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Dog Friendly Guide to Cape Cod National Seashore

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by Kenny Gallo



Every summer the inevitable happens to me. I plan a beach vacation. I get a friend to watch my dog for the week and then I fuss over her well-being the whole time from afar. When I return, I'm informed she did some dog business on a carpet to spite me. Bad dog!

Dog owners have all been there and asked themselves: how can I be a jet-setter or road warrior with my pooch in tow? Take heed. This year, I'm taking my dog with me and you can too. If you don't know what Cape Cod National Seashore looks like, it's time for you and your dog to see it. This is not the Jersey Shore. It's a beach and nature lover's paradise christened by native Cape Codder JFK in 1961¹ and it's one of the most dog-friendly beach trips you can take. Grab your animal. Let's go. (If beachin' is your thing, see more guides here).

"Cape Cod is the bared and bended arm of Massachusetts. The shoulder is at Buzzard's Bay; the elbow at Cape Mallebarre; the wrist at Truro; and the sandy fist at Provincetown." – Thoreau



Dunes, Marconi Beach

Nicely put, Henry.... About 65 miles in length. Cape Cod National Seashore (download map) starts around Eastham and any "happening" nightlife (tip: things close on the early side on the Cape) is nearest the tip of Provincetown). There's marshes, ponds, dunes, hiking trails, plenty of green, a rougher surf on the ocean side, and a mellow feel and ridiculous tranquility on the bayside. Cape Codders speak with a slow drawl that is part Maine and Massachusetts, though it is unlike either. They are genuine people and some of nicest folk you will ever meet.

Getting There

A drive from Boston is about two hours in, so aside from a dog or people pit stop there shouldn't be a need to crash if your ultimate destination is the best beaches AND you're leaving from Beantown. From Boston: Route 93, to Route 3, to Route 6 – the main drag through The Cape. (I never get lost and my inner compass is always on the Fritz.) Once you go over the Sagamore Bridge in Bourne, you're officially in Cape Cod territory.

Ferry: Can you handle NOT driving and lounging for 1.5 of hours? Leashed, well-behaved dogs with a seaworthy disposition are welcome. Bay State Cruise Company runs this fast ferry from Boston to Provincetown. Once you're in Provincetown, you'd need to make arrangements to rent a car or have someone pick you up, so it may not be the most practical option.

Where to Stay

Firstly, you need to ask the question: What am I here for? Beach! Dog vacation! Since your hotel is dog-friendly, there's a slight chance you will smell someone else's dog in your linens. But this trip is about the Dog, not you and your love of 4-star luxury hotels. You'll get over it. (Reminder: Bring a crate. Unless he/she is the most perfectly grounded hound, they'll probably feel safer in a crate, or having access to it, if you need to leave them unattended for any extended amount of time. Some hotels will require it. You also don't want them getting freaked out by the help when they come to flip the sheets, or vice-versa.)

There may be other options with cottage rentals or shared properties. Remember to call ahead. The Cape is loaded with Motels and B&B's that may take dogs, if they don't advertise their policy officially. In many, there may be a surcharge per-night, per-dog. In Eastham, Four Points is a good bet chain hotel, that might just give you a doggy care package upon check-in. Wellfleet's Mainstay is a no-frills, perfect location, old-school family run motel on Route 6 that I've stayed at twice with no complaints from me or my dog. In Truro, Outer Reach Resort has a list of dog sitters in the lobby and Sandbars Inn on Shore Road (off Route 6) has amazing views as it sits right smack on the bay.



(Race Point Lighthouse, Provincetown)

Provincetown

The sandy fist (per Thoreau) is the mothership of dog-friendly anything. Tongues wag like mad in P-Town (what the locals call it) – as there seems to be a dog sporting a jaunty bandana on every corner. P-Town also features what has been called one of the best dog parks in America. Designed by local artists and dog lovers, Pilgrim Bark Park boasts an acre of dog fun and welcomes 10,000 pooches a year. It is no joke. If your dog could talk, it will tell you and never wants to leave – it might tell you to stop tugging on its leash or hogging the bed also, but that's another story. Plenty of dog-friendly hotels and inns dot the area and, unlike most of the other Cape Cod beaches, the Provincetown beaches have off-leash hours in the early morning and early eve. (More on that awesome below).

