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1D

# Living



#### INSIDE ERIC JOHNSON BRINGS HIS 'MOST POWERFUL **GUITAR RECORD' TO** LEXINGTON, LIVE, 2D

## We went for the colorful leaves, but found so much more on our trip to Rhode Island

#### BY PATTI NICKELL

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#### PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND.

I had been looking forward to this for a long time — a road trip in Rhode Island with two friends to see New England fall foliage at its best. The only problem was that while my friends and I were there, the foliage was a no-show.

October is generally peak time to catch fall's annual display of botanical pyrotechnics, but this year — due to the region's unusually long, hot summer — trees were still emerald green, with not even so much as a wayward gold or orange leaf peeping through. So much for witnessing the blazing tapestry of colors.

I was disappointed, but couldn't remain so for long with a city as vibrant as Providence to explore and with

good friends to explore it with. The first thing that became immediately obvious was that this was a city known for its architecturally intriguing neighborhoods and its devotion to donuts. Let's start with the donuts.

Dunkin' Donuts may have been founded across the state line in Massachusetts, but Rhode Islanders are obsessively devoted to them, with a "Dunkin" on seemingly every other corner, and long lines to make sure they stay there.

The corporate crullers may be uber popular, but there are just as many artisanal and mom-and-pop donut shops (and bakeries in general) scattered throughout the city's eclectic neighborhoods — also not lacking for business.

And that brings me to the neighborhoods themselves. Some 15 of them — each with its distinctive personality and history — have helped make Providence what Travel + Leisure has called "America's Favorite City," and GQ has labeled its "coolest city."

SEE PROVIDENCE, 4D



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Providence is known for its unique neighborhoods, and neighborhoods like this one have helped make the city what Travel + Leisure has called "America's Favorite City," and GQ labeled "coolest city."



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If this Providence building seems familiar, it's because it's the one used in the 1950s TV series, "Superman."

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## **PROVIDENCE**

Starting in the compact downtown, a walking tour will showcase classic Art Deco architecture, most notably the state's tallest building known as the Superman Building. You'll see why immediately — just imagine the Man of Steel, hands on hips and cape flying behind him — standing heroically atop it.

Another building of note is the Greek Revival Arcade, the oldest indoor mall in America (1828), and now a mix of apartments and select retail (check out the bookstore dedicated to H.P. Lovecraft, a Providence native who gained fame posthumously for his works of horror fiction).

A short walk from the Arcade is the Rhode Island School of Design, consistently ranked among the world's best. RISD, as it is known locally, is not just a school but a museum open to the public, housing a collection of fine and decorative arts.

If you're looking for an intriguing theatrical experience, book a performance at Trinity Rep where innovation is key. My friends and I saw a comedic take on Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," where most of the actors played dual characters, and both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley were played by females, while Charlotte was

### If you go to Rhode Island

Where to stay: The Weekapaug Inn, 25 Spray Rock Road, Westerly. 888-852-5110. Hotel Providence, 139 Mathewson Street, Providence; 401-861-8000.

Where to eat: Yoleni's, 292 Westminster Street, Providence; Rosalina's, 50 Aborn Street, Providence; Matunuck Oyster Bar, 629 Succotash Road, South Kingston; COAST at the Ocean House, 1 Bluff Avenue, Watch Hill; Georges at Galilee, 250 Sand Hill Cove Road, Narragansett.

FYI: visitrhodeisland.com

décor or the expertly mixed classic cocktails.

Less than an hour's drive from Providence — through a landscape crisscrossed with salt pond marshes and salted with the scent of the sea — is South County. This is an area of classic New England beach communities, from upscale Watch Hill to working class Galilee to the quintessential fishing village of Matunuck.

It was at the latter that my friends and I arrived at Matunuck Oyster Bar where the oysters are



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The Arcade in Providence is America's oldest indoor shopping mall, dating back to the 19th century.



