



# Exclusive summer retreat becomes magical seaside town at Christmas

PAMELA FIEBER, FOR POSTMEDIA Updated: October 26, 2018



The Christmas Stroll on Nantucket. Courtesy, Nantucket Island Resorts *CALGARY*

The exclusive island of Nantucket, like many summer vacation destinations, battens down the hatches for winter. But not without one final hurrah. On the first weekend in December, summer folks, visitors and locals gather one last time for the rollicking winter celebration known as Christmas Stroll.

As visitors make their way off the Friday night ferry, the crowd gathers momentum and surges up the 200-year-old cobblestone streets, ready to be wined and dined at exclusive restaurants — many of which offer special Christmas Stroll menus, and some of which have reopened for just this weekend. Decked out in red-and-white Nantucket scarves or flashing reindeer antlers (the more garish the better is the tradition), they are ready to take in the festivities and do some shopping.

A wintry seaside village all decked out for the holidays is a magical thing. And Nantucket does it up right.



Christmas on Nantucket. Courtesy, Nantucket Island Resorts *CALGARY*

After 45 years, the little island 42 kilometres off Cape Cod has perfected the winter weekend with fantastic retail sales (up to 75 per cent off as boutiques sell their winter wares) and public festivities like the outdoor Christmas market, the festival of trees and the Santa parade.

To take it all in, one must plan ahead. There is much to do. It's wise to arrive early to catch a bit of the quiet side of the island as preparations ramp up. Check into one of the island's most luxurious resorts, the White Elephant, so you can start each day with a glorious breakfast on the sunny, screened veranda, taking in a seaside view, just steps from the famed Brant Point Lighthouse.

Bundle up to stroll the windy beach and snap at least one photo of that famed lighthouse — at this time of year, it sports a giant Christmas wreath to welcome the visitors arriving by sea.

Downtown, you can wander past the cheerful holiday window displays, stopping in for a hot chocolate at one of many bustling cafes, or browse in one of the many adorable bookstores. Take in the picturesque buildings of downtown with their weathered shingles and crisp white trim, the doors and window boxes painted one of the island's 12 designated heritage colours — against the intense blue of the sky.

For a culinary adventure, sign up for a cooking class with wine tasting, and private lunch for you and your friends, at the Nantucket Culinary. A creamy clam chowder, delicate in-season scallops, and Nutella pot-o-creme for dessert, (yes, you will remember how to make this for your next dinner party).

The friendly silhouette of the sperm whale is everywhere here. You'll want to stop in at the Nantucket Whaling Museum, and not just for the array of locally decorated Christmas trees, but for the tale of Nantucket's whaling past, and its lucrative oil and candle-making industry. The 14-metre-long skeleton of a sperm whale, suspended above a tiny whaling boat, puts it in perspective.

By Friday, the crowds arriving by ferry, private plane and the popular Cape Air flight out of Boston have taken over, and the party atmosphere — and festive headgear — is everywhere.

There's one place you can always just drop in — CISCOWinery, an out-of-town farm that offers a winery, a distillery and a brewery in one picturesque location. Order up a tasting flight of the delicious CISCOWinery brews while taking in the live music. Finish off your Christmas shopping with an \$800 bottle of the distillery's single malt whiskey, "Notch," three-time winner of best single malt whisky in the world.



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One of the island's most popular events, the Tour of Homes, is held on Friday night. As darkness falls, the festive streetscapes blink to life, with candles in every window of the classic, square, saltbox houses. And then you get to go inside some of Nantucket's finest old homes, all decked out for the holidays.

It's a perfect pre-dinner activity, and you're still just walking distance from the finest restaurants. Hustle on through the cold toward your reservation (naturally, you've planned ahead) at trendy Dune. Inside, the grateful crowd is shrugging out of heavy coats and unwrapping scarves, ordering cocktails while awaiting a coveted table. Tuck into some Grey Lady Oysters with Cucumber-Lime Mignonette, or Wild Baby Shrimp Risotto. Needless to say, the seafood served on Nantucket is sublime.

The Christmas Stroll began as a shopping event, so really, one must do one's part. Every year, island merchants slash prices and open their doors to the crowds, often offering hot drinks and treats. Sales or no sales, this is the place to shop for certain exclusive items, from the traditional antique lantern baskets (often featuring an etching of whalebone, they are considered an heirloom item for local families) to the pink "Nantucket Red" canvas shorts available exclusively here, at the original Murray's Toggery Shop.

You may have to buy some sort of cashmere wrap from a stylish little shop along the way. This gorgeous item will not only keep your face warm in the salty wind, it will be from Nantucket, and therefore full of memories. And you will want to hang on to every last memory of your winter visit to Nantucket.