

The Boston Globe

TRAVEL

3 Rhode Island road trips to consider when you want to get out safely, but start small

By **Diane Bair and Pamela Wright** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 14, 2020, 10:47 p.m.



Mason Lambert, 5, looked up at the rain from his car's sunroof during a daily outing with his mother and grandmother to a parking lot by the sea in Narragansett. DAVID GOLDMAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Exploring close-to-home destinations from the comfort — and safety — of your own vehicle is looking like a mighty fine option right now. In fact, industry travel experts are predicting a resurgence of the American road trip, as travelers, eager to get out after the shelter-in-place pandemic, hit the road.

We're thinking Rhode Island, the smallest state in the country, is perfect for a Sunday drive (or any day of the week). It measures a mere 37 miles east to west; if you hopped on Interstate 95, you could drive the 48 miles north to south in less than an hour.

But why rush? It's better to shunpike on one of these lovely road trips, offering plenty of eye candy and interesting sites along the way. You can stop, or stay in your car; either way, enjoy the ride! (Note: At the time of this writing, Rhode Island had announced a phased in reopening of parks, beaches, restaurants, and other sites. Be sure to confirm details in advance, as things change frequently.)



In Weekapaug, on Rhode Island's southern coastline, you'll have views of saltmarshes leading to open ocean. PAMELA WRIGHT

South County sojourn

www.southcountyri.com

Shoreline views, seaside towns, parks, preserves, and historic sites are highlights of this 33-mile or so drive, showing off the best of pretty South County. (Note: This ride is best when the state parks and beaches reopen, expected later this month.)

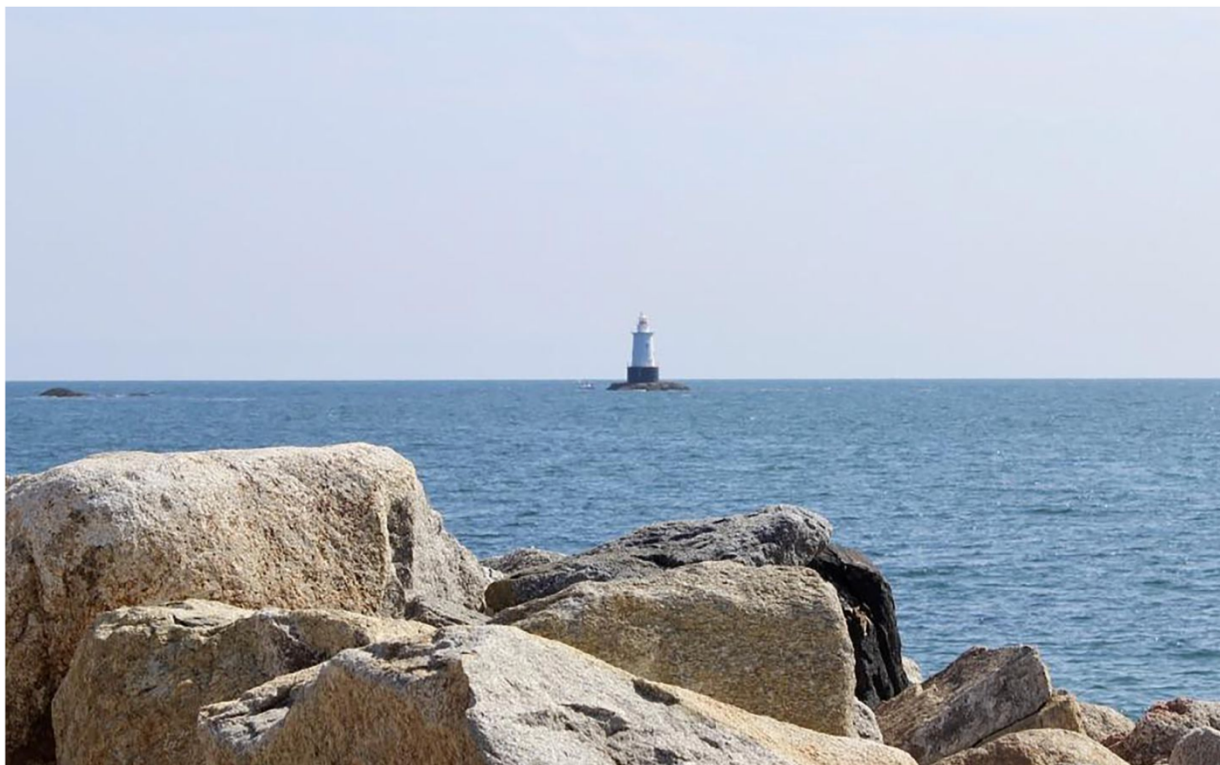
Start in Wickford Village in **North Kingstown**, the real-life inspiration for the village of Eastwick in John Updike's 1984 novel, "The Witches of Eastwick," and the corresponding movie. North Kingstown is also home to the Gilbert Stuart Museum, set on 23 acres, with the artist's 1750 home, gardens, and trails (www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org). Follow Route 1A south toward Narragansett, considering stops at pristine and protected Moonstone Beach or East Matunuck State Beach, with swimming and picnic areas.