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The Rhode Island School of Design in Providence is not just one of the nation's best schools for design, but also a museum of decorative arts.



Courtesy of Ocean House

played by a male (all convincingly).

Other neighborhoods of note include Federal Hill and College Hill/Benefit Street. The former, settled largely by early 20th century Italian immigrants, still evokes Italy's La Dolce Vita, while the latter, a bastion of culture and history, is home to Brown University.

If there's one thing Providence is known for other than architecture and neighborhoods (and donuts), it's the sophistication of its culinary scene. Ethnic restaurants abound — from Yoleni's, a classic combination of a Greek market and café (try the moussaka and the creamy yogurt) — to Rosalina's, an Italian favorite where you can go heavy (Burrata cheese ravioli and housemade scene. Ethnic restaurants abound — from Yoleni's, a classic combination of a Greek market and café (try the moussaka and the creamy yogurt) — to Rosalina's, an Italian favorite where you can go heavy (Burrata cheese ravioli and housemade meatballs with Pomodore Sauce and basil) or light (grilled swordfish with lemon, oil, oregano, cucumber/tomato salad and sautéed orzo).

If you're looking for the perfect spot for an after-dinner drink, check out the Dorrance. It's hard to decide which is more elegant, the ornate plucked from owner
Perry Raso's oyster farm
across the road from the
beach restaurant, and
shucked by several young
men who put on quite a
show. My friend David
and I lost no time in
ordering a gargantuan
platter of the bivalves,
which are saltier and
brinier than the ones I
was used to on the Gulf
Coast, but no less delicious.

One look at the number of cars parked outside the restaurant is proof of the popularity of this rustic homage to the best of New England seafood.

Next, it was time to check into the Weekapaug Inn, picturesquely situated on the shoreline of the unpronounceable (at least for me) shoreline of Quonochontaug Pond.

A member of the presbest of New England seafood.

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A member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux, the Weekapaug is everything one imagines a New England inn should be. Luxurious without being pretentious, it's the perfect escape – whether one wants to take a sailboat or kayak out on the pond or book a birding tour with naturalist Mark

The Ocean House is an imposing seaside mansion in Weekapaug with luxurious guest rooms and a formal restaurant with a wall of windows facing the beach.

Bullinger, or just curl up before the fire with a book and a glass of hot cider.

Semi-isolated on its promontory, Weekapaug is synonymous with tranquility. After savoring the flavors of New England, from local oysters and halibut to Narragansett Bay lobster, in the inn's dining room, I retired to my comfortable room where crisp breezes from the ocean were more conducive to a good night's sleep than any pill could ever be.

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While we were at Weekapaug, the three of us arranged dinner at Weekapaug's sister property, the Ocean House. Arriving at the imposing seaside mansion, we were greeted with a glass of champagne on the veranda. It all seemed like something out of The Great Gatsby.

At dinner in COAST, the formal dining room, with its candlelit ambiance and wall of windows facing the beach, we feasted on a sevencourse meal, each course accompanied by a perfectly curated wine.

The adjoining bar, with its club-like atmosphere, was buzzing on a Saturday night, but the buzz was genteel and subdued. Looking at the obviously well-heeled crowd, I couldn't help thinking that if you substituted mutton-chop whiskers and waistcoats for \$200 haircuts and designer sport coats, you could imagine it was a Vanderbilt or an Astor sitting by the fire and knocking back a vintage cognac.

Before I knew it, my New England idyll was over. One last seafood lunch (the best chowder I can ever remember havsport coats, you could imagine it was a Vanderbilt or an Astor sitting by the fire and knocking back a vintage cognac.

Before I knew it, my New England idyll was over. One last seafood lunch (the best chowder I can ever remember having) at Georges at Galilee in the fishing port of Galilee, and then it was no more lobsters straight from the sea or oysters plucked from the salt marshes.

My friends and I agreed, it had all been special, even without the fall foliage.