



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Nauset Light Beach: Parking, Crowds, Swimming & the Famous Lighthouse Above the Sand

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

Cape Cod National Seashore			
Park Passes			
Private Vehicle	\$25	Per Person	\$15
Per Day		Walk-in, Bicycle, Per Day	
Motorcycle	\$20	Park Annual	\$60
Per Day		Valid at this park during the months of May-September	
Admits up to 2 Motorcycles		U.S. Residents Only	
U.S. Residents — America the Beautiful Passes			
Interagency Annual	\$80	Access Lifetime	Free
Valid 12 Months from Purchase		Permanently Disabled	
Senior		U.S. Military	Free
U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident, Age 62 or older		Active, Veteran, or Gold Star Family	
Senior Annual	\$20		
Senior Lifetime	\$80		
Non-U.S. Residents			
Non-Resident	\$250		

capecodcertified.com/guides/nauset-light-beach-guide

The parking lot at Nauset Light Beach fills completely by 9:30am on peak summer mornings — sometimes earlier on weekends in July. If you arrive after 10am without a National Seashore pass or Eastham resident sticker, you may be turned away at the gatehouse. That single fact shapes every smart visit to this beach.

Nauset Light Beach sits at the end of Ocean View Drive in Eastham, perched at the top of a glacial scarp above the Atlantic. It is one of the most recognizable stretches of the Cape Cod National Seashore, anchored by the candy-striped Nauset Light lighthouse that has stood watch over the Outer Cape since 1923 in its current location. This is not a quiet, tucked-away beach. It is one of the signature beaches on the Outer Cape — big surf, dramatic bluffs, cold blue water — and it draws crowds accordingly. Here is how to visit it well.

Getting There: Ocean View Drive and What to Expect at the Gate

Nauset Light Beach is located at the end of Ocean View Drive in Eastham, off Route 6. From the Eastham Rotary, head north on Route 6, turn right on Brackett Road, then left onto Ocean View Drive. The beach parking lot is about 1.2 miles from Route 6. There is no public transit directly to the lot.

The Cape Cod National Seashore charges a vehicle entrance fee at the gatehouse from late June through Labor Day. Check the National Park Service website for current fee schedules, as rates adjust periodically. The most cost-effective option if you plan multiple visits is the America the Beautiful Annual Pass, which covers entrance to all federal lands including all CCNS beaches.

Eastham residents with a town beach sticker have a dedicated lane and priority access. If you rent in Eastham, verify whether your rental property provides a sticker — many do.

Overflow and Alternatives When the Lot Is Full

When Nauset Light fills, rangers close the entrance gate and post a “Lot Full” sign. At that point your nearest alternatives are:

- **Coast Guard Beach** (Doane Road, Eastham) — the other major National Seashore beach in Eastham, about 1.5 miles south. Coast Guard Beach itself has only a small lot reserved for people with mobility needs; most visitors park at the Little Creek overflow lot on Doane Road and ride the CCRTA Flex shuttle to the beach. This is actually a smoother experience than fighting Nauset’s lot on a peak day.
 - **Marconi Beach** (South Wellfleet) — about 8 miles north on Route 6, another full-service National Seashore beach with comparable surf and bluffs.
-

Parking: The Practical Breakdown

The Nauset Light Beach parking lot holds roughly 300 vehicles. That sounds like a lot until you factor in a sunny Saturday in August.

Arrive by 8:30am for a reliable spot with no stress. Arrive by 9am for a reasonable chance. After 10am on a clear summer day, treat the lot as full unless you have a resident sticker or a handicap placard, which have their own designated sections.

Parking fees are paid at the automated kiosk or through the gatehouse attendant. Credit cards are accepted. There is no cost to enter the beach on foot or by bicycle — a significant advantage for cyclists on the [Cape Cod Rail Trail](#), which has a spur connecting to the National Seashore network.

Off-season parking (roughly Columbus Day through Memorial Day) is free and unrestricted. The lot stays open year-round, and shoulder-season visits — October especially — are among the best experiences the Outer Cape offers.

The Beach: What You're Actually Getting

Nauset Light Beach is a straight-shot Atlantic beach with powerful surf, cold water, and a dramatic backdrop. The bluffs behind the beach rise 50 to 80 feet, made of glacial till — sand, gravel, and clay laid down 20,000 years ago and actively eroding into the sea. The lighthouse and its keepers' quarters sit at the top of those bluffs, set back from the edge that is visibly retreating each decade.

The beach itself is wide and sandy at low tide, narrower at high tide. There is no calm inlet here; this is open ocean. Waves come in with consistent energy and the undertow is real.

