

# Escape: Long haul

by SAM WALKER

**T**HE waiter casually informs me that former US President Barack Obama and his family are regulars and that he passed Carly Simon in the street 'just the other day'.

The workers of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, are full of tales of such A-list close encounters, raising the tantalising prospect that an ordinary traveller, such as I, may share a passing glance with another island regular Sir Paul McCartney, use the same cutlery as Reece Witherspoon or share a table with Bill Murray or Sylvester Stallone.

While you would expect such celebrities to hide away in secluded mansions along the coast, these Hollywood icons are well known for using the island as a playground, which means the chance of a sighting always hangs in the air.

But while celebrity spotters may be excited, any inquiry to a shopkeeper or barman about whether they've met the likes of Bill Clinton or Oprah Winfrey will be met with a nonchalant 'Sure' as they shrug and hand you your bill.

Glancing from the restaurant window out to the horizon, it is strikingly obvious why the A-listers have chosen this place as their summer retreat.

While residents of The Vineyard, as locals call it, may share a postcode with their mainland counterparts, that is where the similarity ends.

I'd read about Martha's Vineyard ahead of our three-night stay and envisaged a paradise island full of well-dressed couples walking designer dogs.

But I quickly realised the posh clothes I had packed would remain neatly folded away in my suitcase.

Because on The Vineyard, it seems casual is king.

**A**S my wife will testify, I've never been much good at 'just chilling' but I defy anyone to stand on the shores of this holiday island without embracing The Vineyard's unofficial motto – emblazoned on gift shop tea towels – of 'Relax, you're on island time'.

And so with my new unclenched mentality in tow, we dragged our suitcases the short distance from the ferry to our beautiful boutique hotel, a century-old former doctor's house in upmarket Vineyard Haven.

Owned by Liverpool-born hoteliers Simon and Annabelle Hulton, Nobnocket Boutique Inn was saved from rack and ruin by the couple in 2016.

We were given a warm welcome and offered a complimentary glass of wine before being shown to our deluxe suite.

Tastefully decorated with a private patio and garden, the property is exquisitely decorated. And with only a handful of staff, the service is personal. There is even complimentary whisky, port, brandy and any number of snacks and soft drinks available at all hours.

Taking a car on the ferry can cost up to \$137 (£106) return but tourists can board as foot passengers for \$8.50 (£6.50), renting a car on the island or cycling.

Neither of us has bicycles at home but we chose to cycle as the island is relatively flat.

But a word of warning: the island covers 100 square miles, so exploring every inch on two wheels is impossible unless you plan an extended stay.

There are, however, no fewer



Celebrity spotting is included as standard on Martha's Vineyard

Haven: It's so easy to simply enjoy the calm of 'island time'



The usual, Barack? Ex-president Obama is a regular visitor to the island. Left: The stylish Nobnocket Boutique Inn

than 14 bus services connecting the towns, running every 15 minutes late into the night, so you can go clear across the island for a night out or day trip in only ten or 20 minutes.

With that in mind, we chose to use our first full day cycling. We lunched at the Black Dog Tavern in Vineyard Haven before cycling out of town, passing within shouting distance of singer Carly Simon's home, before heading to the beach to dip our feet in warm water made famous by 1975 Steven Spielberg thriller Jaws.

I was relieved to hear that, although almost every scene shot for the movie was filmed on the island, there have been

very few shark sightings in the area and no recorded attacks.

Researching the history of the island – 'discovered' 400 years ago by English explorer Bartholomew Gosnold – we decided to be more adventurous and spend our second day a short bus ride away in Edgartown, exploring the period buildings and lush hotels famed for guests including any number of American presidents such as JFK, Bill Clinton and Obama.

We visited the Carnegie Museum, built by Dunfermline-born industrialist Andrew Carnegie, which gave us a brief rundown of the island's history, then took a stroll out to Edgartown Lighthouse and its golden

sand beach. After a dinner of fried clams and chowder we headed back to spend a relaxed evening sipping complimentary whisky and wine and watching the sunset from the hotel garden as the cicadas chirped away.

We spent our final day in the town of Oak Bluffs, admiring its famed 'Gingerbread houses', and for our last meal we had a proper American dinner of burgers and chips, before crashing a music event held by locals – who upon hearing my distinct British accent, plied me with foamy Boston lager. Thankfully our gracious landlords, who happened to be at the party, kindly offered us a lift home.

There is lots to do on Martha's Vineyard, but the beauty of the island is that you don't have to do any of them. Simply being there is more than enough.

So it was with sad eyes that we waved goodbye, 'Island Time' tea towel in hand. Roll movie credits.

## TRAVEL FACTS:

AER LINGUS Glasgow to Boston via Dublin from £600pp return. Deluxe room at Nobnocket Boutique Inn, \$195-\$450 (£150-£347). Boston Logan Airport bus, 2hrs, \$35pp (£27). Ferry, Woods Hole-Vineyard Haven, \$8.50pp (£6.50)

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