

# Cape Air<sup>®</sup>

Where 'MOCHA HAGoTDI' Makes Perfect Sense

by Christopher Abrami



PHOTOS: CAPEAIR

The skies in the vicinity of Boston-Logan International Airport are often filled with a large variety of aircraft. Sometimes, among the big jets arriving from and departing for destinations near and far, you may spot an aircraft that, at first glance, looks as if it has no business at a large international airport: a Cessna 402C. It will have the outline of a gray seagull against a deep blue background on the tail. If you watch it taking off, you will most likely see it banking south/southeast, toward Cape

Cod and the islands off Massachusetts. Several minutes later, you will see what appears to be the same airplane. And then again, not long afterward. And yet again. You may therefore be excused for believing that this airline, flying the small piston-twin, could be operating more flights than any other airline at Logan. If you're not from the area, and haven't vacationed in the US Virgin Islands or southwest Florida, you may ask yourself, 'What airline is this?'

The answer is Cape Air—which grew out of Hyannis Air Service, a fixed based operator (FBO) at Hyannis Barnstable Municipal Airport, led by pilots Daniel Wolf (the company's president) and Craig Stewart, with financier Grant Wilson. Cape Air began when the team seized an opportunity to provide scheduled air service between Boston and Provincetown, Massachusetts. With eight employees, one Cessna 402, five passengers, and the president in the captain's seat, the airline began scheduled service on October 16, 1989.

Two years later, the newcomer began serving the island of Martha's Vineyard from Hyannis. A huge leap forward occurred when Cape Air was approached by Continental Express to serve the Boston–Martha's Vineyard route. Continental Express, which had been serving the island using larger turboprop aircraft, found it uneconomical to sustain the service on a year-round basis. Cape Air took on the route in November 1991, acquiring not only a new home at Logan's Terminal A but also a route that would prove to be part of the backbone of the lucrative summer season. Also, it began a working relationship with Continental Airlines that would only strengthen in the years ahead.

On May 1, 1992, Cape Air merged with New Bedford-based Edgartown Airlines, which had been serving Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard from the working class fishing town of New Bedford—the starting point of Ishmael's storied journey in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Cape Air gained three more routes and added four aircraft to its fleet as a result of the merger. Less than two years later came a second merger, this time with Nantucket Airlines. The latter provided hourly shuttle service between Hyannis and Nantucket and, at the time of the merger, was flying more passengers on that single route than Cape Air was carrying on its entire route network. Unlike the Edgartown merger, however, the Nantucket name was retained, although today practically no financial or operational distinction exists between the two entities.

When Cape Air began, it was filling a void left by several defunct carriers, which included Air New England



CEO Dan Wolf remains current in the left seat.

(Airways, November 1998), Northeast Airlines, Gull Air, and, perhaps most noticeably, Provincetown-Boston Airlines (PBA), which had been serving the Cape and Islands since 1949.

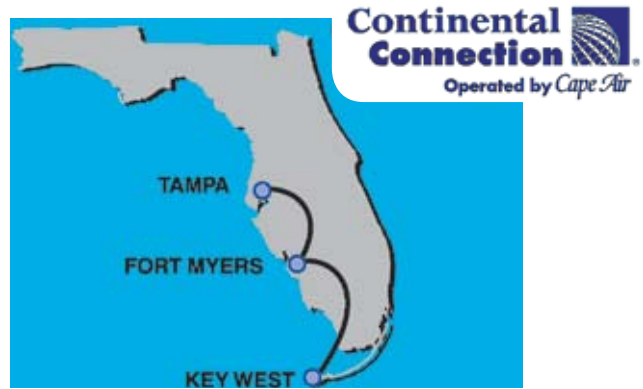
From the outset, Cape Air adopted several operational legacies from PBA. The first was high frequency. During the off-season, Cape Air retains daily services to many of its destinations that would not be economically viable with larger types.

