

LIVING COLOUR

New England may be America's postcard summer yachting destination, but its quieter natural charms are all yours in the autumn months,

says Pamela Ellertson



New England is known for its lobster fishing, left, and its riot of fiery-coloured trees in the autumn months



PHOTOGRAPHS: EYEVINE; GETTY IMAGES; GRETA RYBUS; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

Monhegan Island, in the Gulf of Maine, offers seclusion after the summer day-trippers have gone



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t would be easy to chalk up the spellbinding peace of New England in autumn to the dogwoods and maples painting vistas from Nantucket to Bar Harbor in blazing scarlet, canary yellow and pumpkin orange. But it's more than that. The changing colours of the leaves are perhaps the main event, but almost everyone describing New England in autumn also talks about the clarity and intensity of the light and flocks of migrating birds and butterflies within arm's reach. It's also an experience made more special by context - for people sending their children back to school or crunching Q3 numbers, this is not a time of year typically associated with peace. But here, if anything, life shifts down a gear.

"In addition to the weather being beautiful, the whole vibe of the island changes," says Christina Martin, director of marina operations at the Nantucket Boat Basin. "Things and people slow down, there are no waits in the restaurants, all the shops have sales and the shopkeepers have time to chat and get to know their customers. Everyone enjoys the fall atmosphere."

