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Travel

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36 Hours

NANTUCKET, MASS.

This sophisticated getaway is a bastion of conservation, offering both creature comforts and untrammelled natural wonders.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN NIMERPROH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left: Cisco Beach on Nantucket, where most of the 82 miles of beach are open to the public; Millie's, a casual seafood spot a short walk from Madaket Beach; and the Great Point Light at Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge.

By HANNAH SELIGSON

In “Moby-Dick,” Herman Melville famously called “lonely” Nantucket an “elbow of sand” that was “all beach, without a background.” The description is more appealing today. The 14-mile-long island, once a refuge for persecuted Quakers, is now a summer refuge for the global elite. But don’t worry, the one-percenters haven’t completely taken over. Thirty miles southeast of Hyannis on Cape Cod, Nantucket is a bastion of conservation, with almost 45 percent of the land in trusts, and over 800 pre-Civil War-era buildings still standing in Nantucket town. There are virtually no fenced-off beaches; most of the 82 miles of glorious coastline are open to the public. Nantucket hasn’t turned into a fossilized monument of its whaling past. Instead, it has evolved into a sophisticated getaway, with dining and shopping options that will impress even the most jaded urbanites. Its serene moors and dunes belie a fatal transience — beaches are quickly eroding, accelerated by climate change, and the island itself is projected to disappear beneath the waves in several hundred years. So enjoy Nantucket’s natural wonders while you still can, striking the right balance of timeless island pleasures and new creature comforts.

Friday

1 2 P.M. > GO NATIVE

Get to the beach as quickly as possible. En route, stop at the beloved local sandwich institution Something Natural on the outskirts of town, and pick up one of the piled-high sandwiches such as an avocado, Cheddar and chutney (\$7.25 for a monster-size half). Then walk 10 minutes east to Steps Beach, which sits on the calm harbor side of the island. Soak in the panoramic view from the top of the steps before descending onto the soft white sand.

2 4:30 P.M. > RETAIL RELIEF

Shopping on the island has evolved past “Nantucket reds” and paisley prints. Start at the men’s store Henley & Sloane on Federal Street, which sells English dress shirts in a variety of appealing patterns, along with its must-have trademark striped socks (\$25 a pair). Next door is the Charleston Shoe Company, known for its comfortable, handmade, machine-washable wedge called the Cannon (\$135). The Skinny Dip, new this year on the Old South Wharf, sells a mix of men’s and women’s clothes from independent contemporary brands. Across from it is the ingredient-conscious pop-up cosmetics company Beautycounter, also a first-timer on Nantucket. (Don’t leave the island without a bar of their charcoal cleanser; \$24.) The swimwear brand Letarte on South Water Street sells boho chic bathing suits and cover-ups for women and girls. And if you forgot a house present, stop by Bodega on Candle Street for the appealing mix of housewares, including such items as candles, place mats, picture frames and blankets.



3 6:30 P.M. > COCKTAILS AND CLAMS

Most of Nantucket’s institutions are redolent of salty-dog New England, but the bar and restaurant Cru would blend in easily in St.-Tropez. With an unrivaled location on the marina at the end of Straight Wharf, there isn’t a better place to sip a glass of rosé (\$14) and eat delicacies from the raw bar, arguably the best on the island, such as the enormous, juicy shrimp (\$5 each) and littleneck clams (\$2). Watching sailors coming in from their docked yachts is all part of the experience.

4 8 P.M. > ACK ASIAN

One of the most inventive restaurants to open in the last few years is the Nautilus, which serves Asian fusion food with a nod to the island. Some of the standout dishes are small plates: Manny’s scallion pancakes (\$9), two Hawaiian tuna poke (\$24), Day Boat Scallop sashimi (\$16), and the crispy marinated calamari (\$15). For two, with drinks, expect to pay around \$120.

5 9:30 P.M. > SWEET TREAT

There’s a reason there is almost always a line at the Juice Bar, the homemade ice cream and smoothie joint in the center of town. It’s addictive. There are no bad choices here, but make sure to get a hand-rolled waffle cup and fill it with any combination of chocolate Oreo, butter pecan, coffee and cookies & cream (two scoops, \$7.25). Insider tip: The blackberry ice cream makes for an exceptional milkshake (\$8.75). Cash only.

Saturday

6 8:30 A.M. > BY LAND OR BY SEA

Grab an egg, turkey bacon and cheese sandwich on a homemade biscuit (\$5) from the Petticoat Row Bakery. Then

select a land or sea adventure to Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge, a sprawling, remote stretch of dunes and beach accessible by deflated-tire four-by-four or boat. The overland option, run by the Trustees of Reservations, an organization dedicated to preserving land in Massachusetts, is a three-hour over-sand tour. It leaves daily from town at 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. (May to October), and takes you through some of the 1,200 acres of protected barrier beach habitat. Call ahead for reservations (\$60). Or head out by boat on a seal-watching tour led by Shearwater Excursions to Great Point, the northeastern tip of the island. The two-hour tour leaves at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. (\$95).