Surf and Conditions

Nauset Light sees consistent Atlantic swells. On a typical summer day, expect 1-to-3-foot surf; after a storm or with offshore winds, waves build significantly. The beach is popular with bodyboarders and experienced swimmers who want actual ocean conditions — not flat, protected bay water.

Lifeguards are stationed at Nauset Light Beach daily from late June through Labor Day. They post red, yellow, and green flag conditions at the stand. **Red flag days mean no swimming.** The National Seashore takes this seriously and rangers enforce it. Check conditions before you go: the National Seashore posts daily beach reports on the NPS website and their social channels.

Rip currents form regularly at this beach, particularly near the ends of the guarded area. If you are caught in one, swim parallel to shore to exit the pull, not directly against it.

Water temperature: Atlantic water off Eastham typically ranges from the low 60s°F in early June to the mid-60s°F in August. It rarely feels warm. A wetsuit for bodyboarding or extended swimming makes a meaningful difference in comfort, especially before July 4.

Swimming: Guarded Zone and What Parents Should Know

The guarded swimming area is marked with buoys and flags running along a defined stretch of beach in front of the lifeguard stand. Stay within those markers. Outside the guarded zone, you swim at your own risk, and rangers can and do ask swimmers to return to the designated area.

Young children should stay in the shallower break zone close to shore. Even on calm days, the surf at Nauset Light is unpredictable enough to knock over a small child. This is not a bay beach where toddlers wade in flat water — the wave action is constant and strong.

What to bring for a full beach day: - Umbrella and shade structure (the bluffs provide no afternoon shade) - More water than you think — the walk from the lot to the waterline is level but the return uphill carry is the part people underestimate - Sun protection appropriate for direct Atlantic exposure - Sand anchor for your umbrella — the beach gets wind

The Lighthouse: Nauset Light History and How to See It

The Nauset Light you see today is a 48-foot cast-iron lighthouse that began life as one of the Three Sisters of Nauset — a trio of small brick lighthouses that once lined this stretch of Outer Beach. The current light was moved here in 1923 from Highland Light’s original companion location in Truro, and it is the only one that still functions as an active aid to navigation. It flashes a distinctive red and white alternating pattern visible 23 miles offshore.

The lighthouse is maintained by the Nauset Light Preservation Society. **The interior is open for tours on Sunday afternoons from late spring through fall** — exact dates and hours change seasonally, so check with the Preservation Society before making a special trip. Access to the lighthouse grounds (the exterior and the keepers’ quarters area) is generally possible during daylight hours. You can walk up the path from the beach parking lot to reach the lighthouse area; it sits about 200 yards from the main lot entrance.

The view from the lighthouse bluff looking south along the Outer Beach toward Coast Guard Beach — where Henry Beston wrote “The Outermost House” — is one of the defining views on the Cape. Worth the 3-minute walk even if tours are closed.

The Three Sisters and the Keepers’ Quarters

About a quarter mile west on Nauset Light Beach Road, the National Park Service has reassembled the Three Sisters lighthouses — the original 1838 brick towers — in a small clearing accessible by a short walking path. These are not in operation and not on the bluff, but they are a notable piece of Cape Cod maritime history and the walk is easy. The site is free and open year-round.

The two historic keepers’ houses adjacent to Nauset Light are owned and maintained by the National Seashore. They are not open to the public for interior tours but are part of the Nauset Light Preservation Society’s stewardship.

Best Time to Go

Early morning weekdays in July and August are the sweet spot: crowds thin, the light is flat and beautiful on the water, the surf is often glassy before afternoon sea breezes build, and parking is manageable.

Late September and October are the locals’ consensus for the best Nauset Light experience. The lot is open and free, the beach is nearly empty on weekdays, the water is at its warmest (cooled only slowly from summer), and the light along the bluffs in fall is exceptional. You will not have lifeguards, so swimming is at your own risk, but experienced swimmers find the fall ocean conditions superb.

Avoid: Saturday and Sunday mornings in August between 10am and 2pm unless you have a resident sticker, a guaranteed early arrival, or a high tolerance for crowded parking situations. This is the single biggest friction point at this beach.

Sunrise visits are possible year-round — the lot is open early and the beach faces due east, meaning the sun rises directly off the water. Sunrise at Nauset Light is genuinely one of the best sunrise spots on the Outer Cape. Bring a jacket; it is always cooler than you expect at that hour on the Atlantic side.

