

M V V A C A T I O N

The Vineyard in the Fall

2026 EDITION

The Derby, the beaches that finally open to everyone, what closes and exactly when — the honest guide to the island's best-kept season.

LATE LIGHT ON THE ISLAND'S BACK ROADS — BUILT FOR LEAF SEASON

The season, date by date

Fall on the Vineyard is not one season — it is a series of curtains coming down, each on its own schedule. Here is the whole autumn on one page, so nothing closes on you by surprise.

SEPTEMBER — THE ISLAND EXHALES

Sep 8-13	MV International Film Festival , Vineyard Haven.
Sep 10	Last day of the Steamship's frequent summer service into Oak Bluffs — from the 11th, OB keeps four round trips a day (through Oct 22), everything else lands at Vineyard Haven.
Sep 13	The 81st Derby begins — 35 straight days of island religion (page 3).
Sep 15	Summer weekend car premium ends on the ferry — standard auto fare drops to a flat \$127 each way.
Sep 16	Lucy Vincent and Lambert's Cove open to everyone — no town sticker needed. The most exclusive sand on the East Coast, free (page 4).
Sep 19	Tivoli Day street fair, Circuit Avenue, Oak Bluffs (rain date Sep 20).
Late Sep	Harbor seals return to the shoals; the Felix Neck osprey cam goes dark as the birds head south.

OCTOBER — THE GOLDEN MONTH

Oct 3	Ponies and Pumpkins at Misty Meadows (rain date Oct 4). Last day of the VTA summer schedule — fall timetable from Oct 4.
Oct 12	Columbus Day — the island's second curtain. Last day for the Island Queen and SeaStreak ferries, the Flying Horses (its 150th year), the Polly Hill visitor center and the Trustees gatehouses.
Oct 13	Cranberry Day — the Aquinnah Wampanoag's most important holiday. The bogs are tribal land and the harvest is for tribal members; admire the tradition, give it room.
Oct 17	Derby ends; Morning Glory Farm's Pumpkin Festival, 10:30-2:30, Edgartown.
Oct 18	Derby awards at Farm Neck; the Chappy ferry shifts to its winter schedule.
Oct 19-22	MV Food and Wine Festival — opening night the 19th, Grand Tastings the 21st and 22nd.
Oct 22	Last day of the fall ferry schedule — and the last Steamship boats into Oak Bluffs until spring.
Oct 23	Winter ferry schedule begins: every boat, Vineyard Haven only (through Jan 5).

NOVEMBER — THE LOCALS' ISLAND

Late Oct-Nov	Foliage peaks — the ocean keeps the island two or three weeks behind the mainland (page 8).
Nov 1	Clocks fall back — sunset jumps from about 5:40 to 4:40 PM . Plan the light, not just the day.
Nov 7	Barn Raisers Ball at the Agricultural Hall, West Tisbury.
Nov 27-28	Vineyard Artisans Thanksgiving Festival CONFIRM VENUE and the Edgartown Chowder Contest (Nov 28).

SEPTEMBER 13 – OCTOBER 17

The Derby: 35 days of island religion

The Martha's Vineyard Striped Bass and Bluefish Derby turns 81 this year. For five weeks the whole island fishes — and you are welcome to watch it happen.

If you want to fish it

Enter online at mvderby.com, then finish registration **in person** at Derby HQ on Dock Street or an island tackle shop before you wet a line — fish caught before that do not count. One entry covers all 35 days; there is no weekly pass.

2026 fees: adults \$70 · seniors 65+ \$45 · juniors \$25 · fly rod division same rates. Shore or boat, four eligible species: bluefish, bonito, false albacore — striped bass has been off the board since 2020.

If you just want to watch

The **weigh-in at Derby HQ, Dock Street, Edgartown** runs every day, **8–10 AM and 7–9 PM**, and it is free, open and genuinely theatrical — headlamps, coolers, fish taped and weighed while the crowd leans in. Evening is the better show.

Keep clear of the scales and the anglers unloading — it is a working weigh-in. The awards ceremony follows on Sunday, October 18 at Farm Neck.

Why it matters even if you never fish: Derby month is the island at its most itself — every parking lot at dawn has rod racks, every conversation has a rumor about albies at the jetties. Plan dinner around the evening weigh-in and you have the best free entertainment of the fall.

