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By Lauren Matison Photographs by Elizabeth Cecil
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On the surface, Newport is what it appears to be: the glamorous “Sailing Capital of the World” with a new [sailing museum](#) to show for it. On the Narragansett Bay side, the harbor brims with America’s Cup boats and celebrity yachts. On the Atlantic side, a rugged coastline

with legendary surf and Gilded Age mansions. In between, picturesque streets are lined with boutiques, bars with tipsy brides-to-be, and one of the largest collections of colonial-era buildings in the United States. Recently, locals have been reframing Newport's well-worn nautical narrative with additions like new art galleries and an L.G.B.T.Q. pride center, and by unveiling, if gradually, the town's leading role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Lesser-known stories about Newport can be found off-the-beaten path, but with the city's compact grid, free trolley system, and bike-friendly hotels, car-free wanderers are sure to capture the essence of both worlds.

Recommendations

Key stops

- **Bowen's Wharf** and **Bannister's Wharf**, with an idyllic backdrop of boats, seafood restaurants, local shops and colonial-era buildings, offer a traveler's initiation into Newport.
- The new **Sailing Museum** will enthrall skippers and landlubbers alike.
- **The Museum of Newport History** provides context of the city's long and complex past.
- **Ocean Avenue** is a scenic stretch perfect for mellow pedaling along Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic coast, with hidden beaches and (not-quite-so-hidden) mansions around every turn.

Restaurants and bars	+
Attractions, historical sites and outdoor activities	+
Where to stay	+
Getting around	+

Itinerary

Friday



3:15 p.m. **Sail like a champ**

Next to Bowen's Wharf, board a 12-metre America's Cup boat for a two-hour, family-friendly sail (\$90) up Narragansett Bay. The [America's Cup Charters](#) fleet includes the legendary US 22 Intrepid, known for winning the sport's most famous race in 1967 and 1970. Cruising through the harbor, you may spy a white egret coasting off the bow and catch a fishy whiff in the warm breeze. Guests can pitch in, taking the wheel or trimming the sails, or simply relax with a can of sparkling water. The knowledgeable crew sprinkles in tales about points of interest such as the 1870 [Rose Island Lighthouse](#) (where you can spend the night)

and a red-roofed Victorian mansion where Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy grew up and later had her wedding reception with President John F. Kennedy in 1953.

5:30 p.m. **Walk the wharf**

Back on land, [Bowen's Wharf](#) and [Bannister's Wharf](#) mark the unofficial starting line for exploring Newport. Along the historic brick and granite quay, you'll find moored schooners, seafood restaurants and 18th-century buildings. Grab a stool at the oyster bar at [Clarke Cooke House](#), built by a sea captain in 1780, and pair a glass of Sancerre with freshly shucked oysters (\$3.50 each) from Nova Scotia, Maine and Rhode Island. Make time to locate the first [Rhode Island Slave History Medallion](#) on the Chandlery building behind the Bowen's Wharf anchor, installed in 2020. Scan the QR code to read about the port's history as a major hub in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.



6:30 p.m. **Enjoy a local feast**

In a sea of tourist-driven, fast-casual restaurants, [Thames Street Kitchen](#) is an ever-classy, farm-to-table buoy. The chefs Tyler Burnley and Chad Hoffer take full advantage of the small-scale agriculture on Aquidneck Island (home to the towns of Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport), where farmers are known to deliver produce off the back of a moped. Reserve a seat in advance at the bar to watch supper come to fruition in the open kitchen. Order warm salted bread with cacio e pepe butter (\$4) to soak up the yolky sauce of the cavatelli with serrano ham and ricotta (\$18). Early reservations also mean top pick of shareable cuts of rib eye and strip steak (\$3 an ounce).

8 p.m. **Raise a glass to the past**

New bars seem to open with each regatta season, such as the speakeasy-styled [Bar 12](#) and tiki charmer [Wharf Fish House](#). But who can compete with the O.G.? The [White Horse Tavern](#), a National Historic Landmark that is believed to be the oldest tavern still operating in the United States, is toasting its 350th anniversary this year. It was a meeting place of the colony's General Assembly and Criminal Court for nearly 100 years (and was also run for a time by a rich pirate). Under the big wood beams, patrons sip vanilla-infused, smoked old-fashioned (\$17), sharing stories about far-flung

travels. Some are hoping history will be honored nearby, too: Across from the tavern, in Liberty Square, a [Newport Middle Passage](#) monument has been proposed to honor the Africans who perished on slave ships and the enslaved workers who helped build the city.



Grab a stool at Clarke Cooke House, built by a sea captain in 1780, and pair a glass of Sancerre with freshly shucked oysters.



Saturday

10 a.m. **Learn the ropes**

The [Sailing Museum](#), which opened last year in the historic Armory building, is a high-tech interactive voyage across an ever-evolving sport. You'll design your own sailboat, learn its anatomy, and race alongside fellow museumgoers. Exhibits cover ocean conservation and barrier-breaking seafarers, like Bill Pinkney, the first African American to sail solo around the world, and Maureen McKinnon, the first woman to win gold in the Paralympic Sailing Olympics in 2008. Check out the America's Cup Hall of Fame, which displays models of the winning boats, and use the touch screen to discover nationwide sailing organizations, be it a school, yacht club, or community sailing program.

