

The background of the entire page is a collage of aerial photographs of a coastal town. The top left shows a wooden pier structure. The top right is a close-up of green foliage. The middle left shows a white boat docked at a pier. The middle right shows a view of houses on a hillside. The bottom left shows a view of houses and a pier. The bottom right shows a view of a pier and houses. A green banner at the top contains the text "AN OFF-SEASON MOTORYACHT ADVENTURE TO THREE CLASSIC NEW ENGLAND ISLAND DESTINATIONS". The author's name "BY MICHAEL VERDON" is written in white serif font on a dark background in the middle right. The title "TRIPLE CROWN" is written in large white serif font across the center.

AN OFF-SEASON MOTORYACHT ADVENTURE TO THREE CLASSIC NEW ENGLAND ISLAND DESTINATIONS

BY MICHAEL  
VERDON

# TRIPLE CROWN

# N

antucket is deserted, as deserted as I've ever seen it. There are no hordes of tourists clogging the cobblestone streets, no melting ice cream on the sidewalks, no kids screaming that they want to go home. I've been here many times in the summer, and each time I had to wait in line for my favorite restaurants and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with hundreds of people in the crowded pubs.

But it's early September now, the beginning of the off-season. The weather is still summery, but the crowds have retreated to the mainland. I feel as though I have the place to myself. I stroll around for an hour, up narrow streets, and down to the artists' cottages on the South Wharf, relishing the quiet. I nip into the Club Car for a cup of coffee and take out my book, settling into a booth. There's no hustle, no hassle. The waiter is happy to let me sit and read. This is the way Nantucket should be experienced, as a sleepy seaport on the edge of the New England coast.

I arrived on Nantucket aboard *Destiny*, a 124' Broward that has chartered in these waters each summer for more than a decade. It was our first stop on a post-Labor Day tour of southern New England's three most popular island destinations, the other two being Martha's Vineyard and Block Island. Insiders will tell you, unless you fancy vacationing with lots of company, September is the best time to experience these places. I'm a convert.

Block Island lies just off the Rhode Island coast. Nantucket and the Vineyard hang off the south coast of Cape Cod. The three are close in proximity, but leagues apart in culture, architecture and atmosphere.

Nantucket has been called "The Little Gray Lady of the Sea" because the majority of the island's houses and buildings are made of cedar shingles that are weathered to their natural gray by the salty air. Most of the houses are carefully preserved or restored to the way they looked in the 19th century. Zoning laws are so strict that new cedar-shingled houses built on the island can only be painted one of two colors, battleship gray or light blue, presumably to maintain the Gray Lady image.

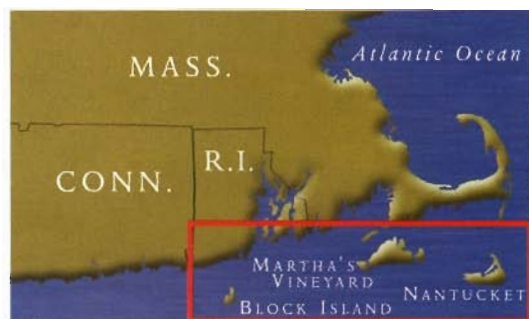
"And that paint will get worn away in a few years, anyway," said Gail Nickerson Johnson, a sixth-generation native who leads tours of the island. I spent half a day with Gail, who showed me a side of the island I never would have found on my own. She showed me the oldest house on the island, a two-story cedar-shingled house built in 1686 as a wedding gift for Jethro and Mary Gardner Coffin; the Old Mill, which was built in 1746 and still grinds corn in the summer; and the Quaker Meeting House, erected in 1838 as a school, and still used today as a weekly gathering house for local Quakers. Once you get going, nearly every converted B&B, hotel and restored house has an interesting history attached to it. The same goes for the outlying villages of Madaket and Surfside.

But Nantucket's bucolic flipside, its 82 miles of beaches and the huge expanse of cranberry bogs, also beckoned. Though it was too cold for an ocean swim, I enjoyed walking the deserted beach at Surfside, and, later, seeing the red-dotted bogs that were soon to be harvested. Once out of town, the island has a peaceful, almost barren feel about it. Coming from New York City, I inhaled as much of that serenity as I could get.

The island's charms go far beyond the excellent restaurants and chic shops downtown. It's in the salt air, the clam bakes you can have on the beaches, the stunning vistas from the island's lighthouses. In other words, enjoy the town but don't miss the rest of the island.

I skipped the Nantucket clam bake since a "New England Clam Bake" was on *Destiny's* menu the night we arrived at Martha's Vineyard. Actually, a boiled lobster was the centerpiece of this New England feast, surrounded by sumptuous mussels, clams and oysters, and roasted potatoes, corn and other vegetables. It was exquisite.

