

Must-See Attractions for an Authentic Cape Cod Experience



written by [Hertz](#) | September 20th, 2017 | 4 minute read

Cape Cod is the 70-mile peninsula shaped like a flexing bicep making a fist that juts from the southeast corner of Massachusetts. About 100 miles from Boston and Logan International Airport and affectionately called "The Cape" by locals, it's best known for legendary seafood caught in lobster bays that are part of 556 miles of unspoiled beaches. The area is the origin of the classic Cape Cod-style home that is popular across America, and the architecture is a core part of its landscape and spirit.

The Cape's must-see locales integrate into the daily lives of year-round residents like the scent of honeysuckle and freshly mowed summer grass. Understanding the area's unique past, geography, and many-sided personality helps you plan an authentic Cape Cod experience that is exactly right for you.

A Place in History

Arriving anywhere on the Cape and breathing in the salt air, you immediately savor its long connection with the Atlantic Ocean surrounding the peninsula. The 16 lighthouses that spread across its shores provide evidence of the Cape's fishing and whaling past. According to legend, Cape Cod played a central role in America's founding. The locals assert that 10th-century Icelandic Viking Leif Eriksson was the first European to make the voyage to America and that he landed at the Cape. Popular history dictates that Wampanoag Indians met the Mayflower when it anchored in Provincetown Harbor on the Cape's far northeastern tip in 1620.

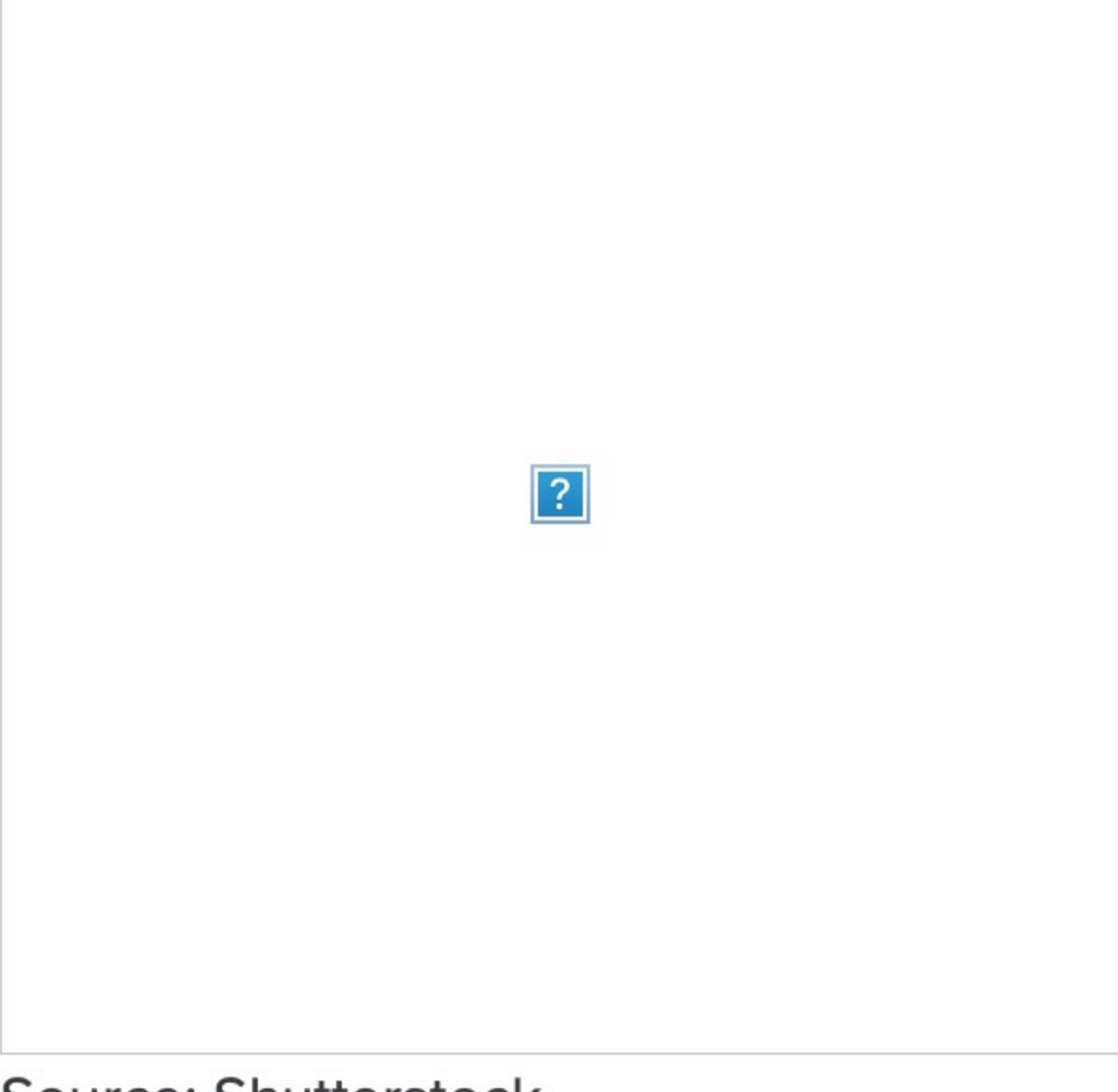
If you're an American history buff, you can learn more about Cape Cod's earliest European explorers at the [Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum](#).

