages covered in climbing roses that bloom in June and into July.

From ‘Sconset, you’re on the Atlantic-facing east end of the island. [Jetties Beach](#) near the ferry terminal is bay-facing and sheltered — good for families.

Evening: Sunset from the Harbor

Nantucket faces west toward the mainland on its harbor side. That means the ferry dock area and the wharves catch the full western light at the end of the day.

Spend the last hour before your departure back on the wharves or walking the town one more time. Check your ferry departure time carefully and be at the dock 20 to 30 minutes early.

Practical Notes

Getting there: Hy-Line Cruises runs high-speed service from Hyannis. Reserve seats in advance.

Bikes on the island: Rentals are available near both ferry terminals in Nantucket Town.

Season: Most visitor-facing businesses operate May through October.

For more on what the island offers, start with the [Nantucket Town Directory](#).

◆ THINGS TO DO

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