

Nature in the Neighborhood – July 2023

Staycations

Ready for a Staycation-vacation? Merriam-Webster defines “staycation” as “a vacation spent at home or nearby.” Though frequently thought to be a recent addition to our lexicon (gaining in popularity during the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the 2020 pandemic), the word apparently dates at least as far back as almost eighty years ago (*“Take a Stay-cation instead of a Va-cation, this year.” ~ Cincinnati Enquirer, 18 July 1944*). Back then it wasn’t the pandemic, but World War II and the rationing of gas and tires that prompted the inspiration for staycations.

This notion of taking a staycation instead of a vacation has been the topic of a number of articles over the years (including, now, mine). Some tout its benefits (saves money) while others warn of its risks (not far enough away from the temptations to work). There have also been numerous articles on how to best plan your staycation, including a recent July 8, 2023 New York Times article *“How to Make a Staycation Feel Like an Actual Break”*. One key is to have your staycation really be a break, make a plan and then treat the time as a vacation -- not an opportunity to catch up on chores.

At this time of year, when the weather’s warm and the sun shines much later in the day, my personal preference is to stay close to home and enjoy that warmer weather and extra sunlight -- saving more distant travels for the colder, darker New England months.

In short, I think summer is an ideal time for a staycation.

The summer is also a great time to get outdoors -- and getting outdoors (no matter what the season) is what study after study shows is good for both our physical and mental health. A recent report even now suggests that spending more time in nature, or just living near green space, can help protect against some of the risks associated with dementia.

We are lucky to be close to the coast and the many outdoor water-related opportunities that offers. To name just a few, there’s kayaking in

the Essex River Basin or canoeing along the Ipswich River, going whale watching out of Gloucester, or taking one of Essex National Heritage Area's boat tours, maybe to visit Misery Island. Plum Island and Parker River National Wildlife Refuge offer walking trails and wildlife observation, as do also the area's many parks, including Bradley Palmer in Topsfield, Stage Fort in Gloucester, and Halibut Point in Rockport -- the latter where you can climb along Cape Ann's rocky coast exploring tide pools. ("Dog Town," the hidden five square miles of trails in the center of Cape Ann, stretching from Gloucester and Rockport with its inscribed boulders, is a favorite of mine).

For swimming and beachcombing, there are the area's many beaches, for example, Crane's in Ipswich, Good Harbor in Gloucester, and Singing in Manchester-by-the-Sea (but you'll have to watch for unfortunate beach closures this year resulting from high bacterial counts in the water). There are also farms to visit, Appleton Farm and Russell Orchard in Ipswich, and Cider Hill in Amesbury.

In short, there's *much* to do outdoors as this shortlist shows. To help you in planning an outdoor staycation, the Swampscott Conservancy has been hosting a series of local walks and one bike ride this summer season. The remaining of these activities include the following:

- July 29, 12:00PM, Steer Swamp and Crowninshield Island, Marblehead
- August 13, 12:00PM, Appleton Farms, Ipswich
- September 3, 12:00PM, Bike Ride on Border to Boston Trail
- September 17, 11:00 AM, Harold King Forest, Swampscott
- September 23, 11:00 AM, Harold King Forest, Swampscott

These hikes and the bike ride provide an opportunity to get to know some of the local forests and trails in and around our neighborhood and beyond. More information on each can be found by clicking the "Events List & Sign Up" link at: swampscottconservancy.org/events/

Studies show that just planning or anticipating your vacation can make you happier than actually taking it -- so start planning your outdoor staycation in the neighborhood!