One Cape Cod, Four Distinct Regions

If you think of the Cape as an arm attached to a shoulder, imagine its four parts or separate regions with distinct personalities. Each has its own towns comprised of individual villages, and you can choose countless activities in each of them, including catching hermit crabs or mussels, hiking dunes, and chasing fireflies with the kids.

Upper Cape

The "shoulder" is located far west, nearest to inland, and is home to Bourne, Falmouth, Mashpee, and Sandwich, the Cape's oldest and most historic town. Colonial charm abounds here, as does a love of nature. Visit Woods Hole, the scenic seaport location of a thriving intellectual community with a famed [oceanographic institute](#), an aquarium, a marine biology lab, and a history museum. You can also take the ferry to Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket from the Upper Cape.



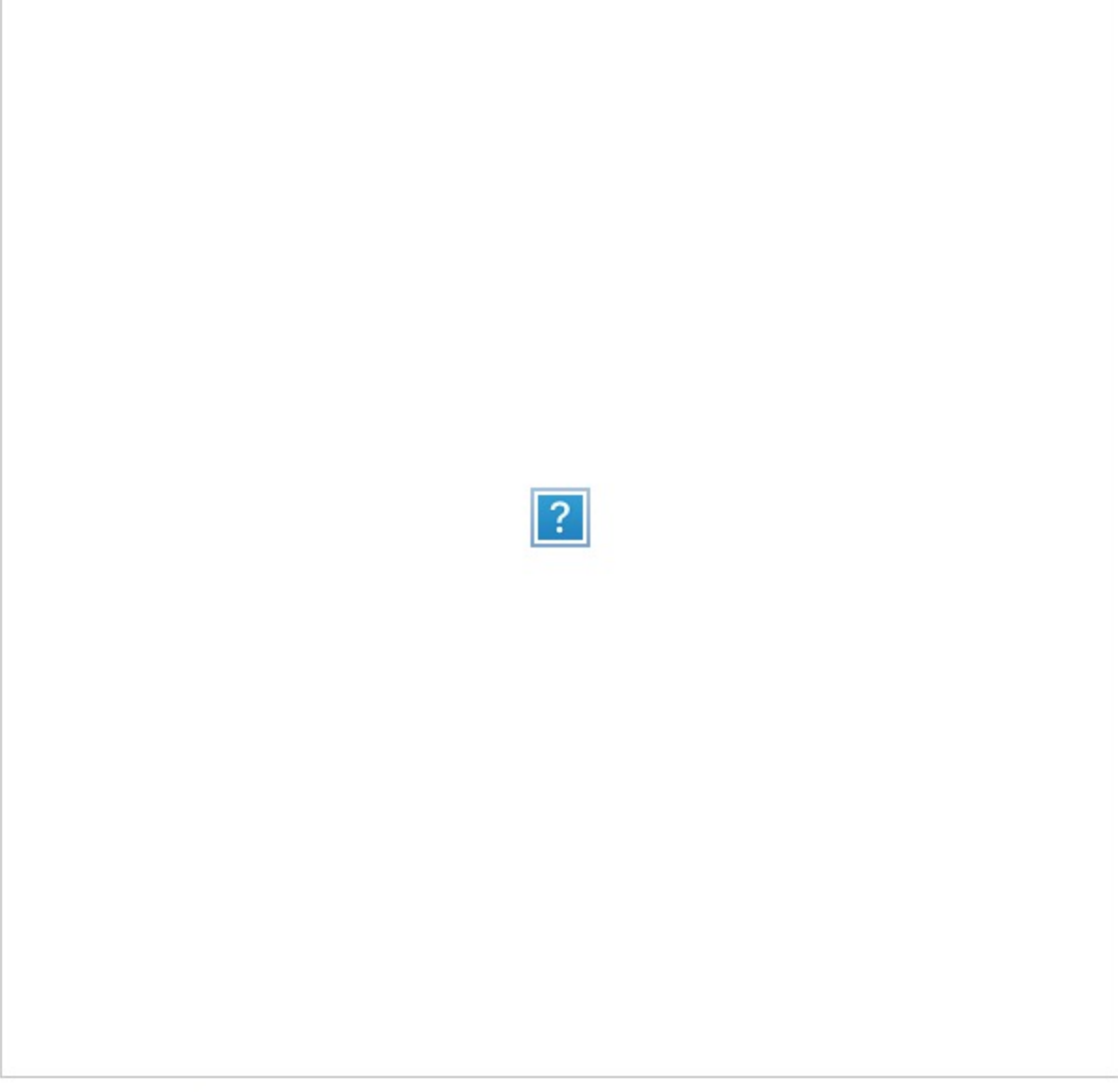
Source: Shutterstock

Mid-Cape

In the middle of the peninsula or "bicep," Mid-Cape is a getaway for visitors and a popular spot with the locals for shopping and dining. The towns consist of well-heeled Barnstable, Yarmouth, family-friendly Dennis, and Hyannis, home of the Kennedy clan and the Cape's largest city. Stop by the [John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum](#) to learn more about JFK and the time he spent on Cape Cod.

Lower Cape

