

TRAVEL

If you've only experienced Falmouth by hopping on and off the Martha's Vineyard ferry, you've missed the boat

Sure, take that ferry to Martha's Vineyard — but spend a night or two in this town first.

By **Diane Bair and Pamela Wright** Globe Correspondent, Updated June 8, 2023, 9:56 a.m.



There's nothing like a bike ride along the ocean and saltmarsh during the summer in Falmouth. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

FALMOUTH — Here's a phrase you will never hear: "I was passing through Falmouth the other day ..." Why? Because "nobody passes through Falmouth. We're not on the way to anything! You have to intentionally want to come here," and take that hard-right turn when you get to the Cape, says Todd Bidwell, general manager of the [Island Queen ferry](#) to Martha's Vineyard.

Bidwell, who's been a year-round Falmouth resident since 1998, enjoys sharing the glories of the town with ferry passengers (and suggests they tack on an extra day to explore). Although Falmouth may not be the first place Cape-bound visitors choose, "we tick all the boxes when it comes to a Cape Cod experience," he says. "So many people want to relive their childhood memories of the Cape when they visit. You can do that in Falmouth."

If you've only experienced Falmouth by hopping on and off the Martha's Vineyard ferry, you've missed the boat, so to speak. Falmouth is also the home of the world-famous 7.1-mile [Falmouth Road Race](#), held in August. So, maybe you've run through it. But there are plenty of reasons to take it slow, and savor the southwest corner of the Cape: a historic Main Street, a scenic bike trail, some of the Cape's best lobster rolls, and a cool overnight option: a colony of vintage Airstream trailers. Not only that, but Falmouth claims more public golf courses than any other town in New England. After some (very pleasant) sleuthing, here's what we discovered down Falmouth way.

Down on Main Street

Falmouth's Main Street is lined with an engaging collection of specialty shops, bakeries, and restaurants. Fun stops include the well-curated Eight Cousins Books (www.eightcousins.com), an outpost of Ben & Bill's Chocolate Emporium (www.benandbillsfalmouth.com), home of lobster ice cream, and the Bean and Cod (a go-to for plump, tasty sandwiches and specialty food products.)

A bike path that rivals the Cape Cod Rail Trail

At the top of our list of what's fab about Falmouth: The Shining Sea Bikeway (www.falmouthma.gov/1362/The-Shining-Sea-Bikeway), the only bike path on Cape Cod that skirts the seashore. The 10.7-mile rail trail runs between Woods Hole and North Falmouth, with parking at both ends (and in between). Nearly one-quarter of the bikeway passes through conservation areas, winding past ponds, cedar swamps, salt marshes, cranberry bogs, woodlands, and Buzzards Bay. Fun fact: The trail is named for the lyrics of "America the Beautiful," written by Falmouth native Katharine Lee Bates. (There's a plaque in her honor along the bikeway.)



The seaside vibe is alive and well in Falmouth and its villages — including Woods Hole, shown here. DIANE BAIR

Falmouth the Beautiful

More glorious scenery awaits at Cornelia Carey Sanctuary, also known as The Knob, (www.saltpondsanctuaries.org) at Quissett Harbor in Woods Hole. A short hike to the top of the Knob reveals New Bedford to the west and the Elizabeth Islands toward the south on a clear day. Tucked away Highfield Hall & Gardens (www.highfieldhallandgardens.org; mansion tours \$10) is an architectural gem that was saved from the wrecking ball when local folk raised nearly \$9 million to restore it. Built in 1878 as a summer retreat for the Beebe family, the stick-style Queen Anne mansion now serves as a cultural center. Nature provides the art in the surrounding Beebe Woods, a 383-acre woodland laced with walking trails and a lovely landmark, the Punch Bowl pond.

Beauty and the beach

Surrounded by water on three sides, Falmouth boasts 68 miles of shoreline. The waters of Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound are warmed by the Gulf Stream here, a treat for ocean swimmers. Among the 10 town beaches, Old Silver Beach on Buzzards Bay is the most accessible to visitors. The parking lot is divided into two sections, with one area reserved for Falmouth residents, and the other side for visitors. (Arrive early to snag a parking space.) Amenities include a food stand, a bathhouse, and lifeguards. (Tip: If you're staying late in Falmouth, stop by Chapoquoit Beach, set on a west-facing peninsula, to watch the sunset.)



