

During the early part of every weekend this time of year, it seems as if everyone within driving distance of Cape Cod tries to cross the canal, vacation-bound, at the same time.

When the urge to travel strikes some of us who live here, we're pleasantly surprised to find we may leave the Cape Friday night or Saturday morning and return anytime on Sunday without having to fight a solid wall of flying steel.

Too many of us, perhaps, fail to take advantage of this opportunity to travel against the heavy stream of traffic and enjoy in moderate comfort the joys of summer vacationing.

Most of us, whether we admit it or not, are in a rut. We spend our weekends doing household chores and complaining about the crowds. It wouldn't take a lot of planning to reschedule activities and do something different. A change of scene could give your spirits a lift.

The first question that follows such a suggestion is "Where do you want to go?" And unless you've already been to a place, you really aren't sure you'd like it - or what there is to do once you get there, so too often the suggestion dies aborning and the weekend passes routinely.

Within a few hours' driving time of the Cape there are half-a-dozen or more worthwhile places to visit. The Whaling Museum in New Bedford and the Battleship Massachusetts moored in Fall River combine to make interesting stops enroute to Connecticut or for just a day-trip.

Block Island, reached by ferry from Point Judith, Rhode Island, at the port of Gallilee, welcomes visitors with an away-from-it-all atmosphere entirely different from that of nearby Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

Block Island, a popular summer resort for residents of Providence and environs sixty or eighty years ago, has returned to favor in the eyes of some people anxious to escape more crowded places.

If you like meals of fresh fish, or enjoy fishing parties, Block could become your favorite summer vacation spot without changing one iota.

From its rolling fields, marked off by miles of stone walls, and from its flower-studded meadows, you can enjoy some of the most beautiful scenery and views of the wide-open Atlantic Ocean to be found on the Eastern Seaboard. It's like being at sea -- ashore.

Broad beaches, small harbors, and towering headlands of clay cliffs, similar to those at Gay Head on the Vineyard -- although without the variety of color -- make beachwalking a new experience to those accustomed to beaches and marshlands common on the Cape.

The ferry accommodates cars as well as passengers, but for a day-trip you'll find ample parking space near the ferry dock, and rental bikes available on the island. Block is small; seven miles long, three wide at its widest point, and shaped rather like a pork chop.

If you prefer more organized sightseeing, chart your course for Mystic, Connecticut, and the Seaport Museum. It's about two-and-a-half hours' drive from the Cape.

This summer the Seaport's principle project is the restoration of the Gloucester fishing schooner L.A. Dunton. The exhibit is a working one, demonstrating the process of ship preservation.

The schooner is a 124-foot wooden vessel and is hauled up on the yard's lift dock. Visitors watch the work from a gallery above the rigging loft, carpenters' shop, and from an area indoors where smaller vessels are maintained and restored.

Periodically a slide presentation illustrates the process being made as the work continues; the exhibit includes the opportunity to board the schooner to see, at close quarters, the work being done.

Mystic Seaport's shipyard is the only one in the world devoted entirely to the preservation of historic vessels. Skilled shipwrights, boat builders and riggers, since wooden ships are almost a thing of the past, are rare in the labor-market today, but the shipyard employs approximately thirty people, full time, maintaining and preserving the museum's fleet.

Among the large vessels is the Charles W. Morgan, the biggest at the Seaport, and among the 200 or more small craft is a Crosby Cat Boat.

The featured vessel, this summer, is the L.A. Dunton; she was built in Essex, Massachusetts, in 1921 and is representative of the finest in design of vessels fishing under sail.


She carried her dories, small seaworthy boats accommodating one or two men, on her deck until she reached the fishing grounds. There, the men lowered the dories and, using a trawl -- a long, hook-studded line -- fished the Grand Banks, from the dories and returned to the mother-ship with the skuppers awash.

The fishing fleet of ships like the L.A. Dunton was based at Gloucester, though some came from Provincetown, as all good Cape Codders know, and the ships were noted for their seaworthiness and speed.

Rigors of the North Atlantic storms are especially dangerous on the Banks where shallows create steep waves and rough waters. Thick fogs in days before radar and radio communication, were another serious hazard.

The ships had to be fast to be money-makers, for the first schooner to return to port commanded the highest prices for her catch.

The Seaport offers many other nautical exhibits and welcomes visitors of all ages. A day at Mystic wouldn't be wasted for any family or for any person interested in our country's history -- a history inextricably woven from lives of men who went to sea as well as those who tilled the soil and took their living from the land.



Should you prefer to vacation where the atmosphere is quite different from that of the Cape, you might enjoy the Connecticut and Hudson River Valleys in western Massachusetts and eastern upper New York State.

A three-hour drive will bring you to the richest farmland of our state, and the foothills of the Berkshire mountains. Wander around the campus at the University of Massachusetts, visit the library and the Student Union building.

Explore the little village of Deerfield, not far away, to soak up some Bicentennial flavor. The architecture makes it a pleasure to walk beneath the tall shadey elms lining the streets, and many of the houses are open to visitors and are beautifully and authentically furnished.

Not much further west is the New York state line, roughly paralleling the Hudson River. At Hyde Park on the river's east bank, you may visit the home of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the library housing his Presidential papers and memorabilia.

Nearby and open to the public is one of the Vanderbilt mansions. Both places offer interesting interiors through which you may roam and explore, as well as magnificent views of the Hudson. You'll enjoy these, no matter what your political persuasion.

Back in Massachusetts, you might like to stop in Stockbridge on your way home. Here the Norman Rockwell Museum is well-worth your time and attention. The original paintings and drawings of this American artist and illustrator present their own history of our lives in ways most of us remember.

As you return from your summer holiday on a Sunday afternoon in July or August, approach the Cape with a carefree heart. The urge to travel won't be crushed by the need to join the hordes of cars, trucks, campers and trailers fighting to cross the bridges to the mainland.

You'll encounter traffic, sure. But you'll be meeting most of it, and your lane of the Mid-Cape highway won't be bumper-to-bumper, creepy-crawly, stop-and-go. That will all be on the opposite side of the broad median strip.

You'll sail home on a tailwind.