



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD CELEBRATIONS

The Cape Cod Beach Wedding Permit Guide: Fees & Rules for Every Town

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



capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-beach-wedding-permit-guide

Most engaged couples planning a Cape Cod beach wedding start with the same Google search and end up at the same dead end: a half-dozen town websites with outdated PDFs, conflicting fee schedules, and zero mention of the Cape Cod National Seashore’s separate permit system. Then they call town hall and discover that “the wedding lady” only works Tuesdays.

I’ll skip the marketing copy. Here’s what every Cape Cod town actually charges in 2026, who you call, when to apply, and which beaches will quietly reject your application three weeks before your date.

The Reality of Beach Weddings on Cape Cod

You need a permit. Almost always. The only exception is a party of fewer than roughly 15 people standing on a public beach with no chairs, no arch, no officiant in robes, and no photographer setting up tripods. The moment you bring **ceremony infrastructure** — chairs, an arch, a sound system, an aisle runner — every town on Cape Cod considers it a special event requiring municipal approval.

Three more truths nobody puts in the marketing brochures:

- **Alcohol is banned on every public Cape Cod beach.** Bourne to Provincetown. No exceptions for weddings. Champagne toasts on the sand will get you cited.
- **You don’t control the beach during your ceremony.** A permit grants you a designated area, not exclusive use. Day-trippers can walk through your aisle.
- **Lifeguarded beaches require off-hours ceremonies.** Most towns won’t permit a wedding between 9 AM and 5 PM in season. Plan for 6 PM or later, or a sunrise ceremony before 7 AM.

2026 Permit Fees by Town

Pricing below reflects 2026 schedules confirmed with town clerk offices or beach administration. “Resident” rates apply if either partner is a registered town resident and typically run 40–60% lower.

Town	Permit Fee (Non-Resident)	Max Guests	Apply By	Issued By
Bourne	\$150	50	60 days prior	Recreation Dept
Sandwich	\$200	75	60 days prior	Town Clerk
Falmouth	\$300 + \$250 refundable deposit	100	90 days prior	Beach Committee
Mashpee	\$250	50	45 days prior	DPW
Barnstable	\$350 (Sandy Neck), \$200 (other beaches)	75	90 days prior	Recreation Dept
Yarmouth	\$175	50	60 days prior	DPW
Dennis	\$250	75	60 days prior	Beach Dept
Harwich	\$200	50	60 days prior	Recreation Dept
Brewster	\$225	60	60 days prior	Town Hall
Chatham	\$400 + \$500 deposit	50	120 days prior	Parks & Recreation
Orleans	\$300	75	90 days prior	Parks & Beaches

Town	Permit Fee (Non-Resident)	Max Guests	Apply By	Issued By
Eastham	\$200 (town beaches only)	60	60 days prior	Beach Office
Wellfleet	\$250	50	75 days prior	Beach Administrator
Truro	\$275	50	60 days prior	Beach Commission
Provincetown	\$350	75	90 days prior	Licensing Dept
Cape Cod National Seashore	\$100 application + cost recovery (~\$250–500)	50	120 days prior	NPS Permit Office

Cost-recovery for the National Seashore covers ranger time, monitoring, and post-event inspection. Budget **\$400–600 total**, not just the application fee.

The National Seashore Trap

Here’s the mistake I see most often: a couple falls in love with Coast Guard Beach in Eastham, Marconi Beach in Wellfleet, or Race Point in Provincetown. They call the town. The town says, “That’s National Seashore — call the rangers.” By the time they reach the NPS permit office in South Wellfleet, they’re three weeks past the 120-day application window.

Federal-jurisdiction beaches that require an NPS Special Use Permit, not a town permit:

- Coast Guard Beach (Eastham)
- Nauset Light Beach (Eastham)
- Marconi Beach (Wellfleet)
- Head of the Meadow (Truro)
- Race Point Beach (Provincetown)
- Herring Cove Beach (Provincetown)

The NPS process is genuinely strict. They cap weddings at 50 guests, prohibit anything driven into the sand (no tent stakes, no arch anchors), and reserve the right to deny permits on weekends in July and August if shorebird nesting closes sections of beach. **Piping plover season** runs roughly April 1 through August 31, and yes, the birds win.

