

The Boston Globe

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE FEBRUARY 17, 2013 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/TRAVEL

Travel EUROPE

CAPE COD ALL TO YOURSELF

See its cooler side at a leisurely pace, with plenty of elbow room



CAPE COD CHAMBER

One of the many beaches you can have to yourself in the off-season is Craigville Beach in Centerville.

BY VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

If you've been to the Cape in summer, you know how congested it can be. Hotel prices are at their peak, popular restaurants are jammed, and finding a parking spot at a beach can be problematic. Visit now and the Cape is yours in all its tranquil beauty.

"It's a huge misconception that Cape Cod closes up for the winter season," says Kristen Mitchell Hughes, vice president of tourism marketing at the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce. "It's a perfect time to explore all our villages without the crowds and the temperatures are relatively mild."

While options abound, here are some suggestions for where to go and what to do.

The **Sandwich Glass Museum** is filled with over 6,000 candy-colored treasures. Only an hour's drive from Boston in winter, it has 15 galleries and rooms devoted to molded, blown, and pressed glassmaking, including a room showing how glass colors are mixed. You can see live glassblowing demonstrations every

hour on the hour, along with special exhibits like "Glass Jewelry by Penrose Design" running through March 28.

A bit farther down the Cape is the **John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum**, devoted to the president's life on Cape Cod. Through a video narrated by Walter Cronkite and over 80 photographs taken from 1934-63, you'll see Kennedy sailing, sunning, and relaxing with his family in and around Hyannis.

Then, for some salty, crunchy fun, head to the **Cape Cod Potato Chips** factory, also in Hyannis, where you can take a free, self-guided tour to see how those thick, kettle-cooked chips are made. One of the area's most popular attractions — over 250,000 people visit each year — the tour ends in the gift shop with free samples.

Cape Cod Beer in Hyannis also offers free tours, along with tastes of their small-batch brews made and sold only on Cape Cod. "If you come on a guided tour at this time of year," says Beth Marcus, who owns the

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KEEP THE KIDS BUSY THIS WEEK. FIND VACATION DESTINATIONS AND ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT NEW ENGLAND AT WWW.BOSTON.COM/TRAVEL.

Tour, taste, take a hike, dine finely, stay over

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business with her husband, Todd, "it could be a private one. Stop by on a summer day, however, and you could be on a tour with 150 people." Guided tours share the history of the company and the beer production process, while self-guided tours can be taken any time during retail hours.

All tours end with tastes of the seasonal beers on tap (21 years or older), all of which can be purchased in the retail store, where you'll also find a huge selection of locally-made goodies, ranging from Bog Beans (chocolate covered cranberries) to hand-crafted cutting boards.

If snow falls on the Cape, it melts quickly, which is why the area's **hiking, rail, and bike trails** are ideal for running, biking, and walking this time of year. Nature's colors have become soft and muted and the hush of the season encourages the appearance of wildlife, like foxes, birds, and seals along the shore.

For a true Zen moment, bundle up and stroll down an empty beach, where you'll be soothed by the rhythmic crash of waves and refreshed by the crisp, salt air.

Reward all this activity with a warming meal and or a hot drink or glass of wine in front of a crackling fire. Most restaurants in the larger towns on Cape Cod stay open year-round, including **The Dunbar Tea Shop** next door to the Sandwich Glass Museum in a former carriage house that dates to 1740. Right out of a Beatrix Potter storybook, it has two rooms with fireplaces — one cozy and wood-paneled and the other white and airy — where you can order tea and crumpets or simple lunches, like curried chicken salad with greens and crusty bread.

Another favorite place for lunch or dinner is **Pain D'Avignon Café-Boulangerie** in Hyannis. Located next to



An original church window, the Rose Window, in the Tuesday Room in the Abbey, at the Belfry Inne and Bistro in Sandwich.

the bakery, the cafe has chunky wooden tables, where you can sit and sink your teeth into excellent salads and sandwiches like the succulent pulled-pork Banh Mi on a baguette. Come dinner, the space becomes positively romantic with white tablecloths, candles, and seasonal bistro fare, like coq au vin with root vegetables and pan-roasted sea scallops with pork belly and cauliflower puree. Cocktails, beer, and wine are available at lunch and dinner.

For some of the best oysters on the Cape, head to **The Naked Oyster Bistro & Raw Bar** in Hyannis, which has its

own oyster farm. The menu offers nearly a dozen raw and baked oyster preparations (such as with mushrooms, bacon, onion, shrimp, and cream), along with heavenly seafood dishes, including pistachio-crusted salmon and ravioli stuffed with local lobster. "In the winter, we also offer \$1 oysters every day at lunch and all day Monday," says chef-owner Florence Lowell, who adds a Gallic touch to her cooking, as a nod to her French heritage.

Out in Provincetown you'll find terrific dining at **The Mews Restaurant & Cafe**. The cafe menu features homey

fare, such as burgers and roast chicken, while the restaurant serves fancier entrees, such as almond-crusted cod with clementine citrus beurre blanc.

Should you wish to spend the night, lodging prices are at their lowest this time of year. **Chatham Bars Inn** in Chatham, for example, offers rooms for nearly half their summer price. The property has a full spa for men and women and several restaurants, including Stars, which overlooks the water and specializes in steak, but serves plenty of local seafood.

In Provincetown, **Land's End Inn** is likely to have rooms available and maybe in one of the more coveted suites, like the circular Moroccan Tower room with its domed ceiling, heavy

Winter hours: Counter service daily 7 a.m.-6 p.m.; dinner Wed, Thu, Sun 6-10 p.m.; Fri-Sat 6-11. Dinner entrees \$25-\$35.

The Naked Oyster Bistro & Raw Bar
410 Main St., Hyannis
508-778-6500

www.nakedoyster.com
Mon-Sat lunch and dinner 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m., dinner entrees \$16-\$33.

The Mews Restaurant & Cafe
429 Commercial St., Provincetown
508-487-1500
www.mews.com

Sun-Sat 6 p.m.-closing. Restaurant entrees \$22-\$35.

Chatham Bars Inn
297 Shore Road, Chatham
508-945-0096
www.chathambarsinn.com
Winter rates from \$169. Stars' winter hours Thu-Sat 5:30-8:45 p.m. Entrees \$21-\$58.

Land's End Inn
22 Commercial St., Provincetown
508-487-0706
www.landsendinn.com
Winter rates from \$155.

The Belfry Inne & Bistro
8 Jarvis St., Sandwich
508-888-8550
www.belfryinn.com
Winter rates from \$169. Bistro's winter hours Wed-Sat lunch 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m., dinner 5 p.m.-closing, Sunday brunch 11-3, dinner 5-closing. Entrees \$22-\$38.

red rugs, and North African decor. In Sandwich you might find a vacancy at **The Belfry Inne & Bistro**, known for its Tuesday Room in the Abbey. The church's original rose window lies above the bed and floods the room with a stunning gem-like light. The Belfry Bistro, also located in the Abbey, serves upscale New England fare for lunch and dinner, such as Chatham cod in a smoked haddock chowder broth.

Regardless of what time you leave the Cape, you'll zip back to Boston with little traffic.

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