

Go wild
Family fun
in Costa Rica

Find the perfect
playground in
Central America
page 6



Winter weekend
Arosa revealed

Make the most of the
little Swiss ski resort
that thinks big
page 4

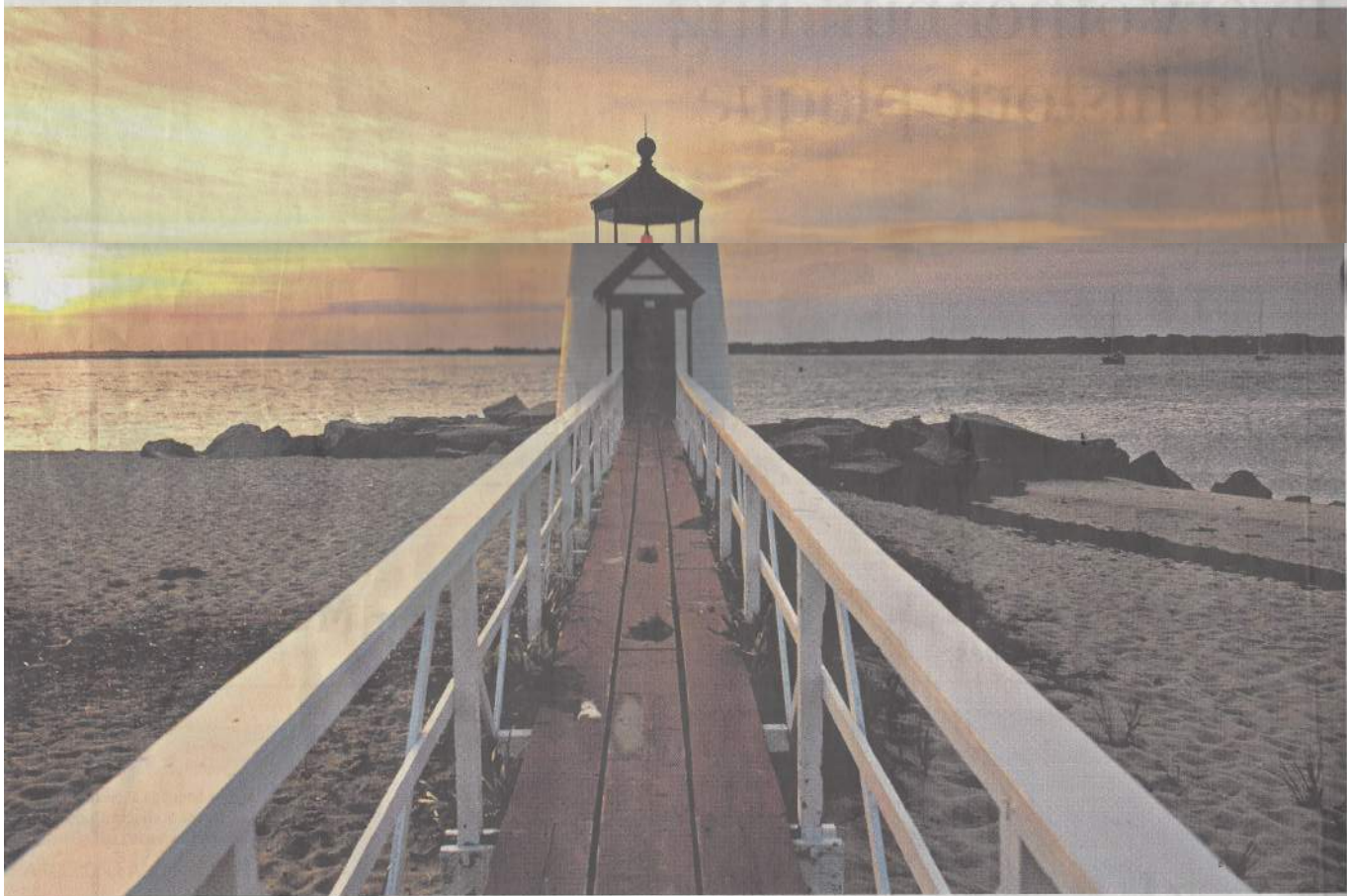


Telegraph Tours
The Masters with
Sandy Lyle

Visit Augusta in the
company of a golfing great
page 5

TRAVEL SECTION
OF THE YEAR

TRAVEL



A sea change for Nantucket

As the true story behind 'Moby-Dick' comes to our cinemas, *Kathy Arnold* travels to New England to visit the one-time whaling hub that is now one of America's most exclusive holiday retreats

COVER STORY



Great Point, left, is one of many stunning vistas on Nantucket island. Cover image: Brant Point Lighthouse



'Every other building has a historic plaque'

The ferry slowly eases into Nantucket harbour. From the deck, I can see Brant Point Lighthouse flashing its warnings and sleek yachts in the marina. The white steeple of the First Congregational Church stands silhouetted against a deep blue sky. On shore, there are old-fashioned streetlamps, Georgian-style homes and ankle-twisting cobble stones. Lying 30 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, this small island is one of America's most exclusive holiday destinations. With no advertising hoardings or fast-food outlets, the place is positively delightful.