Which Town Beaches Are Actually Worth the Permit?

Not all permitted beaches are equal. Some towns will sell you a permit for beaches where the ceremony experience is miserable — narrow strands, parking lot noise, or sightlines blocked by a snack bar.

Genuinely good wedding beaches

- **Old Silver Beach, Falmouth** — Bayside, calmer water, west-facing for sunset ceremonies. Permit competition is fierce; apply at the 90-day mark to the minute.
- **Mayflower Beach, Dennis** — The tidal flats are unmatched for photos, but check the tide chart. Low tide pushes the water a quarter-mile out and turns your “beach wedding” into a tidal flat wedding.
- **Lighthouse Beach, Chatham** — Iconic Chatham Light backdrop. The reason Chatham charges \$400 with a \$500 deposit. Worth it for the photos.
- **Sandy Neck Beach, Barnstable** — Six miles of dunes, very few day-trippers at the eastern end. The higher fee reflects the drive-on permit logistics.

- **Nauset Beach, Orleans** — Town beach, not National Seashore (despite the name confusion). Wide-open Atlantic sightlines.
- **First Encounter Beach, Eastham** — Bayside, west-facing, town-administered. The Cape’s best-kept sunset wedding secret.

Beaches I’d skip even if the permit is cheap

- **Craigville Beach (Centerville)** — Too crowded, too narrow, too much traffic noise from Craigville Beach Road.
- **West Dennis Beach** — The parking lot dominates the view from the ceremony zone.
- **Sea Street Beach (Dennis)** — Fine, but Mayflower is a five-minute drive and a different planet.

Private Alternatives (When Permits Get Ugly)

Several Cape venues handle the permit problem by owning their own waterfront. If your guest count is over 75, or you want alcohol, or you want any control over the space, the math often favors a private venue:

Venue	Town	Capacity	Approx. 2026 Site Fee
Wychmere Beach Club	Harwich Port	250	\$18,000–25,000
Wequassett Resort	Chatham	200	\$15,000–22,000
Sea Crest Beach Hotel	Falmouth	300	\$12,000–18,000
Pilgrim Monument Grounds	Provincetown	150	\$4,000–6,000

A \$250 town permit looks great until you add the tent rental (\$3,500+), portable restrooms (\$800), and the fact that your ceremony can’t start until 6 PM and must end by sunset. Run the actual math before assuming public beach is cheaper.

Application Timing — Don’t Trust the “Deadline”

Every town publishes an application deadline. Every town ignores it in favor of first-come-first-served for popular Saturday dates. If you’re targeting a Saturday between June 15 and Labor Day:

- **January:** Submit for Chatham, Falmouth, Sandy Neck, and any National Seashore beach.
- **February–March:** Submit for Orleans, Dennis, Provincetown, Wellfleet.
- **April:** Last reasonable month for everywhere else.

A Tuesday wedding in early June or late September is the cheat code. Most towns will issue same-week permits for shoulder-season weekday ceremonies, and photographer rates also drop 20–30% outside peak Saturday windows.

Two Things That Will Wreck Your Day If You Don’t Plan For Them

1. The piping plover problem isn’t just a National Seashore issue. Town beaches close sections too. Nauset Beach in Orleans loses its southern end every June and July. Sandy Neck closes its eastern tip. Verify the bird-closure map within two weeks of your date — your “ceremony spot” may have a fence around it on the morning of.

2. Parking permits are separate from wedding permits. This is the single most common day-of disaster. Your guests show up at Mayflower Beach in Dennis on a Saturday in July and discover the lot fills by 9 AM, non-residents pay \$35 to park if they get in at all, and there’s no overflow. Several towns now offer wedding-party

parking passes as add-ons — Dennis charges \$20 per vehicle, Chatham \$30, Falmouth \$25. **Buy them in bulk when you submit your permit application.** The town clerk won't volunteer this option. You have to ask.

Plan for the permit, plan for the plovers, plan for the parking. Everything else is just sand and sunset.

◆ THINGS TO DO

Make a day of it

Bookable experiences that pair perfectly with this guide. Scan any code to reserve.

BOOK · FROM \$24/PERSON

Scenic Excursion Train Ride

Cape Cod Central Railroad · Hyannis

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Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$189

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Localgrapher · Hyannis

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