



Martha's Vineyard Seasonal Population Estimate 2024

INTRODUCTION

Seasonal population estimates for the Vineyard have varied widely over the years. In 1970, the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission placed the estimate at around 40,000 (a nearly seven-fold increase from the year-round population of 6,000 at the time), while MVC estimates since 2000 have been in the range of 75,000–89,000. Other Island organizations have offered unofficial figures ranging from 100,000 to 200,000. The last MVC estimate, in 2018 (based on 2016 data and an outline of methods from 2010), placed the figure at 89,231.

This report aims to provide the *likely maximum population* for the Vineyard on a given day in August, which has consistently been the busiest month of the year. An accounting of data sources and methods is available below. Following these methods, we place the Island's current peak seasonal population at about 94,650, or about 4.6 times the year-round population, which itself has more than tripled since 1970.

METHODS

Overview

The absence of a dedicated seasonal population census for Dukes County, and of standardized methods for estimating the seasonal increases, have made it difficult to pinpoint the summer population on the Island. In light of this, the MVC sought guidance from the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) in 2020 on how best to move forward. In 2023, UMDI issued a report providing a framework for estimating seasonal populations in general, and several case studies including Nantucket and Provincetown. The report (available [here](#) or by request) recommends a structure-based framework, where housing units and other structures are used as a basis for estimating population by type (Figure 1).

The 2024 seasonal population estimate for the Vineyard follows this general approach, using the permanent resident count from the 2020 Census (which correlates to primary homes), but relying mostly on FY2024 town assessor records for the remaining sub-populations. The records were sorted by residential, mixed, and non-residential uses, which account for nearly all bedrooms on the Island, including hotels, short-term rentals, and guest rooms, with some adjustments based on town property cards, hotel websites, and other information. Further sorting was done by on- and off-Island mailing address (to indicate year-round and seasonal properties) and other criteria. Key assumptions were then applied to estimate each sub-population, as outlined below.



Figure 1: Overview of UMDI Proposed Population Estimates Framework (2023).

Permanent (Year-Round) Residents

The 2020 Census counted 20,530 permanent residents on Martha’s Vineyard. According to the US Census Bureau, this category includes all people who were living and sleeping on the Island most of the time, or for whom a usual residence could not be determined at the time of the Census. It should be noted that the 2020 Census was somewhat anomalous due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with counts extending into the summer season and follow-ups extending into the fall. This likely contributed to an observed increase in population in seasonal communities like the Cape and Islands between 2010 and 2020. Separately, the Island towns counted a total of 18,982 residents in 2022. However, this seasonal population estimate uses the official Census count of permanent residents.

Permanent (Year-Round) Residents

Aquinnah	439
Chilmark	1,212
Edgartown	5,168
Oak Bluffs	5,341
Tisbury	4,815
West Tisbury	3,555
<i>Total</i>	<i>20,530</i>

Overnight Guests and Seasonal Tenants of Permanent Residents

This portion of the estimate is based on the total number of bedrooms on year-round properties that are classified by the town as residential or mixed-use, or as non-residential if it appears that the property is occupied year-round.¹ We assume that each bedroom is occupied by an average of 1.5 year-round occupants and that any remaining bedrooms are available for guests or seasonal tenants.² Year-round properties are defined here as those where the owner is listed as having an on-Island mailing address. We further assume a peak seasonal guest/tenant rate of about two people per available bedroom. It should be noted that available bedrooms for guests or tenants might not be in the same building where the permanent residents live.

This category, along with *Overnight Guests and Seasonal Tenants of Seasonal Residents* (see page 3), is intended to include short-term rentals (STRs), which have become extremely popular on the Island in recent years. The MA Department of Revenue’s Public Registry of Lodging Operators lists 4,059 STRs on the Island as of June 2024.

1 Staff reviewed town property cards, including photos where available, to determine how many properties classified as non-residential are likely occupied year-round. Most of these are classified as tax-exempt, including properties owned by housing authorities, religious groups, nonprofits, or government agencies. Other non-residential properties with bedrooms are accounted for in the *Additional Overnight Population* (see page 5).

