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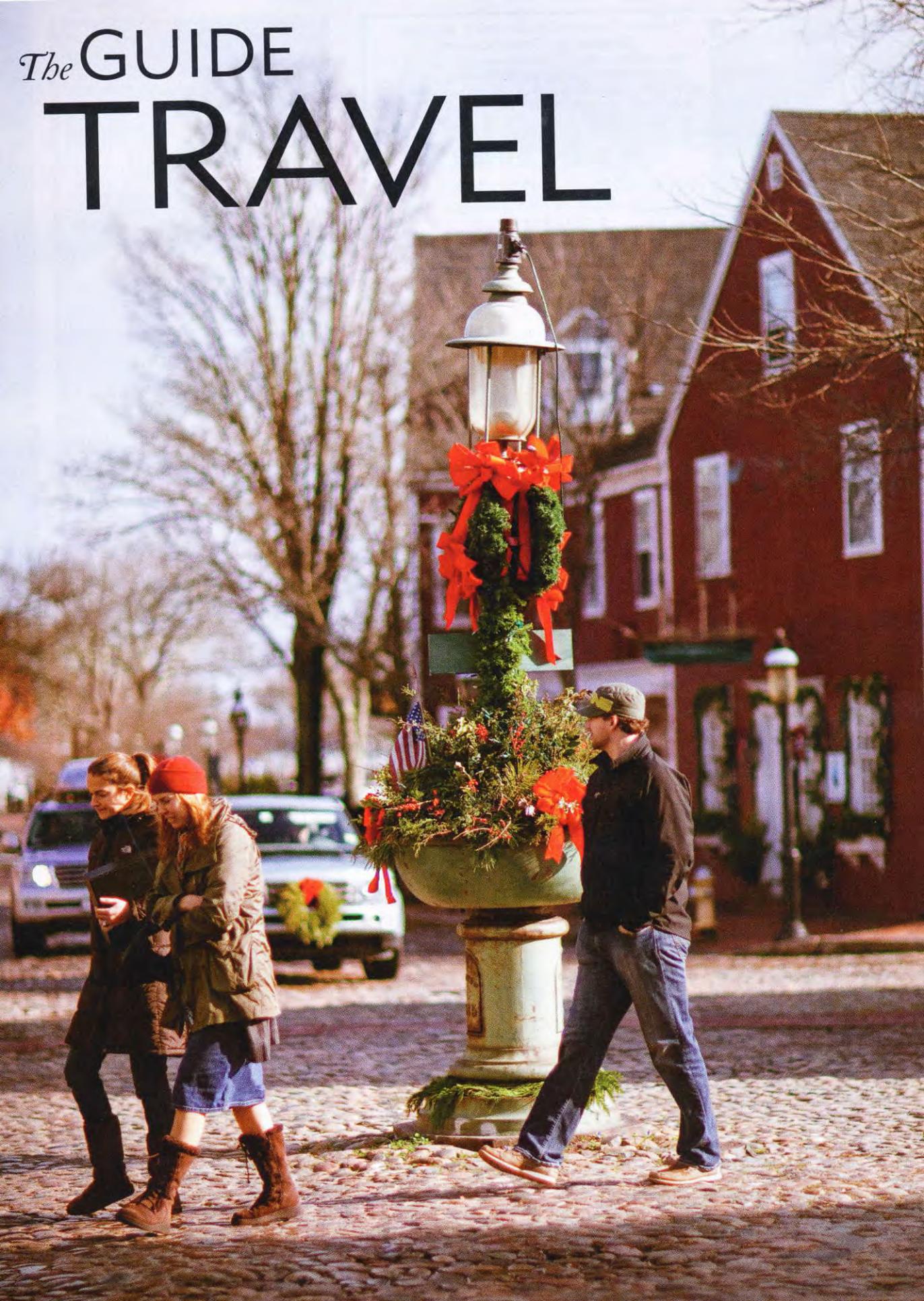
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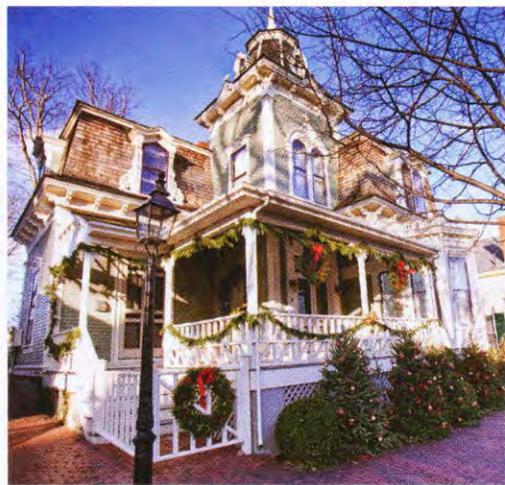
The GUIDE
TRAVEL



