

Welcome to TimesPeople
What's this?

TimesPeople Lets You Share and Discover the Best of NY...

1:00 PM

Get Started No, thanks

HOME PAGE TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

Get Times Reader Log In Register Now

The New York Times

Escapes

Search All NYTimes.com

Go

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

Search

Go

Plan Your Trip

Go

Adobe® Acrobat® Connect™ Pro Web Conferencing
» Get started today



Sounds of Silence on Cape Cod



Erik Jacobs for The New York Times

In winter, Lighthouse Beach in Chatham, Mass., like much of Cape Cod, is filled only with unspoiled vistas.

By LAURA M. HOLSON
Published: March 6, 2009

TO enjoy [Cape Cod](#) in winter, you must close your eyes and listen.

Multimedia



Slide Show

[Cape Cod in the Off-Season](#)



Cape Cod, Mass

There is a symphony of cold in sound: A lone seagull dives for an errant fish offshore, a far-off splash echoing across the emptiness of gray and blue. Frozen ice and sand crackle underfoot as a golden retriever bounds along the beach. The gentle whistle of icy breath, the muffled scratch of a coat collar pulled tight around the neck.

But the real allure of a winter day at this warm-weather getaway is what you don't see when your eyes are open. Absent are the lines of cars snaking through jammed parking lots of summer or the dance of sunburned beachgoers who slap and yell at stinging waves. The Cape in winter is like a carnival park past its prime, empty but approachable because it is so familiar.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

ARTICLE TOOLS
SPONSORED BY



Times Delivers E-Mail



Sign up for special promotions from NYTimes.com's premier advertisers.

Sign Up

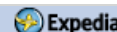
[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

At 6.5 feet, kick back in the longest Business Class seats in the world. All for this one moment.

learn more

lufthansa.com/moments

BOOK FLIGHTS



FLIGHT HOTEL PACKAGES
 CAR CRUISE ACTIVITIES

Leaving from: Going to:

Departing: Returning:

Adults: Seniors: Children:

[Search for flights](#)

MOST POPULAR - TRAVEL

E-MAILED BLOGGED

1. [Ski Report: In Utah, Getting a Lift to the Top of Powder Mountain](#)
2. [Luxe Meets the Lake in 'Real' Florida](#)
3. [36 Hours in Doha, Qatar](#)
4. [Frugal Traveler: In Milan, the Best Meal Deal in Italy?](#)
5. [Asia-Pacific Issue | Choice Tables: Tastes of Bali With a French Accent](#)

Cape Cod, Mass.

And along the shore, there is always the promise of spring, when small waves frozen in sand will retreat with the thaw and slip back to sea, waiting to embrace the crowds when they arrive once again.

That, at least, is what crossed my mind as I stood one crisp afternoon in January on Coast Guard Beach, 15 miles north of [Chatham](#), Mass., the town situated at the Cape's elbow. I was seeking a tonic for my post-New Year's blues. As I wound my scarf tighter around my neck to ward off the bitter cold, I noticed a single [fishing](#) boat bobbing in the [surf](#) near shore. A rugged fisherman onboard waved in my direction, then hauled up a heavy metal cage from the water, hand over gloved fist.

It was easy to imagine what the Lower, or Outer, Cape (actually the easternmost part, stretching north from the elbow to [Provincetown](#)) might have looked like in the early 1700s, when settlers plucked abundant mackerel and cod from the waters along the northeastern shore. Nearly a century later, the author John Hayward described the area in *The New England Gazetteer* as a place "noted for its fine sailors and men of superior nautical talents." But it was a place of hardship too, he wrote, where widows "had lost their husbands by the dangers of the sea."

These days, the biggest hardship in winter is finding that a favorite fried clam shack is closed for the season. But in the off-season, the unfettered charm of the area's small shore towns is easier to explore.

[Beaches](#) like Lighthouse Beach in Chatham are empty, their unspoiled vistas rimmed in blue and crystallized white froth. Empty houses line the gullies around Pleasant Bay, where lonely chunks of frozen ice bunch along the water's edge, ushered together by the drifting tide.

Chatham has a year-round population of about 6,600, and it is a bustling tourist town in high season. Wealthy Bostonians summer in stately shingled houses, a patchwork of gray and white against a blue sky. In January though, the homes almost disappeared into a somber montage of knee-high drifts of powdery snow and silver-colored storm clouds overhead.

Small bed-and-breakfasts are plentiful, although many winter travelers stay at the Chatham Bars Inn, a resort and [spa](#) where a \$1,100-a-night oceanfront suite in summer can be had for one-third the price this time of year. The inn has two white Land Rovers to shuttle guests the few blocks to and from downtown. And while I have never been a fan of hotel spas, theirs was considerable. Masseuses rub hot rocks down the spine to loosen tight muscles. And each patron has a private steam room scented with lavender oil.

