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CAPE COD CELEBRATIONS

# Holiday Season on Cape Cod: Tree Lightings, Shops, and December Getaways Worth Planning

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



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There's a version of Cape Cod that most visitors never see: December. No beach traffic, no wait for a table, wreaths on every weathered-shingle door, and town centers strung with lights against a early-dark sky. It's quiet in the best way — and if you've only known the Cape in July, a holiday-season weekend here will reframe the whole place. Some towns lean all the way into it with Dickensian festivals and stroll weekends; others just glow softly. Here's how to plan a December Cape Cod getaway that's actually worth the drive over the bridge.

## Why December is the sleeper season

The Cape in December is a trade: you give up the beach and get everything else. Rates drop hard from summer highs, the restaurants that stay open aren't slammed, and the towns that were shoulder-to-shoulder in August feel like they belong to the people who live there. If your idea of a holiday getaway is a fireplace, a walk on an empty beach, and a stroll through a lit-up village with a hot chocolate, this is the coast for it.

## The tree lightings and stroll weekends

| Event                            | Town         | When (typical)            | The vibe                                             |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Nantucket Stroll*                | Nantucket    | First weekend of December | The famous one — carolers, Santa by boat, packed     |
| Chatham Christmas Stroll         | Chatham      | Early December            | Walkable Main Street, shops open late, tree lighting |
| Falmouth Christmas by the Sea    | Falmouth     | Early December weekend    | Parade, tree lighting, holiday market                |
| Sandwich Holly Days              | Sandwich     | Early December            | Historic town, Glass Museum, cozy and low-key        |
| Provincetown Holly Folly         | Provincetown | Early December            | The Cape's LGBTQ+ holiday weekend, festive and fun   |
| Hyannis Village Christmas Stroll | Hyannis      | Early December            | Main Street shops, lights, family activities         |

\*Nantucket is a ferry ride from Hyannis and worth the day trip if you plan it.

Most of the marquee strolls cluster in the **first two weekends of December**, so you can often catch more than one in a weekend if you town-hop.

## Where to base yourself

- **Chatham** — arguably the most picture-perfect holiday town on the Cape: a walkable Main Street, independent shops, and an easy stroll. Upscale, but magical in December.
- **Falmouth** — walkable, ferry-adjacent, and its “Christmas by the Sea” weekend is a genuine town celebration.
- **Sandwich** — the Cape's oldest town does quiet-and-historic better than anyone; pair it with the Sandwich Glass Museum.
- **Provincetown** — quieter than summer but far from closed, and Holly Folly gives it real December energy.

## What to actually do

- **Shop local.** December is when the Cape’s independent boutiques and makers shine — and buying here supports the year-round businesses that keep these towns alive off-season.
- **Walk a winter beach.** Nauset, Coast Guard, Old Silver — empty, dramatic, and yours. Bundle up.
- **Book a fireplace room.** Half the appeal of a December Cape trip is the inn itself: fire, chowder, no crowds.

## The practical caveats

This is the off-season, so **check what’s open before you go.** Many restaurants and some inns close or go to reduced winter hours after the holiday weekends, especially on the Outer Cape. The stroll weekends are the exception — that’s when towns turn everything on. Book those dates ahead; midweek later in December, call first.

**Don’t miss:** an early-December stroll weekend paired with a fireplace inn. It’s the Cape at its coziest, at a fraction of the summer price — the getaway locals quietly take while everyone else assumes the Cape is closed.

*Cover photo: New England holiday lights — photo by Famartin, licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons.*

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