

VOGUE

TRAVEL

32 Things to Do in Newport, Rhode Island, the Land of Gilded Age Architecture and No-Frills Lobster Shacks

BY VOGUE



Photo: Getty Images

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Maybe it was the chance to sail John F. Kennedy's beloved route along Narragansett Bay. Maybe it was Grace Kelly's *High Society* digs. Or maybe it was the grass courts of the Tennis Hall of Fame seen on HBO's *The Gilded*

Age. Perhaps you needed to scope out for yourself what, exactly, is luring billionaires to snatch up historic homes on Bellevue Avenue. Whatever initially attracted you to Newport, Rhode Island, just one visit will make you fall *hard* for this charming harbor town.

Newport is unique for its blend of Gilded Age architecture and low-frills lobster shacks on the wharf. Though genteel (more than a few spots require men in jackets) and associated with yesteryear's titans of industry, Newport is not a flashy place. Its version of glamour is men in espadrilles and seersucker jackets, or women in breezy linen dresses with cashmere-wrapped sweaters flopped around their necks. The vibe is casual: social airs give way to the natural beauty of the deep blue of the Atlantic crashing against a craggy coastline and rolling farmlands by the sea.

Things to Do



The historic Rosecliff Mansion. Photo: Getty Images

Bellevue Avenue

Thanks to the Preservation Society of Newport, Rhode Island, those Gilded Age-era estates famous for their grandeur have been preserved. Think of Bellevue as 5th Avenue, but instead of Gucci and Louis Vuitton, you have Marble House (the embarrassment of riches built by Alva and William Kissam Vanderbilt), Rosecliff (the house where the original *Great Gatsby* was filmed) and The Breakers, The Elms, and Rough Point, the house and gardens of Doris Duke. If you do one thing in Newport, it should be visiting all of these.

Whitehorne House Museum

I love a good house museum—The Frick, the Morgan Library, Madrid’s Museum of Romanticism, London’s Leighton House Museum—and the Whitehorne (at 414 Thames Street) is an extremely charming one. The focus of its collection is 18th-century furniture made in Newport, and to creep down its halls is to be thoroughly transported to this nation’s earliest days. Yes, Newport has much grander and flashier houses than this one, but no place puts such compelling emphasis on local craftsmanship.

Newport Classic Cruises

After making a reservation online to enjoy one of many experiences, like a sunset cruise on the 80-foot pilot schooner the Adirondack II, head down to the Booth at Bowen’s Wharf, where you’ll board for your cruise. Newport can’t be fully experienced until you’ve done it by water.

Redwood Library

Bibliophiles, get ready to geek out: The Rosewood Library in Newport is half library, half museum, and with a founding date of 1747, it’s the oldest lending center in the United States. The Peter Harrison-designed building holds a treasure trove of rare books and artifacts, including letters from Edith

Wharton and a “how-to” guide by England’s most beloved gardener, Lancelot “Capability” Brown.

International Tennis Hall of Fame

Newport is known as the sailing capital of the world, but the city is also deeply rooted in another go-to summer activity, tennis. Pop into the International Tennis Hall of Fame on Bellevue Avenue for a tour of the famous grounds or, if you're up for it, book a grassy court with friends for a doubles match. Remember to pack your whites or stop into The Shop to pick up a new look to take on the turf.

Elizabeth in Newport

“Elizabeth” is the name of a classic 1961 Rolls-Royce: a Newport native that spent years in a private garage but is now available for booking (driver included!) to scenic tours or Newport or picnic lunches. Once you’ve cruised Ocean Drive in Elizabeth, it's hard to do it any other way.

