

Travel

EDITOR: SARAH MacWHIRTER

NANTUCKET

An unexpected escape

A solo weekend away was supposed to give Globe Travel editor **Sarah MacWhirter** time to work. But bracing ocean winds and refreshing local brews make it hard to stay focused

NANTUCKET

Nantucket. The name alone inspires a reaction. Sometimes snickers about limericks, but more often sighs of wistful longing. Who doesn't want to go to Nantucket, to sit in an Adirondack chair on the grass looking out over the sand to the blue Atlantic beyond?

In summer, Nantucket is hopping, positively abuzz with moneyed visitors with names like Kellogg and Gillette. In the off-season, it's a different vibe altogether. I bucked the trend and came on a chilly October weekend, looking for that charmed set of circumstances that simultaneously instills comfort and inspires creativity. It was meant to be a working weekend with a holiday feel.

Because everyone knows working moms need a vacation – to get work done.

In fact, every woman needs a good wife as the joke goes. A quiet weekend away, though, to catch up on work, to stretch and bend both creative and physical muscles? This was within the realm of possibility, and would do more to create a lasting sense of calm than any beach holiday.

So I packed my laptop and notebooks, my Pilates DVD and a warm sweater, and hopped on a plane to Nantucket.

A seamless flight is key to a productive work vacay – there's no point creating stress in pursuit of preventing stress. I start Friday morning with a latte and biscotti in the Porter lounge (no special membership required), leisurely reading the newspaper before the easy hop to Logan International in Boston. Who knew catching a plane to a major U.S. hub could be less harried than getting the kids off to school?

Because Porter is a smaller airline, we arrive at a smaller terminal and are the only flight waiting to get through customs. Except for one obnoxious traveller yelling at his wife, clearing customs is quick and stress-free. The connecting flight on a puddle jumper is smooth and fast, and I love the bird's-eye view of the island I'm about to explore.

I'm on a work mission, but the spit of sand I'd just flown over is too inviting to pass up. So I set off with Captain Rob for a guided tour of Great Point. Nantucket, Capt. Rob explains, is just a big pile of sand, bulldozed up by a glacier ages ago, that is slowly washing back into the ocean. Here on the point, where the dune grasses sway under the sparkling sun and the stinky seals seem to be inviting us to frolic with them in the frigid



The town is known for its cobblestone streets and weather-worn wharf. SARAH MacWHIRTER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

water, that future seems more than a few thousand years away. The bracing wind clears the mental detritus and I become absorbed in the interplay of light and colour and motion, hoping I can capture a few pictures to inspire future moments of calm.

We're alone on the point, our small group and the seals, with only a narrow line of footsteps in the sand to prove someone else was there before us.

Back in town (the island's permanent population hovers around 10,000, ballooning to 40,000 in summer), I unpack in a new White Elephant residence. I'd hoped for more of that Cape Cod feel, but these elegant digs (more like an Upper East Side condo tucked in a yellow clapboard house) are easy to get used to.

The bathroom alone is reason to book another week, and I sink into the Victoria and Albert tub for a long hot soak. Work can wait...

The local art association is launching a new exhibition tonight – Nantucket through artists' eyes. and I can't resist droop-

ping by. Paintings, sculpture and photos give me a glimpse of the island I'd never get on my own. The locals are chatty and inviting, and we've traded information and swapped stories before it's time for another glass of wine. But instead I make my way to Black Eyed Susan; it's the hottest restaurant on the island, packed inside (every seat is taken, creating that excitement that comes when fascinating people gather over a good meal) and out (with more patrons waiting to get in). At the door, guests who are leaving are all too happy to share the details of their dinner, to make recommendations and wish a delicious meal and great night on you as well, before wandering off satiated and a little bit tipsy down the cobblestone streets.

It is as good as it seems, a perfect close to a seamless day. I return to my little house on East-on Street, flick on the fireplace and a Diana Krall CD, and snuggle onto the couch with a book. For pleasure, not for work...

The next morning, the cold Atlantic wind is baneing into every-

thing in its path (bringing record snow to the rest of the northeastern U.S.). I put the coffee on to brew, push the chairs aside for some morning Pilates, then crack open the laptop. I get a good hour in before breakfast and a walk about the island.

It's such a miserable day, you'd think it would be easy to concentrate on work, but there's a brewery here known for its cool crowd and great beer. An afternoon tour is just the ticket!

Cisco Brewery is packed, rain slicker to puffy vest, as locals and visitors escape the first signs of winter outdoors. The energy level is high as we push through the crowd to the back room where the tour begins. It's not much to look at, but brewmaster Jeff Horner is highly entertaining and the beer – we're encouraged to keep topping up our glasses with different types – is good. Especially the cloudy Grey Lady (which I liked even more than the Whale's Tale Pale Ale). Cisco Brewery also makes a jalapeno-infused liqueur that is a key ingredient in the best Bloody Mary I've ever had. I don't even like

tomato-based drinks – but I can't stop the yearning for another. I refrain, and catch the lift back to my apartment (as I now think of it) to get to work.

Before I tackle the e-mail quagmire, I need a walk to clear my head. Nantucket's cobblestone streets and inviting shops make it hard to focus. The independent bookshop is loaded with great finds and lots of corners to duck into to get lost in the pleasure of perusing. I load up. Books for work, I tell myself. But it's cold and wet outside, so why not another hot soak before dinner...

By the end of the weekend, I have little accomplished on the work front, but I am calm, collected and stretched. I feel poised. I am ready to face the busy weeks ahead.

Mission (almost) accomplished. And for a working mom, that's reason enough to fly away.

ONLINE

See more photos of Nantucket in the off season at team.ca/travel

IF YOU GO

WHEN TO COME

Nantucket shuts down in the off-season – except for U.S. Thanksgiving (Nov. 24) and Christmas. The hotels tend to open on weekends only.

WHAT TO BRING

As the locals say, "The weather moves fast on Nantucket." The sun may be shining one moment, and a storm blowing in the next. Be prepared. And bring sensible footwear. The cobblestone streets are not forgiving, and the sidewalks are misshapen by tree roots. You simply can't strut here, which may contribute to the relaxed vibe.

THE FLIGHTS

Porter flies to Boston daily. flyporter.com
Cape Air flies to Nantucket. www.flycapeair.com

THE FOOD

Brant Point Grill: I liked the pastrami hash for breakfast, and the balsamic skirt steak with a side of brandied crimini mushrooms at dinner. 508-325-1320; whiteelephanthotel.com

Black-Eyed Susan's: Don't be put off by the fact this place is a BYOB restaurant where credit cards are not accepted. It's worth the wait to get a seat. 10 India St.; 508-325-0308; black-eyedsusans.com

THE SIGHTS

November tours at Cisco Brewers Inc. run Tuesdays through Sundays and cost \$20 (sign up at the bar). 5 Bartlett Farm Rd.; 508-325-5929; ciscobrewers.com.

WHERE TO STAY

The White Elephant hotel is open only weekends in November (but from Nov. 24 to 28 for Thanksgiving), and from Dec. 1 to 5. The hotel's residences, where I stayed, are open until Dec. 5. From \$195 (U.S.) at the hotel; from \$500 at the residences. 1-800-445-6574; whiteelephanthotel.com

Sarah MacWhirter



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