

INDIAN SUMMER IN NANTUCKET

Anchor under sail

It's where affluent Americans are fighting for the largest beach houses. Each summer around 250 millionaires and billionaires set down their jets there. Dutch news anchor and former US correspondent Twan Huys went sailing for a week in the waters surrounding Nantucket.

Words **Twan Huys** Translation **Marika Popma** Photography **Onne van der Wal**





No windmills in the *KENNEDYS'* *BACK YARD!*

Our New York friends – and seasoned sailors – Jamie and Camilla receive some last minute instructions from Brian. Meanwhile my wife Cheryl and I are wondering whether our one year old, Jack, is going to be seasick, not yet aware that babies handle these things much better than their parents. Nantucket being a seventy-mile trip, our first destination is Block Island, 23 miles north of Newport and about a four-hour sail with good weather conditions. The skies may be bright, the wind and current aren't quite as friendly. Seven-foot high waves test our extremely wobbly sea legs. Accompanied by a slight nausea we motor in the direction of Block, trying to remember what it was again that had made us so enthusiastic about going to Nantucket. But the sight of Block Island – named after Adriaen Block, the first ever Dutchmen who set foot in New Amsterdam – and the calm waters in the harbor, soon make up for our ordeal at sea. Our mood gets even better once in my favorite tavern on the island: the *Oar Bar*, at Great Salt Pond.

The next day it's off to Menemsha, a small fishing-village on the southern tip of Martha's Vinyard, and a little further west to Edgartown, which in 1975 set the background to Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. Two days into our trip the contours of Nantucket loom in the distance. This is the Nantucket Sound, an area that in recent years frequently made the news due to the scheduled build of a gigantic windmill-park. American Democrats may usually be very environmentally conscious and thus pro clean wind energy, things appear to be different when they occur in their own back yard. "Not in the Kennedys' back yard" the headline read in a *New York Times* article last year. As it happens, the remaining Kennedys are fond of sailing in this area. Ted Kennedy – brother to JFK – and environmental solicitor Robert Kennedy Jr. – son to RFK – are

The coast of New England is by far my favorite holiday destination. It's the cradle of American history. It was here that in 1620 after an arduous journey

the Pilgrim Fathers landed their *Mayflower*; the same English settlers who had previously fled to The Netherlands for religious reasons. They landed on the infinite beaches of the Cap Cod peninsula, facing the island of Martha's Vinyard.

It's in those very environs that over the past years we have explored beaches, towns and islands. My favorite one is Block Island; the American counterpart of our very own, Dutch isle of Schiermonnikoog. From our New York home at the time it was less than a three-hour drive, plus an hour by ferry. Still, in all those years we never came around to sailing or exploring Nantucket. According to some this island had to be sheer paradise, albeit that it mostly appears to be confiscated by wealthy and sometimes cri-

minal as well – Americans.

It must have been in the summer of 2004 that I saw a televised John Kerry – Democratic presidential candidate at the time – whiz by on a surfboard. As it appeared, his wife Teresa Heinz-Kerry, heiress to the ketchup empire, owns a less than modest beach villa there.

The same goes for the now tainted Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski, who swindled his company out of 400 million dollars and currently serves a jail sentence of eight years. He was the proud owner of a 15 million dollar castle on Nantucket, until the judiciary and IRS relentlessly intervened.

The natural onset for a sailing trip to the island has to be the "Sailing Capital of the World"; Newport, seaport town in the smallest American state, Rhode Island. It is there that we meet up with the owner of the charter company, Brian Blank, who has a real natural gift for telling stories. 'Many times a man will buy a boat, only

to find after a trip or two that his wife despises sailing. He doesn't dare admit to his buddies that the purchase was a big mishap, and that he should really sell his yacht. And that's where we come in, as caretakers of the boat. Everyone happy.'

'We get a lot of Wall Street cats, hedge fund managers and CEOs, but also sailing fanatics from Europe. Next week, "Batman" is coming to town with a few friends for a sailing trip on one of our boats,' says the born and raised Newporter.

As soon as the ladies in our party find out that "Batman" is really the alias for George Clooney, they are hugely disappointed they will be missing him.

'Hollywood has discovered Newport,' says Brian. 'Actor Nicolas Cage just bought an 18 million dollar house here.'

