

[At Salisbury Beach, a lifetime of returns](#)

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By James Lomastro, June 24, 2025

No frills and stubbornly unchanged, it's been my favorite destination for 70 years.

The mourning doves' call drifts across the campground at 5:30 a.m., the same sound that has awakened me here for decades. I step outside my camper into the salt-tinged air of Salisbury Beach, where the Merrimack River meets the Atlantic, and feel the familiar pull of a place that has anchored my life for 70 years. With its no-frills camping, working-class sensibility, and stubbornly unchanged character, Salisbury Beach is the antithesis of Instagram perfection. Yet it has been my most faithful travel destination, a constant across the changing seasons of life.

My first memories there date to 1954, when I was 7, walking its sands with my grandfather Pepino. The beach stretched endlessly then as it does now — a broad expanse flanked by modest cottages and the kind of carnival-style attractions that defined American summer before Disney-like theme parks homogenized experience. As a child, I sensed something elemental there: the democracy of sand and surf, where the ocean levels all social distinctions.

This character sets Salisbury apart from New England's increasingly gentrified coastal destinations, like Cape Cod, where daily parking fees can cost nearly what it does for a day's camping at Salisbury, and where beach access can require a sticker. Salisbury, in contrast, maintains its accessibility. There are no resort concierges, valet parking, or restaurants requiring reservations. Families arrive in aging RVs, set up modest campsites, and make their own entertainment.

At upscale beach destinations, the infrastructure can overwhelm the natural setting — manicured landscaping that adds an artificial beauty, boutiques selling \$30 beach towels, and restaurants where a simple lobster roll costs a day's groceries. Salisbury offers the mild chaos of real life played out in public. Children catch crabs in tide pools. Teenagers navigate first romances along the seawall.

This authenticity carries a cost that resort destinations have eliminated: unpredictability. Your favorite parking spot might be claimed, or your neighbor might play music too loud. But these challenges create opportunities that packaged vacation experiences cannot provide — the chance to practice patience, flexibility, and human connection.

It was when I began bringing my children to Salisbury in the 1970s and '80s that I discovered that its gift is its resistance to dramatic change.

This constancy became even more precious when I started my most frequent visits in 2011, arriving with my granddaughters. Suddenly, I saw the beach through three generations simultaneously — my childhood wonder, my parental pride in passing down traditions, and now, the joy of watching my grandchildren discover the simple pleasures of sand between toes and the hypnotic rhythm of waves.

In this way, memories create meaning. Walking the same beach where I'd played and taught my

children to swim, where I now guide my granddaughters through tide pools, I understand that places become sacred through experience.

What transforms Salisbury from a day trip to a life-changing experience is time. In 2014, I spent more than 40 days there — enough time to witness subtle changes in light and tide and establish relationships.

Travel magazines typically celebrate the exotic, the luxurious, the once-in-a-lifetime destination. Choosing and returning to an ordinary place allows it to become extraordinary. Salisbury Beach will not appear on lists of the world's most beautiful beaches, but for me, it has provided something rare: the revolutionary idea that sometimes the best journey is the one that brings you home.