



Red Brook Harbor Yacht Club

Cataumet, MA 02534

Martha's Vineyard - the crown jewel of Southern New England Cruising (2022)

Martha's Vineyard has become a playground for the wealthy, especially since Presidents Clinton and Obama started coming here. Try and rent a summer house here for a week or more and you'll be in for serious sticker shock, if you can even find one available. However, if you have a cruising boat "The Vin-yad", as locals like to call it; can be surprisingly affordable or even free. There are good anchorages scattered around the island and many relatively affordable mooring balls available in some of the bigger towns.

This is a fairly big island, 18 miles by 8 miles, and so without a car you might think it would be difficult to get around, but The Vineyard has a very affordable public bus service that will take you almost anywhere you want to go, and there are plenty of places to rent bicycles to ride the bike paths all over the island. In addition, the island has several good supermarkets, although they are generally more expensive than on the mainland, and of course an enormous variety of restaurants from cheap to very expensive. There is also several chandleries, and gasoline and diesel readily available.

Vineyard Haven

The biggest town on the island is Vineyard Haven and it has a large harbor. This is also where the ferry from Woods Hole comes in (as well as Oak Bluffs in the summer) so if you have guests arriving you can have them take the bus or park in Woods Hole and take the ferry over.

To find a transient mooring go deep into the harbor and on the west side you'll see a small breakwater with moorings both inside and out. Call the harbor master on Ch 69 and you can request a mooring on a first-come-first-serve basis. The price is \$70/night. You can also reserve a mooring using Dockwa from the Vineyard Haven Marina for \$95/night. Try to get a mooring

inside the breakwater (not available from Dockwa) because the harbor can be quite roly in a north wind and the large ferries coming in from early morning to late at night create substantial wakes. The harbor also has a public dinghy dock on the small beach inside the breakwater and rudimentary showers behind the harbormaster's office.

If you prefer to save your money, there is a spot on the east side called the Beach Road anchorage that has good holding and is farther away from the ferries. Be sure to set your anchor well here because the holding is not great.

If you prefer a very calm anchorage you can go through the drawbridge and anchor in Lagoon Pond. To go through the bridge hail the bridge tender on Ch 69. The bridge opens upon request between 8:15-8:45, 10:15-10:45, 3:15-4, 5-5:45 and 7:30-8 during the summer. During the rest of the year you have to call (508-627-0497) and request an opening 24 hours in advance. The Lagoon is a beautiful spot with easy access to Vineyard Haven, but has a three-day limit for anchoring. Given the inconvenience of getting into the Lagoon you might want to anchor in the harbor near the bridge if there is no north wind forecast and move into the Lagoon if rougher weather arises. The Lagoon is very well protected from all wind directions with good holding and is an excellent place to hide in extreme weather.

Oak Bluffs

About three nautical miles to the East you'll come to Oak Bluffs Harbor. Oak Bluffs is party central on the island and the harbor can get pretty raucous in the summer with a lot of powerboats. Moorings are on a first-come-first-serve basis and cost \$45/night in season. But beware, if the moorings are full you will be required to raft up with up to two other boats. The mooring field is extremely tight and if you're not comfortable maneuvering in tight quarters you won't be happy.

Oak Bluffs is a fun town and there is a lot to do and see here. Don't miss the gingerbread cottages, which began as a Methodist summer campground in the 1800s. And if you have young children aboard be sure to take them to the Flying Horses Carousel, which was moved from Coney Island in 1876. In the grand old tradition of carousels you can try to catch the brass ring and get a free ride. But don't get your hopes up, local kids have gotten this down to a science and have learned to snag five or six rings on every pass, putting newbies at a distinct disadvantage.

President Obama has been known to show up from time to time at Nancy's restaurant right on the harbor. You'll know it by the giant Great White Shark replica hanging at the entrance.