A certain number of residential or mixed-use dwellings in each town are listed by the assessor as having zero bedrooms. In some cases, a studio apartment or finished basement, for example, might not be counted as a separate bedroom, or data for a newly renovated house might not yet have been added to the assessor database. MVC staff reviewed town property records to determine how many of these properties should be included in the bedroom counts used to estimate the number of overnight guests and tenants of permanent residents. Residential or mixed-use properties with at least one potentially habitable structure, where the structure was not clearly being used for other purposes, are included in the counts, assuming an average of 3.13 bedrooms per property, in line with the average for year-round properties across the Island.

2 Based on town assessor data and the 2020 Census, there are about 1.12 year-round bedrooms per resident. However, bedrooms are often shared, or reserved for guests or tenants. In estimating the number of bedrooms available for guests and tenants, we assume that about two out of three permanent residents share a bedroom with one other person.

Overnight Guests or Seasonal Tenants of Permanent Residents

Aquinnah	573
Chilmark	1,858
Edgartown	4,022
Oak Bluffs	4,935
Tisbury	4,381
West Tisbury	2,924
<i>Total</i>	<i>18,693</i>

Seasonal Residents

Seasonal residents are defined here as Island property owners and their households who live on the Island for less than six months of the year. In this report, the seasonal resident population is estimated by identifying all residential and mixed-use properties listed by the town assessor as having at least one bedroom, plus an owner with an off-Island mailing address. We then apply an occupancy rate to each property based on the average household size in the county where the owner receives mail (according to the 2022 American Community Survey).³ While there is likely some overlap between these residents and the permanent resident count from the 2020 Census, the ratio of permanent to seasonal residents as estimated here (52:48) closely aligns with the ratio of occupied to vacant units as counted in the 2020 Census (51:49).

The largest portion of off-Island mailing addresses was in Massachusetts (36%), followed by New York (15%), Connecticut (9%), and New Jersey (6%). However, every state except Nebraska and North Dakota were represented, along with 11 other countries or territories. Off-Island property owners are generally concentrated in other coastal areas.

Seasonal Residents

Aquinnah	732
Chilmark	2,059
Edgartown	6,926
Oak Bluffs	5,204
Tisbury	2,536
West Tisbury	1,847
<i>Total</i>	<i>19,304</i>

Overnight Guests and Seasonal Tenants of Seasonal Residents

Similar to *Overnight Guests and Seasonal Tenants of Permanent Residents*, this portion of the estimate is based on the total number of bedrooms on seasonal properties classified as residential or mixed-use, assuming that each bedroom is occupied by an average of 1.5 seasonal residents and that any remaining bedrooms are available for guests or seasonal tenants.⁴ We further assume a peak seasonal guest/tenant

³ In some cases, such as where a municipality spans more than one county, the average household size for the municipality was used instead. The sum of these figures among seasonal properties represents the seasonal resident population estimate for each town. (The average household size among all off-Island property owners was 2.45, compared to 2.94 for Dukes County.)

