

# MEN'S JOURNAL

TRAVEL

## The Best Ways to Explore the Off-Season in Newport, Rhode Island



by [Brittany Smith](#)

In many ways, tourists are the lifeblood of coastal towns the likes of Cape Cod, Nantucket, and the [Hamptons](#). When the mercury swells, tourists descend on hot spots, eager to belly-up to a bar brimming with sun-scorched, wind-blown locals. Come winter, most of these eateries and hotels are shuttered. But for a city like Newport, [Rhode Island](#), the shoulder season offers travelers a way to explore the destination like a local, which is to say [sans crowds](#).

### [Fourth-Century Fortresses, Verdant Ruins, and Hipster Dives: The 4-Day Weekend in Tbilisi, Georgia](#)

You won't be able to make the most of Newport's inimitable sailing scene, but you can spend the weekend ogling Gilded Age mansions; feasting at local haunts (fireside espresso martinis, anyone?); and cherry-picking activities by interest, whether that's perusing the International Tennis Hall of Fame, trying your hand at a mixology class, or ice skating on a waterfront rink. Use our travel guide to make the most of your time in the City by the Sea.



## Where to Stay

**Hotel Viking** is an attractive option if you want moderately priced accommodations that put you within walking distance of many attractions, bars, and restaurants. Situated in the Historic Hill neighborhood, Hotel Viking dates back to 1926, as a hotel for guests attending soirees at neighboring mansions. Its guestrooms are appointed with period-inspired flourishes—some sporting cherry wardrobes and gilded mirrors reminiscent of opulent manor homes, while others have more modern color palates and rich textures relative to the Progressive Era. While the rooftop (Top of Newport Bar & Kitchen) is closed in the winter—and offers one of the best vantage points—highlights include afternoon tea service in the in-house restaurant One Bellevue and a Thai body ritual or massage in Spa Fjör.

If you want something a little more upscale, book a stay at **Gurneys Newport Resort & Marina** nestled on Goat Island, surrounded by Narragansett Bay. While it lacks some of the character of more historic lodgings, the modern, airy accommodation is a stone's throw away from the cobblestoned wharves nearby. **Forty 1° North** is a modern boutique hotel with its own private marina. It offers high-tech amenities such as an iPod-integrated media system and creature comforts like a gas fireplace and luxury linens. And **Castle Hill Inn** is a little ways out from downtown Newport, but this converted Victorian summer cottage has unrivaled coastline vistas. Themed rooms and suites are impeccably appointed; for example, the Beach Cottages have private beach access and French doors that flood the room with natural light.



## What to Do

### ...If You Fancy Theater/Comedy:

- **Fire House Theater:** This improv comedy show gets the audience involved, is inexpensive, and BYOB. Need we say more?
- **Jane Pickens Theater & Event Center:** The historic venue offers a traditional theater viewing experience—showing documentaries, shorts, live performances, and all matter of cinema. They even have craft cocktails, beer, and wine.

### ...If You're an Automobile Buff

- **Newport Car Museum:** A collection of more than 75 cars—including Ford/Shelby models, Corvettes, muscle cars, and more—from the 1950s to present day.
- **Audrain Automobile Museum:** This museum puts on themed exhibitions (like The Past to the Present and Horseless to Horsepower), showcasing a small assortment of rare models.

### ...If You Want to Tour Mansions

- **Newport Mansions:** If you're gonna tour a mansion, tour a freaking *mansion*. **Breakers** is like a wedding cake among muffins, architecturally speaking. The Vanderbilt's palatial villa has 70 rooms embellished top to bottom

in Renaissance-style elements. Ceilings are gilded, and walls are adorned with platinum-leaf panels and slabs of marble butterflied for symmetry. During the holidays, decorations provide an added dose of pageantry. Marble House is a little toned down but equally impressive. Make sure to check out the Chinese Tea House out back overlooking the cliffs, where Alva Vanderbilt hosted rallies during the women's suffrage movement.



