

## WHALE WATCHING

NEW ENGLAND GETAWAYS

# WHALE WATCHING



Photo courtesy of Oceanic Adventures

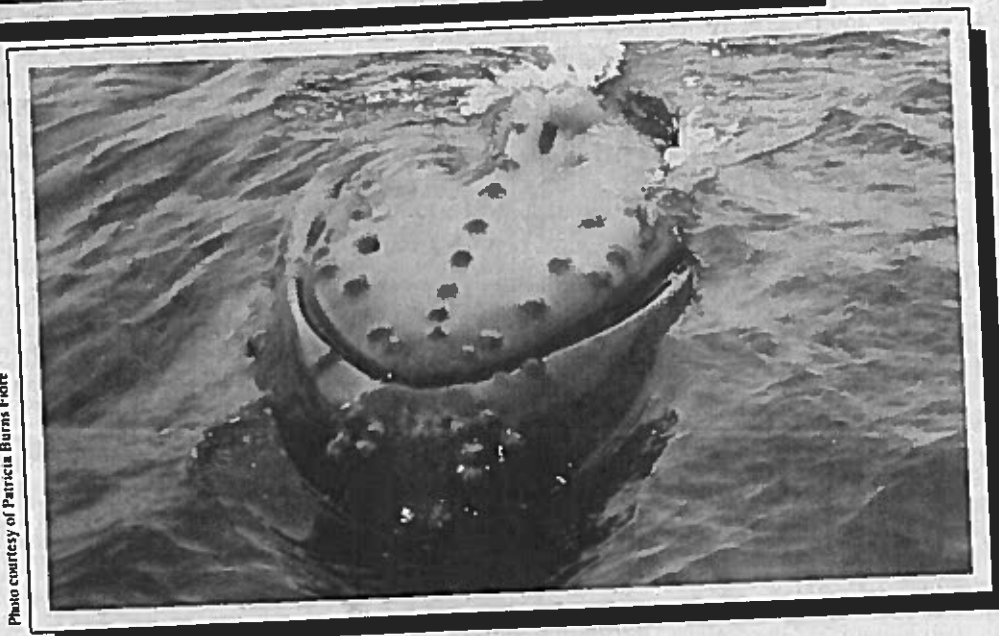


Photo courtesy of Patricia Burns Fiore

# It's A Whale of A Time!

**A**mong its many justly famous attractions, New England's summer season boasts unusually beautiful and busy beaches and coast areas. Visitors come from everywhere in all shapes and sizes. Many come for the famous seafood and salt air. Some of them are real whales. Yes, real whales: those Lighthearted Humpbacks, Fins and Minkes. This isn't the annual meeting of Former Weightwatchers of America; we're talking about one of New England's newest and booming industries: Whale Watching!

Between April and October, those aquatic acrobats of the open seas entertain and amaze boatloads of their legged relatives, many of whom have travelled further than the whales themselves to marvel at these mysterious denizens of the deep. Originally organized by ecology and scientific concerns, whale watching cruises have grown so tremendously in popularity that, in response to the growing demand, everyone from pleasure lines to fishing concerns has gotten in on the action.

The whales are attracted by that famous New England seafood, but probably not anything that's on your list of favorites. Have you ever tried "krill?" Krill is a type of animal plankton, a micro-shrimp of sorts, which thrives in an area known as Stellwagon Bank, an underwater mountain range located about 10 miles off the coast between Boston and Gloucester.

The krill forms the basis of the aquatic food chain. It attracts the tiny fish who in turn attract slightly larger fish and so on. This "algae soup" produces an abundant and apparently tasty ecosystem. But then again, quantity may have it over quality; an average whale consumes about 2000 pounds of food a day, or about one million calories! And when they're not eating, they're enjoying the warmer waters of the Caribbean during their mating season - burning off all those calories in the course of their journey, no doubt.

Most tours now feature on-board professional naturalists or, in some cases even marine biology researchers, who narrate the excursions. Join one of these

adventures in any of several ports and learn how these surprisingly graceful creatures evolved from furry four-footed land roamers millions of years ago. Cruises vary from the downright educational to the lighthearted and anecdotal.

Whale watching cruises are nothing if not photo-opportunities. No-one, from Flipper fan to marine scientist, boards without a camera. Sightseers stand poised with finger to shutter release, hoping to catch the next leap or spray of the gentle giants.

---

*Join one of these adventures in any of several ports and learn how these surprisingly graceful creatures evolved from furry four-footed land roamers millions of years ago.*

---

Scientists use photographs to identify individual whales, hoping thereby to learn more about their migrating habits. Some types of whales are more readily identified by unusual markings. And, each spring the scientists hold their annual naming party. All of the new whales sighted and photographed that year are named by general consensus. Frequently, they choose names like Stripe or Silver for easy identification. Having identified individual whales, information on them can be collected from various different sources. Should a newborn be spotted and named relatively soon after birth, for example, it can be studied over the entire course of its life. Right now, estimates of the creature's average life span range from 40 to more than 100 years!

Cruises manage to maintain surprisingly successful sightings ratios; in fact, it's rare that an excursion pulls in to dock without a boatload of people racing to have film developed. So successful are they, that many companies offer guarantees. So pack plenty of film, grab those motion-sickness pills and head for the docks. You're in for a whale of a time! ■—  
K.C.