State Beach

About three nautical miles south southeast of Oak Bluffs you'll come to a beautiful two-mile long crescent beach called State Beach. There is good holding in sand all along the beach. You can take your dinghy in to the beach, which will be packed with bathers during the summer, so much so that it's very difficult to get a parking space, or you can swim from your boat and avoid the crowds. This is also the location of the famous "Jaws" bridge, so named because this is where the famous scene in the movie Jaws takes place with swimmers running for their lives. Many of the extras were locals. This bridge is also where visitors love to strut their stuff jumping or diving 20 feet into the swift current below. Be careful, though, there have been drownings here.

State Beach makes for a very pleasant overnight as long as the wind is from the west to southwest, the prevailing wind direction in the summer. If the wind is from any other directions there is a long fetch and you'll be in for a long uncomfortable night. This is also not a very good spot for seeing the rest of the island as there is no place to leave your dinghy except for pulling it up onto the beach. If you do pull your dinghy onto the beach you can catch the public bus at the bridge.

Edgartown

The most fashionable town on the island would be Edgartown, and it has some surprisingly nice options for staying a few days. The harbor is about three nautical miles southeast of State Beach, but you have to first go northeast to red nun 2 in order to avoid a large shoal. Once beyond the shoal you can anchor off Chappaquiddick Beach, which has a beautiful view of Edgartown light to the west and the quaint Chappaquiddick Beach Club directly south. The anchorage has excellent protection from all wind directions except northwest to north. If the wind becomes unfavorable you can head to the inner harbor and pick up a mooring from the Edgartown Harbormaster (\$45/night). Reservations can be made in advance through Dockwa and this is advised as the summer months can be very busy. If the weather outside is rough and there are no moorings available, I have heard the

harbormaster sometimes gives permission to anchor deep inside the inner harbor, called Katama Bay.

Whether coming into the inner harbor by dinghy to dock or with your big boat to anchor or take a mooring you will need to negotiate the Chappaquiddick Ferry. There are two small ferries that cross the narrow opening between Edgartown and Chappaquiddick Island (where Ted Kennedy swam across the night Mary Jo Kopechne drowned). This is like a game of Frogger as the two ferries are often crossing in opposite directions at the same time. If you're patient, and wait until the ferries have stopped at each end to pick up cars and passengers, crossing is not terrible but it can be intimidating the first few times.

A very crowded dinghy dock can be found on the west side of the harbor just as you pass the exclusive Edgartown Yacht Club. Edgartown offers free showers but they're nothing to write home about. The town has numerous excellent restaurants and lots of shopping or you can rent a bicycle or hop on the bus and tour the island.

Chappaquidick Island

It can also be fun to take the ferry across to Chappaquidick Island and explore on foot. Walk about two miles down Chappaquidick Rd to Dike Rd and you'll come to the Mytoi Japanese Garden. This garden of exotic and native plants encircles a serene pond are 14 acres of intimate Japanese elegance. Walk a little further and you'll get to a wooden bridge (where Ted Kennedy crashed his car into the water that fateful night in July of 1969 that dashed his hopes of becoming president) and then out onto the magnificent East Beach that runs north to south for four miles. There is no lifeguard for this beach, but the water is warm, the waves are fun and the beach is pristine. The surf fishing here is world class.

Cape Poge

For another fun adventure you can take your dinghy one and a half miles east southeast from Edgartown Harbor to Cape Poge Bay. You'll find a very narrow entrance into a large and pristine bay with only a few houses scattered about the shore. There is lots of natural scenery and wildlife to see here via dink, paddle board or kayak and it's well worth spending a full day (be sure to bring your suntan lotion). You'll see a number of powerboats but the bay is shallow and I don't recommend taking your big boat in here without local knowledge.