Another operational legacy adopted from PBA is the concept of 'sections'. On a busy summer day, a single flight operating between Boston and Nantucket, for example, might have several sections (airplanes and pilots) assigned to it. As soon as nine passengers check in for the flight, the corresponding bags are loaded onto an aircraft which is sent with those nine passengers. In theory—and almost always in practice—all sections



Nine-seat Cessna 402Cs are used exclusively in North American operations by Cape Air, the largest independent regional airline in the United States. During peak tourist season, Cape Air operates more than 850 flights a day.





except for the last one leave early, the final section of the flight leaving on time. During summertime in New England, flights can operate with up to eight sections, especially on the busy Hyannis–Nantucket route. Sections have proved to be a potent way of matching capacity with demand, and keeping aircraft flying full as often as possible. Additionally, they also provide operational flexibility, and carry passengers to their destinations on time, or even early.

A third 'inheritance' from PBA has been that of moving a portion of the company's resources south during the northern winter months. PBA moved much of its fleet to Florida during this season in order to capitalize on migrating tourist traffic. Cape Air adopted a similar strategy, beginning in December 1993 with service between Key West and Naples, Florida (dubbed 'The Key West Express'). Five years later, the company took the practice one step farther, beginning service in the Caribbean between San Juan and the island of St Thomas in December 1998. Cape Air's personalized, reliable, and high-frequency service was a boon in this area, and the airline now operates an extensive network in Puerto Rico, as well as in both the US and British Virgin Islands.

By 2001, the carrier's fleet had grown to approximately 50 Cessna 402s, and it was carrying more than 500,000 passengers a year. Indeed, Cape Air had seen double-digit

growth throughout the Nineties and had enjoyed a string of profitable years. There were learning experiences along the way, chief among them a failed foray into the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Overall, however, the company had grown steadily and conservatively, and could be considered successful by almost any measure.

Many travellers would agree that these days there are precious few airlines in the USA that stand out for positive reasons, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue Airways being two likely examples. However, both are mainline carriers. Airlines operating smaller aircraft, which often provide feeder service for the majors, are seldom afforded the opportunity to cultivate a public image and reputation of their own. In this respect Cape Air is distinctive. As an autonomous and independent operation, Cape Air has an identity all its own; one characterized perhaps most visually by its 'Art in Flight' program. In the mid-Nineties, the company commissioned a series of artwork on its airplanes by acclaimed airbrush artist Jürek. The airborne 'murals' depict various historical and cultural aspects of destinations served by Cape Air, including Boston, Key West, Nantucket, and Provincetown, and

*Airbrush artist Jürek portrays Nantucket Island's popular annual rite of Spring Daffodil Weekend on this Cessna 402C, nicknamed 'Daffy'.*





*N69SC, painted in a whale scheme, posed by Provincetown's Pilgrim Monument.*

underscore the airline's most cherished expression of its individuality: customer service. At Cape Air this is summed up succinctly by the airline's motivational mantra: 'MOCHA HAGoTDI'—Make Our Customers Happy and Have a Good Time Doing It. This is a philosophy that can only be executed in a company built on fairness, integrity, and trust, as the following story demonstrates.

One day in Martha's Vineyard, two passengers rushed to the counter several minutes before flight time to check in. When asked for their tickets, they presented two small and slightly wet piles of paper. Apparently, the tickets themselves had already gone on a trip of their own—through the washing machine. They were indecipherable. After checking the passengers' ID and records in the computer, the agent brought them to the gate for their flight, which had already begun boarding. When later asked why she had boarded passengers who didn't have readable tickets, the agent responded: "Dan [the president] always told us to trust our customers."

To the customer, Cape Air is the airline that will hold the last flight of the night for you a few minutes more, should your connection arrive late. Your child might fly on Cape Air to a neighboring island for a softball game.

If you're traveling to Provincetown in August, you might find Dan in the captain's seat, flying the line just as he did in 1989. It is truly a hometown airline and is an integral part of the lives of its customers and the communities that it serves. Over the years, Cape Air has contributed to hundreds of charity and community organizations. Additionally, the company has received dozens of awards and recognition from parties as diverse as the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, the Regional Airline Association, the Cape Cod Planned Giving Council, and the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration).