For a tasty bite with a view of Falmouth Heights Beach, Shipwrecked is the go-to joint. DIANE BAIR

Arguably, the best way to enjoy Falmouth Heights Beach is from a seat overlooking Nantucket Sound at Shipwrecked (www.shipwreckedfalmouth.com), the former home of the British Beer Company. There's indoor seating, too, and tasty drinks like "Wrecked Juice," their signature rum runner. Besides the usual pub grub array of burgers and fish tacos, they offer a sushi menu. Sushi + ocean + rum = not a bad way to spend an afternoon on the Cape.

A delicious bite

Sticking around for dinner? On North Main Street, the Glass Onion (www.theglassoniondining.com) offers a chic and cheery vibe, and delectable dishes. (That sweet potato gnocchi!) Water Street Kitchen (www.waterstreetkitchen.com), in Woods Hole village, offers water views, excellent service, and superb scratch cooking. Tasty mains like duck confit risotto with pancetta-braised kale come out of this kitchen.

Bars and breweries

Ahh, the lobster roll — a perennial taste of summer! The king of crustacean sandwiches in Falmouth is definitely a massive specimen called the "Monsta," constructed at Quahog Republic Dive Bar (www.quahogrepublic.com). Set in a strip mall behind a Walmart, this dark, TV-lined bar doesn't exactly shout "awesome eats," but appearances are deceiving: The Monsta boasts 12 ounces of tail and claw meat, served with a light touch of mayo on a brioche roll. (Check out their sister property, the newly-opened Leaside Pub, on the waterfront in Woods Hole.)



Come for the beer, stay for the pizza — this is why Bad Martha Farmer's Brewery is a local hotspot. DIANE BAIR

All winter long, when things are eerily quiet on the Cape, there were cars in the parking lot at Bad Martha Farmer's Brewery (www.badmarthabeer.com) in East Falmouth, a testament to its popularity. Bad Martha is known for brewing some 50 different craft beers annually, sourcing ingredients from local farms. It's a festive setting with outdoor games, live music, and lots of families; food-wise, they offer charcuterie platters, snacks, and very good thin-crust pizza. We recommend the hot sausage and pepper pie.

What lies beneath

Woods Hole isn't just a cute seaside village and busy ferry port, it's a global hub of oceanic scientific research. After you've had the requisite pastry from Pie in the Sky Bakery & Café (www.piecoffee.com), wander over to the WHOI Ocean Science Discovery Center (www.whoi.edu/who-we-are/visit-whoiocean-science-exhibit-center) to learn about the

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution's research and exploration in ocean science. Great for families, the center's exhibits feature the Titanic, the plight of the North Atlantic Right Whale, and the 'twilight zone' of the ocean, plus a shark-cam to observe great whites and a replica of the deep-sea submersible, Alvin. Nearby, the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/outreach-and-education/woods-hole-science-aquarium), the oldest public aquarium in the country, displays approximately 80 species of marine animals found in Northeast and mid-Atlantic waters.



An Airstream hotel room at AutoCamp Cape Cod. CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

Cool sleepovers

Feel like a different kind of overnight — say, a glamping tent, cabin suite, or a classic 31-foot Airstream? That's how they roll at AutoCamp Cape Cod (www.autocamp.com/capecod; Airstreams from \$199). Accommodations are clustered near a modern Clubhouse with beautiful

views of Buzzards Bay. AutoCamp loans cruising bicycles to guests, the better to explore the Shining Sea Bikeway, accessible nearby. Inn on the Sound, (www.innonthesound.com; from \$299), a B&B, boasts a stellar location: it's right across the street from Falmouth Heights Beach. Eight of the 12 guest rooms offer straight-on water views. Digs are bright, comfortable, and contemporary, set within a fully renovated, circa-1872 building.

As for that island that's 7 miles offshore ...

Daily, round-trip ferry service between Woods Hole and the Vineyard is offered year-round by the Steamship Authority (walk-on passengers and motor vehicles; www.steamshipauthority.com), and available seasonally aboard the Island Queen (passengers only; www.islandqueen.com).

For more information, visit www.capecodchamber.org.

Diane Bair and Pamela Wright can be reached at bairwright@gmail.com

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