In the Newport dock a 42 foot Bénéteau is awaiting us; one of Brian's twelve charter boats. It's a beautiful September morning. The coming week we'll spend aboard the *Summer Magic*, for a trip to Nantucket.





FLY, DRIVE, SAIL

The quickest route to Nantucket begins with a plane ticket from Amsterdam to Boston. From there it's a good hour by rental car or train to the Rhode Island harbor town of Newport. We sailed in the 42-foot Bénéteau *Summer Magic*, one of Brian Blank's well-equipped boats – they all have GPS on board and are for rent with or without crew, for a minimum of one week.

Info: www.bareboatsailing.com / +1 860 388 64 63

The high season – early July until late August – is extremely expensive and in many of the harbors in the region, especially in Nantucket, mooring places are fully booked months in advance. September is the ideal month for an island trip to Nantucket, Block Island or Martha's Vineyard. During our journey we often called ahead to make sure we had a place to moor the next day, but most of the times it wasn't necessary at all.

Harbor fees start at 30 dollars a night, with the exception of Nantucket (harbor master: +1 508 228 72 60), where it's 65 dollars including a wireless internet connection. By the way, out at sea our cell phones had reach most of the time. And for all the Nantucket news, up to date weather forecasts and regatta listings we found the on-line version of the island paper *The Inquirer and Mirror* to be outstanding (www.ack.net).



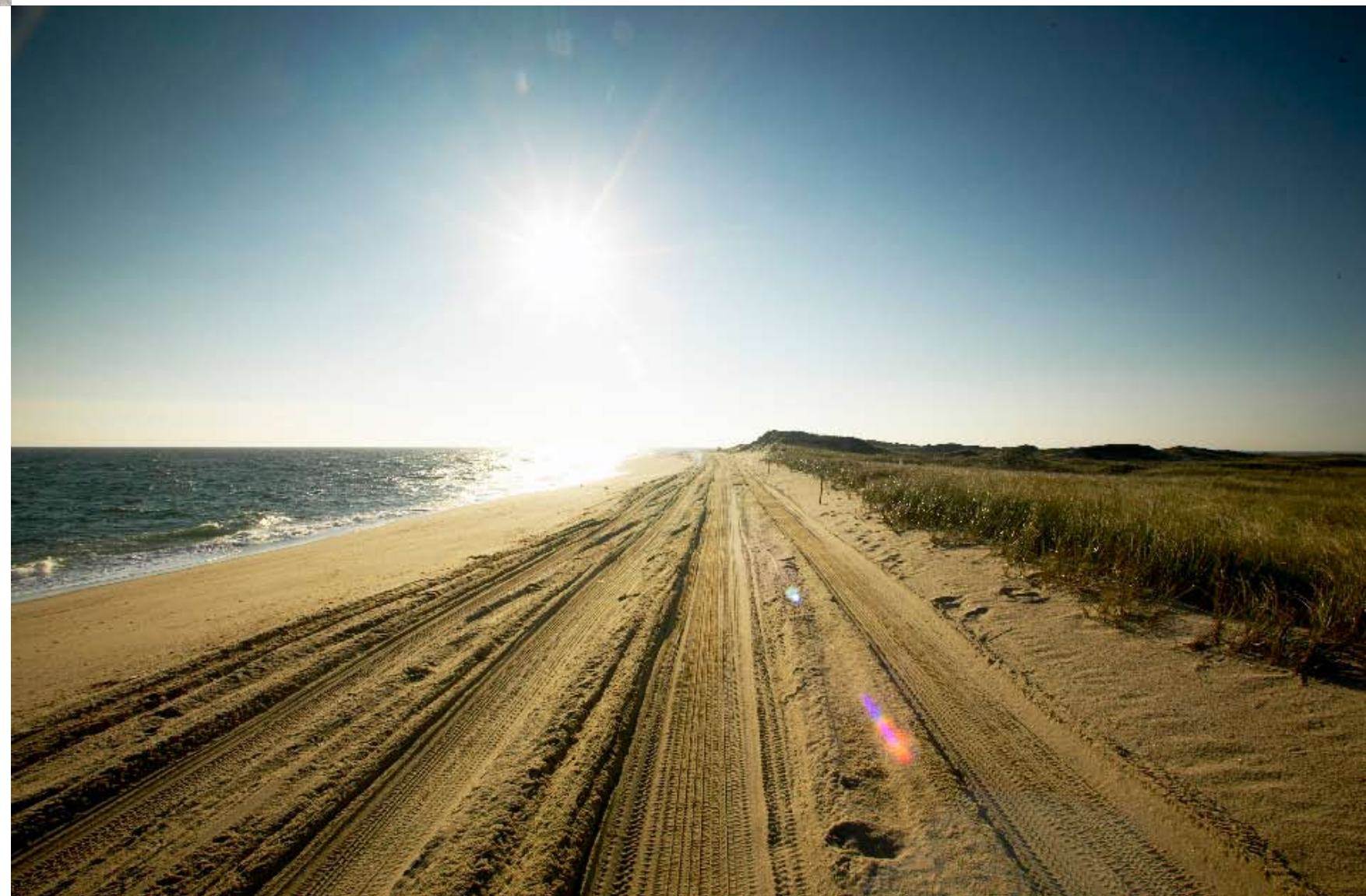
‘We get lots of “**FAT CATS**” visiting Nantucket’