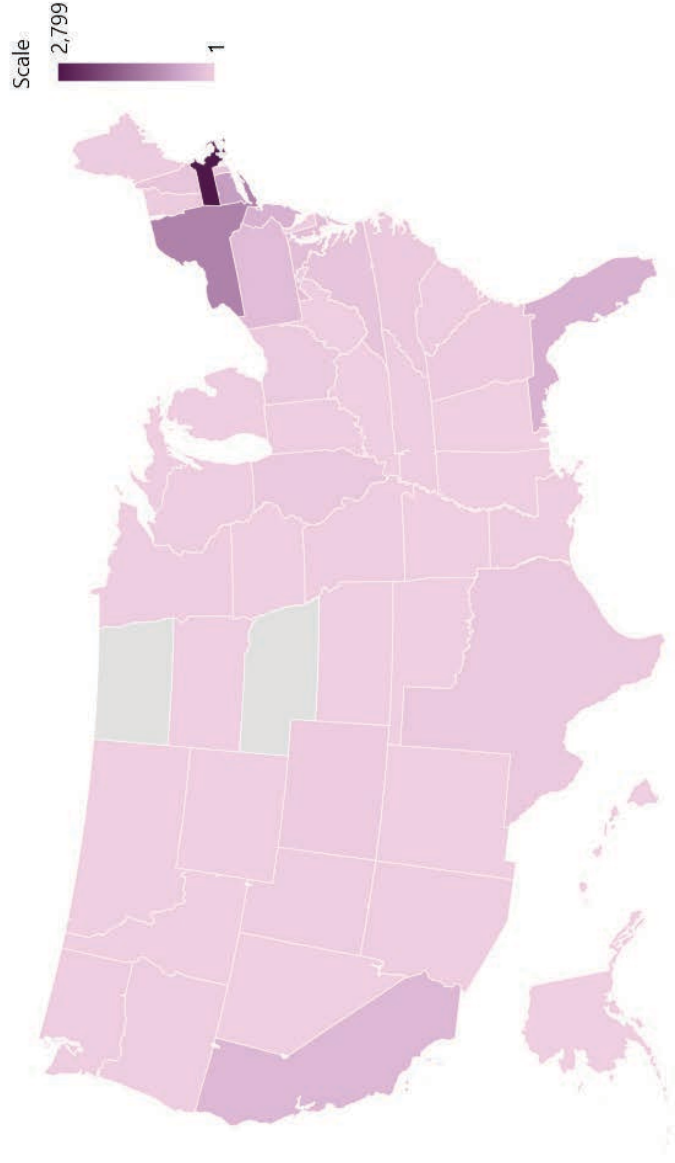
⁴ Based on town assessor data, and our estimate for the seasonal resident population, there are about 1.41 bedrooms per seasonal resident. As with year-round homes, bedrooms in seasonal homes are often shared, or reserved for guests or seasonal tenants. In estimating the number of bedrooms available for guests and tenants, we assume that about two out of three seasonal residents share a bedroom with one other person.

Martha's Vineyard Seasonal Property Owners, 2024

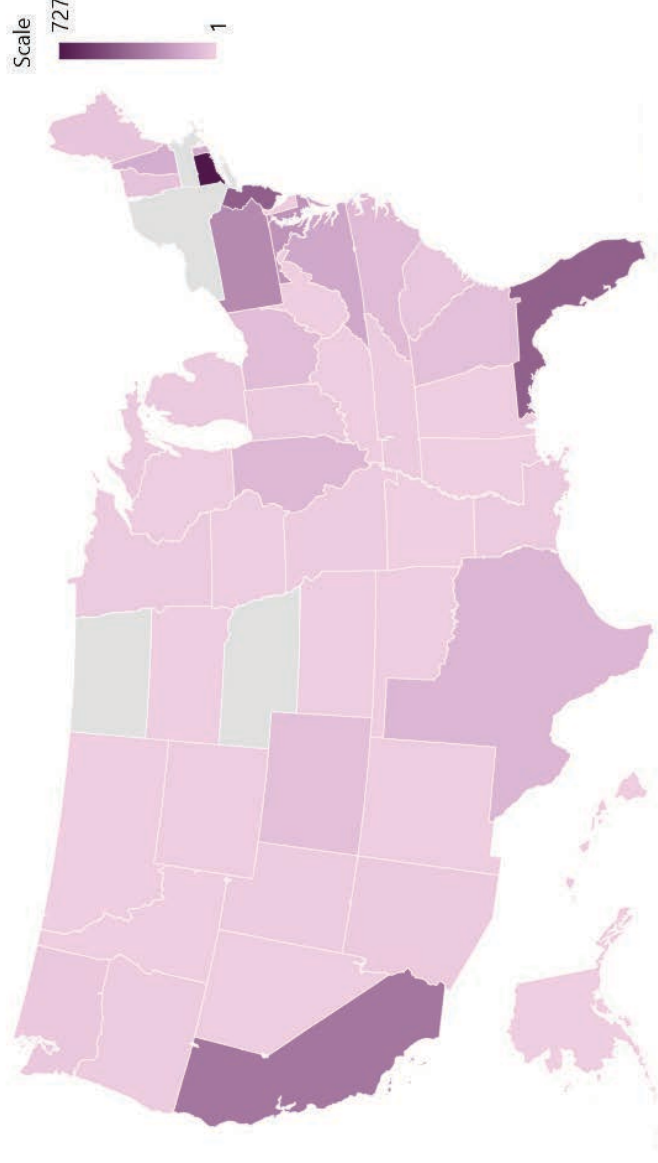
Utah	12
Missouri	11
Wisconsin	10
Hawaii	7
Kentucky	7
New Mexico	7
Wyoming	7
Oklahoma	6
Kansas	5
Iowa	4
Nevada	4
Alabama	3
Alaska	3
Idaho	3
Montana	3
Puerto Rico	3
South Dakota	3
West Virginia	3
Arkansas	2
Mississippi	1