7 12:30 P.M. > BIKE AND BEACH

Rent bikes at Young’s Bicycle Shop (\$35 for 24 hours) and start making your way, via the Cliff Road bike path, to Madaket Beach, a wave-lover’s paradise. (From town, this is a 6.2-mile hilly bike ride that can be strenuous depending on the wind.) Along the way stop at Tupancy Links, a golf course-turned-preserve that is popular with dog owners, and walk the one-mile loop; don’t miss the path to the cliff’s edge for a view of the harbor. Another detour is the bike path spur to Dionis, a placid beach that’s great for children. Or continue on the main path, which will take you past stretches of moors, wetlands and pine groves, toward Madaket Beach. For the cycling-averse, there’s a public shuttle bus (the WAVE; \$2/ride) running between town and Madaket.

8 2:30 P.M. > MEXICAN MILLIE’S

Now that you’ve worked up an appetite biking, swimming and walking, reward yourself with lunch at Millie’s, a casual but top-notch Mexican-inspired seafood place, a two-minute walk from Madaket Beach. An ideal selection: Eel Point tacos (seared tuna with wasabi crème fraîche; \$22) and

IF YOU GO

- 1 Something Natural**, 50 Cliff Road; somethingnatural.com.
Steps Beach, nantucket.net/beaches/north.php.
2 Henley & Sloane, 18 Federal Street #A. 508-228-6209.
Charleston Shoe Co., 18B Federal Street; charlestonshoeco.com.
The Skinny Dip. Beautycounter. Letarte. Bodega.
3 Cru, One Straight Wharf; crunantucket.com.
4 The Nautilus, 12 Cambridge Street; nautilusnantucket.com.
5 The Juice Bar, 12 Broad Street; 508-228-5799.
6 Petticoat Row Bakery, 35 Centre Street; petticoatrowbakery.com.
Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge Tour, thetrustees.org/about-us/our-mission.
Shearwater Excursions, shearwaterexcursions.com.
7 Young’s Bicycle Shop, 6 Broad Street; youngsbicycleshop.com.
Madaket Beach. Tupancy Links, nantucketdogwalk.com/Tupancy.html.
Dionis Beach, nantucket.net/beaches/north.php.
8 Millie’s, 326 Madaket Road; milliesnantucket.com.
9 Cisco Brewers, 5 Bartlett Farm Road; ciscobrewers.com.
10 Ventuno, 21 Federal Street; ventunorestaurant.com.
11 Nantucket Culinary Center, 22 Federal Street; nantucketculinary.com.
Whaling Museum, 13 Broad Street; nha.org/sites.
12 Topper’s at the Wauwinet, 120 Wauwinet Road; wauwinet.com/dining.
LODGING
21 Broad. A hip yet very comfortable boutique hotel in the center of town with easy access to all town beaches, shopping and restaurants. Amenities include a large porch with a fire pit, free breakfast and a steam room. From \$139 to \$689 depending on room and season.
The Nantucket Hotel & Resort. The most family-friendly option on the island, the resort offers one- to four-bedroom suites and cottages a few minutes’ walk to the heart of town. With a kids’ club and two heated pools. In August, the lowest room category starts at \$625.

a Gibbs Pond salad (lobster salad, corn, mixed greens, tomatoes and fingerling potatoes; \$23.95).

9 4 P.M. > BEERS AND BANDS

Either bike or take a taxi to Cisco Brewers (7.3 miles biking on the main roads and bike paths from Millie’s), which, along with making their own beer, wine and liquor, turns into a party every weekend. Two bands play on Saturdays and Sundays — one at 1:30 p.m., the other at 4:30 p.m. The brewery is a paean to summer, where islanders and visitors bring their dogs and kids while sipping beer and wine in this picturesque setting. Don’t miss the blueberry sangria (\$8). Bonus: There’s a free shuttle from the visitors’ center in town to the brewery and back.

10 8 P.M. > ALFRESCO ITALIAN

Ventuno, formerly 21 Federal, serves fresh, sophisticated Italian fare. Try to reserve a table on the outdoor patio, one of the most appealing on Nantucket. Start with a pepe picante, a cocktail made with tequila and three kinds of hot pepper (\$15). Move on to appetizers of chickpea fries (\$6). Try the tagliolini verdi with fresh garbanzo beans, spring vegetables, pancetta and cured egg yolk and the spaghetti alle vongole (both \$19). Share an entree of the local catch of the day, and finish with the bomboloncini, bittersweet chocolate doughnuts (\$12).

Sunday

11 10 A.M. > TIME TRAVEL

Grab coffee and a bite at the newly opened Nantucket Culinary Center and head to the Whaling Museum, renovated in 2005. It might not be worth missing an entire day at the beach for, but it’s a must-see destination on the island’s role as the global capital of whaling, circa 1800-1850. In particular, the exhibit about the famous sinking of the whaling boat the Essex is an interactive and engaging homage to the ordeal of the sailors adrift; through November. Also worth seeing is the documentary “Nantucket” made by the Emmy award-winning filmmaker Ric Burns.

12 11 A.M. > BRUNCH BY BOAT

Topper’s, the restaurant at the Wauwinet, a Relais & Châteaux property, is best reached by boat. If you book brunch at the hotel, the stunning hourlong boat ride through the harbor — with views of the waterfront manses — is free. The menu veers toward very pricey, but steer toward the classics: house smoked organic salmon (\$15), the lobster roll (\$28) and lobster and crab cakes (\$25). Lounge in a plush green lawn chair before heading back on the boat for one last look at this wondrous spit of land.

ONLINE: AN OVERVIEW

Check out our interactive map at nytimes.com/travel.