In **Narragansett**, take a detour on Ocean Drive, past beautiful mansions, down to the historic 1816 Point Judith Lighthouse, where you'll have sweeping Atlantic Ocean views. Work your way back to Route 1, heading south to **Charlestown**, with a string of beaches, including woodsy Burlingame State Park and Campground, with a freshwater pond and canoe rentals, the Charlestown Breachway, located on Block Island Sound, and East Beach, with limited parking but a nice, quiet spot for a beach walk.

Reconnect with Route 1A and take a short jog to **Weekapaug**, where you'll have views of saltmarshes leading to open ocean. Consider stopping at the Weekapaug Inn, where you can enjoy a beverage outdoors on the expansive lawn overlooking the water (www.weekapauginn.com).

Continue on Route 1A into the small village of **Watch Hill**, part of Westerly, named when soldiers perched here to watch for British raiders during the Revolution. The summer resort is filled with solid old Victorian homes and stately mansions (Taylor Swift has a summer home here); its small downtown has a cluster of shops and restaurants, and the Flying Horse Carousel, the oldest continuously operating merry-go-round carousel in the country, with hand-carved, hand-painted horses.

We'd recommend a final stop at the sprawling Ocean House resort, where you can take a DIY art tour; the hotel displays more than 250 original works. Or simply grab drinks on the porch overlooking the ocean (www.oceanhouseri.com).



At Sakonnet Point, you'll have a view of the picturesque Sakonnet Light, a sparkplug lighthouse built in 1884. COURTESY/VISIT RHODE ISLAND

Country coastal chic

This 12-mile jaunt from **Tiverton** to **Sakonnet Point** packs in a lot of pretty: river views, rolling farmlands bordered by stone walls, historic villages, vineyards, and open ocean views. Follow Route 77 south, hugging the Sakonnet River as it flows to the Atlantic Ocean, passing Nannaquaket Pond and several farms and roadside stands. Consider a stop at the Emilie Ruecker Wildlife Refuge (www.asri.org/hike/wildliferefuges/emilie-ruecker-wildlife-refuge.html), with 50 acres of preserved woods and saltmarshes and 1.6 miles of trails, including Jack's Island Trail that leads to a peninsula jutting out into the river.

Your next stop is **Tiverton Four Corners**, a historic 18th-century village filled with one-of-a-kind shops and galleries. Grab snacks and picnic makings at Provender Fine Foods (www.provenderfinefoods.com) or takeout at Evelyn's Drive-in, a longstanding and popular waterside clam shack (www.evelynsdrivein.com). A stop at Gray's is also an option, for a scoop or two of their famous homemade ice cream (www.graysicecream.com).

Continue into **Little Compton**, a peaceful little town with a handful of shops, a historic general store, and a small beach. Stop by Carolyn's Sakonnet Vineyards (www.sakonnetwine.com), with 150 acres of land, a tasting room, and outdoor seating, before making your way to Sakonnet Point, with open ocean views and the picturesque Sakonnet Light, a sparkplug lighthouse built in 1884.

A river runs through it

www.tourblackstone.com

The Blackstone River Valley in northern Rhode Island, dubbed the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, was once clogged with textile mills, powered by the Blackstone River. Today, you'll find historic sites, small towns, and river views on this short, 12-mile or so country drive.

Begin in **North Smithfield**, home to the Slatersville Historic District, a Blackstone River Valley National Historic Park site (www.nps.gov/blrv/planyourvisit/slatersville-self-guided-tour.htm). This pretty little riverside neighborhood was the first planned mill village in the country. Download a self-guided map from the park website, which will direct you to a number of historic buildings and sites, including a massive mill complex lining the Branch River, dams, a reservoir, and two waterfalls.



Brown & Hopkins in Chepachet Village is the oldest continuously-operated country store in America. PAMELA WRIGHT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

From here, follow Route 102 through **Burrillville**, where you can stretch your legs at the Buck Hill Management Area (www.tourblackstone.com/buck-hill-management-area-trail); there are several trails leading through the woods and to a pristine pond. Continue on to Glocester and historic **Chepachet Village**, a tiny riverside village with a few shops and Brown & Hopkins, the oldest continuously-operated country store in America (www.brownandhopkins.com).

You can continue south on Route 102, past woods, fields, ponds, farms, homes, small towns, and not much else, before reaching I-95. Or head toward Providence, with a detour to **Lincoln**, where you can drive down the Great Road, the state's oldest highway dating back to 1683. The Lincoln Woods State Park (www.riparks.com/Locations/LocationLincolnWoods.html) has a scenic 2.5-mile loop hike, and a small beach on Olney Pond, and the Blackstone River State Park, also in Lincoln, is set along the Blackstone River, with walking and biking paths (www.riparks.com/Locations/LocationBlackstoneBikeVisit.html).



Stretch your legs at the Buck Hill Management Area in Burrillville, where trails lead to a pristine pond. COURTESY VISIT RHODE ISLAND