

CLOSE-UP ON CHATHAM



# Old and in the waves

## Historic Cape Cod village offers simple pleasures amid seaside beauty

By Ron Driscoll, Globe Staff | June 4, 2008

Like many Colonial-era coastal towns, Chatham has evolved with the tides of commerce. Since William Nickerson bought 4 square miles of land from the Monomoyick tribe in 1656, the town has relied, in turn, on farming, maritime trade, fishing, and tourism, and its success in retaining links to its past earned it recognition in 2007 from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Visitors come here for the simple, old-fashioned pleasures the town affords: Friday night band concerts on the green, college summer league baseball, offloading of the day's catch at the fish pier. The waters off Chatham were the site of many shipwrecks in the 19th century, when they were part of one of the world's busiest shipping routes. Some of those wrecks were caused by Chatham's mooncussers, men who waved lanterns on murky nights in an effort to disorient sailors into grounding their ships so they could loot the cargo. Perhaps a bit of that rogue spirit lives on in a popular bumper sticker spotted around town: "Chatham, Mass.: A quaint little drinking village with a fishing problem."

### Do

The town boasts six public beaches along Nantucket Sound, two on Pleasant Bay, and four more on freshwater ponds ([chathaminfo.com/beaches](http://chathaminfo.com/beaches)). The best known are probably **South Beach** on Shore Road and **Hardings Beach** in West Chatham. South Beach falls away from **Chatham Lighthouse** toward the famous Chatham Break, where a 1987 storm breached the barrier Nauset Beach and allowed the Atlantic to crash through into Chatham Harbor. There is a 30-minute limit on parking at South Beach, so those hoping to spend the day will need to bike or be dropped off. Hardings is a popular windsurfing and kiteboarding venue that offers a bathhouse, lifeguards, and two large parking lots. The **Chatham Railroad Museum** (153 Depot Road, 508-362-3225, open 10 a.m.-4 p.m., mid-June to mid-September, donations accepted) is housed in a station that operated from 1887-1937 and contains hundreds of railroading artifacts, including a 1918 caboose from the New York Central System. The **Monomoy Theatre** (776 Main St., 508-945-1589, June 24-Aug. 30, [monomoytheatre.org](http://monomoytheatre.org)) and its Ohio University Players have been staging shows for 51 years. This year, "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds" features longtime Chatham resident and American theater grand dame Julie Harris, from Aug. 19-23.

### Play

The **Chatham Athletics** of the Cape Cod Baseball League (Veterans Field, 750 Main St./Route 28, 508-945-3841, [chathammas.com](http://chathammas.com)) open their 44-game season June 14 with a home game against the Hyannis Mets. Admission is free; A's players pass the hat for donations. The team also conducts **baseball clinics** in seven weeklong sessions (\$60 for ages 6-12, \$90 for 13 and older). Perhaps your son or daughter will learn from a future World Series MVP. Mike Lowell played for the A's in 1994, and an estimated 1 in 7 current major leaguers honed their skills in the Cape League. If you'd rather learn to fly, **Chatham Airport** (240 George Ryder Road, 508-945-9000, [chathamairport.com](http://chathamairport.com)) offers flight instruction, aircraft rentals, and three-passenger scenic flights over the Lower and Outer Cape for \$105-\$175. **Spirit Well Massage and Yoga** conducts a yoga class on South Beach at 7:30 every morning, starting June 21 (\$10, no preregistration required, [chathamyoga.com](http://chathamyoga.com), 508-945-7643). **Monomoy Island Excursions** offers 1 1/2- to 3-hour trips on a 43-foot catamaran to the 2,700-acre Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge and the estimated 300 to 400 gray seals who call it home (702 Main St., Harwichport, 508-430-7772, \$30-\$35, [nantucketislandferry.com/cruises.shtml](http://nantucketislandferry.com/cruises.shtml)).

