



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Best Seafood on Cape Cod: A Guide to What to Order and Where to Find It

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

capecodcertified.com/guides/best-seafood-cape-cod



Cape Cod runs on seafood, but here’s the trap visitors fall into: they sit down at the biggest, most convenient waterfront restaurant with the best parking, order a frozen shrimp scampi, and leave thinking Cape seafood is overrated. The Cape’s great seafood isn’t hiding — but it rewards knowing *what* to order and *where* the real stuff is served. Do that, and you’ll eat some of the best seafood of your life. Here’s how.

What to order (the Cape canon)

If you only eat a handful of things on the Cape, make them these:

Dish	What it is	Order it when
Lobster roll	Cold with mayo (Maine-style) or warm with butter (Connecticut-style)	Always. The Cape signature.
Whole-belly fried clams	Soft-shell clams fried whole, briny belly and all	At a real clam shack
Raw oysters	Wellfleets and other local oysters on the half shell	At a raw bar, cooler months best
Clam chowder	Creamy New England chowder, clam-forward	Cup on the side of everything
Steamers	Steamed soft-shell clams in broth, dunked in butter	Summer, at a shack
Fresh local fish	Cod, haddock, striped bass, day-boat catch	Grilled or fried at a seafood-serious spot

Lobster roll: know your styles

The Cape’s most iconic order comes two ways, and both are correct: - **Maine-style (cold):** lobster meat tossed with a little mayo, on a buttered, toasted split-top bun. Clean and lobster-forward. - **Connecticut-style (warm):** warm lobster meat with drawn butter. Richer, more indulgent.

A great roll is **generous with sweet, fresh meat** and light on filler. If it’s mostly bun and celery, keep looking.

Where the real seafood is

The pattern is simple: **the less it looks like a tourist restaurant, the better the seafood usually is.**

- **Clam shacks and fish markets** — order-at-the-window, picnic-table spots near the water, often attached to a market selling the same fish.
- **Harborside spots in fishing towns** — Chatham, Wellfleet, Provincetown, Woods Hole/Falmouth — where the boats actually land.
- **Places that name their sources** — “day-boat cod,” “Wellfleet oysters,” “Chatham-landed” — care about what they serve.
- **The Cape’s Certified local seafood spots** over the big batch-cooking waterfront barns built for volume.

Red flags to avoid

- Enormous menus with seafood from every ocean — a sign of freezer, not dock.
- “Market price” with no local sourcing named.

- Empty at 7pm on a summer Saturday when the good spots have lines.
- Frozen-tasting, uniform “seafood platters” that could’ve come from anywhere.

How to eat well without overthinking it

- **Follow the lines of locals**, not the tour buses.
- **Ask what came in today** — good spots love the question.
- **Eat near the water, casually.** The best Cape seafood is often served at a window and eaten at a picnic table, not under a chandelier.
- **Pair a couple of classics:** a lobster roll and a cup of chowder, or fried clams and raw oysters, and you’ve had a proper Cape meal.

Don’t miss: a day-boat catch grilled simply at a seafood-serious Cape kitchen — proof that the best thing the Cape does with a fish is get out of its way. Order local, order simple, and eat where the boats come in.

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