The relationship with the communities it serves, coupled with high operational reliability, has helped to position the airline to meet the challenges faced by the airline industry today. As with nearly all airlines, the events of September 11, 2001, and the industry turmoil in subsequent years called into question the strength and viability of every aspect of Cape Air's unusual business model. Certainly the nature of its routes and its customer base were well understood, and without doubt it had enjoyed years of profitability; its employees were happy and productive, but would all of these things hold in the post-9/11 world? However, never at Cape Air was



*'Fantasy Flyer' illustrates the Conch Republic flag, underwater life, a pirate, treasure, Captain Tony, parrots and other images from Key West.*



there talk of merger or filing for bankruptcy protection. Conversely, seizing opportunity and future growth have remained firmly on the agenda. More significantly, there was deed behind the word.

Five years ago, responding to a request from Continental Airlines to provide feeder service in Micronesia, Cape Air secured Part 121 certification from the FAA (it had previously been operating under less-stringent Part 135 rules) and introduced a second type into the fleet: the 42-seat ATR 42. Cape Air now operates two ATRs between Guam and the nearby islands of Saipan and Rota under the aegis of Continental Express.

Even as the certification process for the Guam operation was underway, Cape Air was strengthening its long-standing relationship with Continental in other parts of the world. A code-share agreement with Continental was established in Florida and the Caribbean, which subsequently proved beneficial to both parties. More recently, in February 2007, Cape Air entered into a code-share with JetBlue. In addition to making good financial sense, the agreement was pursued because of the two companies' similar style: JetBlue's 'restoring humanity to air travel' jibes well with Cape Air's 'MOCHA HAGoTDI' spirit.

Cape Air's new partnership gives it strong connectivity, particularly in Boston. In response to high fuel prices forcing incumbent carriers serving smaller New England markets to reduce or eliminate service entirely, Cape Air has expanded by adding several new aircraft to its fleet, along with new cities. New destinations from Boston include Rutland (Vermont), Lebanon (New Hampshire), Saranac Lake and Plattsburgh (New York), and Rockland (Maine), bringing the total number of points served from Boston to nine. Additionally, the airline has recently established a base in Albany, New York, and has begun serving the cities of Massena, Ogdensburg, and Watertown—all in the Adirondack



region—under an essential air service (EAS) agreement, replacing the Beech 1900Ds formerly operated by Big Sky Airlines from Boston.

Fuel costs are a lower percent of total costs for Cape Air than for other airlines. Cape Air also enjoys the benefits of being the sole air carrier serving many of its routes, as only a few of them are viable for a second airline operating larger aircraft. This is particularly true of the Caribbean, where competitor Caribbean Star was recently merged into LIAT, and where American Airlines recently announced a major reduction in service, particularly out of San Juan. Finally, the airline will have an increasing number of options in terms of new markets to serve, as increasing numbers of smaller communities seek to retain air service in the wake of service reductions and/or eliminations from other carriers.

Significantly, Cape Air has always thought itself a niche operator, rather than a network or regional carrier. By whatever measures you ascribe to it, whether it's the use of nine-passenger airplanes, the 'MOCHA HAGoTDI' factor, or the fact that it serves the island of Guam, this airline is unlike others. Its past record has demonstrated that different is good, and, to this day, it does things in its own way, setting goals and aspirations at its own pace, and meeting them. For Cape Air, everything augurs well for a fruitful future on which the sun never sets. ➔

*Fast Facts—* **Cape Air**

**IATA:** 9K    **ICAO:** KAP    **IATA/ARC:** 306    **Radio:** *Cair*

660 Barnstable Road                      Tel: +1 508 771 6944  
Hyannis, MA 02601 USA                      Fax: +1 508 775 8815

**Website:**      www.flycapeair.com

**Code-shares:** Continental Airlines; JetBlue Airways

**Founded:**      1956 (as Hyannis Air Service)  
**Start date:**      October 16, 1989 (as Cape Air)  
**CEO:**              Daniel A Wolf

<b>Fleet Type</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>Seats</b>	<b>Engines</b>
Cessna 402C II**	49	Y9	CO TSIO-520-VB
ATR 42-320*	2	Y46	PWC PW121

(\* for Continental Connection in Guam)  
(\*\* includes 6 operated in Nantucket Airlines colors)



## Cape Air Flyer

by Luigi Vallero

**Sectors:** Boston, Massachusetts (IATA: BOS/ICAO: KBOS) to Nantucket, Massachusetts (ACK/KACK); ACK-Hyannis, Massachusetts (HYA/KHYA); HYA-Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (MVY/KMVY); MVY-BOS

**Flights:** 9K 521; 9K 106; 9K 1382; 9K 308

The day before my first flight I contacted the airline's reservations department requesting a transfer to an earlier service. This was immediately granted by the friendly and courteous female operator.