the fiercest opponents of the intrusion by 130 windmills in their sailing paradise. The mills would seriously impede the view onto sixteen locations of historical importance. One of those locations is the Kennedy-compound in Hyannis Port on Cape Cod. So far, the resistance by the Kennedys and others has prevented the park from being built. It has to be said, from aboard the *Summer Magic* it does look better that way; virginal beauty, the two lighthouses of Nantucket looming in the distance. September turns out to be the ideal month for our trip. The big herds of tourists have stampeded back home, while the sun is still standing high in the sky and the sea-water is almost pleasant enough for a dive. Without effort we find a mooring space in the Nan-

tucket harbor, with a view on the antique houses where once upon a time the captains of whaler ships resided. This area is undoubtedly a moneymaker. And yes, in less than five minutes, we are greeted by harbor master Dennis, who is coming to collect the dock dues: 65 dollars a day, tasty harbor gossip included. ‘We get lots of “fat cats” here. Behind you there’s the boat of the loaded Google-boys, and before you sail into the harbor – three houses down from the lighthouse – there’s the villa of John and Teresa Kerry.’ ‘Two years ago, during the presidential elections, it was pandemonium out here. Fifteen inflatable boats filled with photographers and cameramen were waiting for him to get on his surfboard. Now, there is

nobody waiting for him anymore.’ ‘When senator Ted Kennedy comes sailing in, we always give him a first class spot in the harbor. Before, when he was still drinking, you had to watch out for him. But now, he’s been on the wagon for a while.’ I ask Dennis whether the current presidential candidates also make personal appearances on Nantucket. ‘Sure as hell. They all know there’s money to be made here in summer. And so they all campaign on the island. Last year, we had Hillary Clinton, as well as Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.’

We’re enjoying the Italian cuisine at *Cioppino’s*, while a thick blanket of fog falls over the island. ‘That’s why they nicknamed Nantucket “*The Gray Lady*”,’ the waitress informs us. ‘Summer or winter, it’s very foggy here. And also, nearly all the houses are painted in grey. You see?’ Around the year 1690 – as the legend goes – a group of men is gathered on the beaches of Nantucket, when they see a school of huge, white whales. Pointing at the enormous sea mammals, one of the men says: ‘Look at that green pasture, that will bring rich harvests to ▶





My mind's made up: **WE ARE SETTLING DOWN** in this living painting

our children and grandchildren.' And as it happened, between 1730 and 1840 the economy of Nantucket blossomed, thanks to the whale-fishery and the production of high-quality oil, which "lights the streets and keeps the machines running smoothly during the industrial revolution", as Nathaniel Philbrick writes in his book *In the Heart of the Sea*. In this prize book the Nantucket native describes the tragic journey of the *Essex*, which – fifteen months after its departure from the harbor in 1819 – is rammed by a raging, white whale. The *Essex* sinks off the coast of South-America, and the twenty men strong crew tries to reach the shores. Three of the men succeed, after an arduous journey of three months,

during which they kept themselves alive by feeding on the carcasses of their deceased shipmates. The *Essex*' epic journey also ended up being the inspiration for Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Nantucket saw an especially booming year in 1820, when the number of residents reached ten thousand, and the number of whaler ships seventy. The city had grown to be one of the richest cities in America. In the local whaling museum visitors can admire the rich history of the island, as well as the impressive skeleton of a white whale that washed ashore several years ago. Today, Nantucket still remains one of the most affluent areas of the United States. The average piece of real estate sells for around two million dollars; higher even than on