Domestic	
Massachusetts	2,799
New York	1,147
Connecticut	727
New Jersey	440
Florida	433
California	350
Pennsylvania	269
Maryland	231
Washington DC	166
Virginia	159
Rhode Island	140
New Hampshire	131
Texas	96
Illinois	86
North Carolina	74
Ohio	66
Colorado	61
Georgia	57
Vermont	50
Maine	41
South Carolina	36
Washington	27
Indiana	22
Michigan	22
Arizona	21
Louisiana	18
Minnesota	17
Delaware	14
Tennessee	14
Oregon	13

International	
United Kingdom	19
Canada	9
Ireland	4
Denmark	2
Germany	2
China	2
Switzerland	2
Bermuda	1
Italy	1
Singapore	1
Virgin Islands	1



Martha's Vineyard Seasonal Property Owners, 2024 (Minus MA and NY)



rate of about two people per available bedroom. It should be noted that available bedrooms for guests or tenants might not be in the same building where the seasonal residents live. It should also be noted that a certain number of seasonal properties with bedrooms are categorized as non-residential. These properties and their occupants are accounted for in the *Additional Overnight Population* (see below).

Overnight Guests or Seasonal Tenants of Seasonal Residents

Aquinnah	960
Chilmark	1,372
Edgartown	10,352
Oak Bluffs	7,064
Tisbury	4,082
West Tisbury	2,896
<i>Total</i>	<i>26,726</i>

Likely Additional Seasonal Residents

A certain number of residential and/or mixed-use seasonal dwellings in each town are listed by the town assessor as having zero bedrooms. MVC staff reviewed town property cards to determine how many of these properties should be added to the overall seasonal population estimate. Residential or mixed-use properties with at least one potentially habitable structure, where the structure was not clearly being used for other purposes, are included here, assuming an average household size of 2.45, in line with the average for all other seasonal households. Guests and seasonal tenants are not estimated for this population, since the number of available bedrooms is uncertain.

Likely Additional Seasonal Residents

Aquinnah	15
Chilmark	17
Edgartown	120
Oak Bluffs	61
Tisbury	59
West Tisbury	37
<i>Total</i>	<i>309</i>

Additional Overnight Population

A significant portion of Island properties with bedrooms are classified as other than residential. These may include hotels and other transient group quarters, or tax-exempt properties such as those owned by a housing authority, religious group, nonprofit, or government agency. Properties of this type that are likely occupied year-round are not included in this section, since we assume they are accounted for in the permanent resident count. A significant number of overnight visitors also stay on boats. The Island's approximately 150 homeless residents, as estimated by Harbor Homes MV in 2024, are also included in this section.

Data for non-residential properties with bedrooms was obtained through town assessor records, with additional research by MVC staff to determine bedroom counts and likely occupancy. We assume an average of two people per hotel room (based on hotel website information), and 1.5 people per other room (based on the assumptions described on page 2). The town harbormasters in Aquinnah, Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury provided estimates for the peak number of people staying on boats who may choose to come ashore. (West Tisbury does not have any town harbors.)

Additional Overnight Population

Other non-residential properties with bedrooms, including hotels	
Aquinnah	28
Chilmark	132
Edgartown	1,410
Oak Bluffs	566
Tisbury	299
West Tisbury	104
MV Family Campground	581 ⁵
Boats	
Aquinnah	0
Chilmark	148
Edgartown	930
Oak Bluffs	130
Tisbury	200
Homeless	150
Total	4,678

Day Trippers

People visiting the Island without staying overnight are among the hardest to quantify. Previous estimates in 2000, 2010, and 2016 equated the number of day trippers with two thirds of peak passenger ferry ridership, but it is not clear how this was determined. Following an approach recently used in Nantucket, MVC staff inquired with StreetLight Data, which maintains a database related to cell phone activity, which could be used to estimate the day tripper population in May-August 2021. However, the quality of this data has declined in recent years as more people have opted out of data tracking on their phones. The \$21,000 cost to obtain the data was also prohibitive, so this approach was not taken.