Cape Air shares Boston-Logan's Terminal C with JetBlue. I showed up at the check-in desk in plenty of time, approximately 90 minutes before the 1500 STD for the flight to Nantucket-Memorial. After being asked my weight (a standard question for this kind of operation) before checking in my heavy suitcase, I was given my boarding pass by a cheerful agent who told me to go directly to Gate 33, where all Cape Air flights are boarded.

Once through security—this time the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) agents were much less intrusive than during recent experiences—the gate area offers a good view of the ramp, on which five Cessna 402s were being readied for departure.

My flight, which was full, was called about ten minutes before STD. During the gate agent's short briefing we were advised that in case of bad or foggy weather at Nantucket—not unusual in summer—we could be diverted to Hyannis and continue from there by ferry.

Although the boarding passes—actually paper receipts—show a fictitious seat assignment, Cape Air adopts a free seating policy, so the first passenger in line has the opportunity to choose the right-hand cockpit seat. I was second, so I took the one immediately behind it. But no one is disappointed where views are concerned, because everyone has a window seat.

All baggage incapable of being accommodated inside the cabin was placed in one of the compartments of the 402—either in the nose or at the rear of each engine nacelle. After a short security briefing from our pilot, and with the left-side pilot's window open to keep cabin temperature at a pleasant level, we were pushed back—literally—by two ramp agents. At 1519, N120PC began a relatively long taxi to the holding point of Runway 22, following another Cape Air flight heading to Martha's Vineyard. In each seat pocket was the latest issue of Cape Air's magazine *Bird's Eye View*, as well as a safety instruction card.

Finally it was our turn to go, and at 1530 we were roaring at full power down the runway, quickly taking to



the air to overfly the freight docks of Boston Harbor before heading southeast in the direction of Nantucket Island.

Early summer afternoon thunderstorms were starting to form right across our path, shortly after we crossed the coastline. With the Cessna having settled at a cruise altitude of 4,000ft, it became apparent that we had to fly through a





column of cumulus. Bumping through the boiling clouds is an unusual and slightly unsettling sensation for those who do most of their air travel in jetliners.

Twenty minutes into the flight, we were through the clouds and back in clear skies before passing over Cape Cod's southern coast, then the town of Barnstable, with Hyannis-Barnstable Municipal Airport clearly in view. Thence we headed directly to Nantucket, already visible across the sound bearing the same name, although partly enshrouded in low-lying clouds. Only when descending through 300ft did the runway lighting become visible.

Swooping over the threshold of Runway 24, the Cessna touched down at 1605, for a sector time of 35 minutes. Four minutes later we stopped in front of ACK's terminal building. Hand luggage was returned upon disembarking, while hold baggage was available on the delivery bench within five minutes of arrival.

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Having spent a day on this beautiful and historic island, it was time to continue to Hyannis, on a very busy route flown in competition with rival Island Airlines. I had reserved a seat on Flight 9K 106, an 0900 departure and one of 15 daily flights which Cape Air operates to Hyannis in partnership with subsidiary Nantucket Airlines.

Arriving at the pleasant airport on a gorgeous cloudless morning, with a light sea breeze blowing in from the ocean, I felt like I was quitting paradise. The small terminal building was undergoing refurbishment, so all 'short-haul' flights to Hyannis, Martha's Vineyard, and Providence, Rhode Island were handled from a nearby annex, with 'long-haul' flights—relatively speaking—to Boston and New York processed elsewhere.