New rule to know: since 2025, Massachusetts requires bonito and false albacore to measure at least 16 inches (curved fork), with a limit of five combined. Derby HQ has the full rulebook.

The Derby decoder

TERM YOU WILL HEAR	WHAT IT MEANS
Albies	False albacore — the fall's rocket fish, and the rumor mill's favorite subject
Triple Crown	Heaviest combined weight across three species — the marathon prize
The Key Ceremony	Grand-prize finale: eight finalists, eight keys, one starts the new boat
Shore vs. boat	Separate divisions — a surfcaster never competes against a center console
Weighmaster	The person running the scales — what they say, goes

FROM SEPTEMBER 16

The beaches finally belong to everyone

All summer, the island's most beautiful sand hides behind town parking stickers. In mid-September the stickers stop — and the water is still warmer than it was in June.

Now open to you

Lucy Vincent Beach (Chilmark) — sticker season ends September 15. Clay cliffs, sculpted light, the most photographed shore on the island.

Lambert's Cove (West Tisbury) — open from September 16. Pine-framed, calm Sound water, sunset side.

Squibnocket (Chilmark) — resident rules end with the season. Boulder-field surf, moody and wild.

Swim like a local now

Lifeguards leave after Labor Day, everywhere.

The ocean holds 62–69°F through September — swimmable — but rip currents on the south shore do not read the calendar. Swim the Sound side, keep it shallow, never alone.

Seals are back from late September — and where seals gather, white sharks patrol. Give hauled-out seals 50 yards (it is federal law), check the Sharktivity app, and stay out of the water near active haul-outs.

Chappaquiddick changed this year: the January 2026 breach at Norton Point cut the sand road — there is **no over-sand route to Wasque**, and the little On Time ferry from Edgartown is now the only way onto Chappy. Cash onboard (a card kiosk operates on the Edgartown side), runs all fall — winter schedule from mid-October; confirm times at 508-627-6965.

An honest word about the water

September seas are the warmest of the year and the crowds are gone — it is glorious. It is also the statistical peak of hurricane season (September 10), and this island remembers Bob in 1991. If a swell warning is up, the south shore is for watching, not wading. Conditions change by the hour; when in doubt, ask a local or stay dry. Every swim this season is at your own risk.

OCTOBER – MARCH

Scallop season: the fall's quiet gold rush

Bay scalloping is the most Vineyard thing you can do after Columbus Day — and visitors can take part, town by town.

Each town runs its own waters, sells its own permits and opens its season on its own date — and those dates are set by the select boards **in September and October**, so the honest advice is: pick your town, then call. Recreational season traditionally opens in October and runs into winter. Here is what the towns had on the books as this guide went to press:

Chilmark VERIFIED 2026

Non-resident family permit **\$50** plus a **\$100 scallop endorsement**; seniors over 70 **\$25**. Dip-net only — wonderfully old-school. Town Hall, 508-645-2100 ext. 2145.

Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, Aquinnah

Each sells shellfish permits with its own non-resident rates and landing spots — call the town shellfish department for the 2026–27 season sheet before you plan a trip around it.

Edgartown

Family scalloping traditionally opens **October 1** (dragging in Cape Poge Pond later in the month), limit one wash basket a week. Non-resident fee by phone: **508-627-7570**.

No permit? Watch the fleet.

The commercial boats land at **Dutcher Dock, Menemsha** through the day. It is a working dock: watch from the public edge, keep clear of gear and trucks, and stay for the sunset — the season's best free show.

Menemsha in the fall: Larsen's runs deep into October (call 508-645-2680 for the last day), and Menemsha Fish Market is the harbor's year-round anchor. The sunset crowd thins to a handful of people in fleece — which is exactly when it is best.

What closes, what never does

Seasonal spots post their exact final days on Instagram in September and early October — the ranges below are the reliable pattern, and a marked few are worth a call before you build a day around them.

