



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Cape Cod Rail Trail with Kids: Family Biking Tips, Best Entry Points & Stopping Points Along the Way

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



capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-rail-trail-with-kids-guide

The Cape Cod Rail Trail runs 25 miles of flat, paved trail from South Dennis to Wellfleet — no hills, no cars on the path itself, and long stretches of shaded pine forest that keep the midday heat tolerable. For families with kids, that combination makes it the most approachable bike ride on the Cape. The catch: knowing which entry point to use and which segment to target makes the difference between a great morning and a hot, overshot slog back to the car.

This guide covers the trail from Dennis through Wellfleet with a focus on what actually matters when you're riding with kids: parking, restrooms, road crossings, swimming stops, and the sections worth doing at different ages and fitness levels.

The Trail at a Glance

- **Total length:** ~25 miles, South Dennis to Wellfleet (connects to Province Lands trails near Provincetown)
- **Surface:** Paved asphalt throughout, 10 feet wide
- **Terrain:** Almost entirely flat — this was a railroad bed
- **Trail type:** Multi-use (bikes, inline skates, walkers); dogs on leash permitted
- **Massachusetts helmet law:** Helmets are required for all riders under 17

The trail passes through the towns of Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet. It runs through Nickerson State Park in Brewster and crosses the boundary of Cape Cod National Seashore in Eastham, giving families access to two of the Cape's best outdoor destinations without ever touching Route 6.

Entry Points by Town

Dennis — South Dennis (Southern Terminus)

Location: Off Route 134, South Dennis, near the intersection with Rte 6 (look for the signs to the Rail Trail from the rotary area)

The South Dennis lot is the official southern trailhead. Parking here is free and the lot is sizable, though it fills by 9am on peak summer weekends. From here you're heading north toward Brewster — the first few miles through Dennis are exposed with less tree cover, so start early or plan a shorter out-and-back.

For families: This is a fine starting point if you're renting bikes nearby and plan to ride the Brewster stretch. It's less ideal as a standalone family destination since there are no restrooms or swimming stops at the trailhead itself.

Brewster — Underpass Road

Location: Underpass Road, Brewster, just off Route 6A. Free parking lot, fills quickly on summer days.

This is arguably the best entry point for families on the whole trail. The lot sits near the trail's crossing under Route 6A — once you're through, you're quickly inside Nickerson State Park territory heading north, or you can head south toward Dennis. The parking is free and the position puts you within a short ride of Nickerson's ponds, restrooms, and camp store.

Pro tip from locals: Arrive by 8:30am in July and August. The Underpass Road lot is full by 9:30 on busy days.

Brewster — Nickerson State Park

Location: Route 6A, Brewster. Follow signs into the main park entrance.

Parking here requires a Massachusetts State Park fee in season — check the current rate before you go. Once inside, the trail runs directly through the park, giving you immediate access to Cliff Pond, Little Cliff Pond, and the park's restroom facilities. If you're bringing a toddler in a trailer and want to combine biking with a swim, starting here is the move.

Nickerson is the single best family destination on the trail. Restrooms, picnic tables, multiple ponds for swimming, and a camp store for snacks. You could park here, ride 3-4 miles in either direction, and come back for a swim — that's a complete family day without ever needing to go further.

Orleans

Location: There are informal parking areas near the Route 6A/6 junction area in Orleans. The trail passes through Orleans heading northeast toward Eastham.

Orleans is a useful midpoint stop if you're doing a longer ride, but it's not the most practical entry point for families with young kids — parking is more limited and the section here is primarily a connector between Brewster and Eastham. If you're doing the Brewster-to-Eastham run and want to pick a turnaround point, the Orleans area is a reasonable halfway marker.

Eastham — Salt Pond Visitor Center (Cape Cod National Seashore)

Location: Route 6, Eastham. Follow signs to Salt Pond Visitor Center.

The Salt Pond lot is part of Cape Cod National Seashore, so the standard CCNS fee applies (or a valid America the Beautiful interagency pass gets you in free). The Visitor Center itself is worth stopping at regardless: exhibits on the Cape's natural history, a bookstore, clean restrooms, bike racks, and staff who can answer questions. The junior ranger program here is a genuine hit with kids 5-12.

The trail passes directly by the Visitor Center. From here, heading back southwest toward Brewster is a 10-12 mile round trip — good for kids 8 and up. Heading northeast from the Salt Pond lot takes you toward Wellfleet.