Martha's Vineyard (right) is summer camp for scores of celebrities and power brokers. During the summer season, the island's population swells to nine or 10 times its normal size.



I've taken many charters around the world and have to say that the food on *Destiny* is top of the class. Chef Matt Ludka's culinary creations kept me in seventh heaven. Matt trained in Europe, Michigan and Hawaii, and has won a number of prizes for his cooking. It shows. After the lobster bake, which I devoured in true pilgrim fashion, he outdid himself the next night with roast rack of lamb with cherry mint glaze and dried fruit orzo, followed by creme brulee for dessert. The food was always exceptional, and the yacht's wine cellar was well-stocked and varied.

If you relish luxury accommodations and don't want to pack and unpack three times during your vacation week, a fast charter yacht such as *Destiny* is a great way to take in this New England island Triple Crown. *Destiny* collected me in Newport, R.I. Right away I knew I would like the yacht and her crew when a deckhand met me in bare feet. Her crew maintained a relaxed, yet efficient and respectful demeanor throughout my charter. The yacht's light-oak woodwork and off-white accents extended that relaxed theme. A piano, leather furniture, upscale entertainment center and elegant cherry dining table reminded me I was aboard a luxury yacht of the highest order.

I spent much of my time exploring ashore, but aboard the yacht, I made liberal use of the master stateroom's Jacuzzi (there are five staterooms, which can accommodate a total of up to 10 guests). My favorite hide-out under way was the sky lounge. There, I munched on brie and crackers, read my book "The Perfect Storm" (which was just about as different from life aboard *Destiny* as you can get), and even got a massage from Tanji, the stewardess, who is also a certified masseuse—and a very talented one.

**I** also spent time on the bridge with Capt. Steve Ernest, who has been at the helm of *Destiny* for 10 years. One of the nicest, most unassuming charter captains you'll ever meet, Steve's also extremely knowledgeable about the islands. On the five-hour trip from Newport to Nantucket, I grilled him about local lore and places to visit.

My nights were occupied by fine food and drink, but the mornings always brought a crisp autumn sunrise and a scene that was purely New England. For instance, as I sat against the Edgartown lighthouse on the Vineyard watching the sun break over the horizon, fishermen in huge black waders cast their lines from the beach, hoping to hook bluefish or stripers. Surf-casting's a longstanding New England tradition and a pleasure to watch. Every now and then I heard the whir of line and one of the anglers would pull in a fish. All around me, the sky was turning from black to orange, and the seagulls were screaming on the wind. I left the fishermen and walked Edgartown's empty streets, feeling refreshed and ready to see the rest of the island.

Unlike Nantucket, which seems to take pride in its uniformity, Martha's Vineyard is architecturally diverse. There's stiff-lipped Edgartown, filled with white colonial homes built by whaling captains, that stand as testaments to its prosperous past. Ten miles down the road, Oak Bluffs is hip and funky, with multicolored gingerbread cottages clustered together in the center of town. These

bright-painted wooden cottages, which look like they're dripping in icing, were built in the late 1900s by religious revivalists who came there each summer. Some are still in the hands of the Methodist families that built them. Oak Bluffs also has the oldest working carousel in the country, which has been spinning since 1876.

During the summer season, when the population swells to nine or 10 times its year-round number, many of the beaches on Martha's Vineyard are restricted to residents. But after Labor Day, it's a free-for-all. I took a leisurely stroll along the beach below the Gay Head cliffs, and had its five-mile expanse almost entirely to myself. The island was named in the 1600s when Bartholomew Gosnold was exploring the coast and landed there. Seeing wild grapes, he named the island after his daughter, Martha.

Adriaen Block had no such selfless intention when he named Block Island after himself in 1614. The last of our stops, Block was my favorite. More rural and far less crowded than Nantucket or the Vineyard during peak season, the pork-chop-shaped island proved to be the final bastion of solitude on a memorable charter that left me progressively more relaxed. While the other islands had a fair share of tourists even in early fall, Block seemed firmly back in possession of the locals. In fact, we had Champlin's Marina in the Great Salt Pond to ourselves. Captain Steve

## EACH MORNING BROUGHT A SCENE

explained that on weekends in the summer boats are rafted four and five abreast, a scene that resembles a huge beach party, friendly and informal.

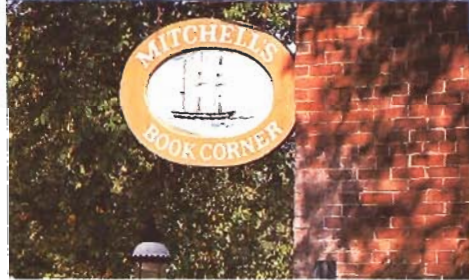
Block reminds me very much of Ireland, where I lived for five years. Stone walls crisscross green hills; grazing cattle are a common sight, and horses run wild in the fields. There is a rural, wild feeling to the island. I like a place that's eccentric enough to make a tourist attraction out of a path and turnstile leading to the grave of a dog.

