

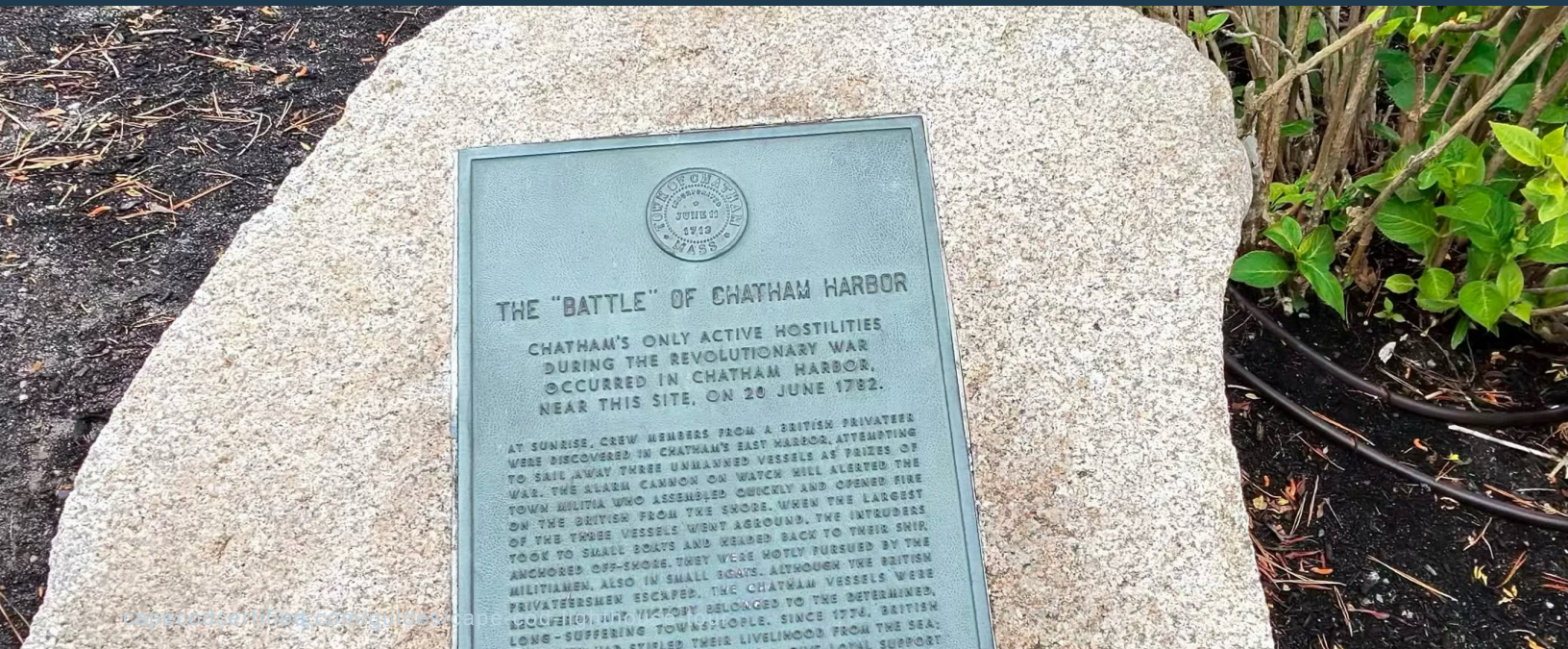


CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Cape Cod Lighthouse Tour: All 6 Lighthouses and How to Visit

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



Cape Cod’s hooked arm juts into the Atlantic with enough navigational hazard — shifting sandbars, dense seasonal fogs, and storms that have sent hundreds of ships to the bottom — to have warranted more lighthouses per mile of coastline than almost anywhere else in New England. Six major lights remain standing today, each with its own character, history, and access challenge. Visiting all six in a single trip is entirely doable and makes for one of the most photogenic drives on the East Coast.

This guide covers every major Cape Cod lighthouse: where they stand, how to reach them, the best conditions for photography, and practical notes on parking, fees, and seasonal climbing access.

The 6 Cape Cod Lighthouses at a Glance

Lighthouse	Town	Access	Tower Climb
Chatham Light	Chatham	Drive-to, free parking	Lighthouse Days only
Nauset Light	Eastham	Drive-to, small lot	Seasonal (fee)
Highland Light	Truro	Drive-to, paid lot	Seasonal (fee)
Race Point Light	Provincetown	Walk ~1.5 mi or boat	No (exterior only)
Long Point Light	Provincetown	Walk breakwater or ferry	No (exterior only)
Stage Harbor Light	Chatham	View from shore only	No (private)

1. Chatham Light — Chatham

About the Lighthouse

Chatham Light is the lighthouse most visitors picture when they think of Cape Cod: a white tower on a bluff above the Atlantic, with a keeper’s quarters alongside and an overlook that draws crowds every morning. What many visitors don’t know is that this was once a twin-light station — two towers standing side by side on the same bluff. The second tower was disassembled and relocated to Eastham in 1923, where it became Nauset Light, linking the two sites by blood as well as geography.