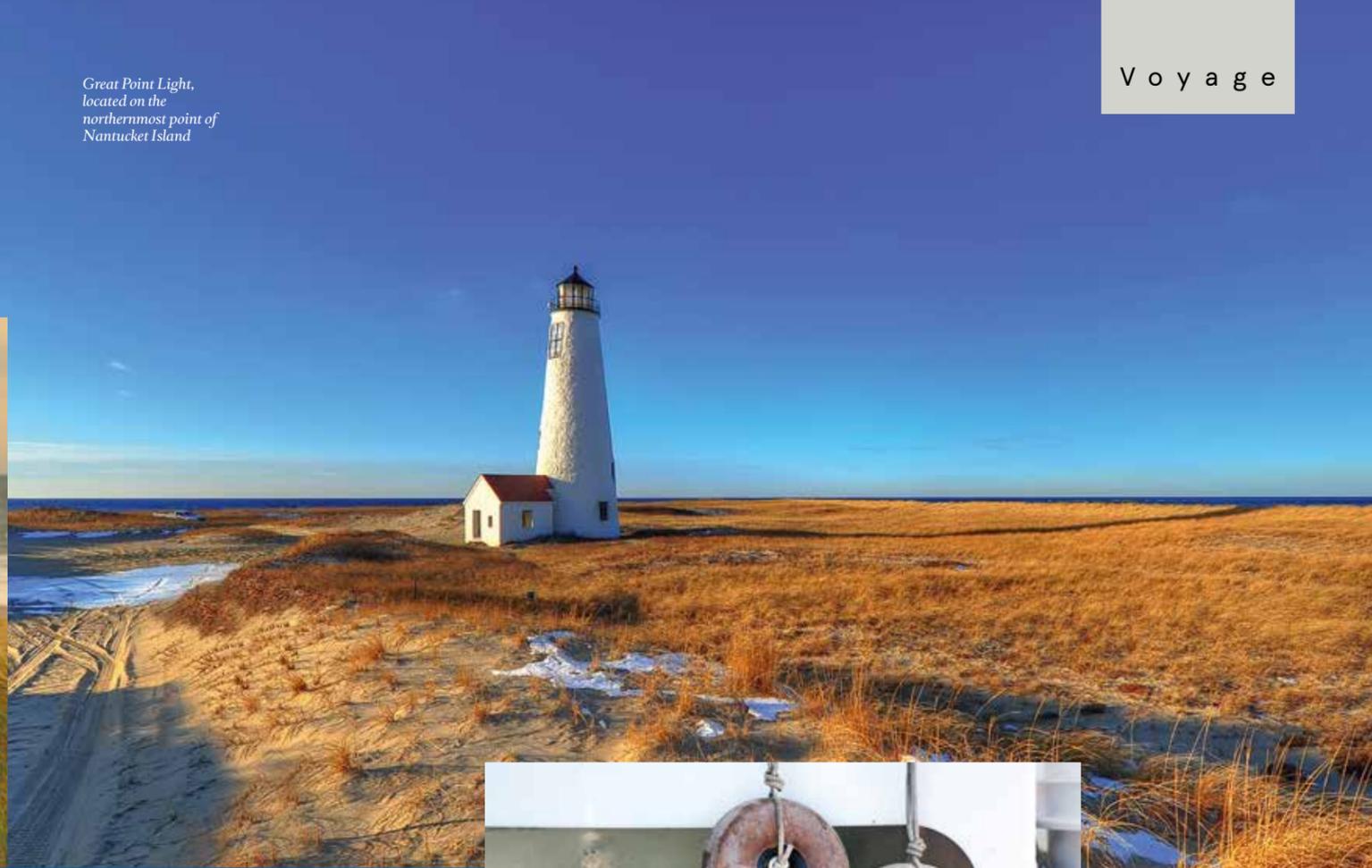
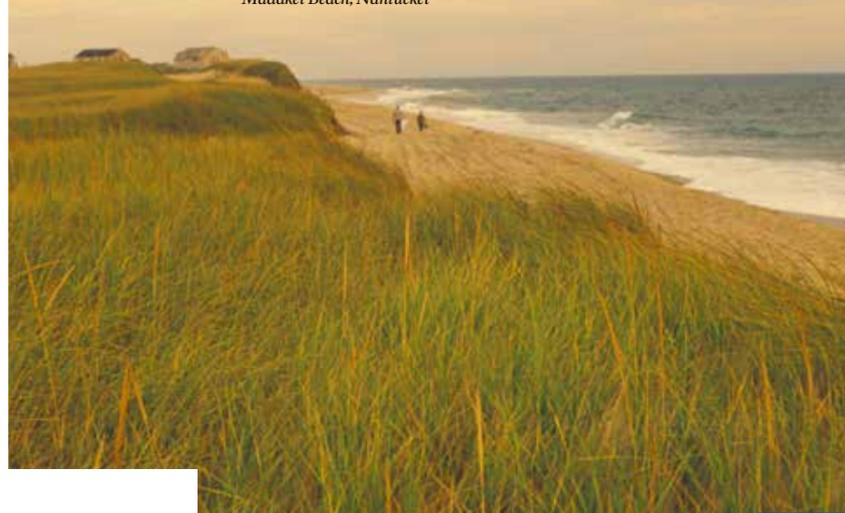
Superyacht owners can also take advantage. In the frantic high season, all 26 of the basin's slips accommodating yachts more than 24 metres will likely be booked up, sometimes as much as a year in advance. But in autumn you can not only enjoy rates cut by as much as 50 per cent, the reduced demand

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also gives you the flexibility of booking a slip just a few days in advance. Peter Brace, owner of guided hiking service Nantucket Walkabout, jokes that Nantucket island after Labor Day (the first Monday in September) sheds more population than it does leaves. "We lose about two-thirds of the tourists," he says. "The energy of the island is not as urgent." In the autumn, however, Nantucket does fill up with travellers of the winged variety on their migratory journey south. "Sometimes there will be groups of as many as 50 or more monarch butterflies eating nectar," says Dr Sarah Bois of the Linda Loring Nature Foundation (LLNF) on Nantucket. Visitors strolling through the 34.8 hectares comprising the LLNF can also take in more than 30 different species of aster in purple, white and yellow, as well as the large violet blooms of the New England blazing star. The most spectacular colour changes here take place at ground level, rather than in the treetops. "Nantucket is known for grasslands and heathlands. We have these really wide, open, low-growth habitats dominated by black huckleberry, which becomes really colourful in the fall," says Dr Bois. Nantucket's bayberries and cranberries - which are celebrated in October at the Nantucket Cranberry Festival - attract avian visitors needing a break. "Nantucket is 30 miles out to sea, so it makes it an ideal stop over during migration," Dr Bois explains. The migration Mecca for birds travelling through New England, however, is located on an island that is so different from Nantucket it seems odd that it is only 175 miles to the north. Hilly, isolated, lacking paved roads and blanketed with spruce and fir balsam, the population