Lake Tashmoo

On the opposite end of the island from Cape Poge, directly across from Woods Hole, you'll find Lake Tashmoo, an oasis of tranquility. I saved this anchorage until now because its got a tricky shallow entrance and most cruisers are afraid to enter. But if your keel is less than five feet it's doable. As you enter stay close to the northeast side of the jetty and follow the markers in carefully. The bottom is all sand so if you do ground it will be soft. You might want to wait until the tide is rising and near high. All that said, I have found the entrance to Lake Tashmoo to be variable. The best route into the channel seems to change every year. Once inside you can either anchor on the west side just past the sand banks, you'll often see boats anchored here, or at the very back of the lake where the lake it narrows. There is a map posted at the entrance showing where anchoring is allowed and the harbormaster strictly enforces this. The lake is a delicate ecosystem and the town is trying to protect the eel grass that populates much of the bottom. The lake also has a pump-out boat and you can call the harbormaster for a pumpout, although it may take a long time before it can get to you.

All that said, Tashmoo is a gorgeous location that is extremely quiet even in the busiest time of the summer. It is also possible to rent moorings from the Tashmoo Boatyard, a very small affair on the east side of the lake about half way down. Their phone number is 508-693-9311.

Tashmoo has a large dock jutting out into the lake where you can tie up for short periods to take on passengers and water. At the same dock there is a large dinghy dock that is always overcrowded. From the dock it's a fifteen minute walk into Vineyard Haven and the ferry dock. It's quite a shock to go from quiet Tashmoo to bustling Vineyard Haven in the summer months.

Menemsha

The last and most remote anchorage on the island is Menemsha, on the southwest side of the island. You can anchor outside the harbor when the seas are calm or go inside and get a slip (\$3.50/foot) or mooring (\$50/night), both available through Dockwa. Anchoring inside is not allowed.

Be aware that getting into Menemsha Harbor is not for the faint of heart. The currents run very fast and there is a lot of shoaling. First timers should definitely take the dinghy in first to scout it out.

However, Menemsha is the one harbor that gives you easy access to Up Island, which is very different from the rest of the Vineyard with exquisite rolling farmland all around and the famous rainbow colored cliffs of Gay Head. You might want to take the bicycle ferry (I kid you not) across the harbor just for a lark.

Getting There

One of the toughest things about this great island is getting there. If you're on Cape Cod in the Hyannis area it's an easy shot straight across Nantucket Sound. If you're coming from the south, Rhode Island for instance, you can sail up Vineyard Sound. You'll most likely pass into Vineyard Sound from Buzzards Bay through Quicks Hole. The currents can run fast through this area and there is often a lot of commercial traffic, mostly fishing boats, but it's deep and well marked. Once you get close to the island you'll also need to be careful of the Middle Ground Shoals off the northwest side of the island just before you come around West Chop. And keep in mind that the currents can run 2-3 knots through Vineyard Sound, so if you time it wrong your trip can take twice as long.

However, if you're coming from the north down Buzzards Bay, you're in for a tricky passage through the Woods Hole Strait. Some people avoid it all together continuing southwest along the Elizabeth Island chain and passing through Quicks Hole, but this takes you 20 nm out of your way.

If you're a first timer, plan your passage through Woods Hole at slack. The current through here can run up to 6 knots and if you're going against it you may slow down to one or two knots with nerve-racking boat-eating rocks all around. If you go with the current, things will be coming at you so fast you may not have time to avoid the rocks and other obstacles, such as very large ferries from Woods Hole or high speed ferries bombing through the cut at 30 knots. So be sure to wait until slack.

The cut is well marked but it can still be confusing to the novice. The biggest issue is that the passage forks as you get three quarters of the way through. The red and green navigational buoy SB marks the split. To go to the Vineyard you'll want to take the split to the right into the

channel called Broadway. Once through, stick close to the shoreline and you'll stay out of the way of the ferries. Then it's a straight shot across to the Vineyard. Be sure to keep your charts close at hand and go over them several times before you make the attempt. It's challenging but experiencing the Vineyard is well worth the effort.

Submitted by:

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