



# A Date with the Gray Lady

“Nantucket! Take out your map and look at it. See what a real corner of the world it occupies.” —from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*

**Like** backstage anticipation in a theater on opening night, springtime in Fort Lauderdale is wall-to-wall waterfront activity aboard yachts of all sizes and types—the large ones getting spruced up for their passage to the Med for the summer season, to see and be seen along the Cote d’Azur—while others get ready for fishing and fun in The Bahamas, the Florida Keys and the Caribbean. For those that remain, only a relative few venture north to New England, but those that do are in for a grand treat: a date with the Gray Lady.

Generated by both the warm Gulf Stream and the cool Labrador Current, Nantucket fog is legendary—adding to the island’s beauty, mind you—thus the nickname “little Gray Lady of the Sea.” Treacherous at times, the fog has also contributed to many of the more than 700 shipwrecks in the area, including the collision between the ocean liners *Stockholm* and *Andrea Doria* 45 miles south of the island in July of 1956.

The history of Nantucket—an island that in 1659 sold for £30 and 2 beaver hats—runs deep and rich. The sea has always

provided the means by which the islanders have both prospered and perished. Arriving in Boston Harbor in November of 1773, whaling ships *Beaver* and *Dartmouth*, owned by Joseph Rotch of Nantucket, were lying at Griffin’s Wharf having just returned from London with a cargo of East India Company tea, and with it sailed into history by way of a political controversy that sparked the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773.

Before oil was discovered and pumped from the ground in Pennsylvania in 1859, it was hunted on the high seas in the form of whale oil by iron men sailing wooden ships. No place on earth played a more pivotal role in the trade than Nantucket. Located 30 miles off the shore of Cape Cod, Nantucket—the “far away land,” as the native Wampanoag population called it—was once the busiest whaling port in the world. Herman Melville himself, having sailed as crew aboard several whaling ships, would capture the fabric of the whaling life like no other, immortalizing

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JIM RAYCROFT

whaling and the island in his epic novel *Moby Dick* inspired by the sinking of the Nantucket whaling ship *Essex* by an encounter with a sperm whale in 1820.

Today, summer on Nantucket is a special time enjoyed by a seasonal population that swells from 14,000 year-round to nearly 60,000 in July and August. Just getting there is a big part of the fun. Nantucket's primary draw is the ocean, and the majority of its visitors arrive by boat. For last-minute guests (who tend to come out of the woodwork whenever you're docked in a place like Nantucket), daily scheduled flights to Nantucket Memorial Airport (ACK) are available on Cape Air from Boston, Providence, White Plains, Hyannis, New Bedford, and Martha's Vineyard. Surprisingly, ACK is one of the busiest airports in Massachusetts, sometimes logging more take-offs and landings on a summer day than Boston's Logan Airport—due in part to the large number of private planes used by wealthy summer inhabitants.

Entering Nantucket Harbor on any boat is a major photo op—sun or fog—so have your camera ready. When inbound, Brant Point Lighthouse is to starboard past the jetty. First constructed in 1746, Brant Point is the second oldest lighthouse in America. One of three lighthouses on the island, its stone foundation is planted neatly at the water's edge.

On Saturdays, the Rainbow Fleet of Beetle Cats race in the harbor as they have



## CRUISER RESOURCES

**Nantucket Boat Basin**  
VHF 9  
(508) 325-1350  
nantucketboatbasin@niresorts.com  
nantucketboatbasin.com

**Nantucket Moorings**  
VHF 68  
(508) 228-4472  
nantucketmoorings@gmail.com  
nantucketmoorings.com

**Nantucket Yacht Club**  
(508) 228-1400  
mail@nantucketyachtclub.org  
nantucketyachtclub.org

**Great Harbor Yacht Club**  
(508) 325-5200  
screese@ghyc.com  
ghyc.com

**Nantucket Town Pier**  
VHF 9  
(508) 228-7261



Below: Nantucket Whaling Museum  
Opposite page: Brant Point Lighthouse



done since 1926 when the Nantucket Yacht Club created the racing fleet for children—each outfitted with a different color sail making it easy for parents to keep track of their child. It's a beautiful sight. Stop in at the Toy Boat, a fun little shop on Straight Wharf where proprietor Loren Brock offers beautiful handmade wooden models of the Nantucket Light Ship, the

ferry boats that come to the island, and the Rainbow Fleet. For 27 years Loren has strived to offer local handmade items rarely seen these days.

Located in the heart of the town waterfront, Nantucket Boat Basin provides dockage with all the amenities to transient mariners. With 205 slips, the Boat Basin can handle just



*Clockwise from top left: Shops at The Wharf Cottages; "Toy Boat" shop keeper Loren Brock; Nantucket Boat Basin; exploring the island by bicycle*

about any length vessel—recently accommodating the 316-foot megayacht *Limitless*, built for Les Wexler by Lürssen. On arrival, visiting vessels receive a lovely canvas Nantucket Boat Basin welcome bag stocked with marina information, an island guidebook, restaurant guide, island map, and other goodies. Reservations are recommended in season. For land

visitors and overflow yacht guests, dockside accommodations are offered in a collection of quaint, pet-friendly cottages each adorned with a name plaque and flower boxes positioned along a brick garden walk overlooking the marina. You can tie your boat up right outside your door. Unique neighboring shops and galleries are delightful and yield the warmth and tone of a casual yet upscale fishing village. For larger parties, the Boat Basin can organize a clambake for you and your guests with live music, a bartender and all the



trimmings. The Ship Chandlery is also located at the Basin and the onsite concierge service directs guests around the multitude of Nantucket's sights and services.

For yachtsmen who prefer hanging on the hook, Nantucket Moorings has secure holding for boats up to 100 feet with rates ranging from \$65-105 per night in season. Contact Moorings Manager Leigh Van Hoven for a reservation. Catch a ride to shore aboard the Nantucket Harbor Launch service (VHF 68).

Summer events not to be missed include the Nantucket Film Festival, Sail Week ending with the Opera House Cup and the Big Game Battle Fish Tournament to name a few. Any trip to Nantucket must include a visit to the Nantucket Whaling Museum where the Nantucket Historical Association lives up to its mission statement to "preserve and interpret the history of Nantucket Island and foster appreciation of its historical significance." Nantucket has more than 800 buildings dating back to the pre-Civil War era, and Main Street has been a major movie set more than once. With its cobblestones dating back to 1838 and historic buildings lovingly restored to better-than-new, the town of Nantucket is one of the best preserved

collections of period architecture. Inside these charming buildings you'll find a bounty of retail shops, art galleries and world-class restaurants from whimsical to upscale, and around the island from Siasconset to Madaket, Nantucket boasts more than 80 miles of beaches with names like Surfside, Macomet, North Point, and Sconset.

Nantucket remains a gem of a destination for New England summer cruising, a place where mere millionaires get to rub shoulders with billionaires—over 100 of which own homes on the island—and where cruisers and vacationers come to play. Not bad for an "elbow of sand," as Melville once described. 🌊

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