Eastham — Brackett Road

Location: Brackett Road, North Eastham. Small free lot.

A quieter alternative to Salt Pond if you want to skip the entrance fee and are just after a parking spot. Limited spaces — earlier is better.

Wellfleet — Northern Terminus Area

Location: Near LeCount Hollow Road, South Wellfleet.

The Wellfleet end of the trail is quieter and less visited than the Brewster and Eastham sections. The terrain stays flat. If you're staying in Wellfleet and want to ride north toward Eastham with the kids, this is your starting point. Fewer amenities immediately at the trailhead — plan your snack and restroom stops before you go.

Best Family Segments by Age and Ability

Toddlers in Trailers or Balance Bikes: 2-4 Miles

Recommended: Start at Nickerson State Park, ride 1-2 miles toward Underpass Road, turn around, swim at Little Cliff Pond. Total riding: under 4 miles, total time with swim: 3-4 hours. The flat surface handles a heavy trailer well.

Kids 4-7 on Their Own Bikes: 4-6 Miles

Recommended: Park at Underpass Road. Ride south toward Dennis for 2-3 miles and turn back, or ride into Nickerson for a swim. This age group does better on an out-and-back than a point-to-point — they don't understand why the car isn't where they finished.

Watch the road crossings on this segment (see below). The trail crosses several local roads between South Dennis and Brewster, so keep younger kids behind you at each crossing until you signal it's clear.

Kids 8-12 on Their Own Bikes: 8-14 Miles

Recommended segment: Underpass Road/Brewster to Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham and back. This is approximately 12-14 miles round trip and takes 2-3 hours of riding with stops. It passes through Nickerson State Park, Orleans, and ends at one of the most interesting stops on the trail. Ride one-way if you're doing a car-shuttle, but most families do out-and-back.

Teens / Strong Riders: Half or Full Trail

Brewster to Wellfleet one-way is roughly 17 miles. The full trail South Dennis to Wellfleet is ~25 miles. For a one-way ride with a car shuttle, dropping one car at the Salt Pond lot and one at Underpass Road gives you a ~11-mile point-to-point through the most interesting middle section.

Best Stopping Points Along the Way

Nickerson State Park (Brewster) — Cliff Pond and Little Cliff Pond are freshwater and warm by mid-June. Cliff Pond has a small beach area with lifeguards in season (check current schedule). The camp store carries drinks and snacks. Restrooms are clean and reliable.

Salt Pond Visitor Center (Eastham) — Restrooms, exhibits, a genuinely good bookstore, junior ranger activities. Not a swimming stop, but a great break point with real shade and staff around. The bike rack situation is adequate — lock your bikes.

Great Pond and Herring Pond (Eastham) — Both ponds are accessible with short side-trail rides or walks from the CCRT in the Eastham stretch. These are freshwater swimming spots that locals use. No lifeguards, no facilities at the ponds themselves.

Wellfleet town center — If you've ridden the northern stretch, the Wellfleet commercial center is a few miles off the trail but worth the detour for a meal or ice cream if you have the energy. Check ahead for current seasonal hours.

What to Bring

- **Water:** More than you think. Shade is good but the trail is exposed in sections, especially in Dennis and parts of Wellfleet. Plan 16-20 oz per person per hour in summer heat.
 - **Helmets:** Required by law in Massachusetts for anyone under 17. Non-negotiable.
 - **Sunscreen:** Apply before you start — it's harder to stop on the trail.
 - **Snacks:** Energy dips fast on bikes with kids. Pack more than feels necessary.
 - **A basic repair kit:** The trail is smooth but flats happen. A hand pump and spare tube take 5 minutes to use and save you a long push back to the car.
 - **Lock:** You'll want to lock bikes when stopping at Nickerson's ponds or Salt Pond. A lightweight cable lock handles this.
 - **Cash:** Some parking lots and the Nickerson camp store are cash-friendly; having cash on hand helps.
-

Best Time to Go

Best overall: late May through mid-June, and September after Labor Day.

The trail is open year-round, but the sweet spot is either side of peak summer. In late May and early June, the weather is warm, ponds are starting to warm up for swimming, and you'll have the trail largely to yourself. September is equally good — daytime temps drop into the mid-70s, the summer crowds disappear, and the light changes to something distinctly fall-Cape.

