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VISITING CAPE COD

Things to Do in Harwich, MA: Cranberries, Beaches & Cape Cod Calm

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

Harwich doesn't announce itself. There's no single iconic landmark, no famous lighthouse you've seen on a postcard, no celebrity restaurant with a two-hour wait. What Harwich has is something rarer: an honest, unhurried Cape Cod that feels exactly like it should. Cranberry bogs edge the back roads, Nantucket Sound beaches offer the calm warm water that families come back for every summer, and Harwich Port is a working village that hasn't been overworked into a tourist attraction. If you want the Cape without the performance, Harwich is your town.

Harwich Port Village

Harwich Port is a small commercial village a few blocks from the water — a mix of restaurants, ice cream shops, a few boutiques, and the general ease of a place that serves its community as much as its visitors. It's walkable, genuinely charming, and the right size. Saquatucket Harbor is nearby, a working marina with a seasonal high-speed ferry service to Nantucket — a day trip worth doing if you've never been.

Beaches on Nantucket Sound

Harwich's south-facing beaches on Nantucket Sound are among the best family beaches on Cape Cod. The Sound is shallower and warmer than the Atlantic — mid-70s by July — with gentler waves and calm conditions almost every day of summer. Bank Street Beach is one of the most popular, with a wide sandy beach and good parking by Cape Cod standards. Earle Road Beach and Red River Beach are also excellent and slightly less crowded. These are the beaches where the Cape's reputation for calm summer swimming was built.

Cranberry Bogs: A Living Cape Cod Tradition

Massachusetts produces roughly 25 percent of the nation's cranberries, and Harwich is at the heart of it. The harvest happens in September and October, and it's a spectacle worth planning around. Growers flood the bogs and mechanical harvesters churn the berries loose; the bogs turn brilliant crimson, and the berries are corralled into floating red rafts for harvest. Drive Depot Road or Pleasant Lake Avenue in late September and you'll find bogs you can view from the roadside. The Harwich Cranberry Festival in September celebrates the harvest with live music, a parade, craft vendors, and food — it's one of the largest annual events on Cape Cod and draws visitors from across New England.

Outdoor Recreation

Cranberry Valley Golf Course is a well-regarded public 18-hole course that winds through the cranberry bog landscape — an unexpectedly scenic round. The **Cape Cod Rail Trail** passes through Harwich, connecting to the broader 25-mile paved path that runs from Dennis to Wellfleet. The trail through Harwich is flanked by pitch pine forest and occasional bog views; it's flat, scenic, and excellent for families. Bike rentals are available locally.

Brooks Free Library

The Brooks Free Library is a Victorian-era building in Harwich Center that's worth a stop beyond just books — it anchors the civic life of the town and hosts rotating exhibits, events, and a reading room that feels like another era. Small towns with genuinely good public libraries have their priorities right.

Where to Eat

Harwich has solid local dining without the destination-restaurant scene of Chatham or Provincetown. **L'alouette** in Harwich Port is a reliably excellent French bistro that's been a local favorite for years. The waterfront options near Saquatucket Harbor cover seafood basics well.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the best beach in Harwich? Bank Street Beach is the most popular and consistently good. Red River Beach at the end of Red River Road is slightly larger and has a larger parking lot — worth the extra few minutes.

When is the Harwich Cranberry Festival? The festival is held each September, typically the second weekend of the month. Check the Harwich Chamber of Commerce for exact dates, as they vary year to year.

Can I take a ferry to Nantucket from Harwich? Yes — Hy-Line Cruises runs a high-speed passenger ferry from Saquatucket Harbor in Harwich Port to Nantucket seasonally (summer and early fall). The trip is roughly one hour. Book in advance in summer.

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