Last calls this fall

Nancy's (Oak Bluffs) **mid-to-late September**

Giordano's (Oak Bluffs, since 1930) **late September**

CONFIRM

Home Port (Menemsha) **late Sep – early Oct**

The Bite (Menemsha) **seasonal — call ahead**

Flying Horses Carousel — weekends after Labor Day, spins through **Columbus Day, Oct 12** in its 150th year; \$5 a ride

Larsen's Fish Market (Menemsha) **into October 508-645-2680**

Back Door Donuts (Oak Bluffs) **late October CHECK**

INSTAGRAM

Gay Head Lighthouse tours — four days a week, 10–4, after Labor Day **GAYHEADLIGHT.ORG FOR SEASON**
END

Polly Hill visitor center + Trustees gatehouses
Oct 12 (Polly Hill grounds stay open sunrise to sunset, year-round)

The year-round island

The Black Dog Tavern (Vineyard Haven) — chowder does not take winters off

Offshore Ale (Oak Bluffs) — peanut shells on the floor, fire going

Menemsha Fish Market — the harbor's year-round anchor

Alley's General Store (West Tisbury, since 1858) and the **Chilmark General Store**

Cronig's, Stop and Shop, Reliable Market — groceries never blink

All six town libraries — open, warm, and quietly the island's best off-season restrooms

Mytoi garden (Chappaquiddick) — open daily, and arguably best in leaf season

The Chappy ferry, the VH ferry terminal, the hospital — the island's spine runs all winter (page 9)

The pattern worth memorizing: most seasonal boats and businesses run through **Columbus Day, October 12**, then the island winds down over two more weeks. Come before the 12th and you get nearly the whole island; come after and you get the locals' version — both are worth the boat ride.

Fall events worth planning around

Every date below was verified against the organizers this August. Ticket prices for the late-fall events publish closer to the day — check the links before you book the boat.

DATE	EVENT	THE INSIDE LINE
Sep 8–13	MV International Film Festival, Vineyard Haven	Screenings at the Film Center; all-access passes sell first
Sep 13–Oct 17	The 81st Derby	Free weigh-ins daily 8–10 AM and 7–9 PM, Dock Street (page 3)
Sep 19	Tivoli Day, Circuit Avenue, Oak Bluffs	Street fair all day; rain date Sep 20
Oct 2	First Fridays return, Vineyard Haven	Galleries and shops open late on Main Street
Oct 3	Ponies and Pumpkins, Misty Meadows	Small-kid heaven; rain date Oct 4
Oct 13	Cranberry Day (Aquinnah Wampanoag)	A tribal holiday, not a tourist event — the bogs are for tribal members. Know it is happening; let it be.
Oct 17	Pumpkin Festival, Morning Glory Farm, 10:30–2:30	Hayrides, cider pressing, live music — the classic fall Saturday
Oct 18	Derby Awards, Farm Neck	The boat keys change hands
Oct 19–22	MV Food and Wine Festival	Opening night the 19th; Grand Tastings Oct 21–22; tickets via mvfoodandwine.com
Nov 7	Barn Raisers Ball, Agricultural Hall	Donation at the door; the island dances
Nov 27–28	Vineyard Artisans Thanksgiving Festival	Fri–Sat 10–4; confirm venue at vineyardartisans.com
Nov 28	Edgartown Chowder Contest, Fisher House	Vote with your spoon

Saturdays through October: the West Tisbury Farmers Market keeps running at the Agricultural Hall grounds — smaller than July's, better conversations. A winter market follows indoors; dates at wtfmarket.org.

Halloween: Edgartown's Main Street trick-or-treat is an island tradition, but 2026 details publish closer to the day (Oct 31 falls on a Saturday) — check our events calendar for the update.

LATE OCTOBER – NOVEMBER

Leaf season runs on ocean time

The water that warms the island all summer also holds autumn back — color peaks here two to three weeks after the mainland.

Where the color is

Correllus State Forest — miles of paved, empty bike paths under turning oaks (mid-to-late October first). **Menemsha Hills** — climb Prospect Hill for color rolling down to the Sound. **Polly Hill Arboretum** — grounds open sunrise to sunset all year. **Mytoi** on Chappy — a Japanese garden built for exactly this month. The classic drive: **Middle Road**, Chilmark, late afternoon.

The light, honestly

Through October, sunset slides from 6:30 toward 5:40 — then **November 1 the clocks fall back and it lands at 4:40**. Build days that front-load the outdoors: cliffs and trails before three, harbors for the last hour, dinner early the way the island does. September's stats: highs 74–67°F and the driest skies of the year.