11 a.m. **Explore on two wheels**

The first national bike organization, the [League of American Wheelmen](#), was born in Newport in 1880. The mostly flat Newport remains a [bike-friendly](#) town today, ideal for breezy cruising. Pick up a rental at [Ten Speed Spokes](#), then pedal away from downtown and out along peaceful roads, past mansions and the Ida Lewis Yacht Club on Lime Rock, where the lighthouse keeper Ida Lewis rowed out to rescue more than 18 people between 1842 and 1911, including soldiers from a nearby military compound, now [Fort Adams State Park](#). Fort

Adams, which offers expansive bay views and guided walking tours (\$20), marks its 200th anniversary in 2024 and is home to the public sailing center [Sail Newport](#) and annual summer concerts like the [Newport Folk Festival](#) and [Newport Jazz Festival](#).



Castle Hill Inn

12 p.m. **Lunch on a legendary lawn**

Pedaling two miles past Fort Adams along Newport's bucolic southwestern edge, turn right at the sign for the [Castle Hill Inn](#), built in 1875 as a summer home for the pioneering deep-sea oceanographer Alexander Agassiz. While locals prize the hotel's grassy knoll for sundowners, a midday reservation on the patio at [the Lawn](#) restaurant brings plenty of close-up boat watching. Enjoy Point Judith calamari (\$19) and a large gratin pan of rigatoni al forno (\$32) with eggplant confit, tomatoes, olives and goat cheese. If it rains, the floor-to-ceiling windows in the dining

room beautifully frame Narragansett Bay. On a sunny day, recline post-feast in white Adirondack chairs as boats tack across the water. Afterward, follow the hotel's short private trail that leads to the [Castle Hill Lighthouse](#), tucked into a cliff and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1 p.m. **Ride into the Gilded Age**

Pedal south on Ocean Avenue, along breathtaking bluffs and past Brenton Point State Park, popular with kite flyers, until you reach the

secluded [Bailey's Beach](#). There's powdery white sand, few, if any, people, and no place to park a car. From there, a four-minute spin north on Bellevue Avenue will bring you to the Beaux-Art style [Marble House](#) (entry, \$25), which cost \$11 million to build between 1888 and 1892 (\$7 million spent on marble). It was William Vanderbilt's 39th birthday present to his wife Alva, who would make this home an unofficial command post of Rhode Island's suffrage movement. The free self-guided audio tour offers informative nuggets about rooms like the Versailles-inspired grand salon. Suffragettes drank tea from "Votes for Women" chinaware in the [Chinese Tea House](#), which, today, serves a \$35 prix-fixe afternoon tea on weekends.



Newport Art Museum

3:30 p.m. **Admire statement pieces**

Ride north a couple of miles (or hop on the bike-friendly [#67 trolley](#)) along Bellevue Avenue, until you arrive at the [Newport Art Museum](#), an oft-overlooked wonder founded in 1912. In a current exhibition, "[Shaman Ladders and Other Stories](#)" (through Nov. 5), the Cuban-born Rhode Islander Ana Flores' deep-seated tree chairs invite viewers to find answers in nature. Newport is as much for art lovers as for thalassophiles: Newcomers like [CUSP Gallery](#) and the [Matriarch](#) store are keeping the community's creative soul afloat, as well as the longtime art co-op [Spring Bull Gallery](#) and the local artist [Chris Wyllie](#). Also make

time to see the “Pride: In Retrospect” exhibition, showcasing 50 years of queer history, at the [Newport Pride Center](#), a new inclusive space and resource for the L.G.B.T.Q. community.

6 p.m. Level up at a celebrated ristorante

Bypass the crowd outside [Scales & Shells](#), the Italian seafood institution since 1987: Instead, a door on the corner of Thames and Goodwin Streets leads you to its new sister restaurant upstairs, [Upscales](#). Neither restaurant takes reservations, but an early arrival at Upscales, which is the more laid-back of the two, should grant you the coveted balcony table overlooking Thames, where a hungry horde may still be huffing by the time you’ve finished the Lavender Bees Knees cocktail (\$14) and started on the lobster ravioli (\$29).

7:30 p.m. Hit the high notes

Move west on Thames past the booming Midtown Oyster Bar, the bachelorette parties and the glowing pedicabs rumbling along the cobblestones, until you reach a little-known historic site on Pelham Street, the first street in the United States to be illuminated with a gas-lit lamp in 1805. Above the lamppost is a sign for [Dueling Pianos](#), a rollicking piano bar experience with roots in the ragtime era of the 1890s. On the building’s third floor, grab a drink with sparkling harbor views from



Midtown Oyster Bar

the lounge area. At 8 p.m., two singing pianists will perform requested songs, be it Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" or Mark Ronson's cover of "Valerie." (Standing-room tickets range from free to \$20. Tables for five start at \$100.)



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