Chatham sits 30 miles east of [Sandwich](#), which has a thriving community of antiques sellers, although many items I saw were high priced even by New York standards. It is even closer to [Wellfleet](#), to the north, where [oysters](#) and artists abound.

I decided to stop in East Sandwich with my friend Lori Silver, who knew about a workshop that taught novice cooks how to make jam and other preserves. I could not imagine a more comforting way to spend a snowy afternoon than in a warm kitchen stirring pots of melting sugar and bubbling fruit. So we wended our way along Route 6A, Cape Cod's oldest main thoroughfare, past a blueberry farm and boardwalk-covered salt marshes to the Green Briar Nature Center and Jam Kitchen.

Oddly, it is exactly as advertised: a large kitchen with two rows of waist-high burners in

6. [Asia-Pacific Issue | Globespotter: The Perils of Hong Kong Jade](#)
7. [36 Hours in Shanghai](#)
8. [Rituals: Bliss and Sociability Where the Earth Draws a Bath](#)
9. [Asia-Pacific Issue | Surfacing: Still Hip After Blossoms Fade in Tokyo](#)
10. [The Calm of the Swamp in Georgia](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)



The New York Times **TECH**
nytimes.com/tech

Capitalism, Apple style

Also in Tech:
[Cut, copy and paste on the iPhone](#)
[What is the iLane?](#)
[A PC for your kitchen](#)



nytimes.com/business
Where the conversation begins ▶

How will their business affect your business?

ADVERTISEMENTS



Rediscover **KENNEDY.**
Order now ▶

[Advertise on NYTimes.com](#)

LAST MINUTE CAPE COD AND THE ISLANDS HOTEL DEALS



Radisson Blu Hotel, Amsterdam	\$195
Radisson Blu Hotel	\$182
Parc Fifty Five Hotel - Union Square	\$198
Dreams Los Cabos Suites Golf Resort &...	\$819
GrandStay Residential Suites - Madison	\$80

the center, pots stowed in shelves overhead and long stretches of copper-topped counters, which framed windows overlooking a frozen pond. The house was built in the 1780s, and in 1903, Ida Putnam opened a tearoom in it for wealthy travelers making the trek to the Cape from [Boston](#).

After the tearoom faltered, Ms. Putnam turned it into a small workspace to make her popular preserves. It flourished in the late 1920s, and the kitchen still produces 27,000 jars a year.

I was bummed to learn that we missed the apple-pear-jam class, a bargain at \$38, as each participant gets at least four jars to take home. To soothe our disappointment, we bought brandied apricots to eat later. And we took a short walk through the nature preserve where the author Thornton W. Burgess roamed as a child and which was the inspiration for the children's books he wrote about Peter Rabbit and his woodland friends.

Cold weather gear — including heavy, snow-ready boots and wool hats — is essential for beach walks and forest hikes. But when the sun goes down, and the temperature dips into the teens, the best place to be is indoors. The evening has a somber quietude all its own.

At the Chatham Bars Inn, I saw several guests peering out their windows late at night, marveling at the muted dusting of stars against a blue velvet sky. The night was as silent as it was dark, except for the caw of a lonely [bird](#) in flight.

Of course, no trip to the Cape is complete without a meal of oysters. I have never been a fan, but Lori persuaded me that if there was anyplace to try them, it was in Wellfleet. The concierge suggested lunch at the Wicked Oyster, a restaurant in a converted old house, so we decided to spend an afternoon perusing galleries there and taking in the local fare.

The restaurant was packed with locals, a sign our concierge had steered us well. I ordered oyster stew — five oysters freshly shucked and poached in a bowl of steaming chowder — as well as a plate of panko-breaded fried sole. Lori ordered oysters on the half shell and scallops caught that morning. It was a delicious bargain, about \$35 each, including a latte and tip. And while we waited for our meals, a woman at the bar told us about a clothing sale in town where everything was 70 percent off.

Wellfleet, whose name many believe comes from the words “whale fleet” and was incorporated in 1763, is less developed than Chatham, so the downtown was more spare. But what it lacked in abundant shopping was made up in chic appeal.

There are several [art](#) galleries along Commercial Street, including the Left Bank Gallery, which has two locations in town, the other on Main Street. There, I found a hand-painted miniature pin by the artist Christina Goodman, which was discounted 30 percent.

There are several places to walk after a leisurely lunch if the shops are closed, including along Duck Creek; Marconi Beach, part of the Cape Cod National Seashore on the Atlantic, facing east; and the more-sheltered Mayo Beach, which faces Wellfleet Harbor.

