

Despite being smallest state in the US, Rhode Island is home to some of the best views, tastiest seafood and thrilling seafaring adventure in North America, says Richard Jones

# Hitting the Rhode

## Travel

**A**RMANDO BISCEGLIA is a well-travelled man. Over the years, the restaurateur and sommelier has scoured the globe for the best food and wine to use at his Italian eatery Trattoria Zooma in Providence.

But despite frequently jetting off to some of the world's most picturesque locations, Armando's own 'happy place' is not too far away from his home in Rhode Island. "There is nothing better in life than sitting on a deckchair on the beach at Ocean House," he says.

My wife Rachel and I had just begun our tour of America's smallest state, and just a few hours before dining with Armando in the bustling Federal Hill area of Providence, we had flown into Boston, MA, with Virgin Atlantic, before driving an hour south in our Hertz rental car.

Our hotel for the first couple of nights was the landmark Omni Providence Hotel. Connected to the Dunkin' Donuts Center and the popular Providence Place mall, the Omni is within walking distance of the college campuses, attractions and entertainment in the Renaissance City, a place that inspired the town of Quahog in Family Guy. On our first morning, we saw Providence from the sunlit water during a River Boat Tour, as Captain Tom pointed out the city's landmarks including the site of the famous WaterFire celebrations, the Manchester Street Generating Station, Fox Point Hurricane Barrier and The Hot Club bar, which may be familiar to movie buffs as a filming location from There's Something About Mary. Then we strolled around the RISD Museum, before an al fresco dinner of clam chowder, paella, lobster and crab cakes at Hemenway's.

On the second and final morning of our short-but-sweet stay, we lined our stomachs with breakfast at Greek restaurant Kleos in the theatre district, before heading south.

From our next base at the brand-new Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott in South Kingstown, we were set to explore South County, the coastal region centred around Rhode Island's seasonal vacation communities. After Armando's claim a couple of days before, there was only one place to start – Ocean House.

Perched high on the bluffs of Watch Hill, with views of Long Island and Connecticut, this quintessential New England seaside guest house and resort is apparently a firm favourite of the Clintons, among others. Not only is it a Forbes five-star hotel, its OH! Spa and Coast restaurant are also five-star rated, making Ocean House one of only 13 triple five-star resorts in the world in 2018.



Federal Hill, Providence

The lavish property was meticulously reconstructed brick by brick in 2003 to reflect its rich turn-of-the-20th-century history, and some of its quirky touches – the cosy cinema, colourful gelato stall, and pale blue striped towels – are reminders of a bygone era. However, Ocean House's pièce de résistance is unquestionably its beach, where the warm waves of the Atlantic lap the golden sugary sand, and waiters in smart polo shirts shower guests with cocktails and snacks.

Just down the down beach, on Spray Rock Road, is its sister hotel, Weekapaug Inn. We also spent a morning there, and although heavy rain had rolled in off the bay, it didn't stop Rachel and I borrowing some of the hotel's Hunter jackets and wellingtons and embarking on a tour of the salt pond on board electric boat Quonnie Queen with captain David. During our time in South County we sampled some amazing seafood, in particular, the lobster, calamari and mussels at Coast Guard House on the famed Ocean Road in Narragansett. However, my favourite dishes of the week were at Matunuck Oyster Bar on Succotash Road in South Kingstown. Rachel and I took our seats on the patio next to Potter Pond, where the restaurant's tasty oysters are cultivated,

and the organic farm, in which many of the herbs and vegetables in its meals are grown.

The following day, we made the most of the improved weather by jumping on a ferry in Galilee over to Block Island, a 10-square-mile piece of land which has long been a honeytrap for New Englanders seeking sun and surf. We rented bikes and cycled over to Mohegan Bluffs and the Southeast Light lighthouse, where we quenched our thirst with Del's Frozen Lemonade. Then, arriving at the New Harbour, we hired kayaks from Fort Island Kayak and SUP to see more of Trims Pond and Rat Island.

After snoozing on the ferry back to the mainland, Rachel and I joined scores of other tourists and locals at the popular George's of Galilee. Fish tacos and a seafood platter with fresh pasta set us up nicely for a tasting session at Sons of Liberty Spirits whiskey and vodka distillery in South Kingstown. For the final couple of days in Rhode Island, Rachel and I set a course for the "sailing capital of the world", Newport. From our lodgings at Hotel Viking, we went for a driving tour of Ocean Drive, learning more about Eisenhower House and the Bay Walk around Adams State Park fortress, plus Jackie Kennedy's childhood home, Hammersmith Farm – the site of the

Kennedys wedding reception in 1953. We also stopped off at Newport's grandest tourist attraction – the 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo The Breakers.

The next morning, we both went for a jog down the Cliff Walk, the 3.5-mile Atlantic coastal path that allows tourists a peek into the manicured grounds of some of Newport's mansion. Then, after a trip to the beach, we walked to the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Audrain Automobile Museum, before driving to Newport Vineyards in Middletown.

Although Newport has an association with tennis, motoring and wine, it is the maritime heritage that brings most visitors to 'America's First Resort'.

Rachel and I joined the crew of the 72ft schooner Madeleine for a tour of Narragansett Bay, taking in more jaw-dropping scenery including Castle Hill lighthouse, island mansion Clingstone, and Rosecliff, the setting for the 1974 film version of The Great Gatsby.

However, we saved the best view of the entire trip until the final evening, when we had a dinner reservation at The Safari Room at OceanCliff. Although the food was delicious, almost every diner in the place wandered onto the lawn at some point to take a snap of the white sail boats returning to Newport harbour as the crimson sun sank into the horizon. However, it's not just scenery that makes Little Rhody such a perfect destination for a vacation. If delicious food and drink, history and seafaring adventure are also on your holiday wish list, then 'hit the Rhode' for America's smallest, but perfectly formed, state.

### TRAVEL FACTS

Richard Jones and his wife Rachel flew to Boston Logan airport with Virgin Atlantic who offer direct flights from Manchester from £467 one way. Visit [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com) or call 0344-874-7747. Car hire from Boston Logan airport with Hertz ([hertz.co.uk](http://hertz.co.uk)) starts from £31 a day. [visitrhodeisland.com](http://visitrhodeisland.com); [goprovidence.com](http://goprovidence.com); [southcountyri.com](http://southcountyri.com); [discovernewport.org](http://discovernewport.org)



Mohegan Bluffs on Block Island

Picture: Katherine Gendreau



Ocean House is a favourite of the Clintons