



# Small wonder

RHODE ISLAND HAS OCEAN BREEZES, NEW ENGLAND CHARM, ABUNDANT FRESH SEAFOOD AND AN ARTSY FLAIR.

by **Cathy Martin**

**F**ans of the HBO series *The Gilded Age* are familiar with Newport, Rhode Island's rise to prominence in the late 1800s as a summer playground for New York's wealthy elite. "You need four outfits a day — at the minimum — decent jewels and a full dance card," declares New York socialite Aurora Fane (played by Kelli O'Hara) as she prepares a family of newcomers for a visit to the posh coastal enclave.

Thankfully, that's no longer the case. Today, instead of Astors and Vanderbilts playing lawn tennis at their enormous summer "cottages," you'll find locals and visitors from all walks of life strolling down Thames Street and the city's bustling waterfront. Rhode Island still attracts plenty of high-profile celebs: Taylor Swift and Jay Leno have homes there, and Ocean State native Olivia Culpo (who was Miss Rhode Island before she became Miss Universe) and her beau, former Carolina Panther Christian McCaffrey, are getting married there, Culpo shared on TikTok. But you don't have to be a superstar to enjoy Rhode Island's enduring New England charm.

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Left: Lower Thames Street shops in Newport. Right: Newport Flower Show. Above: An aerial view of the Cliff Walk.



While Newport might be Rhode Island's most iconic destination, the smallest U.S. state has more to offer beyond the picturesque coastal town, from a vibrant arts and culinary scene in the capital of Providence to wineries and outdoor adventure. At just 48 miles long and 37 miles wide, it's easy to take it all in over a few short days.

PROVIDENCE

Founded in 1636 and home to several colleges and universities (Brown, Johnson & Wales and Rhode Island School of Design among them), Providence has an artsy vibe and a diverse culinary scene amid a historic backdrop.

The Providence River flows through the heart of the city — to explore it on foot, follow the 2.4-mile riverwalk to view monuments, murals and sculptures and peruse local shops and restaurants. Public works of art abound thanks to a local initiative called The Avenue Concept. One of the most prominent is “Still Here,” a mural by Baltimore street artist Gaia depicting a contemporary Narragansett woman, Lynsea, that's a nod to the resilience of the region's indigenous communities — the Narragansetts were once the region's largest tribe. Art enthusiasts will also want to pay a visit to the RISD Museum, with more than 2,000 works on view.

Stay downtown at **The Beatrice**, walkable to several restaurants and attractions. The 47-room hotel in a renovated historic bank

building has a modern, sophisticated design. Guest rooms have large windows, herringbone hardwood floors and luxury amenities like Mascioni linens, towel warmers and Dyson blow dryers. There's a sleek Italian restaurant, Bellini, with an art deco flair, and a stylish rooftop bar — both part of the luxury global Cipriani brand — where you can sip namesake peach cocktails and nosh on impossibly thin tenderloin carpaccio, burrata and other Italian specialties.

Providence is known for its delicious Italian fare, and **Federal Hill** is the place to find it. The neighborhood settled by Italian immigrants in the early 1900s is now a bustling entertainment district. **Il Massimo**, a two-story trattoria and bar, serves classic Italian pizzas, pastas, seafood and more with Italian wine and well-crafted cocktails. Downstairs is casual and lively with checkerboard floors, leather banquettes and exposed brick; upstairs is slightly more subdued but still festive — and clearly a place where locals go to celebrate, if the succession of candle-lit desserts delivered tableside during my visit is any indication.

Despite its diminutive size, Rhode Island boasts an astonishing 400 miles of coastline, so fresh seafood is plentiful. **Dune Brothers** is a seasonal, pocket-sized takeout joint in a bright red building with picnic-table seating. On the menu: a soul-warming clam chowder (made New England-style with cream or with a clear broth — a Rhode Island specialty), clam cakes, fish sandwiches and crab rolls.

Other casual dining spots include **Plant City**, a meandering

two-story all-vegetarian food hall housing four restaurants, a speakeasy, coffee bar and market. Not a vegetarian? You won't miss the meat at Plant City's Double Zero woodfired pizza bar — the truffle pizza with cashew cream, wild mushrooms, charred kale and a lemon vinaigrette is bright, zesty and filling. If craft beer is your thing, **The Malted Barley** has dozens of mostly New England brews on tap and baked-to-order pretzels, from simply salted to Asiago and Parmesan, along with housemade dips like a sinful apricot butter. For coffee and a sweet treat, try **Ellie's**, a French-inspired café with fresh-baked breads and delectable desserts from macarons to eclairs.

NEWPORT

Just a 45-minute drive from Providence is Newport, a major 18th-century seaport that later emerged as an artists' enclave and summer retreat.

Lodging here ranges from quaint bed-and-breakfasts to larger seaside inns. **The Chanler at Cliff Walk** is an elegant five-star hotel in a Gilded Age mansion on a bluff with sweeping ocean views and lush gardens. Located on a quiet side street a few blocks from the water is **The Vanderbilt**, an Auberge Resorts property in the former home of Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt. Near the epicenter of Newport's waterfront dining and shopping district, **Hammetts Hotel** has a modern, nautical vibe overlooking a marina and a lively courtyard with shops and an open-air bar and restaurant. A more

budget-friendly option is **Hotel Viking**, a historic property with a large rooftop bar (open seasonally) that's a pretty perch for enjoying sunset views.