Come, Let's Stroll

*The summer haven of Nantucket
shines again on one special
December weekend.*

BY ANNIE B. COPPS



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CARL TREMBLAY

M

y first trip to the island of Nantucket was in the 1970s. My little sister was a toddler, and my older brother was spending the summer with family friends on a ranch out West. My mother sensed that I was a little jealous of both the cute baby and my big brother's adventures, so she packed us up for a long girls' weekend. We took the ferry from Hyannis and spent the weekend eating ice cream, visiting the Whaling Museum, swimming at Children's Beach, riding bikes out to 'Sconset, and window-shopping. I spent the return trip working on a needlepoint pattern that Mom had bought me and admiring my excellent sunburn.

That was the first of many trips to an island that captured my heart decades ago, as it has those of the many thousands who spill out of the ferries and fill its cobblestone streets. With its beautiful beaches, outstanding sailing, vibrant shops, and waterside dining, it's so easy to fall in love with Nantucket in the summer.

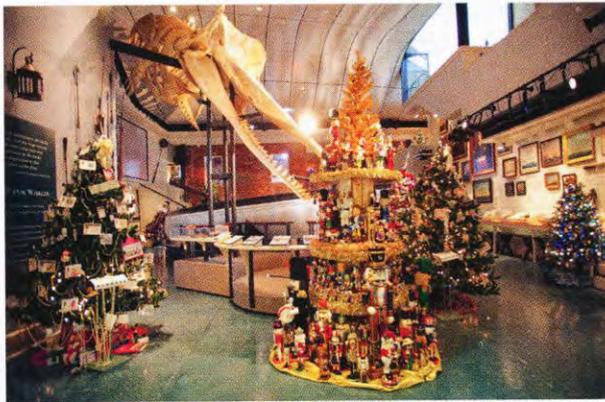
But there's *another* Nantucket. Come fall and winter, it's a sleepy New England village. It belongs again to the locals, and to the hardy souls who love walking its windswept shores with no one in sight, who duck into its warm restaurants, where everyone seems to know everyone else. There's one special weekend in December, though, when the streets hum with visitors again. Officially it's the annual Christmas Stroll Weekend—though locals call it simply "Stroll." It began 37 years ago, and the idea hasn't changed since: Give people a reason to get together, to enjoy the island, to give a big boost to its shops and restaurants, and to celebrate a place that doesn't close up when the air turns cold—it simply relaxes, and in a way its people grow warmer. Stroll brings together people in a good mood, inspired in part by festive shops decorated with holly boughs and fanciful window displays.



OPPOSITE, Nantucket's cobblestone Main Street is decked for the holidays.
LEFT, carolers in period costume are a highlight of Christmas Stroll Weekend.
TOP, a private residence gets into the spirit of the season.



Brant Point Light welcomes holiday visitors into Nantucket Harbor.



ABOVE, at the Nantucket Whaling Museum (15 Broad St., 508-228-1894, nha.org/sites), an impressive sperm-whale skeleton shares space during the holidays with the annual Festival of Trees. RIGHT, Santa arrives by ferry.

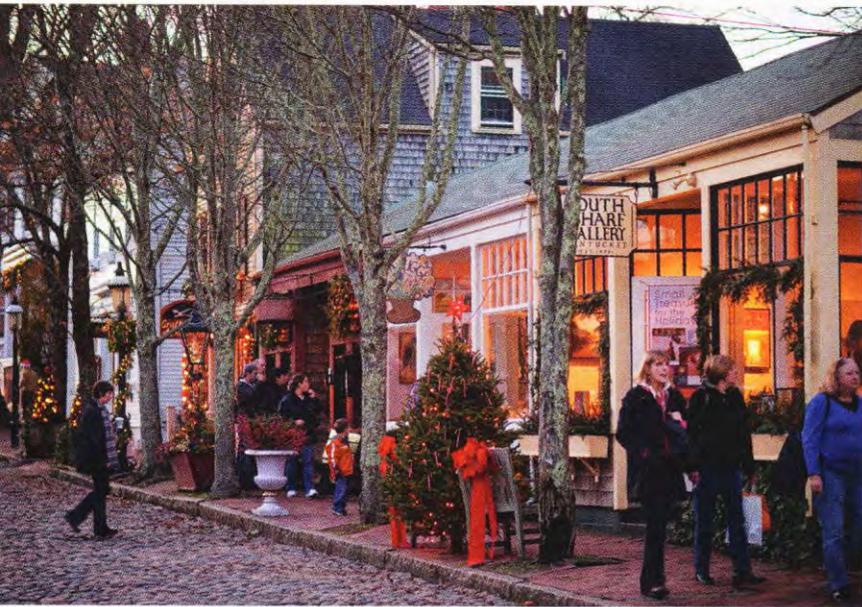
The Nantucket Whaling Museum never gets old for me, so our first night begins here. The museum was renovated in 2003–2005, creating an even more attractive setting for the historical and cultural displays highlighting the island's past as a whaling community. There's nothing abstract here. When you see the 46-foot-long skeleton of a sperm whale hanging above, you know what it feels like to be dwarfed by nature in all its awesome power. All around you is evidence of the islanders' life before tourists came ashore. There's exquisite scrimshaw on display in the many glass cases, along with lightship baskets and other period folk art.

