

HOTEL OFFERS IDEAL LAKE DISTRICT BREAK

Chris Young finds a tranquil retreat not far from home on the edge of Lake Windermere

THE idea of going on holiday somewhere that is a short drive down the motorway may not always seem as appealing as heading to the airport and jetting off to sunnier climes. However, England is home to some of the most beautiful destinations to have a break, and nowhere in the country is a better example of that than the Lake District.

Just a few hours' drive from Bradford is an area where you can totally detach from the hustle and bustle of city life and immerse yourself in outstanding natural beauty, history and culture, without the need to pack a passport.

We took a trip to Windermere on an unseasonably pleasant September weekend, and stayed in the Beech Hill Hotel - which overlooks the lake.

Driving to the hotel we were impressed by the natural beauty as well as the grand homes and hotels. And we were particularly happy when one of these buildings turned out to be our hotel.

The Beech Hill has an almost unmatched view of the lake, and our room had balcony that looked out over that near perfect view. After settling in the room we headed down to the lakeside to make the most of another business based on the site - Wake Nation, which offers watersports on Windermere.

Not being used to watersports we opted to pass on wakeboarding this time and go for the less extreme and more gentle option of paddleboarding.

After donning our wetsuits and lifejackets we hit the lake, which was nowhere near as cold as I thought it might be.

Although, as first timers, we didn't manage to stand up on the board as much as I'd like, we did manage to keep out of the water for most of our session.

Paddling on Lake Windermere on a sunny day is a truly exhilarating feeling. I'm not sure what I enjoyed most, the stillness of the lake when it was quiet, or the occasions when steamers sailed past, with passengers waving at us.

After spending time on the lake we returned to our room and made the most of the amazing view by enjoying a coffee on the balcony and watching the boats pass by.

After relaxing in our room we headed down to the hotel's spa area. The facilities include an indoor



Clockwise, from above: The stunning view of Lake Windermere from the Beech Hill Hotel; the pool at the Beech Hill Hotel's Spa; the hotel's Burlington's Restaurant; the Ruskin Suite at the Beech Hill Hotel

pool, steam room and sauna, as well as an outdoor hot tub and treatment rooms.

Although we didn't go for any of the multiple treatments on offer, we made plenty of use of the pool before relaxing in the steam room and sauna.

After all that relaxing we were just about ready for food.

The hotel is also home to Burlington's Restaurant, an on site eatery that has held AA rosettes for the last 20 years. As well as being a must for anyone staying at the hotel, the restaurant is hugely popular in the area for non-guests.

We opted to go all in, and went for the five-course meal. We started with drinks in the hotel bar, and even before we began the meal we were offered an incredible selection of canapes.

For starters I had an incredible dish featuring fish and rhubarb. This was followed by a sorbet that my partner said was the best she'd ever had.

For the main I had a perfectly cooked duck served on a sweet potato mash, vegetables and pistachios.

Dessert was a chocolate fondant that was incredibly rich, just the

way I like it, with clotted cream. And we ended with coffee and truffles.

Although I was happy with my choices, it was nearly impossible to choose from the menu that had so many highlights. I will have to return to the hotel to try the other dishes on offer.

The next morning we spent more time in the spa, before heading for a buffet breakfast - the highlights of which included a wonderful black pudding.

After our time in the hotel came to an end we ventured into nearby Bowness-On-Windermere. The

Hitting the Rhode for America's smallest state

TRAVEL

By Richard Jones

ARMANDO Bisceglia is a well-travelled man. Over the years, the restaurateur and sommelier has scoured the globe for the best food and wine for his Italian eatery Trattoria Zooma in Providence.

But Armando's own happy place is "sitting on a deckchair on the beach at Ocean House" near his Rhode Island home.