### ...If You Want a Taste of Newport

- **Newport Vineyards & Taproot Brewing Co.:** The tasting staff at the winery—which underwent a multi-million-dollar renovation—is exceptionally friendly and knowledgeable; Brenden recommended wines based on preference, along with a brief rundown of each wine's individual flavor profile. Tastings (five total) yield generous pours. Newport's terroir—cooler growing season, proximity to water, etc.—makes their white wines preferable. (Try the pinot gris.) After the tasting, pop over to the adjoining brewery. Snack on a cheese board, then wash it down with a hazy IPA.
- **Newport Craft Brewing & Distilling:** Try unique yearly releases like their Annual '19 milk stout—a marriage of chocolate, oats, cinnamon, and guajillo chilies—that evokes Mexican hot chocolate. There are also all-year mainstays including a fruity double IPA, a blueberry kölsch, and a traditional amber ale.
- **Ragged Island Brewery:** Hops fiends, rejoice. This brewery specializes in IPAs and often has a food truck out back.

- **Mixology Class at The Vanderbilt:** A mixologist (usually Christina Mercado, The Vanderbilt's Beverage Manager) will guide you through a spirits tasting—could be gin, vodka, whiskey, etc.—then help you craft two specialty cocktails. The ~\$55 reservation includes canapes.
- **Gurney's Newport:** This seaside retreat (which also has a location in Montauk, NY) is no less enjoyable in the winter. Book a treatment in the Seawater Spa, sip on cocktails inside a heated igloo (the pop-up is available Nov. 22- Feb. 29), or go ice skating on the seaside rink (available till March 1).



### Where to Eat/Drink

For brunch or dinner, make a reservation ahead of time lest you find yourself waiting for hours on end for a table. Also note dress codes.

#### For Coffee:

- **Empire Tea & Coffee:** Great for a grab-and-go cold brew or a more leisurely stay, where you can nibble on pastries or a made-to-order egg sandwich.
- **The Nitro Bar:** Drop in for nitro cold brew , signature lattes (like lavender), and specialty teas (try the blood orange hibiscus).

#### For Upscale Fine Dining:

- **22 Bowen's Wine Bar & Grille:** Come for the world-class steak, stay for the waterfront views.

- **The Grill at Forty 1° North:** A dockside restaurant ideal for romantic dinners. Order any of the steaks, chops, and seafood options.
- **Clarke Cooke House:** This multi-level restaurant is a Newport establishment you can't miss. There's sailing memorabilia strewn all over the walls, and the upper level becomes a riotous good time at night. The lower levels are for casual dining, offering multiple bars and a fireplace to post up next to for a cocktail. You can't go wrong with the Newport Clam Chowder, Peppered Tuna Steak, Caramelized Jump Sea Scallops, and Snowball in Hell dessert (chocolate mousse and ice cream cloaked in chocolate and toasted coconut).
- **Midtown Oyster Bar:** This is your spot if you have a hankering for a raw bar. Locals enjoy the Sunday winter roast special, too.
- **Cara at The Chanler at Cliff Walk:** This historic mansion is a 5-star hotel along the Cliff Walk. Locals say it offers some of the best espresso martinis (and more clever craft cocktails). The menu delivers French fare with a New England twist.
- **The Dining Room at Castle Hill Inn:** Make reservations for **brunch**. Share the RI Mushroom Toast with whipped ricotta, sultana raisins, and gremolata to start, then try the Eggs Benedict and French Toast with caramelized bananas, rum syrup, and honey roasted peanuts—with a side of Bloody Mary's, of course.

#### **For Casual Eating and Drinking:**

- **Thames Street Kitchen:** Locals argue this is where you'll find the best food in Newport. The menu changes based on the season, but you must get the warm bread with furikake butter and the raviolo (with serrano ham, ricotta, egg yolk). It's one big ravioli. (More like a pillow of buttery, umami goodness).
- **Pasta Beach:** Light, tender gnocchi. Rigatoni all'Amatriciana studded with bacon and onions. Loads of gourmet pizza choices. You'll need to be rolled out of here.
- **Corner Street Cafe:** This BYOB joint serves up greasy spoon comfort food, but the breakfast is the real treat. Breakfast burritos, stuffed French toast, and omelettes and breakfast sandwiches of every kind await.
- **Diego's:** This craft cocktail bar has a colorful array of tequila concoctions—and plenty of Mexican fare and fried offerings, like Diego's Crack Fries (topped with Oaxaca cheese, black pepper, and garlic aioli), to soak it all up.
- Want a casual spot for a glass of vino, craft beer, or cocktail? Try **Surf Club** or **Salvation Cafe**.
- Looking for dive bar vibes? Head to **Caleb and Broad**, **The Fastnet Pub**, or **O'Brien's Pub**.