Wildlife bonus round: harbor and gray seals haul out near Cape Poge and Katama Bay from late September — bring binoculars, keep 50 yards (150 feet), keep dogs leashed and well back. Report injured or entangled animals to NOAA at 866-755-6622. And no, there is no apple picking or corn maze on the island — pumpkins at Morning Glory are the fall farm ritual here; orchards mean a mainland day.

Photographer's note: fall gives this island its best light of the year — low sun, clean air, gold marsh grass. The cliffs at Aquinnah in late-day November light need no filter and no crowd.

The fall, by the numbers

MONTH	AIR (HIGH / LOW)	OCEAN	RAIN DAYS	THE FEEL
September	74→67°F / upper 50s	62–69°F	~8 — the driest month	Summer without the summer people
October	61 / 53°F	Cooling fast	~7	Sweater weather, gold light
November	52 / 40°F	Watching, not wading	Grayer, windier	Fires, chowder, empty beaches

Hurricane season officially runs to November 30 — a fall trip deserves travel insurance and one eye on the forecast.

Practical island, October onward

The visitor conveniences pack up in October — but the island's spine runs all winter. Knowing which is which is the whole game.

Getting here and around

Ferries: fall schedule through Oct 22 (four daily boats still land Oak Bluffs), winter schedule from Oct 23 — Vineyard Haven only, roughly every 75 minutes. Standby remains suspended; reserve the car, especially October weekends. **Buses:** the VTA runs year-round (fall timetable from Oct 4) and rides were still fare-free as this guide went to press — but a driver contract dispute was unresolved in August, so check vineyardtransit.com before building a car-free day. **Parking:** downtown time limits wind down by mid-October in practice; Edgartown's 2–5 AM overnight ban runs all year. The **Tisbury Park and Ride** (High Point Lane) is the island's only true year-round long-term lot — free for three days, then \$2 a day, with a shuttle that never stops running.

The essentials that never close

Hospital: MV Hospital ER, Oak Bluffs — 24/7, all year (508-693-0410). The new Express Care clinic is **weekdays, by appointment only** (508-684-4500) — not a walk-in. **Pharmacies** (there is no CVS or Walgreens on the island): Stop and Shop in Edgartown, Vineyard Scripts in Vineyard Haven, Conroy Apothecary up-island. None run 24 hours — bring extra days of any prescription. **Groceries:** Cronig's, Stop and Shop and Reliable Market hold their hours all winter. **Fuel:** no true 24-hour pump off-season — fill up by early evening.

The local restroom secret: the seasonal facilities close after Columbus Day, but every town library stays open, warm and welcoming — and the Vineyard Haven ferry terminal never closes. That short list solves off-season logistics better than any app.

Lodging math: hotel rates drop 25–40 percent after Labor Day and rentals follow — the same week that costs a summer fortune is a shoulder-season bargain. Many inns take their own vacation in deep fall: confirm the property is open before you fall in love with it.

As of August 2026: two things were genuinely unresolved when this guide shipped — whether VTA fares stay free past September, and how the driver contract dispute ends. Both can change week to week; re-check vineyardtransit.com close to your trip.

M V V A C A T I O N

The island is still out there in November.

Half-price rooms, empty roads, the Derby, open beaches and the year's best light. Fall is not the consolation season — ask anyone who lives here. These tools stay current all autumn:

Trip Planner

Pick your dates and get every day sketched, with fall events dropped in.

mvvacation.com/trip-planner

Events Calendar

Verified dates with countdowns — including the late announcements this guide could not print.

mvvacation.com/events-calendar

Getting Around by Bus

Exact routes, minutes and transfers from every town — updated when the VTA changes anything.

mvvacation.com/how-to-get-there-marthas-vineyard-bus

Live Webcams

Check the actual weather on the actual harbor before you commit the day.

mvvacation.com/marthas-vineyard-live-webcams

Researched and verified August 2026 against official schedules, town offices and the organizers named inside. Fall is a moving season: businesses post final dates on short notice, ferry and bus schedules can shift, and events change — always confirm locally before you travel. Prices and hours change without notice. All activities, including swimming and shoreline access, are at your own risk; obey posted signs and official guidance. MV Vacation is an independent guide and is not affiliated with any business or agency listed. Not responsible for injury, loss or damages. © 2026 MV Vacation

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