Of course, in winter there is always the threat of snow, which, while beautiful from a hotel room with a fireplace, is less so if you are driving in it. By the time we started home, a snowstorm that had halted traffic outside Boston lifted, though, and snowplows quickly cleared the roads so traffic was brisk.

[Park Inn, Glasgow City Centre](#)
[\\$91](#)

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

[Exploring Cape Cod?](#)

Get All the Tourist Info You Need! Attractions, Museums, Sports & More
www.MassVacation.com/CapeCod

[Cape Cod Beach Hotel](#)

Cape Point Hotel. Minutes from Hyannis. Great service and rates.
www.capepointhotel.com

[Cape Cod Trolley](#)

Travel in style on one of our old fashioned trolleys.
 Weddings/Proms
www.CapeDestinations.com

It was a wondrous sight on the highway near Plymouth: a stretch of five-story-high trees towering like long-limbed marionettes slathered in marshmallow cream. Even as the traffic picked up, the calm of the frozen Cape lingered. So much so, I closed my eyes and pretended the honk of a nearby car was really the cry of lonely seagull beckoning me back to the shore.

IF YOU GO

[Chatham](#), Mass., is about a two-hour drive from either Logan International Airport in [Boston](#) or T. F. Green International Airport in [Providence](#), R.I..

The **Chatham Bars Inn** (297 Shore Road, Chatham; 508-945-0096; www.chathambarsinn.com) is a resort and [spa](#) with 217 rooms and suites starting at \$195.

The **Carriage House Inn** (407 Old Harbor Road, Chatham; 508-945-4688; www.thecarriagehouseinn.com) has six rooms starting at \$139. It is closed in March and opens April 1.

Visitors can learn to make jam at the **Green Briar Nature Center and Jam Kitchen** (6 Discovery Hill Road, East Sandwich; 508-888-6870; www.thorntonburgess.org), run by the Thornton W. Burgess Society, which continues the conservation work of the children’s book writer, who was a Sandwich native. Two-hour jam classes cost \$38 for nonmembers.

The **Left Bank Gallery** has two locations in [Wellfleet](#). One has large [art](#) pieces (25 Commercial Street; 508-349-9451; www.leftbankgallery.com) and the other small works and jewelry (3 West Main Street; 508-349-7939).

At the **Wicked Oyster** (50 Main Street, Wellfleet; 508-349-3455) a bowl of oyster stew costs \$11, while an entree of baked meatloaf topped with smoked bacon and garlic mashed potatoes costs \$17.

Abba (89 Old Colony Way, [Orleans](#); 508-255-8144; www.abbarestaurant.com) serves Mediterranean cuisine with Thai elements, like an appetizer of steamed mussels in coconut milk, pineapple and basil (\$12) and Hawaiian sweet king prawns in a garlic oil paprika sauce (\$29).

[More Articles in Travel »](#)

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

[Cape Cod Luxury Homes](#)

Luxury Fractional Second Homes Own a vacation home on Cape Cod.
www.CapeCoddorResort.com/club

[Get Big Deals in Cape Cod](#)

On Lodging, Dining, & Attractions Download Free Pass & Save Over 25%!
www.MassVacation.com/CapeCod

[Qatar Travel Vacations](#)

Go Exploring! Enjoy authentic local experiences & relax in luxury hotel
ichotelsgroup.com/InterContinental

Past Coverage

- [CULTURED TRAVELER | TRURO, MASS.; Cape Cod, in Edward Hopper's Light \(August 10, 2008\)](#)
- [AWAY; A New Chapter on Cape Cod \(April 25, 2008\)](#)
- [In a '64 T-Bird, Chasing a Date With a Clam \(August 29, 2007\)](#)
- [CHOICE TABLES: CAPE COD; In Clam-Shack Country, the Classics Reign \(August 12, 2007\)](#)

Related Searches

[Travel and Vacations](#)

Mentioned in This Article

[Chatham](#) | [Cape Cod](#) | [oysters](#) | [Provincetown](#) | [Boston](#) |

[Get E-Mail Alerts](#)

Cape Cod (Mass)
Beaches
Bed-and-Breakfast Lodgings

Get E-Mail Alerts
Get E-Mail Alerts
Get E-Mail Alerts
Orleans | Wellfleet | Providence
| Sandwich

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



ESCAPES »



Luxe Meets the Lake in 'Real' Florida

MUSIC »



Finding Fame in Austin in the Internet Age

MOVIES »



Best Man Wanted. Must Be Rush Fan.

OPINION »

Op-Chart: The States of Iraq and Afghanistan

A comparison of statistics from both conflicts.

ESCAPES »



Everybody Into the Rental Pool

OPINION »



Letters: On Torture and the Rule of Law