Green Animals Topiary Garden

Just outside of Newport, in the coastal town of Portsmouth, lies a horticultural fantasyland that feels straight out of a storybook: Green Animals, the oldest topiary garden in the United States. Set on a former 19th-century summer estate overlooking Narragansett Bay, the seven-acre property is home to over 80 whimsically clipped shrubs—think elephants, unicorns, giraffes, and bears—alongside formal flower beds, geometric paths, and heirloom vegetable gardens. Originally cultivated in 1912 by gardener Joseph Carreiro, the garden was initially opened to the public by Alice Brayton, the estate’s last resident—and she even hosted a young Jacqueline Bouvier there during her debutante season, followed by Caroline and John Jr. in the years to come. Today, thanks to the Preservation Society of Newport County, this lush, living menagerie continues to charm visitors of all ages.

Newport Art Museum

Housed in the stately former John N.A. Griswold House (a Richard Morris Hunt design and a National Historic Landmark), the Newport Art Museum blends the historic with the contemporary in ways that feel quintessentially Newport. Inside, rotating exhibitions feature both local and international artists, alongside works by turn-of-the-century Newporters like Howard Gardiner Cushing. It's also a cultural hub, offering concerts, talks, and artist residencies that keep the creative pulse of the city beating.

Cliff Walk

No trip to Newport is complete without a stroll along the Cliff Walk, the city's most iconic (and photogenic) public path. This 3.5-mile coastal trail winds between the crashing Atlantic and the back lawns of Gilded Age mansions, offering front-row views of both nature and Newport's historic splendor. Parts of the path are paved and easy to navigate, while other stretches turn rugged—so wear proper shoes if you plan to do the whole thing. Start at Easton's Beach and head south toward The Breakers for a particularly breathtaking section. Bonus points if you stay at The Chanler, the only hotel with direct Cliff Walk access.

The Beaches

Newport's beaches offer their own sort of glamour—less Saint-Tropez, more salt-of-the-earth New England charm. Easton's Beach (often called First Beach) is the town's largest and most accessible, with a carousel, snack shack, and gentle waves for swimming. A little further down, Sachuest Beach (Second Beach) draws a slightly more local crowd, complete with surfers and sunrise yoga. For a more tucked-away option, Gooseberry Beach—set along Ocean Drive—is set within a rocky cove, ideal for families and picnic-goers. Bring cash, a good novel, and a straw hat worthy of Slim Aarons.

Where to Stay



Castle Hill Inn

If Ocean Avenue has to end, at least it ends at one of Newport's finest hotels: Castle Hill Inn. First built in 1875, the property was commissioned by local marine biologist and naturalist Alexander Agassiz and served as his family's summer home for years before a lighthouse was added to the property in 1890; it later served as an impromptu base for naval officers during the Second World War. Now, it's a "castle" on a hill overlooking Narragansett Bay, ensconced by a sweeping lawn that guests can enjoy year-round.

Family-owned and operated, the hotel (which is also a Relais and Chateaux property) is set on 40 acres across a private peninsula. To stay at Castle Hill is to experience what a Gilded Age beach cottage must have been like on the outskirts of town—water views abound, and walking trails lead you to craggy rock shorelines positioned right where you want to be if you're seeking a sunset.

Guests have a choice: stay at one of the seven rooms in the main house, where two restaurants (Aurelia at Castle Hill and The Lawn Terrace) are located, and experience the Victoriana-meets-maritime interiors of the Agassiz Mansion, which come with wood-paneled and with claw-footed tubs.

(Curious about what's in the Castle Hill Inn's turret? It's the Turret Suite, and right at those top three windows is a bathtub that is ideal for soaks with a view.) Or, guests could opt to be tucked away from the main happenings in one of the beach cottages (a room or a full house) located directly on Castle Hill Inn's private beach, where the highly attentive staff will set you up under a fringed parasol and bring you chilled grapes.

Elsewhere on the private grounds, guests can take a brief walk to visit the Castle Hill lighthouse, rent bikes for the day and cruise around Ocean Avenue, or even hop aboard a boat from Castle Hill's private boat launch that can drop you off in town on Ann Street or Perrotti Park. Those into health and wellness can utilize the gym at the historic Tennis Hall of Fame (offsite) or book a treatment at the Retreat at Castle Hill by Farmaesthetics (onsite). Plus, there's seasonal programming, like Farm Fresh at Castle Hill, which is an annual farm-to-table culinary experience raising funds for local farmers.