The vast majority of visitors arrive and depart on Steamship Authority ferries, which in theory would make it possible to estimate the day-tripper population. The SSA does not currently track the duration of passenger visits, but it does track how long vehicles stay in its Falmouth parking lots for Vineyard ferries. About 51% of the 23,416 parked cars in August 2023 did not stay overnight, providing at least one reference point for the peak day-tripper population. Extrapolating from this—and accounting for the likelihood that a greater share of passengers who walk, bike, or take a bus to the ferry are also day trippers—we roughly estimate that 60% of the 166,334 SSA passengers last August (counted one-way) were day trippers, or about 3,219 per day. Inquiries were also made with the seasonal ferry operators licensed by the SSA (Hy-Line Cruises, Seastreak Ferries, and the Falmouth-Edgartown Ferry). Of these, only Hy-Line responded, stating that 99% of its passengers to the Vineyard were day trippers. All three operators combined (assuming the 99% figure in each case) carry about 1,190 day trippers to the Island per day in August, based on the SSA’s monthly business summaries.

According to OnTheMap, a service maintained by the US Census Bureau, about 2,600 Island workers in 2021 commuted from other counties. However, this does not account for the general uptick in employment during the summer. In any case, the peak commuter population would for the most part be included in the peak day tripper population as outlined here, including some portion of the cars parked in Falmouth.

5 Assuming 80% of peak occupancy.

Day Trippers

SSA passengers not staying overnight	3,219
Seasonal ferry passengers not staying overnight	
Hy-Line	574
Falmouth-Edgartown	93
Seastreak	525
<i>Total</i>	<i>4,411</i>

SUMMARY TABLE

Permanent Residents	20,530
Overnight Guests or Seasonal Tenants of Permanent Residents	18,693
Seasonal Residents	19,304
Overnight Guests or Seasonal Tenants of Seasonal Residents	26,726
Likely Additional Seasonal Residents (no bedrooms listed in assessor data)	309
Additional Overnight Population	4,678
Day Trippers	4,411
<i>Total</i>	<i>94,651</i>

