

AFAR

The Best Road Trips in the Northeast

By Ashlea Halpern; March 18; 2026

From Maine's coast to New York's mountain retreats, these are the top road trips to take in nine Northeastern states.

Few travel experiences are as quintessentially American as the road trip: a fueled (or **charged**) up car, a loose itinerary, and the promise that something exciting waits just past the next curve. For generations, loading up the car has been a rite of passage—equal parts discovery and reinvention. As the country approaches its 250th anniversary, we're celebrating that restless spirit with unforgettable drives in each state. In this list, we're focusing on drives in the Northeast, but we also have picks for the best road trips in the **West**, the **Midwest**, and the **South**.

These nine northeastern road trips wind from the rocky coast of Maine to the Appalachian Mountains, plus plenty of small-town charm to see in between. Together, they start to form a portrait of the United States best understood not from 30,000 feet—but mile by mile.

Rhode Island for lighthouses, lobster rolls, and haunted lore

- **Start:** Narragansett Bay
- **End:** Newport
- **Distance:** 45 miles

Rhode Island's license plate reads "Ocean State," and a drive along even a slice of its 400-mile shoreline makes the nickname obvious (impressive for a state only 48 miles long and 37 miles wide). This coastal route passes lighthouses, scattered islands, and stretches where you're practically driving on the sand.



Newport is famous for its Gilded Age mansions, many of which are open for tours.
Photo by Kumar Mehul/Unsplash

Start at **Point Judith Lighthouse**, a brick beacon used during World War II, before heading north on Ocean Road as it hugs the shoreline. Stop at Black Point Trailhead to photograph the ruins of a century-old carriage house or hike the easy 1.8-mile trail to sweeping views of Narragansett Bay. In Narragansett proper, grab a chilled lobster roll and the city's namesake beer at the **Coast Guard House**, or take your meal to Town Beach, framed by the hulking **Towers**—remnants of an 1886 seaside casino.

Continue north on Route 1A and cross the Jamestown Verrazano Bridge to Jamestown, an island known for its shingle-style cottages and historic lighthouses, including **Beavertail**, which also houses a shipwreck museum. At **Fort Wetherill State Park**, trails wind past abandoned WWII structures and down to a quiet beach. (A scene from Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* was filmed here.)

Get a milkshake or ice cream sundae at **Sugar Shack** at the Ferry Wharf, then drive over the Newport Bridge and detour along Ocean Avenue for views of coves and rocky outcroppings. From there, turn onto Bellevue Avenue to see Newport's most famous **Gilded Age mansions**, including the Vanderbilt family's opulent estate. Check in at **the Vanderbilt**, an Auberge Collection property in downtown Newport with pinstripe-wallpapered rooms and classes in cocktail making or yachting-bag

customization. Finish at **White Horse Tavern**—the oldest, continuously operating restaurant in the USA, and, according to lore, haunted—for a bowl of clam chowder or the beef Wellington. —*Danielle Hallock*