Breakfast is served out on the green lawn, which is peppered with white Adirondack chairs that have to be one of the best places in Newport to catch the sunset.

Amenities: Complimentary breakfast, free parking, spa, two restaurants, bar, beach access

Address: 590 Ocean Drive, Newport, RI 02840

BOOK NOW



Photo: Courtesy of Gardiner House

Gardiner House

Opened late last year, Gardiner House is a 21-room property located on Lees Wharf, directly next to the International Yacht Restoration School. The hotel's proprietors, Wirt Blaffer and Howard Cushing, have a deep connection to the town—especially Cushing, whose 1860s family home, The Ledges, inspired much of the interior design of Gardiner House. (The original white Stick-style Victorian house of The Ledges was built by Cushing's great-grandfather, the artist Howard Gardiner Cushing, and has sat on a cliff perch overlooking the town's member's club, Bailey's Beach, for 150 years.)

This elder Cushing, a celebrated painter whose works can be admired at the [Newport Art Museum](#), painted the entryway of The Ledges with a powdery mural in rose quartz-pink and turquoise blue, featuring butterflies mid-flight and peacocks on the branches next to weeping willow trees. A wallpaper of the very same mural, digitally reproduced by twenty2 Wallpaper + Textiles, now greets guests of Gardiner House hotel in a loving nod to the

Cushing family home. As guests walk up a winding staircase alongside the mural, they'll notice unfinished traces of flora and fauna, as well as cracks in the artwork. Howard Gardiner Cushing passed before he could finish it, and the charming patina of the 100-plus-year-old mural is reflected in its recreation—a thoughtful design choice that winks to Newport's rich design legacy.

No two guest rooms are quite alike, yet what unites them is their bright and cheery textiles—think wobbly stripes or block-printed floral motifs—and their year-round sunny feel, courtesy of sisal rugs, wicker seating, and burled wood accent furniture. Enjoy a cocktail in the very cozy The Studio Bar before heading upstairs to the newly-opened Flora for a Mediterranean and Spanish-infused menu and a view.

As for the activities on offer? Cushing has high hopes his family's Lobster boat—which once welcomed JFK for a fishing excursion—will be rehabilitated and can tour around hotel guests. In the meantime, the hotel has partnered with local charter companies should hotel-goers be interested in a sunset cruise. (Gardiner House also offers a beach picnic experience—parasols and all—and provides bicycles for roving the town.)

Amenities: Complimentary breakfast, free parking, restaurant, bar

Address: 24 Lees Wharf, Newport, RI, 02840

BOOK NOW



Courtesy of Auberge Resorts Collection

The Vanderbilt, Auberge Resorts Collection

One property, the Vanderbilt, Auberge Resorts Collection, is well-practiced at giving visitors the best of Newport's past and present. The 33-room mansion, which was originally built by a Vanderbilt heir in 1908, has recently completed a property-wide renovation, restoring the space to its aristocratic roots. With its sweeping staircases, Georgian columns, and emerald-and-sapphire color palette, the hotel's stately entrance is indeed immediately transporting. Guests can while away their days at any of the Vanderbilt's luxuriously appointed spaces: take in an afternoon tea in the verdant Garden Terrace or the solarium-like Conservatory, enjoy a stiff brandy (or good book) in the plush sitting rooms, then float into the mansion's handsome dining room for a menu of elegant coastal fare from Pasquale Jones's alum Tim Caspare. For a nightcap, head to the hotel's cheerful roof deck for a spritz and sweeping views of the Newport harbor. "We can unequivocally say that the mansion is the luxurious social hub of Newport," says Raphael Pazzini, general manager of the Vanderbilt.

