Immerse yourself in the local arts scene during ArtWeek 2019

One of the best things about the Cape and Islands is the endless variety of artistic, cultural and creative events. One of the hardest things about this area is committing the time to take advantage of such a wide-ranging offering. But imagine if you could gather dozens of events together, in a fairly concise time range, and pick and choose what to experience. Well, no need to imagine—it is about to happen.

April 25 through May 5, 2019 kicks off the second year of ArtWeek Cape Cod. Spawned for the original ArtWeek that took root in Boston in 2013, inspired by the popularity of Restaurant Week, without adopting their business model. Sue Dahling Sullivan, chief strategic officer at Boston's Boch Center, who oversees the organization and implementation of ArtWeek, says: "We used research provided by the National Endowment for the Arts that said people are looking to engage with arts, culture and creativity differently. It's not enough to just sit and listen to a concert or to watch a play or to see an art exhibit. People wanted that learning or social aspect—behind the scenes, interactive, hands-on, demos, panels, that kind of VIP access where they could peek behind the curtain. And that helped us define the ArtWeek twist."

The first season back in 2013 began with 28 events. By the time 2017 rolled around, the number of events had grown to 250, but they also seemed to have sprawled outside of the Boston environs. "It suddenly wasn't ArtWeek Boston anymore," Sullivan explains. "We want to say yes to everyone, so we rethought the model." 2018 officially took the success and the concept statewide.

With the Cape and Islands officially being recognized in the new inclusive model, 2018 saw 50 events across the region. This year that number has almost doubled. Explaining the support that the Boch Center provides ArtWeek, Sullivan says, "We see ArtWeek as an umbrella, and we are sort of a facilitator, a community champion providing the support and the outreach that brings everyone together for a week of creative and unique events." Tactically, they provide the website, artweekma.org, where every accepted event gets its own page with a photo and all of the relevant information surrounding their event. Additionally the website is organized by six regions within the state to make it as easy as possible for individuals to find events in their area. "We function also as the marketing and PR arm of ArtWeek," says Sullivan. "We believe that a rising tide lifts all boats—everyone benefits from the success of the others. But we also hope that the ArtWeek festival has a greater benefit than beyond the 10 days."

In fact, that desire is having a real impact on the success of the Cape-based events. Towns like Orleans and Harwich are cross-promoting each other’s events. Some local lodging businesses on the Cape are presenting package weekends and making schedules of suggested events available for their guests. Sullivan’s reference to tides raising boats is quite apt for the Cape’s local economy, particularly during a sleepy spring.

“It’s not just nonprofits and it’s not just cultural groups or artists,” Sullivan says. “We encourage businesses and Main Streets and chambers to come on board so that ArtWeek is the connective tissue to get all of those groups to activate their spaces and their communities in new ways, especially in a shoulder season when people are not traditionally thinking of traveling.
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Art, culture, history, literature and the culinary arts are just some of the areas that spawn creative and engaging events throughout the week. For example, the Cape Cod Symphony is hosting an open rehearsal at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center. People are invited to go and experience a very casual environment where you can see the musicians and conductor Jung-Ho Pak work out the nuances of an upcoming performance, including enlightening exchanges of ideas, questions and suggestions. Approachable events like these provide the “peek behind the curtain” aspect Sullivan references.

Past events have included a local coffeehouse that hosts workshops to learn how to make personalized artistic designs in the foam of a cappuccino. Last year 65 percent of all events were free, made up of 525 events in 130 towns and neighborhoods across Massachusetts. And 90 percent were free or under $25. “It’s a great way to
make ArtWeek a very affordable but unique vacation," says Sullivan.

Demos and hands-on workshops are always some of the most popular and accessible events available across the Cape. For example, artist Carl Lopes will be providing a demo hosted by Creative Hands Gallery in Osterville, where he will be paying tribute to ancestral heritages and cultures. Addison Art Gallery in Orleans will be presenting Art for the Earth in celebration of Earth Day. Paul Philips will be demonstrating his impressive bird carving abilities at the Harwich Cultural Center. The Eastham Painters Guild will be hosting a plein air event as they paint Nauset Light.

And those are just a taste of the full feast of what is offered across the Cape.

So no excuses. For 10 days at the end of April and rounding into May, you can choose to experience a little or perhaps a lot—the choice is yours—but it really couldn’t be easier. Have an artful week! Julie Craven Wagner
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