The current 48-foot cast-iron tower dates to 1877. Below the bluff, you’re looking directly at the Chatham Break — the inlet that cut through Nauset Beach during a fierce January 1987 storm, permanently reshaping the outer coastline. Gray seals haul out on the outer bars visible from the overlook almost every morning; on calm days you can watch them from the railing with binoculars. This is the Atlantic side of the Cape: the tower faces east, and arriving at sunrise rewards you with warm light across the white tower and gold reflections on the water below.

Visitor Notes

Parking is free along Shore Road and in a small lot adjacent to the grounds. The exterior and overlook are open year-round. Chatham Light also anchors the annual **Cape Cod Lighthouse Days** event (typically held in August), when extended interior access and tower climbs are offered — one of the few times this Coast Guard-staffed tower opens fully to the public.

2. Nauset Light — Eastham

About the Lighthouse

Nauset Light may be the most recognized lighthouse in America that people can't immediately name. That red-and-white striped tower has appeared on Pepperidge Farm Goldfish cracker bags for decades, introduced to generations of American children before they ever set foot on the Cape. The lighthouse stands at the edge of the Nauset Highlands in Eastham, with Cape Cod National Seashore stretching away along the Atlantic bluff in both directions.

The tower itself was the second Chatham tower before being moved north in 1923 to replace the aging "Three Sisters" station. Those three sisters — three identical small brick lighthouses built in 1838 and moved progressively inland as the bluff eroded — now stand in a clearing off Cable Road near the Nauset Light parking area, maintained by the National Park Service. A short, easy loop trail connects the parking lot to the sisters and the main lighthouse, making this the most family-friendly lighthouse stop on the Outer Cape.

Visitor Notes

The grounds are free and open year-round. The lighthouse opens for climbs on select weekends from May through November (fee applies). The parking area on Nauset Light Beach Road is small and fills fast in summer — aim for before 9am or after 4pm. The tower faces the Atlantic; morning light is best.

3. Highland Light (Cape Cod Light) — Truro

About the Lighthouse

Highland Light — officially called Cape Cod Light — is the oldest and tallest lighthouse on the peninsula. The current brick tower, built in 1857, stands 66 feet above a Truro bluff that was, for much of the 20th century, alarmingly close to the eroding cliff edge. By 1996, the tower sat just 100 feet from a 125-foot drop into the sea. In one of the most ambitious lighthouse relocations in U.S. history, the entire 430-ton structure was moved 450 feet inland on a rail system over about three weeks, buying it another century of life.

Today the lighthouse stands in an open meadow at the edge of the **Highland Golf Links**, an 18-hole public links course that is also one of the oldest golf courses in the country. The combination — lighthouse, links, and open Atlantic horizon — gives this location a genuinely remote, windswept quality even though it's reached by paved road. From the top of the tower on a clear day, Provincetown is visible to the north and Wellfleet Bay to the south.

Visitor Notes

Climbs are offered seasonally from late May through October (fee applies, typically around \$5 for adults). Grounds are free and open year-round. Parking is in a paid lot off Highland Road in Truro; the National Seashore pass covers the fee. This is an Atlantic-facing, east-facing site — sunrise and morning visits offer the best photographic light.

4. Race Point Light — Provincetown

About the Lighthouse

Race Point Light is the most remote lighthouse on Cape Cod and among the most dramatic on the entire East Coast. It stands at the very tip of the Outer Cape, where the Atlantic drives hard against a crescent of beach that has wrecked ships for centuries — the name comes from the fierce tidal races that ships had to navigate to round the point. The 45-foot cast-iron tower, built in 1876, replaced an earlier 1816 structure, and the low height is deliberate: the surrounding beach and sky, not the tower, supply the drama.

There is no road to Race Point Light. You reach it by walking approximately 1.5 miles along the beach from the Race Point Beach parking area, or by boat (seasonal lighthouse cruises from Provincetown Harbor pass close by). The beach walk is along soft sand and requires sturdy footwear; allow 45 minutes each way. The lighthouse is maintained

by the American Lighthouse Foundation, which also offers overnight stays in the restored keeper's quarters — a bucket-list experience that books out months in advance.

Visitor Notes

No tower climb is available for day visitors. Parking at Race Point Beach carries the National Seashore day fee (\$25/vehicle in season, or covered by an America the Beautiful annual pass). Walk in the morning: the tower faces roughly northeast, and early light is flattering. In winter, the beach walk is open and wild with no fee.

5. Long Point Light — Provincetown

About the Lighthouse

Long Point Light guards the absolute tip of Cape Cod's curling arm, out at the end of the narrow sandspit that cradles Provincetown Harbor. Unlike every other major Cape Cod lighthouse, Long Point stands on the **Cape Cod Bay side** — the west side of the peninsula. That means it catches afternoon sun and faces sunset, and the view back toward Provincetown from its base — the whole town across the water, Pilgrim Monument rising at the center — is one of the most satisfying photographs you can make on the Cape.

