

VILLAGE VIEW

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Columbus Day weekend is a favorite of New Englanders and of Cape Codders, in particular, for more reasons than there's space to tell, but some are worth more than a passing glance.

This holiday has replaced Labor Day, over the past several decades, as the calendar-mark of summer's wind-down. Well within the memory of many, summer ended abruptly on the first Monday of September. That's no longer true.

Summer visitors not only linger long after the end of August, those who do pack up and go home to get the children into school continue to come back weekends at least through Columbus Day.

Their presence boosts business on the Cape, keeps tourist dollars flowing in, and gives extra income to those of us who depend on them for a living. With Columbus Day we feel we deserve a breather and have earned the privilege of a weekend of pure pleasure.

Along with tourist traffic to the Cape, there's almost as heavy a flow leaving it. Cape Codders find irresistible this opportunity for a mini-vacation. They head for the hills for a change of scene, a breath of mountain air, and the ever-delightful display of fall foliage blazing on slopes of the Appalachians and the Adirondacks.

We're not alone when we take to the road; we find the highways and byways well-trafficked with cars, all bent on the same general destinations. It comes as a surprise because, especially in these days of restricted driving, it has seemed to us who've stayed put below the bridges all summer that soaring gasoline prices and frequent reminders to reduce pleasure-driving should make an appreciable difference.

That we find highways as well-traveled as ever is a shock. It can get downright unpleasant when we look for a night's lodging and find inns and motels fully-booked. Unless we've made advance reservations, we may find it necessary to drive further than we'd planned, just to locate accommodations.

One reason for this, a reason we seldom take into consideration, is that there are more people. Population increases mean not only more crowded cities and more people living on Cape Cod, but also more traffic, fewer available rooms-with-bath, and more fast-food restaurants serving more meals to the public. As post-WW II baby-boom people reach the age of 30 years or so, those now young-adults have been absorbed into the labor force. They compete with us and each other for everything, including weekend vacations, changes in routine, and stimulating views of unfamiliar scenery.

Another reason for crowded roads and a paucity of empty rooms this weekend is the tradition of colleges and universities to schedule Home Coming celebrations to coincide with the three-day holiday that falls mid-October. There's a greater density of schools of higher learning in New England than in any other part of the country. Families with youngsters attending such schools will visit the kids this weekend, see their campuses in action, perhaps for the first time, meet their roommates, attend football games, inspect dormitories, libraries and dining halls where the students will spend their time for the coming semesters.

It adds up to a lot of cars on the road and a lot of people sleeping in unfamiliar surroundings. Wise Cape Codders will carry confirmed motel reservations if they cross the canal, northbound, this coming weekend. We may meet a steady stream of on-Cape vehicles, but we'll find ourselves among as steady a stream heading off-Cape.

There's an alternative to long-distance travel you might like to consider. Staying home. That doesn't mean spending the long-awaited holiday repeating the routines you've been tied to for months. Make it a vacation; make it as refreshing, as much of a change, as different as hitting the road for the White Mountains. There are definitely advantages over putting another 500 miles on your odometer. All it takes is planning.

If you've promised yourself a vacation, whatever household chores or yardwork is scheduled will either be done before you leave or delayed until after your return. Once suitcases are packed and you're on your way, nothing will be done around the house until you're back. No meals prepared, no gutters cleaned, no laundry done, no lawn-fertilizer spread. Stick to that, but skip packing the suitcases.

That's part of the plan. By using your own home as a motel, eating all your meals in restaurants (as you would had you gone away), boning up on the sights-worth-seeing within a 40-mile radius of home, you can be a tourist in your own backyard and learn why hundreds of thousands of visitors come to Cape Cod.

Pick up a couple of good guides to Cape attractions and a large-scale map of the area. Read the guides carefully to determine your best options; then chart your course just as you would if visiting unfamiliar places. Dozens of museums, hundreds of craft studios, art galleries and specialty stores, and numerous antiques shops stud Routes 6-A and 28. Parks, beaches, lighthouses, rivers and streams, ponds and lakes, and even hilltops with breath-taking views are worth seeking. Not as impressive as the Presidential Range? Perhaps not, but until you've explored home territory, how do you know?

Have you toured the National Seashore Park or did you only stop at the Visitors' Center? Do you know where the highest point of land is on Cape Cod? Have you been to Plimoth Plantation? Did you ever take time to see the dolphins in one of the Cape's aquaria? Have you actually participated in a nature walk? Among the restaurants, aren't there some you've always wanted to try, but never did?

Would you enjoy a picnic lunch on the bank of a sun-splashed river? An evening walk on an empty beach with the harvest moon rising out of the sea? The 360° view from the top of the Provincetown Monument? Heritage Plantation's display of antique cars or a ride on its carousel? Visiting a weaver's studio, a glass factory, a potter's shop, an art show? Exploring a marina? Watching fishing boats come in to unload their catch?

Have you ever taken a whale-watching cruise in Cape Cod Bay? Gone deep-sea fishing? Dug clams on the tidal flats? Fed waterfowl at the edge of fresh-water ponds? Visited state fish and game preserves where trout and quail are raised for re-stocking? Seen the Thornton Burgess Society's new home and replenished your supply of sun-cooked jams and jellies? Browsed in bookstores and print shops?

You can do all these things and many more without putting a lot of mileage on the family car or spending six or eight hours driving the interstate. You can sleep late in the morning and go out for brunch. You can take in a movie, hear excellent jazz at several popular nightspots, and sample ethnic meals: French, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Japanese, or stick to New England fare. You can even sail away to Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard to get a taste of island life.

It's all at your doorstep; it's affordable because you're not laying out a week's grocery-budget each night for a motel room. There's got to be a reason the Cape's tourist population continues to swell. Why not find out for yourself what those reasons might be?

And, finally, show me the motel or inn that's as comfortable and well-equipped as your own home. Or one that's free.