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ES Travel

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**

WHAT are you doing here?" isn't the usual greeting from one holidaymaker to another. But flop into a deck chair in Nantucket, the idyllic New England island off the coast of Cape Cod, and you won't be able to avoid it.

"What made you come here?" I was asked in the queue for blueberry-daubed waffles at a hotel breakfast buffet. "What brought you to Nantucket all the way from London?" 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, cobbled 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 "elbow 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).

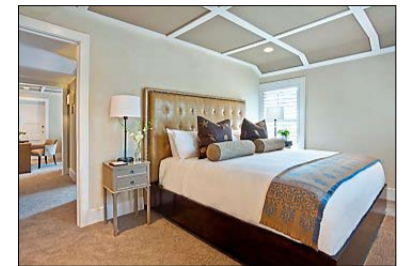
It's only a 45-minute flight from Boston but we went by sea, starting our trip in Cape Cod. Our base was Woods Hole, a small town 90 minutes' drive south from Boston airport, on the Cape's southern tip. Woods Hole Passage Inn offered a gentle setting in which to relax and get over jet lag. The friendly owners Martha and Julie gave us maps to explore the woods and nearby Racing Beach, speckled with multi-million-dollar clapboard mansions. Their imaginative breakfasts (melon, lime and ginger salad, almond-infused French toast and raspberry-oat slices) set us up for the day while there were homely rooms, a spacious lounge packed with games, books, a fridge of free drinks, and home-made cookies to return to in the evenings.

Over three days we explored the Cape, starting with Woods Hole's attractions – it's home to several marine biology research centres, with a great aquarium. We also loved the spicy Mexican fish tacos and jam-jar cocktails at farm-to-table specialist Quicks Hole Taqueria. An hour's drive took us to Breakwater beach in Brewster, where we devoured coconut almond crunch ice cream at JT's Seafood for lunch, and ducked out of near-90 degree heat at lunchtime to learn about whales in the natural history museum. At Chatham, we strolled the quaint high street, lined with 18th- and 19th-century buildings, before watching seals lol around near Fish Pier.

Then it was Nantucket time. Rather



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



Looking for New England

than take a direct ferry from Cape Cod's pretty Hyannis port, we decided to check out another island en route, so we boarded the 45-minute steamship to Martha's Vineyard. We had enough time for a stroll around the affluent island's gingerbread cottages in the Obamas' favourite summer holiday-spot before boarding a second speedy boat on to Nantucket.

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 island is three-and-a-half miles by 14 miles – about the size of Manhattan – but here there are only 9,000 permanent residents, swelling to 90,000 each summer.

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 morning; port and cheese in the evening and smoothies and Haagen Daaz by the pool. Squirting lob-

ster 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.

The millionaire summer-Nantucketers who "vacay" on island in one of its seven-figure price-tagged grey shingle homes ensure you're spoiled for gourmet choice. Of the many restaurants, we spent stand-out nights at Nautilus (with bratwurst bao, lobster a la plancha and Indonesian chicken sticks), Brandt Point (succulent steak, followed by unctuous sticky date cake) 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

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 46ft 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 late 17th century.

Too soon, it was time to leave. We stuffed our luggage into a terrifyingly small Cessna 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 ex-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 0787; ba.com), **Virgin Atlantic** (0844 209 7777; virgin-atlantic.com) and **Delta** (0871 221 2222; delta.com) and from Gatwick by **Norwegian** (0843 3780 888; norwegian.com/uk). **Scott Dunn** (020 8682 5030; scottdunn.com) offers four nights B&B at the White Elephant from £1,955pp 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 (£512) room only. **Boston Foodie Tours** (bostonfoodietours.com). ■ nantucket-ma.gov ■ massvacation.com ■ discovernewengland.org



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