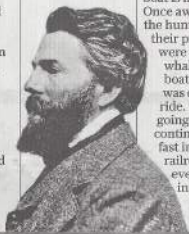
But 200 years ago, the scene was not so picturesque. The air was dense with the grime and odour of tanneries and blacksmiths, taverns and distilleries. Tall-masted ships

dominated the quayside. Nantucket's 70-strong fleet sailed the world on voyages that often lasted for years. They made this community one of the richest in the United States. And that money came from whaling.

That world is captured in the film *In the Heart of the Sea*, which opens in the UK on Boxing Day. Basing his work on Nathaniel Philbrick's award-winning book of the same name, Oscar-winning director Ron Howard recreates the dramatic story of the *Essex*, a Nantucket whaler that was attacked and sunk by an 85ft whale in the South Pacific in 1820. Years later, that real-life saga inspired Herman Melville's masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*.

To learn more, I head for Nantucket's excellent Whaling Museum. The heavyweights of the deep gave their lives and their blubber to light up British homes and factories. In 1713, the streets of Hull were illuminated with whale oil. Fifty years later, with 5,000 street lamps, London was the best lit

Herman Melville, below, was inspired to write his classic novel *Moby-Dick* after hearing of the real-life tragedy that befell the whaler *Essex*



city in the world. As for the leviathan that sank the *Essex*, "that was the first record of a sperm whale charging a ship", an enthusiastic storyteller explains during one of the regular talks. "That 80-ton mammal took on a 238-ton vessel - and it won."

Suspended from the ceiling is the impressive skeleton of a blue whale. Below, the flimsy-looking whale boat is little larger than a dinghy. Once away from the mother ship, the hunters pitted their wits against their prey. Razor-sharp harpoons were thrown; when hooked, the whale tried to free itself, pulling boat and crew for hours on what was dubbed a Nantucket sleigh ride. "Think of a roller coaster going 10-20mph," the storyteller continues. "Nothing travelled that fast in the early 1800s. Not until the railroads came." When the whale eventually tired, the team moved in for the kill.

That is the simple, if bloodthirsty, scenario of



SETTY IMAGES/LODGE BY ALAMY; EVANRATAN PHOTO



Chris Hemsworth and Benjamin Walker spy many dangers in *In the Heart of the Sea*, above; much of Nantucket is unchanged in more than 200 years, left



Moby-Dick are spliced together like a sailor's rope.

Melville made his first - and only - visit to Nantucket in 1852, to see the island he had described so vividly in his novel, published the year before. Staying at what is now the Jared Coffin House, he crossed the street to a grey-shingled cottage, these days a jewellery shop. His purpose was to meet the town's nightwatchman. "To the islanders he was a nobody," Melville recalled, "to me, the most impressive man, though wholly unassuming, even humble - that I ever encountered." He was George Pollard, former captain of the hapless *Essex*.

Whaling was a business that Melville understood. In 1841, aged 21, he journeyed to the South Pacific aboard the whaler *Acushnet*. And, having met the son of first mate Owen Chase, he knew all about the *Essex*. Melville had sailed out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, the mainland port that ousted Nantucket as the whaling capital of the world. Today, the former rivals could not be more different. New Bedford retains its grittiness, with a commercial fishing fleet that is the most profitable in the US. Thanks to careful conservation, visitors can walk in the footsteps of Melville and his characters in *Moby-Dick*.

Much would be familiar to the author. He would recognise the white-pillared Custom House and the Mariners' Home, where a sign reads: "No loose women or alcohol".

Next door, the Seamen's Bethel is still open for worship. Covering the walls are memorials to those who perished far from home from cholera, shark bites or drowning. These cenotaphs are all too real - unlike the pulpiti. In Melville's day, it was plain and simple; this one looks like a ship's prow. "It replicates the version seen in the 1956 movie of *Moby-Dick*," explains a guide, with a wry smile. "Think of it as artistic licence."

Across the street in the New Bedford Whaling Museum, I am greeted by yet another skeleton. This 66ft-long blue whale died nearly 20 years ago, but even now, its bones ooze a pale yellow oil. Nearby is a half-scale model of the *Lageta*, one of the "greatest", or most profitable, whaling ships of all time. The masts are set, the gear is rigged and on deck are the try-works, the furnaces and pots used to render oil from blubber while at sea.