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

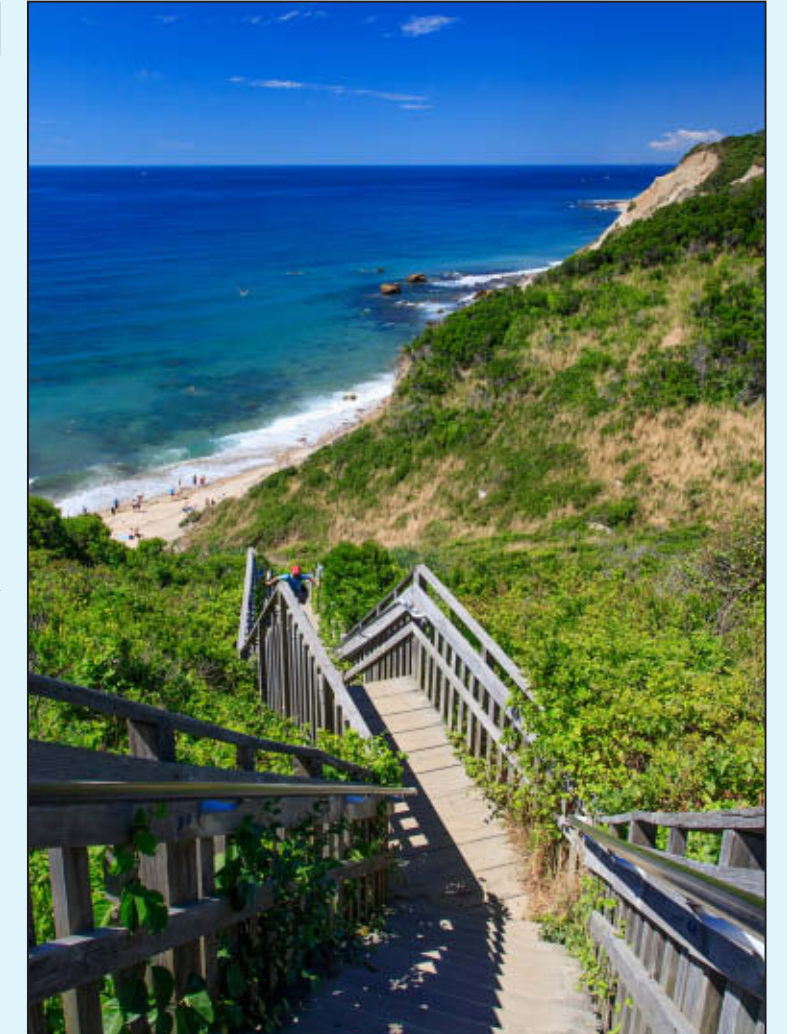
We stayed at the landmark Omni Providence Hotel, within walking distance of college campuses, attractions and entertainment in the Renaissance City, which inspired the town of Quahog in Family Guy.

We saw Providence from the sunlit water during a river boat tour, as Captain Tom pointed out landmarks including the site of the famous Water Fire celebrations and The Hot Club bar. Later we dined al fresco; clam chowder, paella, lobster and crab cakes at Hemenway's.

On our final morning in Providence, we had breakfast at Greek restaurant Kleos, before heading south on the I-95. From our next base, the brand-new Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott in South Kingstown, we explored South County. There was only one place to start - Ocean House. Perched high on Watch Hill, with views of Long Island and Connecticut, this quintessential New England resort is not only a Forbes five-star hotel, its OH! Spa and Coast restaurant are also five-star. The lavish property was reconstructed brick-by-brick in 2003 to reflect its turn-of-the-20th-century history, and quirky touches - cinema, gelato stall, and blue striped towels. Piece de résistance is its beach, where waiters in polo shirts serve cocktails. Down on Spray Rock Road is sister hotel, Weekapaug Inn where we loaned Hunter jackets and wellingtons for a salt pond tour.

In South County we had amazing lobster, calamari and mussels at Coast Guard House on the famed Ocean Road, Narragansett. My favourite dishes were at Matunuck Oyster Bar, where Rachel and I took our seats on the patio next to Potter Pond, where the tasty oysters are cultivated.

Next day we jumped on a ferry to Block Island, a honey trap for New Englanders seeking sun and surf. We cycled to Mohegan Bluffs and the Southeast Light



Mohegan Bluffs. Picture: Katherine Gendreau. Below: Ocean House, a quintessential New England guest house

lighthouse then hired kayaks from Fort Island Kayak and SUP to see more of Trims Pond and Rat Island. Back on the mainland we joined tourists and locals at popular George's of Galilee for a seafood platter.

