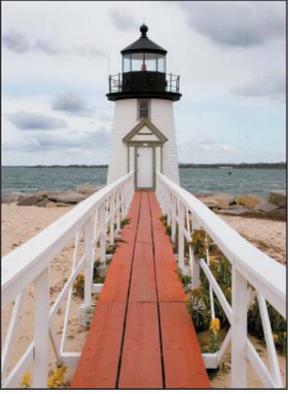


Escape

Cape Cod rewards

After taking an instant liking to Boston, PAMELA WADE meanders down Cape Cod.

Stationary fetishists are never off-duty. Even the attractions of downtown Manhattan will not deflect us from the quest for new delights in pens, paper and plastic, so when I spot a branch of Staples, it doesn't matter that the World Trade Centre site is just a block away, the designer chaos of Century 21 across the road, Brooklyn Bridge within walking distance and the Wall Street bull gleaming nearby in the sun, I am in there. And that's where I find the big red button with "easy" written across it in raised white type, begging to be pressed. So I do, triggering a warm brown American voice that says in a pleased tone, "That was easy!" It turns out to be the theme for the whole trip.



sitting next to a snoozing Orthodox Jew in hat and overcoat at a shoe-shine stand, or hanging out with a couple of bored firemen lounging on the bumper of Engine 14. Forget New Orleans: the real Big Easy is the Big Apple.

Getting away is also simple. I cross the road from the Hotel Pennsylvania, step onto Amtrak's high-speed Acela service to Boston, and sit back for a smooth, quiet three-hour trip, like flying but with scenery and leg-room. She does 150mph (240kmh) on the straight, says the conductor proudly, who with his huge bushy beard would look more at home in striped dungarees pulling the whistle of a steam engine. She certainly gets us to Boston on time, and a taxi takes us to our B&B. OK, maybe this bit isn't as easy as it could have been: you really shouldn't have to ask three taxi drivers before you find one who knows

where to find a city street. Education is highly prized in Boston — Harvard University just over the river, for goodness sake. Cabbies should at least know how to read a map.

From our three-storey terraced brick B&B in a quiet square, where Peter lives with Poultry, an indoor cat (except when they go together to Florida for their annual holiday), we walk under trees past a park into an elegant shopping street and through another park with swan boats on the pond. There we find the red-painted Freedom Trail line on the footpath, which takes us past almost everything worth seeing, so that is easy, too, although the hop-on, hop-off buses would have been easier still.

I like Boston instantly: after the neck-breaking verticality of New York and the bustle on the streets, this is a city scaled for civilised people who have time to talk over a pavement coffee. Founded in 1630, it has cobbled lanes, snaggle-toothed graveyards and stone-and-brick public buildings erected in a time when beauty was as important as function. Everywhere there are trees, softening the edges and filtering the light.

Unfairly, when Bostonians feel the need for a change of scene they have even more beauty at their disposal, whichever direction they go. First, I go east, hopping in a tiny Cessna over to the tip of Cape Cod, where I collect a rental car and meander down the peninsula just like that (easy). Windswept sand dunes, biscuit-brown beaches, little towns of painted wooden houses with turrets and dinky gardens, lobster, clam chowder and red-striped lighthouses: what's not to like? The whole place is absurdly pretty, but Nantucket takes the cake: silver cedar houses with sperm

whale weathervanes on their shingled roofs, cobbled streets with just enough weeds between the pavers not to seem too twee, busy little harbour, interesting shops, classic lighthouses and 350 years of lively history.

A Massachusetts circuit has to take in the Berkshire Hills, so next I head west along the turnpike and a few hours later, dazzled by the endless stretch of October-brilliant foliage, fetch up at Stockbridge.

Within easy reach are the Clark Art Museum, dripping with Renoirs, Monets and Manets, and the studio and museum of local man Norman Rockwell, displaying scores of his sentimental yet irresistible paintings. There are the stately homes of Naumkeag and The Mount, proof that affluence and good taste are not mutually exclusive, with their glorious gardens framing views to the rolling hills where oak, chestnut and hickory do their best with their autumn colour but have to cede sovereignty to the sugar maples. There is the fascinating Shaker Village at Hancock, where the founders, who believed in celibacy, were inspired designers and engineers but failed to see the fatal flaw in their philosophy. Uninhabited now, it is open instead as an absorbing museum.

Linking all these points of interest are miles of beautiful trees with tucked underneath them little towns of neat clapboard houses, their steps and porches decorated for Halloween with pumpkins and chrysanthemums. Having a great time there is easy. The only hard part is leaving to come home.

□ Pamela Wade was a guest of Tourism Massachusetts and flew courtesy of Air Tahiti.