Located in the "elbow" or "quieter Cape" are Orleans, Brewster, Harwich, and Chatham. This area is home to a 200-plus-year-old lighthouse and Chatham Marconi Maritime Center. Take the family to the [Chatham Railroad Museum](#), or go on a guided boat, bike, or biplane tour of Chatham's serene and beautiful beaches.



Source: Shutterstock

Outer Cape

On the peninsula's "forearm and fist," you will find the Cape's true vacation spots, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown. To keep developers from spoiling this region's beaches, President John F. Kennedy created the popular [Cape Cod National Seashore](#) in 1961. The Outer Cape is 40 miles of mostly undeveloped beach and landscape on the Cape's Atlantic-facing eastern coast.

At its tip or fist is the nightlife hot spot Provincetown, a locus for the free-thinking creatives and the home of America's oldest continuous artist colony. Colorful cabarets, galleries, theaters, and trendy hot spots are found throughout the area.

Endless Activities

No matter what an authentic Cape Cod experience means to you, the Cape is a family-friendly and pet-friendly place with as many alternatives to beaches as there are actual beaches. Play golf or walk, hike, or bike to crimson cranberry bogs, freshwater ponds, interior marshlands, dunes, and birch and beech forests. Go whale watching, visit a wildlife sanctuary, or [take a fishing excursion](#). [The choice is yours](#).

Build some lasting memories on the Cape, and then share your favorite experiences with us on [Facebook](#).

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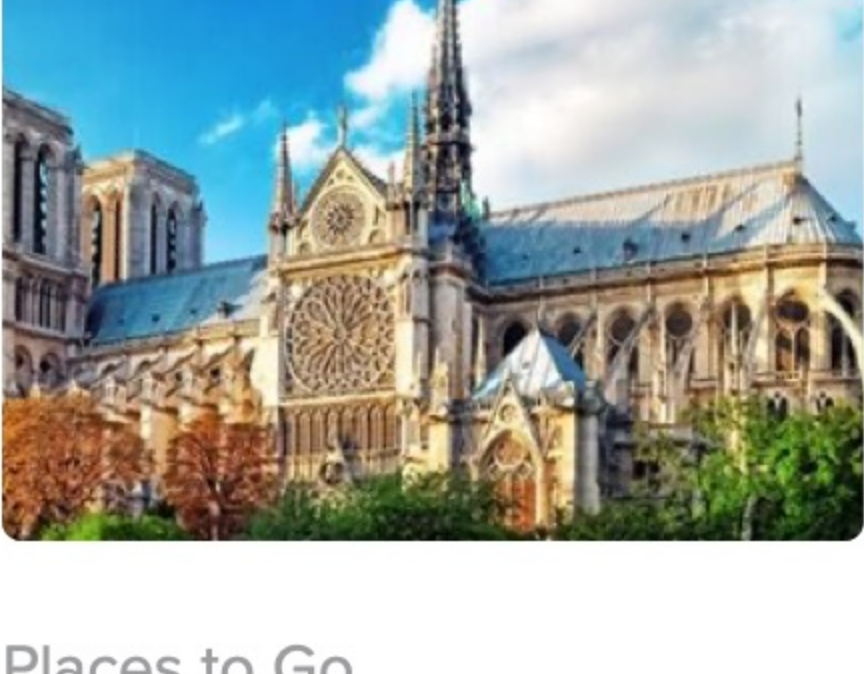
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