



The coolest lighthouses in the U.S. worth a visit

These elegant structures helped make the ocean safer for vessels, and they make for a charming, breezy visit

For old-world maritime glamour, there's really nothing that can beat a beautiful lighthouse. Knowing that these towers [on the shore](#) did their best to cast light over a dark ocean, warning ships of rocks ahead, feels mysterious and compelling. Back before even telegraphs existed, the sole way to communicate with a [ship at night](#) to warn it of danger was the beam that radiated from the lighthouse lantern. When you read lighthouse descriptions, you'll often hear mention of a [Fresnel lens](#), an 1822 invention of Augustin Fresnel. This lens used glass panels with an etched bullseye refracting light horizontally and vertically, making for a dramatically stronger beam of light.

You can visit each of the lighthouses on this list, which eliminates some favorites like the [Nubble Lighthouse](#) in Maine or the [Cape Hatteras Lighthouse](#) in North Carolina, which is closed until 2026. You'll climb an often harrowing circular staircase in the tower to get to the light source—and an incredible panorama of water and land below. Many will offer special events on International Lighthouse Day, August 17, so check their calendar listings. Some of the coolest lighthouses listed here are still on active duty protecting ships—and you might even be able to spend the night and tend the light.

5. Rose Island Lighthouse | Newport, RI



Photograph: Courtesy Visit Rhode Island

The [Rose Island Lighthouse](#), a sweet, squat lighthouse perched on a rocky bluff, simply spells “New England.” You can spend the night inside from April through October, or just come for a spring or summer daytime visit. Access the lighthouse island via the Jamestown Newport Ferry or by canoe, kayak or stand-up paddle board. If you’re an overnighter, transportation on the boat *Rose* is included in your stay. The island also holds the barracks of Fort Hamilton, ruins of the Navy Torpedo Station, beaches and tidal pools, a perimeter trail, and great bird watching. Dating to 1870, the lighthouse is no longer officially in service because the Newport Pell Bridge now holds all navigation aids, but since its establishment as a museum in 1993, it beams a 48-foot beacon out onto Narragansett Bay and is a private aid to navigation. The lighthouse looks as it did from 1910 to 1918 when a little boy lived there with his lightkeeper grandfather.