



# The Cape Awakens

*Deserted beaches and uncrowded restaurants are a breezy off-season eye-opener on the Outer Cape.*

BY ANNIE GRAVES

**I**t's a light that glows from within, like driving into an Edward Hopper painting. Bright, buttery, demanding, it glances off the water and sinks into the sand and sea-weathered shingles. *Paint me, notice me*, it whispers—*I'm spring for your eyes and soul.*

We're here at the gateway to the Outer Cape, a spit of land that coils around on itself like a nautilus shell, pressed between the Atlantic and Cape Cod Bay. Glorious in any season, it's perilously fresh in spring—clean, golden, uncrowded. Crisp breezes, a jumble of cottages and seagulls, whales and waking businesses.

No stranger to multiple personalities (sleepy Truro, artsy Wellfleet, hyper Provincetown), this part of the Cape reveals a whole other persona in early spring. In the gap between low season and high, it feels more hometown, less charged, but with an underlying sense of anticipation—like broken-in khakis and a slouchy sweater you can't wait to pull on.

Frankly, we *can't* wait. Right now it feels as though we're driving toward summer, having left winter only a few stops ago. We survived a shattering ice storm, lifted the last shovelful of snow, burned the final log, and now we're teetering on the brink of spring fever. At land's end, where the dunes embrace the sea, the light is changing. One little nudge will push us over.

Sunrise at Coast Guard  
Beach, Eastham

ABOVE RIGHT, kids beachcomb  
along Provincetown Harbor



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Historic Days' Cottages between North Truro and Provincetown, overlooking Cape Cod Bay; the Marine Specialties store in Provincetown, home to an eclectic collection of maritime gear; Tom Gaudreou kayaking with seadogs Roxy and Minnie in Provincetown Harbor.

Mid-April, and an exceptionally warm weekend is predicted. We drive south, then east on Route 6, stopping at Orleans for the night. This bustling hub straddles the edges of the Outer Cape and offers our first glimpse of Cape Cod National Seashore, unfurling between here and Provincetown. Our B&B, the *Ship's Knees Inn*, is a pretty, dark-silver, shingled home from the 1820s, only a five-minute walk from the town's *Nauset Beach*: nine miles of silky white sand and rowdy waves, and at this time of year almost deserted except for surfers, bobbing like seals.

Tonight we're dining at *ABBA*. No relation to Swedish pop singers (the name means "father" in Aramaic), this beguilingly simple restaurant is the work of chef/owner Erez Pinhas, and his wife, Christina Bratberg. The menu is a warm, spicy blend of Thai and Mediterranean: wine from

the Golan Heights; delicate grilled tuna; pan-seared striped bass with ginger-scallion sauce.

In the morning, we drive a few miles to *Rock Harbor Beach*, tucked away like a postcard from Old Cape Cod. It's shallow and serene, and nearby there's a crusty lobster shack, *Cap't Cass Rock Harbor Seafood*, that looks as though it was dunked in the sea and came up dripping with buoys. It's all a stone's throw from the *Church of the Transfiguration*, a modern-day basilica-in-progress, with artwork from around the world. If you've ever wondered what 2.5 million glass mosaic tiles in 200 colors look like, stop at the gift shop and ask to check out the apse and the Eastern Orthodox-style depiction of Christ.

In Eastham, we drift through seas of daffodils, forsythia in bloom, bits of the sun fallen to earth. We wake up our