The green-capped white tower has marked this harbor entrance since 1827 (current structure 1875). Two routes reach it: walk the Long Point Trail along the stone breakwater from the West End of Provincetown — roughly 1.5 miles each way, allow 45 minutes and watch your footing on wet rocks — or take the seasonal **Long Point water shuttle** from MacMillan Pier, a ten-minute ride that drops you at the beach near the tower.

Visitor Notes

The grounds are free; no tower climb is available. The water shuttle runs from late June through Labor Day (check Provincetown's website for current schedules and fares). The breakwater walk is accessible year-round and is a popular winter outing even when the shuttle isn't running. Come in the afternoon for the best light and stay for sunset over the bay.

6. Stage Harbor Light — Chatham

About the Lighthouse

Stage Harbor Light is the quiet one. Built in 1880 to mark the entrance to Stage Harbor on Chatham's southern shore, it was deactivated in 1933 and eventually sold into private hands. The wooden tower and attached keeper's cottage are now a private residence, not open to the public.

That said, the lighthouse is visible from Stage Harbor and from the area near the Bridge Street causeway, and it appears in the background of countless photographs taken from boats in the harbor. Kayakers and paddleboarders often get the best angles on calm mornings. It's worth a slow drive through Chatham's quieter south side to see it from the water's edge — particularly photogenic at sunrise, when the east-facing water catches color.

Best Lighthouse Photo Spots

- **Chatham Light at sunrise:** The overlook bluff faces the Atlantic; arrive early for gold light on the white tower with seal-studded bars below.
- **Nauset Light:** The clearing near the Three Sisters frames the tower with scrub pine and open sky — shoot from the east-side trail.

- **Highland Light in mid-morning:** The open meadow approach lets you work the tower against a wide Atlantic horizon with no obstructions.
 - **Long Point at sunset:** Shoot from the breakwater with Provincetown glowing across the bay, or from MacMillan Pier with the lighthouse on the horizon as the sun drops over the bay.
 - **Race Point:** Low tide exposes the most sand; the isolation means clean compositions with no competing structures.
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Planning Your Lighthouse Tour

The full Cape Cod lighthouse circuit works naturally as a two-day itinerary. **Day one** (Lower Cape): Stage Harbor Light and Chatham Light in Chatham, then north to Nauset Light in Eastham. **Day two** (Outer Cape): Highland Light in Truro in the morning, then Race Point Light beach walk and Long Point Light by afternoon ferry in Provincetown.

If you're based in Sandwich or Dennis, the Outer Cape lights are roughly a 60-mile drive on Route 6 — budget a full day rather than a half-day. **Lighthouse Days** (annually in August) is the best opportunity for families to access tower interiors that are normally exterior-only; check the Cape Cod Lighthouse Foundation website for dates each season.

FAQ

Q: Can you visit all 6 Cape Cod lighthouses in one day?

You can see all six exteriors in a long, ambitious day, but you will be driving hard and Race Point alone requires a 3-mile round-trip beach walk on soft sand. A two-day plan — Chatham and Eastham on day one, Truro and Provincetown on day two — lets you actually absorb each location rather than check boxes. If a one-day push is unavoidable, skip the Race Point walk and view it from a harbor cruise instead.

Q: Which Cape Cod lighthouses can you climb?

Nauset Light in Eastham and Highland Light in Truro offer public tower climbs on a seasonal basis, typically from late May through October, for a small fee. Chatham Light opens for climbs during Cape Cod Lighthouse Days in August. Race Point and Long Point are exterior-only for day visitors. Stage Harbor Light is privately owned and closed to the public.

Q: Are the lighthouses accessible for visitors with mobility limitations?

Chatham Light's overlook is reachable by car with level paved paths. Nauset Light has a short, flat approach from the parking lot. Highland Light's meadow is mostly level. Race Point requires a 1.5-mile walk on soft beach sand, which is challenging for wheelchairs and strollers. Long Point is most comfortably reached via the water shuttle from MacMillan Pier rather than the breakwater walk. Always confirm current conditions directly with each site before visiting.

Q: Is there an admission fee to visit Cape Cod lighthouses?

The grounds at most lighthouses are free to enter. Tower climbs at Nauset and Highland typically run \$5–\$10 per adult. Race Point Beach and Highland Light share the Cape Cod National Seashore parking fee (\$25/vehicle day pass in season; an America the Beautiful annual pass covers it). The Long Point water shuttle charges a per-person fare. Stage Harbor Light is private and free to view from public roads.

Q: When is the best time of year to visit Cape Cod lighthouses?

All six are viewable year-round. Summer gives you the most access — open tower climbs, the Long Point water shuttle, and Lighthouse Days events. Fall (September through October) is the best season for photography: crowds thin after Labor Day, the light quality is exceptional, and the Race Point beach walk is beautiful among beach grass turning amber. Winter visits to Chatham and Highland are dramatic and uncrowded, though you should dress for wind.

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