

The Cape remains an escape in unsettled times

By [David Abel](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 23, 2020, 4:58 p.m.



Jonathan Dubinsky of Northampton relaxed with his daughter, Yona, while visiting Coast Guard Beach with his family in Eastham. Dubinsky's wife, Elizabeth, said they usually fly to visit family in the summer but they canceled those plans due to the coronavirus. Instead, they used their airfare to rent a house on Cape Cod. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

EASTHAM — It was a long spring of isolation and dread for Kathleen Nichols, a purgatory punctuated by surgery for heart problems.

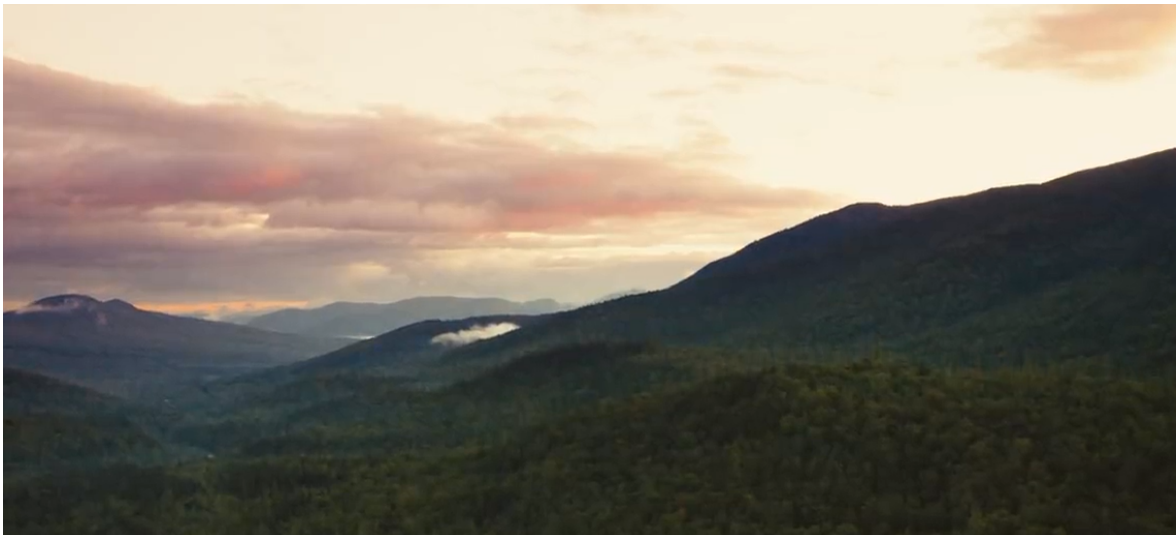
For 30 years, Nichols and her extended family have spent the best part of their summers here on the Outer Cape. But with the virus rampaging through the country, and her health an issue, they canceled the house they've been renting for more than a decade.

But the lure of the beach was too much for Nichols to give up entirely. So she and her husband found another place to rent for a few days and, after a long drive from their home in Ludlow, carried their folding chairs to the water's edge on Coast Guard Beach, where for a few hours on a recent afternoon they could forget about everything else.

“I can just close my eyes, listen to the waves, and nothing else matters,” said Nichols, 67, a nurse, as a group of seals bobbed in the surf a few yards away.

Her husband, Daniel, dug his bare feet into the sand and added: “We’re just grateful to be here.”

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Kathleen and Daniel Nichols of Ludlow shared a joke while visiting Coast Guard Beach. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Unlike the urban beaches in Boston, where on a hot day the crowds can be overwhelming, the vast expanse of sand stretching along the National Seashore from Eastham to Provincetown remains a relative oasis — aside from the sharks, of course.

While there are certainly crowds on the most popular beaches, some of which have narrowed in recent years as rising seas and more powerful storms regularly reshape the coast, there's room to spread out and seek solace, for those lucky enough to get there.

When Eloise Glover, 47, a massage therapist from Keene, N.H., arrived here in June, she came to Coast Guard Beach and was treated to a pod of whales breaching not far from land, as if it was a private show.

“In that moment, it didn't feel like a pandemic was going on,” she said.

As more tourists and summer residents started occupying patches of sand beneath the

large dunes, Glover says she has never felt concerned about others coming too close.



Daniel Nichols floated in the ocean while visiting Coast Guard Beach with his wife, Kathleen. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

“We don’t mind walking away from other people,” said Glover, who had plenty of beach for herself and her 6-year-old son, Harrison.

On the other side of Eastham, along the shallow coastal waters of Cape Cod Bay, the beaches tend to be more slender, though even less crowded.

When the tide rolls in, and there aren’t signs of apex predators prowling the cobalt surf, swimmers, kayakers, and paddle boarders fill the water. When the tide goes out, the beach stretches far into the bay, leaving more room to maintain sufficient distance.

“It should concern me that no one is wearing a mask, but there’s plenty of space between people on the beach and a substantial amount of wind,” said Catherine Clark, 56, a high school administrator from Boston who had just emerged from a balmy swim along

Thumpertown Beach.

That was not the case in Boston last weekend, where throngs gathered at M Street Beach, a scene that city officials said could undercut efforts to contain the virus and to continue to reopen office buildings, schools, and restaurants.



Emmanuel Cordero of Hamden, Conn., found a spot for his family as they arrived at Coast Guard Beach. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

On Tuesday, Mayor Martin J. Walsh urged residents to continue safety measures, such as social distancing and wearing face coverings in public.

“It’s incumbent on all of us to do what we have to do on a daily basis,” he said.

On a late afternoon on Coast Guard Beach, where the cold waves crashed onto a carpet of smooth rocks, Margaret Rubin wore a bandana, one of the few with any visible face coverings — despite signs urging visitors to wear masks.

The retired school teacher from Chappaqua, N.Y., tries to stay at least 12 feet away from others, which she said hasn't been a problem, especially as she tends to visit the beach early in the mornings and later afternoons.

"I feel really comfortable here," said Rubin, 72, as the sun began to set behind her and the water shimmered in the softening light, beckoning.

As more swimmers ventured into the water, despite a covey of seals still bobbing nearby, Rubin smiled at what looked like a normal summer.

"This is one of the few things we can still enjoy," she said. "It's the same as it's ever been."

For the Nicholises, while they were missing the rest of their family as they sat a few feet from the water, in that moment, they had everything they needed — the melody of the undertow raking the rocks, the gentle breeze, the golden light.

"These are precious days," Kathleen Nichols said.

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