W hat are you doing here? Isn’t the usual greeting from one holidaymaker to another. But step into a deck chair in Nantucket, the little New England island off the coast of Cape Cod, and you’ll be able to avoid it. “What made you come here?” was the refrain of passengers piped up on the bus to one of the island’s many wide, sandy beaches. And “what brought you here?” was the refrain of each shop assistant in the town’s picturesque, cobble-high street. Why? Because while it was the British who turned this little harp-shaped island into one of the world’s most important whaling capitals 200 years ago, the English tend not to holiday in Nantucket these days. But they should. This “isle of sand”, as Herman Melville described Nantucket in Moby Dick, is full of natural beauty and friendly people (who also just happen to be super-rich: estate agents’ windows were displaying $30 million properties for sale).

It’s only a 45-minute flight from Boston but we went by sea, starting our trip in Cape Cod. Our base was Woods Hole, a small town 90 minutes’ drive south from Boston airport, on the Cape’s southern tip. The Waves Hole Passage Inn offered a gentle setting in which to relax and get over jet lag. The friendly owners Martha and D.Minj gave us maps to explore the woods and nearby Racing Beach, speckled with multi-million-dollar clapboard mansions. Their imagination eclipsed $150 and reservation arrangements were familiar. Dinner for two easily eclipsed $150 and reservation policies often demand that you queue up at 2pm for a booking that evening. It’s not just the restaurants that are desirable. In Downtown Nantucket, the huge public library is like a posh bookshop; the souvenir T-shirts sport offbeat graphics and a bylaw restricts shops to stocking goods from companies with fewer than 14 identical outlets, meaning almost all the high street stores are independent. So while the Moby Dick ship that Starbucks was named after might have docked in Nantucket, the coffee chain is barred.

Nearby, the town’s Whaling Museum, with a 40ft skeleton of a sperm whale which washed up on the island in 1998, gives a fascinating history of the gruesome and dangerous industry that was established here by early European settlers in the 17th century. Too soon, it was time to leave. We stuffed our luggage into a terrifyingly small Ceressa plane, and took 45 minutes to arrive back in Boston to finish our New England break.

Staying at the Four Seasons, opposite Boston Common, meant we could walk to anywhere in the city. In spite of its luxurious proposition, the hotel is great for families – from the welcome message crayoned onto the bath to the free nappies and child-friendly city guides and spacious pool with views of the state house, we were all well looked after. At the Bristol Lounge restaurant, the vibe was relaxed rather than stuffy: a Red Sox baseball game was on in the background as we gobbled Colorado lamb, succulent steak and creamy burata salad.

The $49 CITYPass gave us access to the city’s impressive aquarium, bird’s-eye views from the top of the Prudential Tower, and the Museum of Science. However, our highlight was the Boston Foodie Tour, on which we strolled John Kerry’s neighbourhood, Beacon Hill, eating truffle pizza at Scampo in the prison hotel Liberty and gourmet nuts, chocolate and ice cream along Charles Street, with native Bostonian tour guide Audrey. All of which meant by the end of our New England tour we weren’t asking ourselves what we were doing there but when we were going back.

Details: New England

Boston is served from Heathrow by British Airways (0344 493 0765; ba.com), Virgin Atlantic (0844 209 7777; virgin-atlantic.com) and Delta (0871 221 1222; delta.com) and from Gatwick by Norwegian (0843 3780 888; norwegian.com/uk). Scott (020 8682 5030; scottdunn.com) offers four nights B&B at the White Elephant from £1,959pp including BA flights and private transfers.

Woods Hole Passage Inn, Cape Cod (woodsholepassage.com). Doubles from $289 (£222) B&B.

White Elephant Village, Nantucket (whiteelephantvillage.com). Doubles from $195 (£150) room only.

Four Seasons Boston (fourseasons.com/boston). Doubles from $665 (£532) room only.

Boston Foodie Tours (bostonfoodies.tours.com).

nantucket-ma.gov

massvacation.com

discovernewengland.org

Looking for New England

Brits left their mark on Nantucket and Cape Cod 200 years ago but now it’s all about East Coasters on ‘vacay’, says Lucy Tobin

Feel the vibe: clockwise from man, Mex appeal at Quicks Hole Taquerija, Cape Cod, a suite at White Elephant, where port and cheese is provided; touring Nantucket in a vintage car.

Over three days we explored the Cape, starting with Nantucket – the White Elephant.

Like the rest of Nantucket, the White Elephant is pricey but it does provide value for money: free croissants and coffee in the lobby each morn, port and cheese in the evening and smoothies and Haa Daaz by the pool. Squirting lobsters bath toys were gifted to our baby each night, while bikes and beach equipment could be borrowed without charge. Non-cyclists are provided with complimentary passes for the excellent Wave bus service, which stops at most of the island’s beaches.

Our island base was the family-friendly White Elephant Village, which is located in “town”, as Nantucketers call it, a five-minute stroll from the port. The millionnaire summer-Nantucket-ese who “vacay” on island in one of its seven-figure price-tagged grey shingle homes ensure you’re spoilt for gourmet choice. Of the many restaurants, we spent stand-out nights at Nautilus (succulent steak, followed by urchin and pricey chocolate and ice cream) and Millie’s (tacos against a backdrop of stunning sunsets on Madaket beach). While we didn’t see any fellow Londoners during our stay, the restaurant prices and ambience were familiar. Dinner for two easily eclipsed $150 and reservation policies often demand that you queue up at 2pm for a booking that evening. It’s not just the restaurants that are desirable. In Downtown Nantucket, the huge public library is like a posh bookshop; the souvenir T-shirts sport offbeat

Green peace: inset, breakfast at Woods Hole Passage Inn, pictured above. Above right, go cycling on Nantucket.