

USA

PUT NANTUCKET ON YOUR BUCKET (LIST)

writes Jenny Piper



MOST Aussies have probably never heard of Nantucket, but they may be familiar with its neighbouring island of Martha's Vineyard, due to its Kennedy connection. Nantucket is located about 50km off the coast of Massachusetts and is the 'summer colony' for the well-heeled.

The spit of sand is home to about 10,000 residents year round but swells to over 50,000

during the summer months due its popularity as a summer vacation and tourist destination. With an array of natural features from beautiful beaches to bird watching, as well as plenty of activities such as fishing, surfing and golf, it's no wonder visitors keep returning.

The island has a rich history as well, which is part of the charm for tourists. First inhabited by the Wampanoag people, Nantucket was settled by the British who arrived in the 1600's. The island is famous

for its more than 100 years as the 'Whaling capital of the world'. The island is all about the 'whale' which features prominently in every aspect of the town. Nantucket has some of the best preserved 18th and 19th century architecture in the nation and the historical societies have worked to maintain the integrity of the 'Nantucket' style in all new constructions, giving the island a unique character which is part of its appeal for visitors.

THINGS TO DO

In summer it's all about the beaches, there are 10 main public ones around the island, which can be reached by car, bike or the local shuttle bus service. The largest continuous stretch of beach is out at Great Point, located about 19km out of town at the northern most tip of the island. The Great Point lighthouse is one of three iconic lighthouses on the Island and is part of the Coskata-Coatue Wildlife refuge, a great place for birdwatchers, picnickers and surfers. Rent a jeep to take you out there, as it can only be accessed by 4WD.

Hire a bike to explore the island – with over 40 kilometres of bike paths that criss-cross the island, it's a great way to get out of town and see some of the natural beauty. Cycle across the island to Sianscot for lunch; on the way you pass moors, cranberry bogs and the Sankaty Head Lighthouse. A round trip ride is about 25km. Most bike rental stores will also deliver the bicycle to your accommodation.

For a bit of culture there is a plethora of museums and art galleries. With a rich history as an artist's enclave there are numerous galleries to meander through, with nautical and landscape paintings, abstracts and sculpture from many of the local artists. There are a number of museums devoted to the various past times of the island over the years. The Whaling Museum is a fascinating place to visit and discover the central part that whaling had in shaping the Island and its culture. Or take a walking tour visiting various historic sites such as the Old Mill dating back to 1746.

Wander around the cobbled streets of the historic old town - with its many shops and restaurants you can while away many hours. Nantucket prides itself on its culinary experience – with a multitude of dining options most of which feature local produce, especially seafood and of course, lobster! Or visit Cisco Brewers to sample the local brew.

ACCOMMODATION

There is a variety of options of where to stay on the Island. In Nantucket town there are plenty of old whaling merchants homes which have been converted into Inns and B&Bs. There is also an array of hotels and resorts. Or at any of the islands various beaches are small villages with cottages available for rent. But with home values among the highest in the USA (one grand estate on the Island is for sale for a mere \$42 million!), accommodation is also pricey particularly in peak summer season. Better rates can be had in autumn and spring but many of the islands restaurants and shops close down after the summer season.

Nantucket is a unique place to visit and well worth the effort to get there. See how the other half live, appreciate the quaint and pretty architecture, see the windswept beauty of the Atlantic coast. But be prepared for crowds in summer and a big credit card bill.



Need to know

WHERE TO STAY

The Nantucket Inn is located a few kilometres out of town so is an affordable option for visitors. An island favourite, the rooms are clean and comfortable and as they say – “the courtyards are green, the pool is wet, and Mom’s breakfast is hot and ready”.

A shuttle service for guests runs all day into town, with an increased frequency at night and the staff are friendly and helpful. For more info www.nantucketinn.net

GETTING THERE

Travel to Nantucket is by Air or Sea only. The Steamship Authority provides daily one and two hour ferries for passengers and vehicles from Hyannisport (on Cape Cod MA). The one hour high speed ferry is for passengers only and leaves on a regular schedule docking close to town.

