

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the eighth edition of *Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket: An Explorer's Guide*.

With the Web, you have infinite information at your fingertips. What I provide here, in a nutshell, in an old-fashioned print guide, is a reasoned assessment of all those choices. These days, I spend my precious word count on why you should visit one place over another, why one place is right for you and not for your sister. I see my job as providing “decision assistance,” as my colleague Tom Brosnahan likes to say.

During one sojourn or another, I have personally visited every place in this guide—and many, many more that don't make it into this guide. Selection is key; the very fact that a place is in this guide means it has been chosen over its brethren for any number of reasons. I hope it helps you determine where best to spend your hard-earned dollars and precious vacation time. Unlike a standalone Web review of a single hostelry, for instance, my reviews appear within a context of knowing what the other 10 or 20 hostelries in town are like.

In my position, I ferret out the great from the good. I assess those intangible qualities that make a vacation memorable. What I am looking for when I research a place to stay, for instance, is how personable and friendly the innkeepers are; how service-oriented the staff is; how clean the rooms are. Those factors can't be measured through surfing Web pages. Thankfully, you seem to sense and appreciate that; sales of this guide continue to increase nicely with each edition. We can tell that you value independent assessment. And we're grateful.

The publishers and I take reader feedback seriously (to comment, please see the “Explore with Us!” page). In fact, I attribute and embed many of my reader's comments (after verifying the information). Some of you have mentioned that you want even more restaurant reviews. So I have provided more. But there are dozens and dozens of eateries along Route 28, for instance, that I don't review. You can trust that I've investigated almost every single one of them and have chosen the best in each range, from budget to expensive, from family-friendly establishments to places for a romantic rendezvous.

One other significant way this guide differs from the competition is that I alone have researched and written it since 1994. What that means to you, the reader, is that when I say a place is the best clam shack on the Cape, you know that I have visited them all. Many other guidebooks dispatch a team of researchers to various parts of the Cape; when these authors write that a place is the best clam shack on

the Cape, what they really mean is, “This is the best clam shack in the territory I was assigned for this edition.” Furthermore, because I have written every edition of this book since its inception, you will benefit from insights I have gained over the course of many years of research.

By most accounts and calculations, almost 120,000 cars cross the Cape Cod Canal every day in July and August, and the ferries to Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket transport more than 2.4 million people each summer. So it would be a stretch of the imagination to say that these fragile parcels of prized real estate are undiscovered or unexplored. In fact, sometimes it seems there isn’t a grain of sand that hasn’t been written about.

But just when I think I’ve seen it all, a ray of bright, clear sunlight will hit the Provincetown dune shacks in such a way as to make them seem new again. I’ll strike up a conversation with a historical society curator, and she’ll regale me with stories about town affairs at the turn of the 19th century. I’ll walk down a trail in October that I previously walked in May and hear different birds and see different plants.

There is certainly no lack of information about Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket. But the way I see it, there are a few big problems with the material. Some stem from its abundance. Many of the print and Web compilations are overwhelming and indiscriminating. Much of what passes for editorial recommendation is actually just paid advertising copy. And finally, many of the special-interest brochures—for antiquing or kids’ activities, for instance—cover the entire area. So if you’re just visiting one town or concentrating on one region, you must wade through a lot of extraneous information.

Quite honestly, this guidebook is intended to be many things to many people. The publishers and I have set our sights to include a wide audience. This book is written for people who live close enough, or are fortunate enough, to be able to make many short trips to the Cape throughout the year—people who know that the region takes on a whole different character from Labor Day weekend to Memorial Day weekend. (It is a common misconception that the region closes

down from mid-October to mid-May.) It will prove valuable, as well, to year-rounders who must give advice to a steady stream of summer guests. It’s for Cape residents who may live on the Upper Cape, but don’t know much about the Lower Cape. It’s for people whose only trip to the Cape or the islands is their annual summer holiday—people who have always vacationed in Wellfleet, let’s say, but are ready to explore other places. My highest hope, though, is to introduce the *other* Cape and islands to that segment of the traveling public that assumes traffic jams, crowded beaches, and tacky souvenir shops define the region.

This book is the result of years of research, conversation, observation,

Photo by Lynette Molnar



pleasure reading, and personal exploration. I am a Bostonian who spent youthful summer vacations on Cape Cod, bicycling at the Cape Cod National Seashore, eating saltwater taffy in Provincetown, and camping on Martha's Vineyard. My introduction to Nantucket came later, in the mid-1980s; by then I was old enough to appreciate the island's sophisticated culinary treats and rich history all the more.

Since I am also a professional photographer, I am pleased to supplement my written observations and recommendations with a visual portrait. I have intentionally emphasized the region's tranquility, since conventional wisdom already associates the Cape with masses of humanity. But the photos are proof, really, that there are beaches where you can walk alone on a sunny September day.

Traveling, and writing about it, is a nice lifestyle; there's no doubt about that, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to do it. But it is work (as my friends and family, temporarily abandoned in favor of my laptop computer, will attest). The book wouldn't have been possible without the encouragement, guidance, and firsthand experience of many people who appreciate the Cape and the islands from many different perspectives.

As much as I love both four-star dining and a bucket of fried clams from a shack on the pier, I just can't eat everywhere for every edition. I have called upon my innkeeper friends, who benefit from the collective opinions of dozens of guests who eat in dozens of places night after night and then discuss their experiences the next morning over breakfast. Likewise, it is impossible to sleep in every room in every B&B, but I can assure you that I have personally visited and inspected every establishment in this guide.

As with all editions, this one benefits from the accumulated knowledge that fellow explorers have shared with me, through letters and over breakfast at B&Bs.

The folks at The Countryman Press (a division of W. W. Norton) epitomize everything that's good about the publishing industry. I appreciate their responsiveness to and respect for writers, as well as their commitment to providing a quality guidebook to the book-buying public.

I welcome readers' thoughtful comments, criticisms, and suggestions for the next edition of *Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket: An Explorer's Guide*.

Feel free to contact me at my e-mail address (cceg@kimgrant.com) or add your voice to the forum on my Web site (capecodeg.com). You may also purchase black-and-white note cards of Cape Cod through the Bindu Press section of kimgrant.com.