For the guest rooms, Dallas-based design collective Swoon drew inspiration from the mansion's namesake as well as another famous Newport resident, American socialite Doris Duke. The nods are subtle, refined, and playful:

each suite is appointed with vintage area rugs, thoughtfully curated *livres*, custom hand-drawn wallpaper, and dignified canopy beds. “The overall design aesthetic conveys a cinematic feel,” says Swoon founder Samantha Sano.

The Vanderbilt has also launched a slate of off-campus activities—from polo matches to classic car rentals—for those who want to really live the Newport lifestyle. The crown jewel in their offerings is a private yacht tour of the majestic harbor from the Newport Classic Yacht Company. The two-hour sail—which takes place on The Temma, an antique motor yacht from 1928—is half booze cruise, half history lesson.

Amenities: Spa, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, fully equipped gym, multiple restaurants, valet

Address: 41 Mary Street, Newport, RI, 02840 USA

BOOK NOW



The Chanler

The Cliffwalk is one of Newport's non-negotiable must-dos. The best way to experience it? To spend the night in one of the historic manses positioned directly on the scenic walk. This can be done if you're the lucky owner of one of these properties or, more simply, by checking into the only hotel along the Cliffwalk, The Chanler. Built in 1873 by New York Congressman John Winthrop Chanler as a summer home for his family of 12, the home is uniquely situated at the very end of the walk and offers picturesque views of Easton's Beach.

This is a property steeped in the past, having served as a private girls' school, quarters for naval officers, and the accommodations of the cast and crew of the 1974 film production of *The Great Gatsby*. In 2000, the perfectly located property was purchased by the Shufelt family, who oversaw a meticulous renovation that honored the home's exemplary Victorian craftsmanship, and it is run today by Lani Shufelt.

Check into a room located within the estate; rooms come with old-timey keys and tassel fobs, and inside, the decor is an eclectic mish-mash that gives the impression you're visiting the home of a well-traveled proprietor with a knack for antiques. Rooms like the Moroccan, Greek Revival, and English Tudor are each outfitted in honor of their name. Despite the varying historical and geographic points of inspiration, the hotel atmosphere comes together as a cohesive whole; its layers reflecting the building's rich history and the Victorian flair for eclectic collecting habits.

For guests looking for a bit more privacy, there are garden and ocean villas offered beyond the historic house. On the dining front, there are three options, all stand-outs: The more casual Living Room. The Café, and Cara—the fine dining experience with a view from executive chef Jacob Jasinski.

Amenities: Restaurants, off-site gym, free parking

Address: 117 Memorial Blvd, Newport, RI 02840

BOOK NOW

Where to Eat

Flora

The buzziest restaurant in Newport can be found on the top floor of Gardiner House—and its name is Flora. Not because there are botanical touches across the decor, but after Flora Payne Whitney, whose portrait hangs above the bar, allowing her the best seat in the house to survey the scene. The portrait was painted by Howard Gardiner (whose grandson co-owns the hotel, see above) and features the young girl lounging in the Gardiner family home. In terms of food, the menu from Chef Somoza is inspired by Mediterranean seaside towns from Saint Tropez to Capri to Marbella, with a standout being the paella. Seats inside and out offer views of Newport Harbor.



Photo: Courtesy of Nick Mele

The Lawn at Castle Hill Inn

Indulge in the panoramic views and the expansive raw bar at Castle Hill's famous summer spot, The Lawn. Outfitted in charming white Adirondack chairs, The Lawn overlooks neighboring beach towns and sits at the Atlantic entrance of Newport's bustling harbor. Order a dozen oysters with a bottle of bubbly and watch the sailboats and mega-yachts pass by all afternoon. And should you feel inspired to stay a little longer than lunch, it's also a hotel—check in and stay all weekend.

The Black Pearl

On the wharf, you'll find The Black Pearl, a Newport culinary institution that delivers casual dining on its outdoor patio (burgers and clams) and inside, drinks at its cozy Tavern bar. Come dinnertime, the Commodore dining room serves up catches of the day on white tablecloths—order the classic Black Pearl Clam Chowder!