Clockwise from left: a sparrow; autumn colour on Mount Desert Island; Madaket Beach, Nantucket

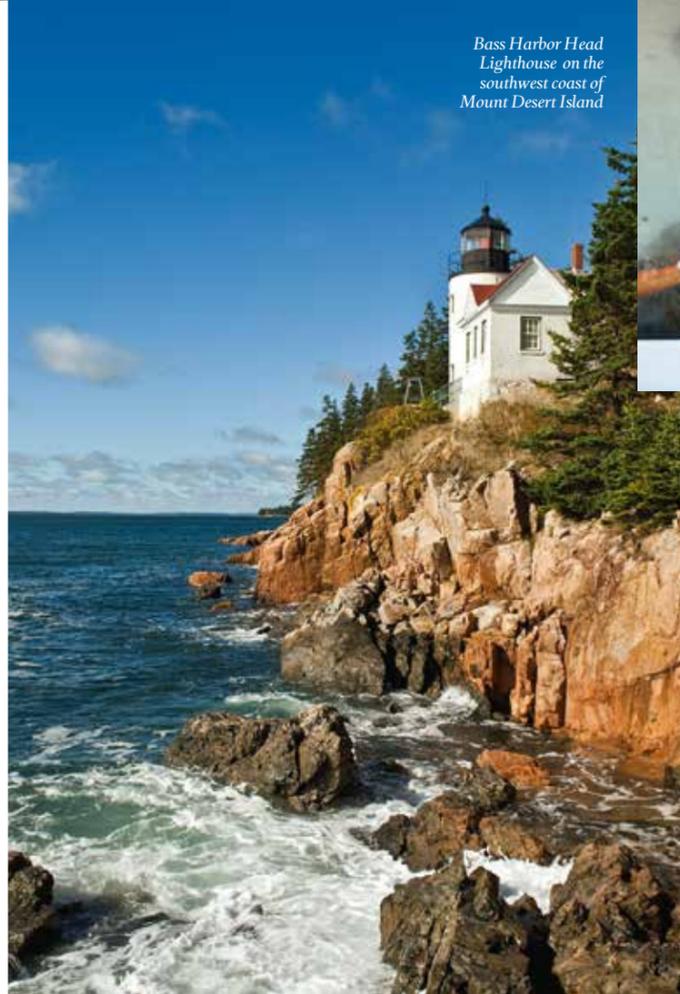


Great Point Light, located on the northernmost point of Nantucket Island



Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse on the southwest coast of Mount Desert Island

Park Loop Road, below, offers opportunities for scenic driving around Acadia National Park

