

Weighing in on NANTUCKET

EXCITED TO BEGIN MY VACATION SANS HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, I APPROACH THE TICKET AGENT AT CAPE AIR AIRLINES WITH MY PASSPORT AND BOARDING PASS IN HAND.

BY SHARON ZOHAR

It's the first time I'm travelling with only one carry-on. The agent instructs me to place my bag on the scale. "That's good," she says. "Now I need to know how much you weigh." I'm a bit taken aback. Then I realize my weight and the weight of 10 other passengers will have to constitute a light enough load to fly us over Atlantic waters in order to safely reach the island of Nantucket. I feel heavier than ever but I breathe a sigh of relief remembering why I came—to break

away from my life on the mainland and float, if just for a few days, in the quiet solitude of Nantucket. Luckily I had a light breakfast and pass the weight limit. I grab my bag and head to the tarmac ready to shed all responsibility as a working mom and head off in search of a peaceful retreat.

PICTURE PERFECT

I choose October to visit. It's shoulder season, that time of year when the weather is still



glorious and most of the tourists are gone. The island population usually drops from 50,000 to around 10,000 after Labour Day, which gives you your pick of beaches, restaurants and shops, many of which offer sales. Room rates are also slashed as much as 75 per cent. Economics aside, it's simply the best time to explore the brilliant foliage any painter (accomplished or not) would be in awe of capturing. I've brought my iPhone 6 in lieu of paintbrushes. I unpack my laptop, a warm sweater and Barbara Kingsolver's *Small Wonder*. Ah, the joy of reading, uninterrupted.

I'm staying at The Wauwinet, a historic waterfront inn situated on the extreme northeast end of the island. The property is beautiful, informal yet elegant, with great views and fabulous sunsets. Not to mention complimentary port and cheese that await

me in the library each day at 4 p.m. I take my drink out to the garden and soak up the warm breeze that drifts off the bay. An older couple from Florida outstretched on the lounge chairs behind me asks if I can take their picture. "It's our anniversary," they say. "We want to capture this day before we leave." I zoom in to their happy, relaxed faces and try not to mess up their picture-perfect moment.

TIME ON THE WATER

With 48 kilometres of bike paths winding through more than 36 square kilometres of coastline, moors, cranberry bogs and sea-sprayed bluffs, tourists have an endless choice of where to explore. I manage to arrange time on the water with the resident historian and fisherman, Captain Rob. His knowledge of everything island shows in his uncanny ability to summon historical dates and places dating back to the early 1700s.

Claiming iconic names such as Macy, Folgers and Starbucks, who were among the founding families of the island, it's no surprise to hear the entrepreneurial feats achieved by the people of Nantucket. For instance, between 1750 and 1850, when this area was the whaling capital of the world, Nantucket whalers would bring in more than 1,700,000 litres of refined sperm whale oil a year, a value equivalent to US\$9 million today. As a working mom trying to put my own business on the map, I am greatly impressed with the townspeople's ability to turn a plot of sand into a pot of gold. I make some mental notes on how I can use this story to inspire my team. But then I remember: I'm here to float.

Moving from historical tour guide to hands-on fisherman, Captain Rob turns our

OPPOSITE TOP:
Shop along Old South Wharf in Nantucket.

LEFT: *Savour freshly baked croissants at a bakery on Centre Street in Nantucket.*
Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism





ABOVE: Take in Nantucket's peaceful Old North Wharf setting.


ABOVE LEFT: A street musician entertains passersby in Nantucket.

ABOVE RIGHT: Cycling is a great way to take in the sights on Nantucket Island.
Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

attention to the squirmy, beady-eyed crustacean in his hand. "She's a beauty," he says as he caresses the underside of her belly with the tips of his fingers. "No eggs, but definitely a keeper." He pinches the claws together with his bare hands, inviting me to band them with elastics. "Don't worry, she won't bite," he assures me. Then he plops the lobster into a bucket of ice atop two other females and tosses the empty lobster crate back overboard. After a few more catches we set sail back to the hotel. It's almost dinnertime.

WINDSWEEP MOMENTS

TOPPERS, the hotel's celebrated restaurant, with its creamy-white walls, crackling fireplace and elegant oil paintings, brings to mind Nantucket of old. The restaurant boasts the sweetest lobsters and diver scallops this side of the Atlantic. Even so, I opt for the vegetarian meal, in honour of my vegan daughter. But I promise myself to indulge in a sweet-buttered lobster roll before I head home.

The rest of my trip continues at the same pace. I take leisurely walks down cobblestoned streets lined with grey-shingled cottages, many of which are affectionately named by their owners, each more whimsical than the last, such as "Want Some Moors" and "Marsh Mellow Madness." I make my way to downtown Nantucket, where I pop into a few trendy shops, eat salted chocolate from a stick and relax on a park bench. Time slows down and I float through the days like one of the many burnt-orange leaves of autumn that get swept up and swirled through the air by a passing gust. It's a treat to have no plans other than to take in the sights, smells and sounds of this alluring island, with its mix of quiet beaches and restrained New England charm. Other than the collection of seashells I take home to my daughters, I feel I'm going home lighter than ever. 

TRAVEL PLANNER

To plan your Nantucket getaway, visit:
Nantucket Island Chamber of Commerce: nantucketchamber.org
Nantucket Whaling Museum: nha.org
The Wauwinet: wauwinet.com
White Elephant: whiteelephanthotel.com