



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD PURSUITS

Hiking Cape Cod: Best Trails, Hidden Walks & Nature Paths

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

Most people picture beaches when they think of Cape Cod. That's fair — the coastline is extraordinary. But locals know a different side of the Cape: a landscape of kettle ponds, pine barrens, Atlantic white cedar swamps, salt marsh, and ocean bluffs threaded together by some of the best trail systems in New England.

Fall is when Cape Cod hiking earns its highest praise. From September through November, the crowds thin, the biting bugs disappear, and the light turns golden over the marsh.

The Best Hiking Trails

Great Island Trail — Wellfleet

4 to 8 miles | Moderate to Strenuous | Cape Cod National Seashore. A tombolo peninsula jutting into Wellfleet Harbor. Through pitch pine forest and down onto open tidal flats with sweeping views of Cape Cod Bay. Harbor seals haul out on the sandbars at low tide.

Beech Forest Trail — Provincetown

1.4 miles | Easy | Cape Cod National Seashore. American beech trees ring a quiet freshwater pond. Excellent for birding in fall — migrating warblers, thrushes, and sparrows funnel through in September and October.

Atlantic White Cedar Swamp Trail — Wellfleet

1.4 miles | Easy | Cape Cod National Seashore. A boardwalk loops through a stand of Atlantic white cedars — a rare swamp ecosystem. The trees grow straight and close, their bases anchored in dark tannin-stained water.

Nauset Marsh Trail — Eastham

1.6 miles | Easy | Cape Cod National Seashore. Beginning at the Salt Pond Visitor Center. Views across the marsh toward Nauset Light Beach. Osprey nest here in summer; great blue herons stalk the marsh edge through fall.

Fort Hill Area — Eastham

1.5 to 2 miles | Easy to Moderate | Cape Cod National Seashore. The finest wildlife overlook on the Cape. Panoramic view over Nauset Marsh, the barrier beach, and the Atlantic. October brings red maple swamp color.

Nickerson State Park — Brewster

8+ miles of trail | Easy to Moderate. Eight marked paths through pitch pine and oak forest connecting kettle ponds. Cliff Pond trail (~2.5 miles) is one of the best easy walks in Brewster.

Punkhorn Parklands — Brewster

45+ miles of trail | Easy to Moderate. 800 acres of conservation land. On a weekday in October, you may hike for an hour without seeing another person.

When to Go

Fall (September–November): Best season. Mosquitoes gone, foliage peaks in mid-October, trails quiet. **Spring (April–June):** Second-best. Migrating birds the main draw. **Summer:** Start early (on trail by 7am), bring tick protection, carry extra water. **Winter:** Underrated. Snowy owls arrive in November, views are clearest without leaves.

What to Bring

Water, tick protection (permethrin-treated clothing, full-body check after), sun protection, downloaded trail maps. Deer ticks are present year-round — wear long pants tucked into socks on wooded trails.

Resources

- Salt Pond Visitor Center, Eastham: best starting point for CCNS hikes
- NPS Cape Cod National Seashore: nps.gov/caco
- AllTrails: GPS maps for most major Cape trails
- Mass Audubon: massaudubon.org — Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary trails

◆ THINGS TO DO

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