The Benchmark Inn, Harbor Hotel and Labrador Landing (appropriately named cottages) are just three of the selections you have for lodging. Hungry? Bubalas by the Bay and Atlantic Grille and Cocktail Bar have the largest dog-friendly patios for yours to slobber scraps off. (My animal prefers fries, thank you much)

General National Seashore Beach Rules

During the summer, dogs are allowed (on leash) on The National Seashore Beaches at all times EXCEPT lifeguard protected parts of the beach. (Download: National Seashore pet policies). There are miles of beach. If you see a lifeguard stand, it's not that hard to find a spot where there isn't one. If you get to a lifeguard spot, you can cross that spot to get to another area where there is no lifeguard. No one is going to kick you off the beach if you're making your way to a non-lifeguard area. That said, during the later parts of the day you'll have a better chance to find a lifeguard-free zone. It's probably a good idea to not let your dog sit in the Cape Cod sun all day anyway – fur coats are not summer-friendly. Note: during certain parts of the season, shorebirds nest on certain beach spots and dogs are banned from these areas. (They'd be clearly marked).

Four Awesome Beaches:



Head of the Meadow

- **Marconi Beach, Wellfleet** (Sand dunes galore at this popular spot.)
- **Head of the Meadow, Truro** (Stunning beauty. Check. Amazing views. Check.)
- **Cahoon Hollow Beach, Wellfleet** (It is home to the popular beach bar, The Beachcomber. They'll let you sit on the patio with your dog and drink an adult bev.)
- **Race Point Beach, Provincetown** (It goes on forever! AND...Provincetown beaches are the only beaches on the Cape where you can legally take your dog off-leash from 6am-9am and 6pm-9pm. Release the hounds!)

Dog Activities

Dog Paddle

Looking for a spot for your dog to swim is an easy task. Judgment trumps logic here. Technically, dogs are not allowed off-leash anywhere that isn't a dog park (aside from P-Town beaches, see above). The Bay, low tide, or crack of dawn/early evening are your best options to sneak a dip. Knowing that your risk: getting a ticket shouldn't dissuade you from letting a well-behaved dog splash in the drink. (Note: well-behaved) When in doubt, do what the locals do: let them go and pretend it's no biggie. (I do this all the time! Who me? My dog swims everyday in this very spot!) Bring your tennis ball. If your pooch is good with their "come" (in this case "come back!") command, you'll be fine.

Pup Treks

Hiking trails galore in Cape Cod. Nice ones. Not your average path to grandma's house here, these are the real deal on the east coast. Your dog will love to think they are leading the way to.... something. That's what they do! If you can keep up, there is nothing more invigorating for you or them. There are some trails and biking areas that dogs aren't allowed, so be sure to double check, and, as with the beaches, there may be a nature preserve or bird nesting area that is off limits to canines on a given day. These are sure bets:

- **Kettle Pond Trail** (Wellfleet, Truro: 3.45 miles)
- **Long Point Trail** (Provincetown, 4.9 miles) Part of the trail is submerged at high tide, so plan accordingly. It's also pretty long (bring water!), so make sure your dog is up for the journey. You'll pass lighthouses and have some awesome views of both the bay and Atlantic as you're basically at the tip of The Cape. Oh, and depending on the day, it's windy as hell.

Dog Prep

Don't forget to think of your furry friend first. These tips make all the sense in the world.

- **Make sure they have a few toys** they like to keep them busy in your hotel room.
- **Pack plenty of the food and treats** they're used to, because 1) It might be hard to find a pet store, and 2) You don't want to change up their diet while you're on vacation.
- You might have a long hike in you, but they might be tired from all the day's excitement. **Be sensible with your pooch.**
- **Bring a water bottle everywhere.** The sun is brutal on a hot day in Cape Cod.
- **Get a comfortable crate** in case you need to leave them in your hotel room for a few hours to chill.
- **Protect your vacation investment** with travel insurance from Allianz Global Assistance. It's a safer way to travel.

There's plenty to do with your dog on Cape Cod's National Seashore. You'll make memories and bond with your hound like never before. Your dog will make dog friends that they'll dream about until next time. As I learned, you just need to know where to go. If you have an urban dog like me, there is not a better reward than introducing them to nature. What are you waiting for? Get your mutt and go to The Cape.

Kenny Gallo is a writer living in Richmond, VA.

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