What’s Nearby

Nauset Light Beach is the anchor of a small cluster of Eastham attractions within a few miles:

- **Salt Pond Visitor Center** (National Seashore, Route 6 Eastham) — the best orientation point for the entire National Seashore; ranger talks, trail maps, and the Nauset estuary overlook

- **Nauset Marsh Trail** — a 1.3-mile loop starting at the Visitor Center that takes you to the marsh edge and overlooks where the Nauset estuary meets the back of the barrier beach
- **Coast Guard Beach** — 1.5 miles south, accessible via the bike path system; quieter some mornings when Nauset Light fills first
- **Rock Harbor** (Orleans, 5 miles) — the best sunset spot on the Bay side when you are done at the Atlantic beach
- **Cape Cod Rail Trail** — the CCRT passes through Eastham and connects to the National Seashore via the Salt Pond spur; cycling to the beach from Orleans or Brewster is a legitimate way to avoid the parking situation entirely

For food near the beach: there is a small snack bar at Nauset Light seasonally, but do not count on it for a full meal. The Route 6 corridor in Eastham has several year-round options. Check ahead for current hours, especially early and late season.

Rules and Regulations (What Rangers Enforce)

The Cape Cod National Seashore operates under National Park Service rules, which differ from town beach rules:

- **No dogs on the beach** from 9am to 5pm, late May through mid-October. Dogs are allowed before and after those hours on leash.
- **No glass containers** on the beach
- **No alcohol** on National Seashore beaches
- **No driving on the beach** — Nauset Light does not have an ORV corridor; the ORV beach is north at Race Point in Provincetown and south at Nauset/Pleasant Bay
- **No fires** on the beach
- **Red flag = no swimming**, enforced

Rangers patrol consistently on peak days. The rules are posted at the lot entrance and the beach access point.

Frequently Asked Questions

What time does Nauset Light Beach parking fill up? On peak summer days (July–August weekends), the lot routinely fills by 9:30am, sometimes earlier. Weekday arrivals of 9am are generally fine; aim for 8:30am to be certain. The lot is never “full” for pedestrians or cyclists — only vehicles are turned away.

Is there an entrance fee to visit Nauset Light Beach? Yes. The Cape Cod National Seashore charges a vehicle fee from late June through Labor Day. Pedestrians and bicyclists enter free. The America the Beautiful Annual Pass (\$80) covers all CCNS beaches and is cost-effective for three or more visits. Check the NPS website for current fee amounts.

Can you visit the Nauset Light lighthouse? The exterior and grounds are accessible during daylight hours without a tour. Interior lighthouse tours are offered on Sunday afternoons seasonally by the Nauset Light Preservation Society — dates vary each year, so check their schedule before planning around a tour.

Is Nauset Light Beach safe for kids? Yes, with appropriate supervision. The beach has lifeguards daily from late June through Labor Day. The surf is real Atlantic ocean — stronger and less predictable than bay beaches. Kids who are comfortable in surf do fine; very young toddlers should stay at the water’s edge in the shallow break zone. The beach has restrooms, outdoor showers, and a seasonal snack bar.

What is the water temperature at Nauset Light Beach? Atlantic water off Eastham ranges from the low 60s°F in early summer to the mid-60s°F in August at peak. The water is consistently cold relative to bay beaches. September water is often comparable to August, as the ocean cools slowly. A wetsuit or rashguard extends comfortable swimming time significantly.

Plan Your Eastham Visit with Cape Cod Certified

Nauset Light Beach is the kind of place that rewards a full day of planning — arrive early, stay through the afternoon, and leave time to catch the light along the bluffs before you head back. For verified restaurants, accommodations, and local businesses in Eastham and across the Outer Cape, browse the [Cape Cod Certified directory](#). Every listing has been reviewed for quality — no generic entries, no outdated information. Whether you need a place to stay in Eastham, a seafood spot for dinner after a beach day, or guidance on other National Seashore trails and beaches, the directory is built to point you to the right places.



Headed to the Cape with friends? Share this guide.

Every share helps a real local business get found — and keeps Cape Cod guides free. Scan to send it along.

[Explore Cape Cod →](#)



Cape Cod Certified · capecodcertified.com/guides/nauset-light-beach-guide · Real guides, real local knowledge. Verify seasonal details before you go.



FOR CAPE COD BUSINESSES

This is what being Cape Cod Certified looks like.

You just read a guide that travelers and locals download, keep, and share. The businesses inside it were chosen on merit — real vetting, real local knowledge, never pay-to-play.

Own a Cape Cod business? Get Certified and earn your place in guides like this one — in front of the exact people planning their trip and their spend.



Get Certified → capecodcertified.com/join