Take in the sea air while strolling the **Cliff Walk**, a 3.5-mile public recreation trail that follows the coastline and passes stately historic mansions. Two of these magnificent homes — **Marble House** and **The Breakers** — are open to visitors year-round; others can be toured during the summer.

Downtown, brick and cobblestone sidewalks are lined with T-shirt shops with names like Nautical & Nice and a flagship Kiel James Patrick store stocked with preppy Fair Isle sweaters and braided, anchor-appliqued dog collars. **Bowen's Wharf**, a commercial hub since the 17th century, and the adjacent **Bannister's Wharf** are touristy but quaint. The waterfront district is filled with shops and restaurants, including Clarke Cooke House, a busy upscale restaurant in a circa-1780 building.

For a more casual bite, **Midtown Oyster Bar** is a lively tavern (with a quieter upstairs patio) adorned with colorful nautical flags and boasting a menu of familiar seafood dishes like fried calamari, tuna tacos, lobster rolls and an extensive raw bar, plus heartier entrees like pan-seared halibut and baked Atlantic cod.

The seafaring theme is strong in Newport, where kids often begin “learning the ropes” at an early age. To learn about Newport's sailing history, **The Sailing Museum**, which opened in 2022, has

PREVIOUS PAGE: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID GLEESON

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Left: The Beatrice Hotel in Providence. Above: “Still Here,” a mural by Baltimore street artist Gaia depicting a Narragansett woman. Opposite page: The music room at The Breakers, a Vanderbilt summer home where scenes from The Gilded Age were filmed.







Newport Vineyards

interactive exhibits, videos and artifacts, and is home to the National Sailing Hall of Fame.

Worth the 15-minute drive from downtown is **Newport Vineyards**, an expansive family-owned compound with a winery, on-site brewery and farm-to-table restaurant with a hyper-seasonal menu showcasing ingredients grown on-site and at local farms. Tours and tastings (try the pinot gris — bright, crisp and not-too-sweet) are offered daily.

### SOUTH COUNTY

In South County, you'll find 100 miles of beaches, hiking and bike trails, and small towns to explore. For a spa day, the **OH! Spa at The Preserve** in Richmond offers everything from massage and facials to manicures and IV therapy in posh 12,000-square-foot digs with an outdoor infinity pool.

Dine on fresh-caught seafood with water views at **The Coast Guard House**, a former life-saving station built in 1888 overlooking Narragansett Bay that's been a restaurant since the 1940s. Don't miss the house-made stuffies — hardshell clams with a chorizo and red-bell-pepper stuffing, a Rhode Island specialty (if you've had deviled crab, you get the idea), and Point Judith calamari, sourced from the nearby cape known globally for its abundant supply of fresh-caught squid.

*Getting there: The nonstop flight from Charlotte to Providence is about two hours. [SP](#)*

PHOTOS BY SUE AURIEMMA AND MAIKE BERNSTROM, COURTESY NEWPORT VINEYARDS

## Plan your visit

**SPRING** April marks the seasonal debut of **WaterFire Providence** (select dates through December), when more than 80 bonfires illuminate the downtown waterways from sunset till midnight. Volunteer "captains" tend the fires built in metal braziers lining the river, and the festivities are often accompanied by food and art vendors and live music.

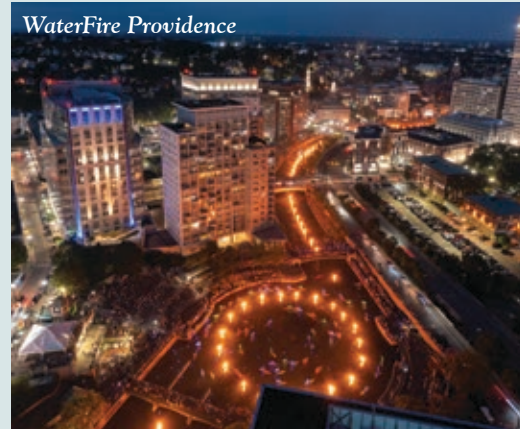
**SUMMER** The **Newport Folk Festival** (July 26-28) and the **Newport Jazz Festival** (Aug. 2-4) at Fort Adams State Park have attracted music lovers for decades. The **Newport Flower Show** (June 21-23) takes place at Rosecliff, a waterfront Gilded Age mansion.

**FALL** Evenings from late September until Halloween, thousands of carved pumpkins are on view during the **Jack O-Lantern Spectacular**, a walk-through exhibit at the city-owned Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence. Proceeds support animal care and zoo programs.

**WINTER** During **Holidays at the Newport Mansions** (Nov. 23 - Jan. 1, 2025), three Gilded Age Newport homes — The Breakers, Marble House and The Elms — are decked with hundreds of poinsettias, fresh florals and other festive finery.



WaterFire Providence



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