DISCUSSION

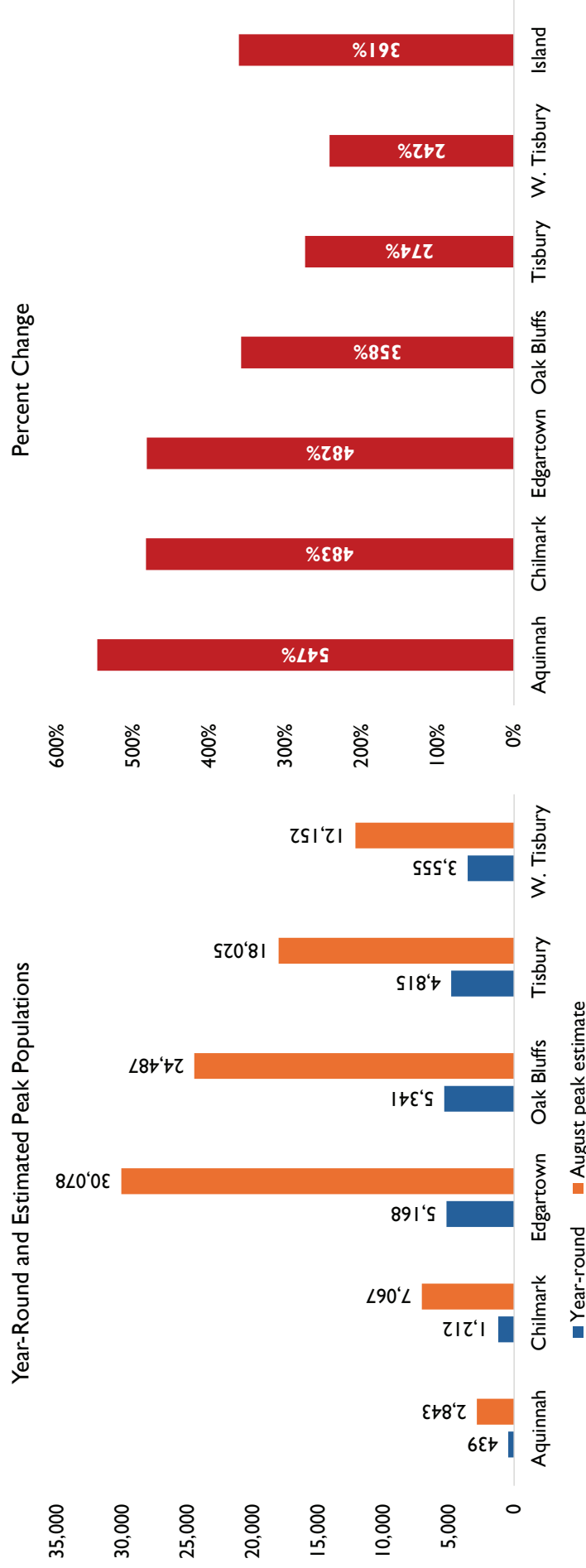
The methods used here allow for an approximate breakdown of seasonal population by town, although some further assumptions are needed, as shown on the following page. Not surprisingly, Edgartown has the largest seasonal population, followed by Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, and West Tisbury. At the same time, Aquinnah and Chilmark experience the most growth relative to the off-season. The differences from town to town speak mostly to the availability of bedrooms not occupied by permanent residents, including in seasonal dwellings, which tend to have more bedrooms (about 3.45 Islandwide, compared to 3.13 for year-round dwellings), and more bedrooms per resident (about 1.41 compared to 1.12).

Whether the seasonal population in is higher or lower than our estimate would depend largely on the assumed occupancy rate of guests and tenants (two per bedroom), which could potentially be lower but is likely not higher. Depending on various factors such as popular Island events, the various sub-populations might also shift on certain days of the month, which is not fully accounted for in this estimate. Adjusting the guest and tenant occupancy rates from two to 1.5 yields an overall estimate of 86,647. However, we believe the 94,650 estimate is the *most likely maximum population* in August, based on the available data. This figure is presented with a medium-high degree of confidence, acknowledging that the required assumptions are in part qualitative.

As noted above, the day tripper population was perhaps the hardest to quantify, due to a lack of data. However, because about 89% of all visitors arrive on SSA ferries, and about 8% on other seasonal passenger ferries (the rest arrive on airplanes), we plan to conduct an online survey in July and August 2025, asking ferry passengers whether they are staying overnight. This could be done by posting QR codes to the survey aboard the ferries and in the terminals, and possibly partnering with the SSA to embed a temporary survey link on its website. Depending on the results, the proportion of respondents not staying overnight could be extrapolated to the total numbers of passengers on SSA or seasonal ferries.

Seasonal Population Estimate by Town

	AQU	CHI	EDG	OB	TIS	WT	Island
Permanent Residents	439	1,212	5,168	5,341	4,815	3,555	20,530
Overnight guests and seasonal tenants of permanent residents	573	1,858	4,022	4,935	4,381	2,924	18,693
Seasonal residents	732	2,059	6,926	5,204	2,536	1,847	19,304
Overnight guests and seasonal tenants of seasonal residents	960	1,372	10,352	7,064	4,082	2,896	26,726
Likely additional seasonal residents	15	17	120	61	59	37	309
Additional overnight population							
Other non-residential properties with bedrooms	28	132	1,410	566	299	104	2,539
MV Family Campground ⁶	0	0	0	0	581	0	581
Boats	0	148	930	130	200	0	1,408
Homeless ⁷	3	9	38	39	35	26	150
Day trippers ⁸	93	260	1,112	1,147	1,037	763	4,411
Total	2,843	7,067	30,078	24,487	18,025	12,152	94,651



⁶ Assuming campers are spending most of their time in Tisbury.

⁷ Assuming the distribution of homeless people aligns with the distribution of permanent residents.

⁸ Assuming the distribution of day trippers aligns with the distribution of permanent residents.