Seems a local farmer had buried his favorite dog more than a century ago, and built a turnstile so that cows couldn't get in to it. His descendants had kept the dog's memory alive by keeping the path and turnstile in good order. Visitors can still see old Buck's grave by passing through the wooden turnstile and up the path.

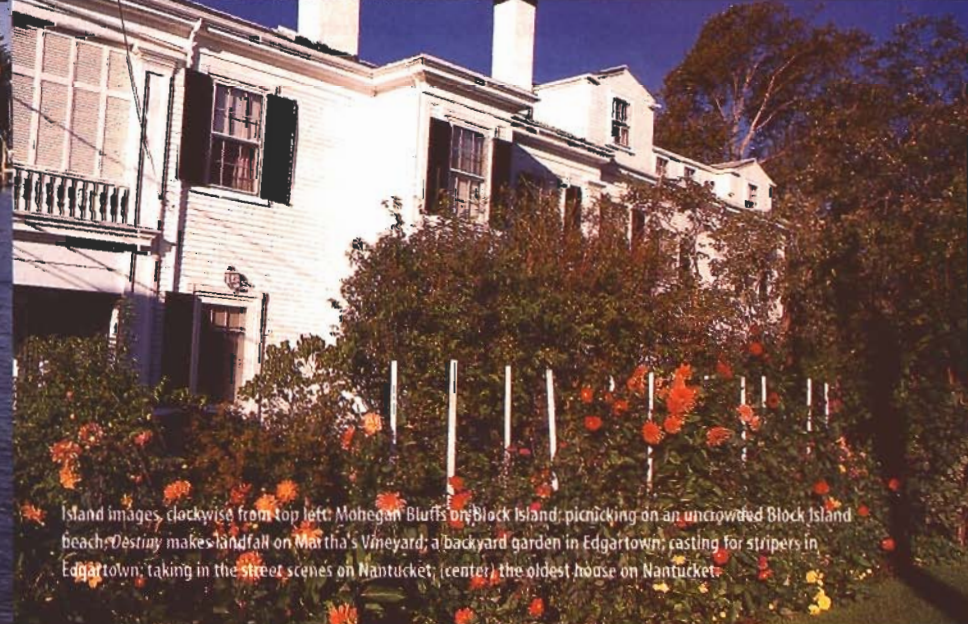
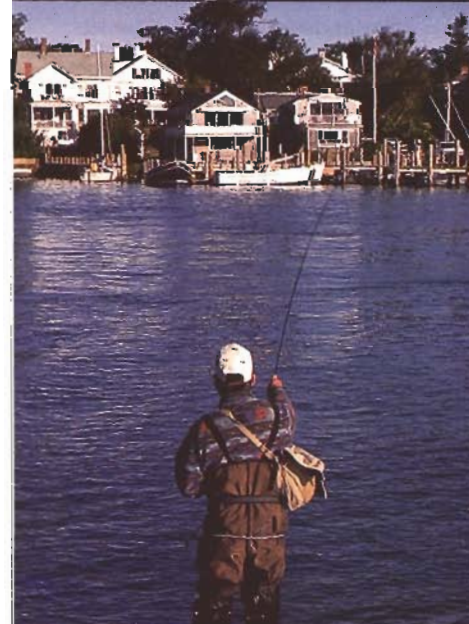
After I visited Buck, I walked up to Mohegan Bluffs, and found a scene right out of "Jane Eyre": the perfect lighthouse. It sat there still and tall, staring back at me in the distance, a brick beauty near the cliffs, glowing blood-red in the sunset. Southeast lighthouse, which first shone in 1875, had to be moved back from the cliffs in 1993 when it threatened to fall into the sea. But there it was, sitting 200' above the sea in one of the most dramatic settings I've ever seen. I spent an hour in this magical place, watching the sun drop into the ocean. With that scene etched in my mind, I headed back to *Destiny*, feeling at peace with the world. □

Contact: Missy Johnston, Northrop and Johnson Yacht Charters, Dept. Y, 0 Lee's Wharf, Newport, RI 02840. (800) 868-5913; (401) 848-5540; fax (401) 848-0120; [njricharters@edgenet.net](mailto:njricharters@edgenet.net); or any charter broker. *Destiny* charters for \$45,000 per week plus expenses. She cruises New England after Memorial Day.

Michael Verdon is a New York-based writer.



THAT WAS PURE NEW ENGLAND



Island images, clockwise from top left: Mohegan Bluffs on Block Island; picnicking on an uncrowded Block Island beach; *Destiny* makes landfall on Martha's Vineyard; a backyard garden in Edgartown; casting for stripers in Edgartown; taking in the street scenes on Nantucket; (center) the oldest house on Nantucket.