Newport Vineyards & Restaurant

A quick drive past Middletown will lead you to Newport Vineyards, where an afternoon can be easily whiled away among the vines and over 100 acres of preserved farmland. Enjoy wines, fresh craft beer, and farm-to-table dining experiences at the scenic spot, which is absolutely kid-friendly.

Root

Vegans, vegetarians, and anyone else who can't abide seafood should already be familiar with Root. Make a quick stop for freshly pressed juice, or settle into its cozy, low-key quarters for a hearty salad or grain bowl. Sweetgreen, eat your heart out.

Clarke Cooke House

There's nothing better than local-caught sushi at the Clarke Cooke House on a summer Friday. The seasonal sushi bar hosts a few heavily sought-after seats

that have a straight-shot view of the incredible sunset over Bannister's Wharf. If you can snag one, order the Rainbow and Lobster roll but save room for their famous "Snowball in Hell" for dessert—you won't regret it.

The Nitro Bar

Born out of a basement in Providence, this coffee shop with a cult following offers locals and tourists a wide-ranging menu of barista favorites. Now boasting two locations in Newport, The Nitro Bar is the perfect spot for an afternoon pick-me-up.

Thames Street Kitchen

Take a step back from lobster rolls and fried clams and enjoy an exceptionally sophisticated menu focused on using the same local ingredients in a new way. Pro-tip: opt for a reservation at the chef's counter for a front-row seat to watch the masters at work.

Mother Pizzeria

New this summer, Mother Pizzeria is a neighborhood joint by local restaurateurs Kevin O'Donnell, Lauren Schaefer, and Kyle Stamp. The trio brings Italian-centric cocktails, a wide selection of cured meats, and, most notably, Neapolitan pizza to Newport. Don't forget to save room for dessert—the olive oil gelato is a must-try!

Sky Bar and the Boom Boom Room

Regarding nightlife, there's really only one place to go in Newport, or rather two. Come nightfall, the town's go-to restaurant, Clarke Cooke House, welcomes the late-night crowd to its top floor, aka Sky Bar, and downstairs, aka the Boom Boom Room. Social butterflies will float between the two of them all night, which, speaking from experience, will likely end with a midnight dip in the ocean.

Shop

The Newport Lampshade Company

Christopher Spitzmiller lamps, antique Chinese pottery, and more giftable knick-knacks fill this jewel box store. If you're in town as a lucky house guest, get your hostess present here!



The wares on offer at the Newport Lampshade CompanyPhoto: Courtesy of the Newport Lampshade Company

Spring Street Bookstore

It's a literary treasure chest with enough charm to put Kindles to shame. Spring Street Bookstore offers new and used titles inside its quaint shop. Whatever you want to read this September—a rare volume of poetry or this year's bestseller—you will surely find it here.

Shopping at the Wharfs

Beyond the restaurants and raw bars, Bannister and Bowen's wharves have some of the best boutiques and art galleries in all of Newport. Check out Monelle's for chic yachting-themed accessories and the perfect cashmere sweater to stay warm on chillier nights. If you're looking for more of a French Riviera meets Saint Barth's vibe, pop into Mandarine Boutique for a new beach suit or bohemian evening look. For men's and women's outerwear, Royal Male pulls from the best local and European designers. At the top of Bannister's Wharf, Sheldon's Fine Art Gallery always catches the eye with gorgeous oil pieces, and the nautical photographs at the award-winning Onne Valderwal Gallery feel very Newport.

Bodhi Spa

Further down from the busier shops on Thames Street, Bodhi Spa might be Newport's best-kept secret summer escape. Get The Water Journey, a multi-step hydrotherapy treatment that comes with a plunge pool and eucalyptus steam room that rejuvenates sun-kissed skin and helps preserve your tan. The spa also offers hot stone massages and custom facials to keep your muscles and pores happy, too.