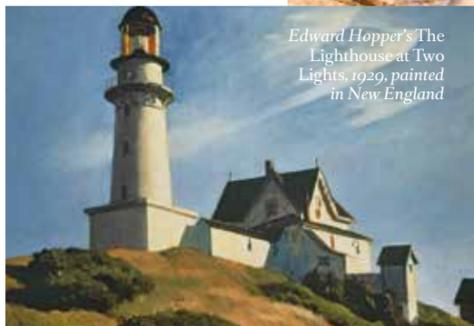


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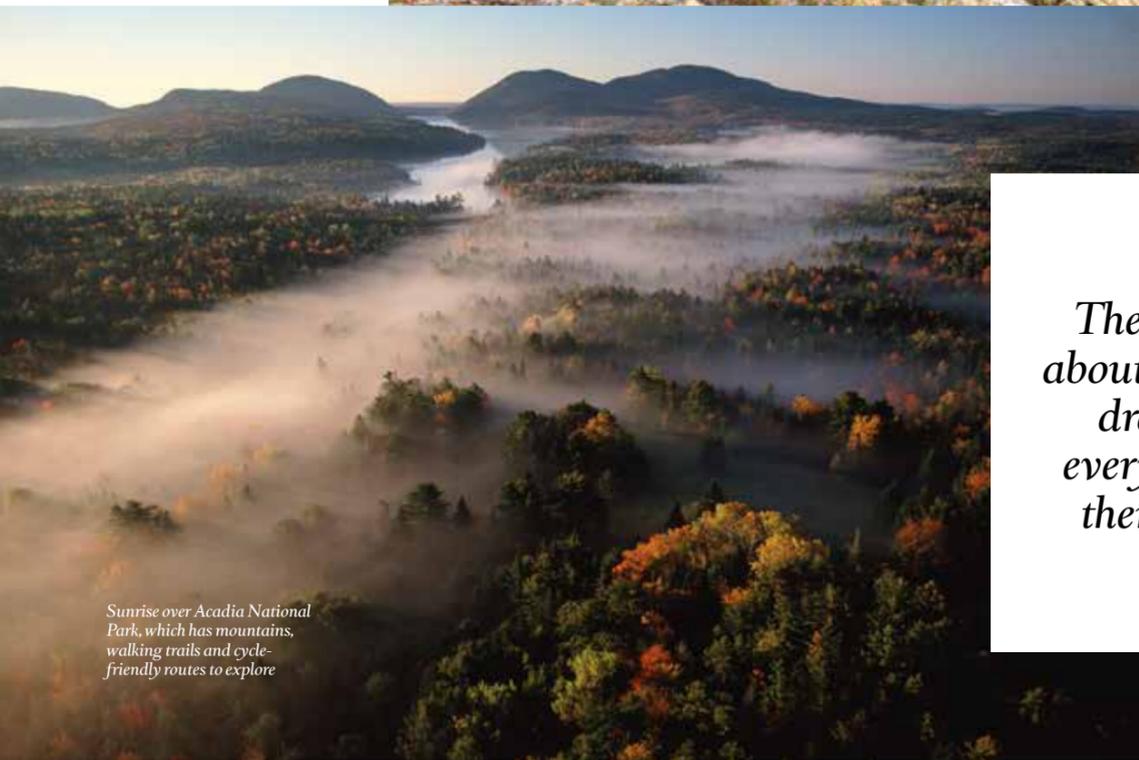


The quiet beauty of a Nantucket sunrise

The jaw-dropping view over Frenchman Bay, in Maine, from Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the US East Coast



Edward Hopper's *The Lighthouse at Two Lights*, 1929, painted in New England



Sunrise over Acadia National Park, which has mountains, walking trails and cycle-friendly routes to explore

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PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; BRIDGEMAN; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE; GRETA RYBUS



Monhegan Island attracts lovers of art and nature

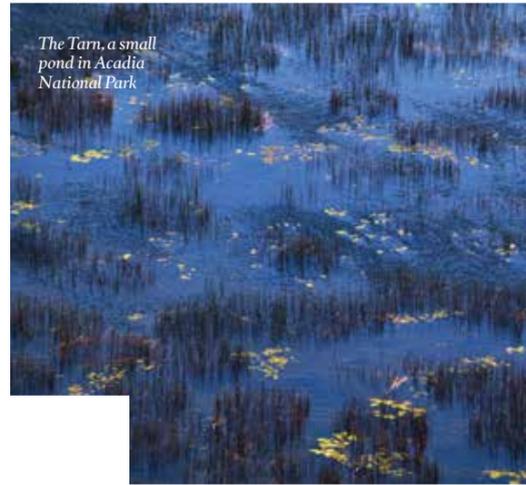


of tiny Monhegan Island in Maine balloons from about 65 people in the winter to hundreds in the summer. During the high season many are day-trippers seeking out Monhegan's stunning 12 miles of hiking trails, dozens of artists' studios and the charm of a working New England fishing village. Starting in September though, its location about 10 miles off the mainland makes it a little oasis for migrating birds – and nature-loving yacht owners – according to Doug Hitchcox, a naturalist with conservation society Maine Audubon. “A lot of birdwatching can be done in town where there are stunted trees and lilacs just loaded with birds,” he says. Yellow-faced warblers, known as the gems of the North American woods, peak in about the middle of September on Monhegan. They are soon followed by sparrows, including the relatively rare clay-coloured sparrow in October.