July and August: The trail is genuinely crowded. Go early — by 10am on a hot July Saturday, Underpass Road is packed and the trail through Nickerson has steady two-way traffic. An 8am start gives you calm, cool conditions. By noon on a busy beach day, some portions feel like a bike highway.

What to avoid: Rainy days in peak season push everyone off the beaches and onto the trail. A cloudy Tuesday in August can be surprisingly congested. Weekend mornings in July between 9am and 2pm are the hardest conditions.

Road Crossings to Know

The trail is not fully grade-separated. Between South Dennis and Wellfleet it crosses more than a dozen local roads, some with traffic signals and painted crosswalks, others that require you to stop and look. The crossings are marked, but with kids, treat every intersection as a full stop — get everyone behind you, scan both directions, then cross together.

The busiest crossing families report: Route 137 in Harwich (just south of Brewster), and the Route 6A crossing handled by the underpass in Brewster (this one is fully grade-separated — you go under the road, not across it). Teach younger kids before you start that every road crossing means “stop behind the adult, wait for the signal.”

Bike Rentals Near the Trail

Several bike rental shops operate near the major entry points in Brewster and Eastham. Most rent children's bikes, trail-a-bikes, and trailer options. Tag-alongs (a rear attachment that lets a kid pedal behind an adult bike) are popular for the 4-7 age range and available at most shops. Check current availability and reservation policies ahead of time — rentals go fast on peak summer days, and walk-in availability is not guaranteed in July and August.

[See the Cape Cod Rail Trail complete guide](#) for a full breakdown of rental shops near each trailhead.

FAQ

How long does it take to bike the Cape Cod Rail Trail with kids?

It depends entirely on the segment. A 4-mile out-and-back from Nickerson State Park takes about 1.5-2 hours with a young child. The Brewster to Salt Pond Visitor Center round trip (12-14 miles) takes most families 2.5-3.5 hours of active riding, plus stops. The full 25-mile trail one-way is a solid 3-4 hour ride for adults and older teens — not a family-with-young-kids proposition.

Is the Cape Cod Rail Trail suitable for young children?

Yes — it's among the most family-friendly bike trails in New England. The surface is paved and flat, which makes it manageable for kids on training-wheel bikes, balance bikes, and trailers. The challenge isn't the terrain; it's pacing correctly and managing road crossings with younger riders.

Is there parking at Cape Cod Rail Trail entry points?

Yes, but availability varies. South Dennis, Underpass Road (Brewster), and Brackett Road (Eastham) have free parking. Nickerson State Park and Salt Pond Visitor Center charge seasonal fees. On peak summer weekends, all lots fill early — arrive before 9am or consider a less popular access point.

Can you swim along the Cape Cod Rail Trail?

Yes. Nickerson State Park (Cliff Pond, Little Cliff Pond) is the most popular freshwater swimming stop directly on the trail. Great Pond and Herring Pond in Eastham are also accessible via short detours. None of these are saltwater beaches — they're warm freshwater kettle ponds, ideal for kids.

Does the Cape Cod Rail Trail connect to Cape Cod National Seashore beaches?

The trail passes through Eastham and connects to the Salt Pond Visitor Center at the edge of Cape Cod National Seashore, but it does not go to the ocean beaches directly. The CCNS beaches like Coast Guard Beach and Nauset Light Beach require a separate drive or the CCNS shuttle in summer. The trail is an inland route — think ponds and pine forest, not oceanfront.

Find What You Need for a Cape Cod Rail Trail Day

The CCC directory covers bike shops, family-friendly restaurants, and outdoor outfitters across the Dennis-to-Wellfleet corridor. Whether you need a rental near Underpass Road, a lunch spot in Brewster after a Nickerson swim, or a place to stay in Eastham to make a rail trail weekend of it, [explore the Cape Cod Certified directory](#) for field-verified recommendations from people who actually use the trail.

◆ THINGS TO DO

Make a day of it

Bookable experiences that pair perfectly with this guide. Scan any code to reserve.

BOOK · FROM \$50/PERSON

Cap'n Kids Fishing Adventures

Cap'n Kids Fishing Adventures · Harwich Port

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$13

Martha's Vineyard Venture Scavenger Hunt

Let's Roam · Martha's Vineyard

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · VARIES

Cape Cod Rail Trail Bike Rentals

Idle Times Bike Shop · Orleans

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book



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/cape-cod-rail-trail-with-kids-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