We arrive by high-speed ferry on Friday, and the spirit of the weekend ignites suddenly as we spy a giant wreath hanging from Brant Point Lighthouse, then boats across the harbor decorated with Christmas trees on their bows and colorful lights strung up their masts. Greetings at the Straight Wharf dock seem more heartfelt than in the summer months—there's less baggage, less bicycle chaos, more hugs and laughter.



Off Easy Street, next to Old North Wharf, the Killen family's dory wears a festive air—an annual tradition since 1965.





LEFT, India Street welcomes holiday shoppers and strollers. OPPOSITE, colorful nutcrackers add a whimsical touch to the Whaling Museum's Festival of Trees.

others are cheeky cultural commentaries—such as one draped with ornaments of empty prescription bottles of Prozac and Viagra. In yet another room of the museum, a hush falls over the gathered audience as a slightly giddy group of fresh-faced high-school students file up onto risers and in perfect harmony charm the crowd with holiday favorites.

But this is Stroll Weekend, so the year-round items share space with the annual “Festival of Trees”—a big deal on the island now, with some 70 holiday evergreens decorated by local merchants, nonprofit organizations, and individuals. Most trees are tasteful, themed expressions of Christmas;

MAGIC & MEMORIES *a selection of festivities around the region*

CONNECTICUT

Mystic Stroll. More than 50 Main Street stores serve up free food, while Santa hands out candy canes and carolers invite strollers to sing along. **December 7, 6–9 p.m.** 866-572-9578, 860-572-9578; mysticchamber.org

RHODE ISLAND

Christmas in Newport. Now in its 40th year of turning the dark days of December into the brightest of the year. More than 1,500 volunteers make sure that every day of the month features something special. **December 1–31.** 401-849-6454; christmasinnewport.org

Downtown Holiday Festival, Providence. Peek inside a selection of venerable residences that open to the public on this special day. Tours, carolers, bell ringers, and a tree lighting ceremony at City Hall. **December 4.** 401-831-7440; ppsri.org

MASSACHUSETTS

Marblehead Christmas Walk. For the 40th annual celebration, a tree-lighting ceremony and holiday parade, plus Santa arrives by lobster boat. Additional family events throughout the weekend. **December 2–5; extended activities December 11 and 18.** 781-631-2868; marbleheadchamber.org/christmaswalk38.html

Stockbridge Main Street at Christmas. Named for the iconic Norman Rockwell painting, this 21st annual weekend features house tours, caroling, and a holiday concert. On Sunday, Main Street closes down, antique cars find their parking spaces, and a live re-creation of the painter's work takes shape. **December 4–5.** 413-298-5200; stockbridgechamber.org

Beacon Hill Holiday Stroll, Boston. Charles Street welcomes shoppers with free hors d'oeuvres, restaurants offer special menus,

and carolers in Victorian garb give the night its soundtrack. Horse-and-buggy rides, too. **December 9, 6–9 p.m.** 617-720-7888; beaconhillbusinessassociation.org

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Winter Holiday Stroll, Nashua. After the tree lighting in Railroad Square, Santa greets kids, adults greet the outdoor beer garden, and everybody gets a chance to take in the local cuisine and a variety of musical and dance performances. **November 27, 5–10 p.m.** 603-883-5700; downtownnashua.org/stroll

Candlelight Stroll, Portsmouth. Strawberry Banke's historic homes are decorated, while hundreds of candles light up streets and properties. **December 4–5, 11–12, 18–19; Saturdays 5–9 p.m., Sundays 4–8 p.m. (call or visit the Web site for pricing).** Part of **Vintage Christmas in Portsmouth**, including live entertainment, opera broadcasts, films, and more at The Music Hall. 603-433-1100, strawberrybanke.org; 603-436-2400, themusicball.org; vintagechristmasnb.org

VERMONT

Winter Wassail Weekend, Woodstock. Regarded as one of the state's don't-miss weekends, highlights include a holiday horse parade, a tour of historic homes, streets filled with singers, and Billings Farm & Museum dressed in 19th-century Christmas finery. **December 10–12.** 888-496-6378, 802-457-3555; woodstockvt.com/wassail

MAINE

Christmas Prelude, Kennebunkport. Since 1982, this seacoast town becomes a winter wonderland each December. Santa arrives via lobster boat; summer shops re-open and glisten. **December 2–12.** 207-967-0857; christmasprelude.com



Outside, the streets are teeming with revelers in just the mood you'd expect. The spell of the season is clearly in the air: men in red corduroys, plaid vests, and Santa hats; women in elf costumes; others wrapped head to toe in white blinking lights; dogs adorned with reindeer antlers (not sure what their mood is). But that's just the Friday-night warm-up. Tomorrow will bring Santa and Mrs. Claus—and no summer celebrity sighting compares.