GETTING THERE

Flights: Air Tahiti Nui has some good deals flying direct to New York via Tahiti; see www.airtahitiniui.co.nz.

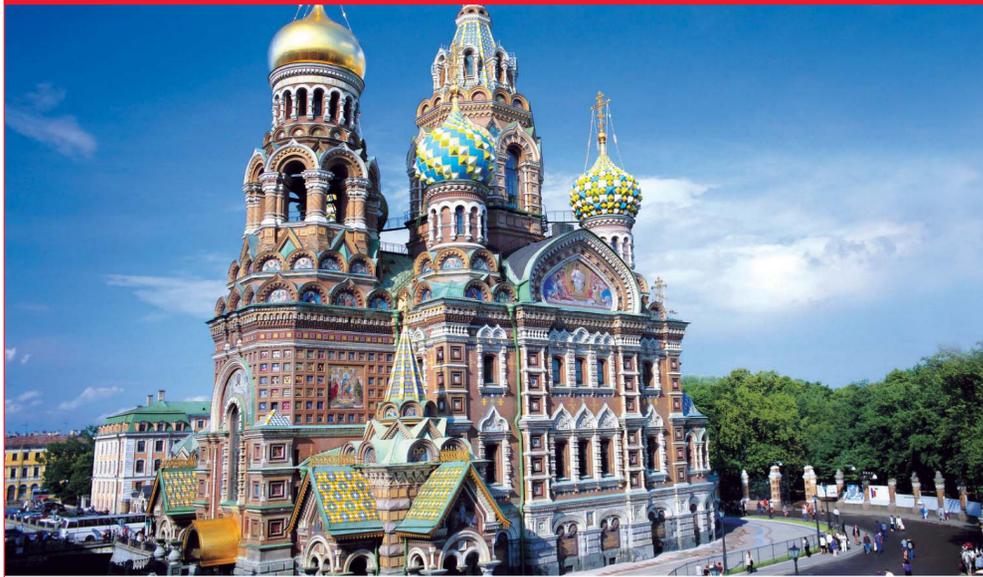
Other travel: take the train to Boston; see www.amtrak.com. Hire a car from Enterprise (www.enterprise.com). Fly to Cape Cod with Cape Air (www.flycapeair.com).

Where to stay: the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York is comfortable and literally across the road from Amtrak's Penn Station and Macys department store; see www.hotelpenn.com. In Boston

Rutland Square House is quaint, comfortable and conveniently situated; www.rutlandsquarebandb.com; on Cape Cod, Acworth Inn, near Barnstable, is pleasant and welcoming (www.acworthinn.com). In the Berkshires choose between Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort for unfussy accommodation with activities on site (www.jiminypeak.com) or The Porches in North Adams for its unique restored decor and notable beds (www.porches.com). Further information: contact Tourism Massachusetts at www.usamass.com.

Photos: top right, Naumkeag — place of stately homes; above, Brant Point lighthouse, Nantucket. Photos: Pamela Wade

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Day 5 Cruising to Mariehamn
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Day 6 Mariehamn, Finland
Today take a tour visiting the many castles of this unique region or visit the Maritime Museum. Late afternoon sailing.

Day 7 Helsinki, Finland
Visit the Olympic Stadium, the unique underground church & see Sibelius Park, a memorial to Finland's greatest composer. Afternoon sailing

Day 8 St Petersburg, Russia
An overnight stay, docked in the heart of the city, allows you plenty of time in St Petersburg. Tonight spend the evening at the ballet or have a musical evening at the Hermitage.

Day 9 St Petersburg, Russia
Today take a panoramic city tour to make sure nothing is missed before we depart this glorious city. Late afternoon sailing

Day 10 Cruising to Gdynia
Why not pamper yourself in the beauty salon or relax by the pool.

Day 11 Gdynia, Poland
This morning take a tour into Gdansk, look out for amber & silver jewellery, local artwork and handicrafts. Afternoon sailing

Day 12 Sassnitz, Germany
This morning wake to the postcard pretty, evocative seaside resort, Sassnitz. Afternoon sailing

Day 13 Copenhagen, Denmark
Boudicca docks near Hans Christian Anderson's immortal Little Mermaid, a site not to be missed. Spend the day window shopping & visit some of the breathtaking parks and museums. Afternoon sailing

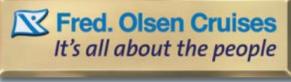
Day 14 Oslo, Norway
Arrive in Norway's lively capital, a small & walkable city with an engaging mix of old and new. Don't miss the medieval castle, sculpture park and viking museum. Late afternoon sailing

Day 15 Cruising to Dover
Our last day at sea with time to browse the onboard shops or relax on the sun deck.

Day 16 Dover to London
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Day 17 London to New Zealand
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