Two-thirds of the island is made up of protected land that has been appreciated by ornithologists, artists and hikers for almost two centuries. “On the east side of the island where the cliffs are, it's a stunning view looking straight down into the ocean: there are nests of cormorants and gulls, and harbour and grey seals in the water beneath,” says Hitchcox.

Tara Hire, assistant curator at the Monhegan Museum, reels off the many artists drawn here through the years, from three generations of the Wyeth family to Edward Hopper and Rockwell Kent. “There is something about the light and the dramatic cliffs – everywhere you look there is a painting,” she says.

But anchoring a superyacht near Monhegan is a fair weather activity only. For a more protected anchorage that will accommodate larger boats, Captain Skip Strong recommends anchoring seven miles away near Allen Island



The Tarn, a small pond in Acadia National Park

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and then tendering over. Strong, who piloted 87.78 metre *Fountainhead* through Somes Sound near Bar Harbor this summer and who is a part owner of the Penobscot Bay & River Pilots Association, also suggests going further north up the Maine coastline during the autumn. “September is the most beautiful month, the water is warmer, the bugs are gone, a significant portion of tourists have already left, it's a truly spectacular time of year,” he adds.

According to Captain Eric Edscorn of 61 metre *Just J's* (see page 254 to read more about the yacht), the most colourful foliage to be appreciated from the flybridge lies between Rockport and Acadia National Park. In terms of finding an anchorage to enjoy the view, it's not so much a question of where, but of which one. “There are thousands of anchorages up there – the retreating (prehistoric) glaciers left a boaters' paradise of islands and bays in their wake,” he says. However, he warns that they also left “tonnes and tonnes” of rocks, which in combination with “big tides and a lot of current” require a captain to be diligent, especially in shallow areas.

For the ever-present hazard posed by the ubiquitous Maine lobster traps, both Edscorn and Strong keep scuba gear on board – if need be, someone can dive in and cut any lines wrapped around a propeller shaft. But weather depending, coastal traps may be less prevalent during the autumn, because the lobsters are usually ▶



Perfect for solitude seekers: Bass Harbor in Acadia National Park



NANTUCKET

Experience an authentic New England harvest at the Nantucket Conservation Foundation's 13th Annual Cranberry Festival held at the Milestone Cranberry Bog in October. nantucketconservation.org

Tender over or rent a Jeep and explore the 16 miles of trails and sand roads on the Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge. Seals, raptors, deer, dunes and Great Point Light await. Jeeps at Affordable Rentals come with over-sand vehicle permits and GPS. affrentals.com



MONHEGAN ISLAND

An artists' colony for more than a century, there are a dozen-plus artists still working on the island who open their studios to the public throughout the summer. Dates and timings are available online. artmonhegan.com



ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

Acadia's 19,020 hectares have something for everyone that enjoys the outdoors. Use a kayak to explore the stunning coastal landscape from the water. nps.gov

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A northern parula warbler

migrating to deeper waters at that time.

When yachts reach Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island, guests' options for enjoying the outdoors both on land and sea increase significantly. "The great thing is there are eight different mountains more than 1,000 feet high," says 72-year-old professor Mark Kryder, who owns an Ocean Series 48 GT sailing yacht. "When you go up 1,000 feet in a three-mile hike, you feel you've done something."

The park also has 45 miles of carriage roads, which are open only to cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders. And there

is a constellation of other islands to explore a stone's throw from here, including McGlathery Island, near Stonington, with its gently sloping beach, or Holbrook Island Sanctuary at the back end of Vinalhaven – rich with wildlife including deer and porcupine, as well as wildflowers that bloom until late autumn.

There are enough natural wonders in New England's autumn months to fill several itineraries. But, says Captain Strong, there's a lot to be said for simply "finding a protected area, sitting by yourself and enjoying it". ▣



Monarch butterflies flock to Nantucket in autumn