Again I was checked in promptly, and given a brown plastic boarding pass. When the flight was called at 0850, the complement of eight humans and two canine guests proceeded to the nearby Gate 4, where N223PB was waiting.

This time I was able to secure the co-pilot's seat, to better enjoy the magnificent scenery on this very short sector. We were off blocks at 0902, and after a brisk taxi the 402 took off from Runway 24 to head toward the Atlantic Ocean.

Almost as soon as the tires had left the ground, the pilot initiated a gentle and large-radius turn to the northwest, allowing great views of the island, then levelled off at 1,500ft.

There could have been no better day for flying, with almost non-existent winds, and we could just about see forever, with clear skies and limitless visibility allowing us to easily spot our intended destination. Slightly more than ten minutes into the flight, we were already crossing Cape Cod's southern shore, and making a circling northeastern approach to Runway 24 at Hyannis. We were on the ground at 0920, blocking-on in front of the compact and functional terminal one minute later.

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In the afternoon it was again time to sample the Cape Air experience, with another short hop to Martha's Vineyard. I checked my luggage and received the usual paper receipt/boarding pass before heading—actually sidestepping to the left—to Gate 6, which is adjacent to the check-in area. While waiting for the flight to be called I was able to observe the interesting challenges that loading bulky luggage on a Cessna 402 presents to ramp agents. Filling up to capacity



the long, curved, and narrow nose definitely requires more creativity than simply loading a pallet into the belly of a wide-body.

Boarding was called at 1625, and along with only three other passengers I was quickly onboard N2714M for the 20-minute leg to the 'Vineyard'. A trainee pilot occupied the right cockpit seat, so again I sat in the right seat in the second row.

Taxiing began right on time, at 1630, and four minutes later we were airborne from Runway 24, closely following another Cape Air Cessna. Gently banking to the right, and slightly buffeted by the wind, we immediately set course for the 13-minute hop to the nearby island, while levelling off at 1,500 ft.

The outline of Martha's Vineyard appeared ahead of us almost immediately, and before long we were overflying its northernmost tip, with the village of Vineyard Haven to the right. A smooth landing followed at 1647 on Runway 24, then a two-minute taxi to the airport terminal, where passengers were again reunited with their belongings in less than five minutes.

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After visiting this scenic, quiet island, it was time to return to Boston and thence to New York. Arriving at the airport at 1025 for my scheduled noon departure, I proceeded directly to Cape Air's check-in counter, and asked the pleasant, helpful female agent if I could take the earlier 1100 flight instead (Cape Air operates up to 15 daily runs between MVY and BOS). In a few minutes I was given my boarding passes for the MVY-BOS sector as well as for the connecting JetBlue flight from BOS to JFK. My luggage was tagged for JFK,

avoiding the need to re-check it at Logan for the next leg. I was also given the good news that my JetBlue flight was leaving from Gate 29, which is adjacent to Gate 33 where the MVY flight would arrive.

The flight was called at 1050, and with five other passengers boarded N524CA, another smart 402. Having been quick enough, I was able to take the co-pilot's seat on this relatively long over-water service to Boston, with a scheduled time of 40 minutes.

Leaving the parking stand three minutes ahead of time, we were airborne from Runway 24 at 1100, then turned on a northerly course toward BOS. While climbing to 4,000ft, the southern shore of Cape Cod passed beneath. It was another fine day, with only a few cumulus clouds causing a slightly choppy ride whenever we passed below them. The beauty of the landscape was stunning: lush green fields and forests mingling with beaches and harbors.

We were treated to an interesting and panoramic approach, displaced to the left of the runway centerline in order to avoid wake turbulence from the 'heavy metal'. This was followed by a smooth touchdown at 1130, and three minutes later the 402 came to a halt at the Cape Air stand, adjacent to JetBlue's terminal area. In a matter of a few minutes I was inside the terminal, my Cape Air experience now over, and ready for my JFK connection from Gate 29.

### Overall Impressions

These four flights proved that Cape Air is providing an extremely efficient, dependable, cost-effective, and fast service for the community it serves. Moreover, it has brought back something that is rapidly disappearing in these fast-paced times on the airways: the romance of flight! →