Manhattan. Old and new money fiercely battle for the possession of the biggest yacht and the fastest jet. The high season is short-lived but insanely busy; in July and August the number of residents quintuples to 50.000. It's a real mad house. Now, in September, the island is cooling off after the heated summer months. The peace returns, so one can spend a relaxing evening at *Jetties*, a beach bar twenty minutes from the centre of town. The beach view, a colorful parasol, and the Nantucket Sound: these are the ingredients for a masterpiece by Edward Hopper. The local dj paints the finishing touches with some Cool Jazz. My mind's made up: we are staying.

The next day we wake up on our boat with the sound of a foghorn. The sight's less than five yards. This is obviously not a day to be spending out at sea, and so we rent a jeep to visit the lighthouse at Great Point. We slightly deflate the tires of our four-wheel drive, and set off for a beach ride to the eastern most point of the island. A man and a woman stand knee-deep in the ▶



sea, angling for striped bass. Less than a yard away, a school of seals is bobbing on the water. ‘Lazy fishers,’ the woman comments. ‘As soon as we catch something, they try and steal the fish off the hook. Often with success.’

As the sun burns its way through the mist, the island yet again shows its splendour. Or, as the lady of the local car rental likes to put it: ‘If you’re from Nantucket it’s hard to shake the sand out of your shoes.’ In other words: who is born here, will not leave easily.

The day of our departure from Nantucket is sunny, but the wind is a bit on the strong side and not blowing at the ideal angle. The Summer Magic is pitching on the eight feet high waves. But this time around our legs are steady.

It’s a six-hour, bumpy ride from Nantucket to the town of Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vinyard, a beloved holiday destination

Once in the harbor we feel as if we just arrived in the Caribbean; café’s with terraces, palm trees and Jamaican staff.

Our very last day we are treated to lots of sun and a light breeze, which will take us back to Newport.

But before we have to end our trip, we stop off at the small isle of Cuttyhunk, one of the Elisabeth Islands. It happens to have an outstanding slogan: “A place to do a whole lot of nothing”. Twenty-five residents, one supermarket and – a fact not to be immediately discarded – Cuttyhunk is alcohol-free. In short: bring your own booze.

Another four hours of sailing later we reach the harbor of Newport at ten o’clock the next morning. Slightly anxious Brian Blank is waiting for us at the pier. He has a busy day ahead of him. There’s a boat to prep for George Clooney, a.k.a. Batman.

NANTUCKET

Nantucket looks as if it hasn’t changed at all over the past two centuries. Even McDonalds didn’t succeed in conquering it. The streets are still paved with cobblestones, supposedly the ballast of British ships.

The Nantucket Historical Society organizes walks along the most important places on the island, and the newly renovated Whale Museum helps to complete the historic picture of the island in its visitors’ minds.

The many beaches on Nantucket – the island is about 13 miles long and 3 miles wide – are almost all accessible for the public. We rented a jeep for a day, with a beach permit.

The only village worth mentioning on Nantucket is Siasconset – “Sconset” as the locals call it – 6 miles out of Nantucket Town. From here it’s just half an hour to the lighthouse at Great Point. By far, *The Jetties* (www.thejettiesnantucket.com) is the best beach bar on the island. There’s a relaxed atmosphere and good food. By the way, there are plenty of culinary highlights on Nantucket, thanks to its wealthy visitors.

According to the leading restaurant guide *Zagat* it’s the cuisine of *The Boarding House*, *Pearl*, *21 Federal* and *American Seasons* that are top of the bill. We found ourselves to be very content with the Italian cookery at *Cioppino’s*.

Lunch is outstanding at *Ropewalk* on the Nantucket wharf and, further down in the village, in *The Atlantic Café*. For a big, tasty, American breakfast with blueberry pancakes *Downy Flake* (since 1960) on the edge of the village is an absolute must-go. Fans of local beer, hard liquor and wine should visit the *Cisco-brewery* (www.ciscobrewers.com) in the hart of the island. The *Triple Eight Distillery* produces vodka, Hurricane Rum, gin en whisky. Cheers!