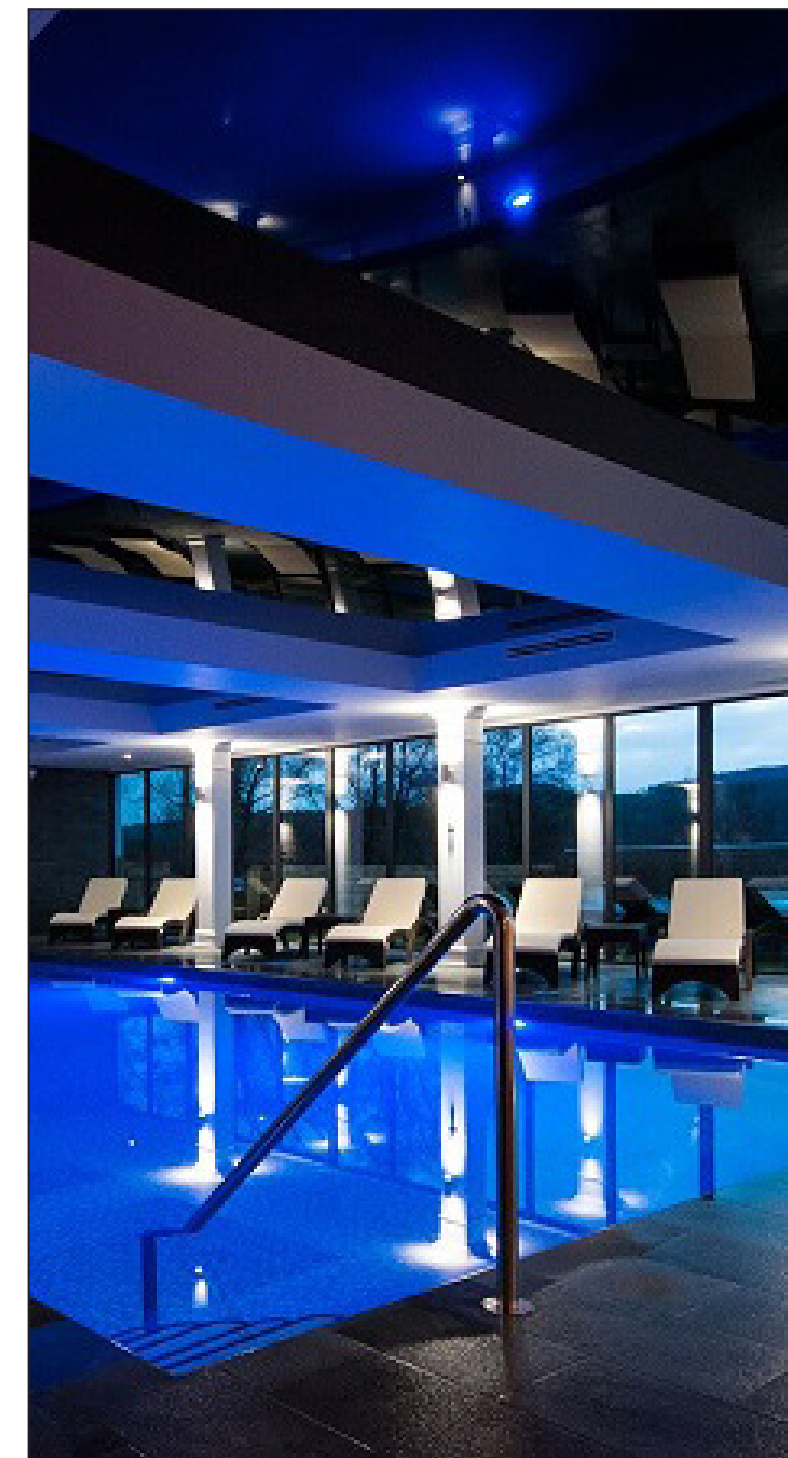
For our final couple of days we set a course for the 'sailing capital of the

world', Newport. From our lodgings at Hotel Viking, we toured Ocean Drive, learning about Jackie Kennedy's childhood home, Hammersmith Farm, and stopped at Newport's grandest tourist attraction, 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo The Breakers. Newport has an association with tennis, motoring and wine, but it's the maritime heritage that brings most visitors to 'America's First Resort'. We joined the 72-foot schooner Madeleine for a tour of Narragansett Bay, taking in scenery including Rosecliff, setting for The Great Gatsby. We saved the best view of the trip until the final evening, with dinner at The Safari Room at Ocean Cliff. Although the food was delicious, almost every diner wandered onto the lawn at some point to take a snap of white sail boats returning to Newport harbour as the crimson sun sank.



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picturesque town was busy with tourists making the most of the final days of the summer, and it was really apparent how popular the destination is as an international as well as a national destination. I was expecting a lot of tourist shops, but was pleasantly surprised how the town has plenty of cafes and restaurants, as well as high street names.

There were plenty of activities in the town - from watersports to boat trips to simple sightseeing as the town has some incredible views. And it is also home to The World of Beatrix Potter. The Peter Rabbit

author lived in nearby Hill Top Farm and the Bowness attraction is dedicated to her colourful characters.

Hill Top Farm itself is now a National Trust-run attraction. We were just in the Lakes for a weekend, but we just scratched the surface of what the area has to offer. If you are looking to stay in England for a holiday rather than travel abroad then I can't think of a better place to recommend.

● For more information on the Beech Hill Hotel, visit beechhillhotel.co.uk