On Saturday, Santa arrives in style—who needs reindeer when you have a trusty Coast Guard cutter? Closer, closer, with Mrs. Claus by his side, the big guy greets the throngs of jumping and clapping children at Straight Wharf. Tugged along by the town crier, the Clauses hop into a horse-drawn carriage, and off they go, parading down Main Street, escorted by carolers in Victorian costume, all the way to Pacific National Bank, where kids get to chat with Santa *and* a “Magical Talking Tree.” Yes, the scene oozes with charm and joy, but it's not manufactured—this is the real deal. The crowd is all ear-to-ear smiles, and the good mood is infectious. Just look at the wide-eyed

Travel back in time when you visit Grand Circle Gallery's exhibit of vintage travel posters—and other inspiring works by such photographers as the renowned Bradford Washburn and George Daniell.

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Detail: "Venezia," A.M. Cassandre (1901-1968)

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Santa and Mrs. Claus make their way along Main Street the old-fashioned way. **BELOW**, two little girls pause for a moment before heading off to visit with Old St. Nick.

faces of the youngest toddlers, the adults not embarrassed to be feeling this happy.

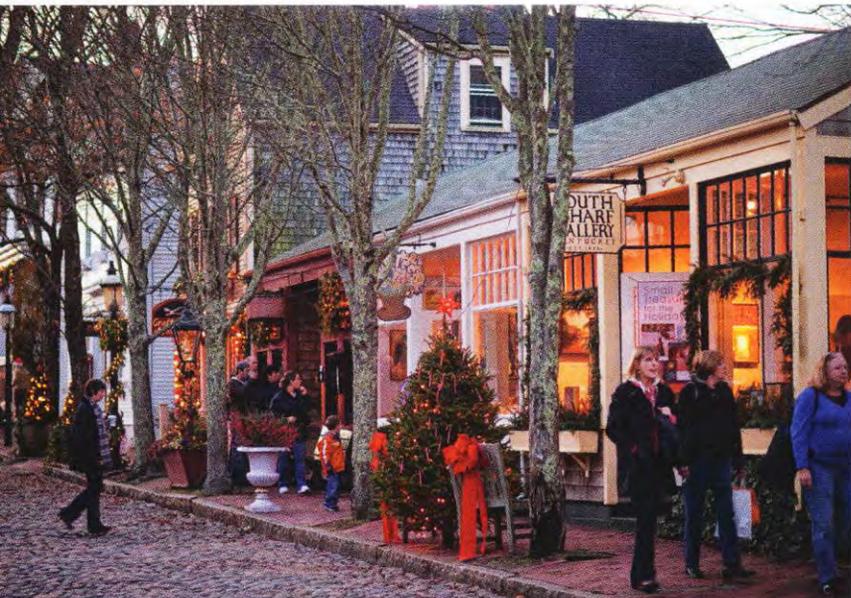
Most shops and restaurants are happily open, too, and feature holiday-theme window decorations, one more extravagant than the next: Christmas trees made of scallop shells, wreaths and ribbons of every sort. The welcoming aroma of hot toddies and warm cinnamon from freshly baked cookies wafts over us. It's a charismatic way to experience a little bit of an old-fashioned Christmas.

And, if you need a practical excuse, you can get some early shopping done without going to a single mall. Nantucket's retailers look forward to this big push to get through the rest of the long winter season, and local crafters get into the act with shows and demonstrations. At the Preservation Institute, St. Paul's Church, and St. Mary's Church, artisans are lined up in rows, displaying handcrafts ranging from ornaments



and greeting cards to jewelry and clothing to foods and toys. It's hard not to spend, whether you're looking for a stocking stuffer carrying a reminder of a fun weekend or a more exquisite purchase to last a lifetime.

Goodwill goes only so far, of course. All that shopping and smiling can certainly build up an appetite—and islanders don't forget how to make great food when the days turn colder. In the parking lot of the Grand Union market, right off Old South



LEFT, India Street welcomes holiday shoppers and strollers. OPPOSITE, colorful nutcrackers add a whimsical touch to the Whaling Museum's Festival of Trees.

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