After five years of seafaring, Melville settled in the Berkshire



The Nantucket Whaling Museum, above; and historic Nantucket village, below

Hills of western Massachusetts. At that point, he was penning schoolboy adventures, but on a hike up Monument Mountain, he happened to meet the author Nathaniel Hawthorne. As their friendship developed, the successful novelist encouraged the erstwhile mariner to come up with a darker and more complex yarn. And he did.

Some 20 miles away is Arrowhead, Melville's home, a shrine to the man and his work. In the book-lined study, a writing table stands by the window. Day after day, Melville looked out at Mount Greylock. Legend has it that, 150 miles from the sea, the mountain's rounded, hump-like shape reminded him of a whale. Melville had never forgotten the gruesome sags of the *Essex*; the result was *Moby-Dick*.

Eight years after the book's publication, petroleum was discovered in Pennsylvania. Although the first US oil boom rang the death knell for the whale oil industry, it threw a lifeline to the mammoths of the sea.

Nowadays, from harbours along the New England coast, boats set off once more to hunt whales. But instead of harpooners, the decks are full of holidaymakers. With cameras and phones at the ready, they scan the horizon, hoping to see one of nature's giants breach and to be the first to cry: "That she blows!"



'That 80-ton mammal took on a 238-ton vessel, and won'



Top tip

Leave your car on the mainland. Use the island's buses or rent a bike.

whale hunting. *In the Heart of the Sea* tells a more horrific tale still. When the *Essex* sank, the crew took to the whale boats but they were far from land, the coast of South America being some 2,000 miles away. What happened next is explained in the museum's current exhibition, "Slove by a Whale: 20 Men, 3 Boats, 96 Days".

As well as harpoons and delicately carved scrimshaw, displays include costumes worn by two of the film's stars, Chris Hemsworth and Benjamin Walker. Central to both book and film is the conflict between their characters, first mate Owen Chase and captain George Pollard. But the museum also has authentic mementoes of the *Essex*: a little loop of twine made by one of the survivors; a sea chest found near the site of the disaster.

Most powerful is cabin boy Thomas Nickerson's manuscript. Having survived the whale attack, he ended his days back on Nantucket. Written 50 years after the ordeal, his version

is the basis of *In the Heart of the Sea*. Nickerson's spindly script records the fate of each crew member: "missing", "died", "survived" and "shot". That is shorthand for a tragedy that included courage and cowardice, skill and misjudgment, starvation and cannibalism. Of the 20-strong crew, only eight survived; among those who died, seven were eaten.

Outside the museum, the warm sunshine lifts my sombre mood. Children slurp ice cream; the posh boutiques and cafés are busy; everyone is having a good time. I amble along brick pavements, where every other building seems to have a historic plaque. The Pacific National Bank looks much as it did 200 years ago, when it was founded to look after whaling profits. A brick-built counting house has a 21st-century ATM. Up on the hill stand the mansions of successful captains and ship owners; many are now posh inns or B&Bs. And this is where the strands of *In the Heart of the Sea* and

ESSENTIALS

Getting there

America As You Like It (020 8742 8299; americaasyoulikeit.com) offers 12-day fly-drive holidays in Massachusetts from £1,410 (two sharing). Includes return flight from London Heathrow to Boston, a whale-watching trip and 11 nights' accommodation, with three nights at the Jared Coffin House on Nantucket.

Where to stay

● **Nantucket Island**
The Jared Coffin House (001 508 228 2400; jaredcoffinhouse.com), below, is close to all the main attractions. In the hamlet of Sausonnet, the Beachside Bistro (thesummerhouse.com) serves New England seafood with an Italian twist.

The film *In the Heart of the Sea* has triggered themed activities including exhibitions and walking tours at the Whaling Museum (wha.org), and a whaling history harbour tour with Shearwater Excursions (shearwaterexcursions.com). Alternatively, explore Nantucket with Gail's Tours (nantucket.net/tours/gails), guided by a sixth-generation islander.

● **New Bedford**
Built for a whaling captain in 1846, the Orchard Street Manor (001 508 984



3475; the-orchard-street-mansor.com) has plenty of whaling memorabilia. The New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park includes the museum (whalingmuseum.org) and the Seamen's Bethel, and offers free guided walks (nps.gov/nbbe).

● Sheffield

Appealingly eccentric, the rural Race Brook Lodge (001 413 229 2596; rbldodge.com) has comfy rooms in a converted 200-year-old barn. Next door, the Stagecoach Tavern (001 413 229 8585; stagecoachtavern.net) features local produce. Hike up the Monument Mountain trail (thetrustees.org) or tour Arrowhead, Melville's home near Pittsfield (mobydick.org).

Further information

massholiday.co.uk
intheheartoftheseaonline.net