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CAPE COD DAY TRIPS WITH KIDS

Car-Free Day Trip to Martha's Vineyard: Ferry + Bike from Woods Hole

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



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The most common mistake people make planning a day trip to Martha's Vineyard is trying to get a car on the ferry. Car reservations for peak-season dates sell out 90 days in advance. The standby line is long. The stress is real and unnecessary.

You don't need a car. Walk on the ferry, rent bikes on the island, and have one of the best days you'll spend on Cape Cod.

The Logistics: Everything You Need Before You Go

Getting to Woods Hole

From Cape Cod: Woods Hole is at the southwest tip of Falmouth, about 20–25 minutes from the Bourne Bridge.

Parking options: - **SSA Falmouth Park & Ride (Palmer Avenue, Falmouth):** Free parking with a shuttle to the Woods Hole terminal. This is the right move — it's free, the shuttle is regular, and you avoid the Woods Hole parking lot fees (\$20–28/day). - **Gifford Street lot in Woods Hole:** Pay lot, limited spaces, fills early on peak days. - **WHOOSH bus from Falmouth center:** Operates seasonally; free or low-cost; connects to the terminal.

The Ferry

Operator: Steamship Authority (Woods Hole terminal) **Route:** Woods Hole → Vineyard Haven (45 minutes), seasonal direct service to Oak Bluffs **Walk-on passengers:** No reservation needed. Buy tickets at the terminal or online. **Approximate cost (2026, verify at [steamshipauthority.com](https://www.steamshipauthority.com)):** - Adult round-trip: ~\$20–22 - Child round-trip: ~\$12–14 - Bike round-trip: ~\$10–14 per bike

First departure: Approximately 7:00–7:30 AM from Woods Hole (verify current summer 2026 schedule before travel — times shift by month and day of week)

Arrive at the terminal: At least 30 minutes before your target sailing on peak days.

Recommended departure: The 7:30–8:00 AM sailing. You arrive in Vineyard Haven by 8:30–9:00 AM — ahead of the day-tripper crowd. The island is yours for the first two hours.

On the Island: The Car-Free Route

Arrival: Vineyard Haven

Vineyard Haven (Tisbury) is the year-round working town of the Vineyard. When you step off the ferry, Main Street is a two-minute walk from the terminal.

First move: Stop at **Pie in the Sky Bakery** in Woods Hole *before* you board — breakfast pastries and coffee to bring on the ferry is the local move. Or get breakfast in Vineyard Haven at the terminal area.

Rent Bikes

Bike rental shops are clustered near the ferry terminals. For Vineyard Haven arrivals: - **DeBettencourt's Bike Shop** — Vineyard Haven; trailers and tag-alongs available for young kids - **Adventure Rentals** — Vineyard Haven; similar selection

For Oak Bluffs arrivals (if direct seasonal service is operating): - **Anderson's Bike Rentals** — right at the Oak Bluffs terminal

Confirm in advance: Call or book online before your trip. Peak summer days can run short on trailers and kids' bikes. Confirm shops are open and have availability.

Cost: Approximately \$25–35/adult bike per day; \$15–20/child bike; \$30–50 for trailer or tag-along per day. (Verify current rates.)

The Bike Route: Vineyard Haven to Oak Bluffs to Edgartown

This is the classic car-free day trip route — a mostly flat, 12–15 mile round trip that a family with kids ages 6+ can complete comfortably.

Vineyard Haven to Oak Bluffs (~3 miles)

The dedicated bike path from Vineyard Haven to Oak Bluffs runs parallel to the road through light woodland and is one of the most pleasant short bike paths in New England. Flat, paved, family-appropriate.

Oak Bluffs (1.5–2 hours)

Oak Bluffs is the most visually distinct town on the Vineyard:

- **The Gingerbread Cottages (Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association):** Hundreds of ornate Victorian cottages in a tight oval, painted in jewel-bright colors. This is one of the most photographed neighborhoods in New England. Walk the laneways — it's free, and it's extraordinary.
- **Flying Horses Carousel:** America's oldest operating platform carousel, now a National Historic Landmark. Kids ride it; adults appreciate it. Admission per ride; cash only (verify current policy). Located near the ferry terminal in Oak Bluffs.
- **Circuit Avenue:** The main commercial street in Oak Bluffs. Ice cream, pizza, gift shops. **Back Door Donuts** operates out of the back of a pastry shop here — a Vineyard institution. Usually open in the afternoon.

Oak Bluffs to Edgartown (~6 miles)

The bike path continues from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown along the coastline, with views of Nantucket Sound. Gentle grades, mostly flat, appropriate for families.

Edgartown (1.5–2 hours)

Edgartown is the most formal of the Vineyard towns — white clapboard, Greek Revival architecture, the oldest settled town on the island.

- Walk Main Street and North Water Street (the most architecturally impressive residential street on the island)
 - **Alchemy Restaurant** or **Newes from America** for lunch if you're staying into mid-day
 - The Edgartown Lighthouse — a short walk from Main Street
 - The On-Time Ferry to Chappaquiddick — a two-car cable ferry (\$4 per person walk-on, runs continuously) that's worth taking for the view even if you don't explore the island
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The Return: Getting Back on Time

Walk-on passengers board by showing your return ticket — no check-in cutoff like vehicle passengers. But on peak summer days, the last few sailings can have long walk-on queues.

Recommended return sailing: The 6:00–7:00 PM departure from Vineyard Haven. Gets you back on Cape by 7:30–8:00 PM, ahead of the last-sailing rush.

Last sailing: Approximately 9:45 PM from Vineyard Haven (verify 2026 schedule). Missing the last boat means staying overnight.

Allow time: Vineyard Haven to the terminal on bike is 10–15 minutes. Return the bikes with 30–40 minutes to spare before your target sailing.

Total Cost Estimate (Family of Four, 2 Adults + 2 Kids)

Item	Approximate Cost
Ferry round-trip (2 adults + 2 kids)	\$65–75
Bike rental (4 bikes, day rate)	\$100–\$140
Parking (SSA Park & Ride)	Free
Lunch + snacks	\$50–70
Flying Horses Carousel	\$10–20
Total	\$225–\$305

Without car reservation, standby risk, or \$400+ vehicle ferry fee.

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