### Spend

Chatham is often called the "first stop of the east wind," and the town center near the water is often enveloped in fog on summer nights. Main Street offers upscale shopping and dining, and there are many other stores and shops along routes 28 and 137 leading into town. The **Chatham Jam and Jelly Shop** (10 Vineyard Ave., West Chatham, 877-JAMSHOP, 877-526-7467, [chathamjamandjellyshop.com](http://chathamjamandjellyshop.com)) boasts that it sells the largest variety of homemade

preserves on the Cape, more than 100 at last count, including cranberry jalapeno. **Marion's Pie Shop** (2022 Main St./Route 28, 508-432-9439, [marionspieshopofchatham.com](http://marionspieshopofchatham.com)) has a dazzling array of breakfast treats, breads, soups, and fruit, meat, and seafood pies that "put grandma's pies to shame," according to Yankee magazine. **Where the Sidewalk Ends** bookstore and gift shop (432 Main St., 508-945-0499, [wherethesidewalkends.book sense.com](http://wherethesidewalkends.booksense.com)), is housed in an airy, three-level building. The store sponsors a series of literary lunches at the Chatham Bars Inn; the July 22 event will feature Alice Hoffman, Ann Hood, and Sara Young. The **Chatham Candy Manor** (484 Main St., 800-221-6497, 508-945-0825, [candymanor.com](http://candymanor.com)) has been around since Naomi Turner set up shop in July 1955, hoping to make enough money to be able to afford a house rental for August. If not, she and daughter Naomi, who now runs the thriving business, would sleep in their DeSoto station wagon. The cases are filled with fudge, chocolates, and candies, from whimsical to artistic.

## Fuel

The **Impudent Oyster** (15 Chatham Bars Ave., 508-945-3545, entrees \$14-\$29) offers a choice of seafood specialties, and the "devils on horseback" appetizer (\$9.95), seared scallops wrapped in bacon in a butter-lemon sauce on toast points, is not to be missed. The place is adorned with benches and stained-glass windows from a Maine church. **Vining's Bistro** (595 Main St., 508-945-5033, entrees \$17-\$30) is a longtime favorite in the heart of downtown with an eclectic menu. The **Anytime Café** (513 Main St., 508-945-4080, lunch \$5-\$10) offers salads, soups, and artisan sandwiches, along with a room-length wall mural by prolific local artist Hans de Castellane. **Larry's PX** (1591 Main St., West Chatham, 508-945-3964, lunch \$5-\$9) is a locals' spot that serves breakfast and lunch, including sausages with gravy and biscuits, fried clams, and fish tacos. The **Chatham Cookware Café** (524 Main St., 508-945-1250, lunch \$4-\$7) has a plentiful batch of baked goods and sandwiches, including our favorite, the Riptide, a panino with turkey, bacon, scallions, dill havarti, and cranberry-chipotle-sour cream sauce. The **Monomoy Coffee Co.** (447 Main St., 508-945-5662) is a tiny shop that provides espresso, cappuccino, and bakery items at the midpoint of your Main Street meanderings.

## Party

For abundant night life, you'll need to venture west toward Hyannis or north to Provincetown. The **Chatham Squire** (487 Main St., 508-945-0945, [thesquire.com](http://thesquire.com)) has been the hangout for both locals and the summer crowd for 40 years. It offers a lively atmosphere, embellished by karaoke on Tuesdays and open mike on Thursdays. The **RooBar** (907 Main St., 508-945-9988, [therooobar.com](http://therooobar.com)), part of a local restaurant/bar group, frequently has a DJ or live music, especially in the high season. The **Chatham Bars Inn** (see Rest) features a pianist on Saturdays in its tavern.

## Rest

The **Chatham Bars Inn** (297 Shore Road, 800-527-4884, 508-945-0096, [chathambarsinn.com](http://chathambarsinn.com)) has been the centerpiece of Chatham Harbor since 1914 and has just completed a \$25 million renovation. The inn sits on 25 acres overlooking Pleasant Bay and the Atlantic, and it has added extensive spa services to its mix of fine dining and recreation. The **Chatham Wayside Inn** (512 Main St., 800-242-8426, 508-945-5550, [waysideinn.com](http://waysideinn.com), \$110-\$495), a former stagecoach stop, offers 56 spacious rooms in the center of town, and the adjacent Wild Goose Tavern serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The **Old Harbor Inn** (22 Old Harbor Road, 800-942-4434, [chathamoldharborinn.com](http://chathamoldharborinn.com), \$149-\$319) is a Select Registry property with eight guest rooms and lovely grounds just a stone's throw from Main Street. The **Captain's House Inn** (369 Old Harbor Road, 508-945-0127, 800-315-0728, [captainshouseinn.com](http://captainshouseinn.com), \$185-\$415) exudes understated elegance in an 1839 Greek Revival-style mansion. ■