

TRAVELAGE WEST

Tips for a Family-Friendly Vacation to Newport, Rhode Island

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Newport, R.I., charms visitors with its beautiful architecture and entertaining yet educational offerings.
Credit: Creative Commons user Maralinga

Newport, R.I., is a picturesque seaside town with beautiful beaches, quaint shops and restaurants famous for New England specialties such as lobster rolls and clam chowder. It's also the location of more than a dozen magnificent mansions that served as summer cottages for America's wealthiest families in the late 19th century.

Newport is an ideal spot for vacationing families, too, as the city is “entertaining, engaging and educational,” and “visitors are surrounded by history,” according to Andrea McHugh, senior communications manager for Discover Newport.

When planning a future trip to Newport, travel advisors should consider the following tips.

What to Do

Clients can start at the 40 Steps, a popular vista point as well as an excellent spot for family photos. Recommend that they stroll along Newport's 3.5-mile Cliff Walk with panoramic ocean views on one side and the “castles of Newport” on the other. The most famous — and certainly the grandest — of these castles is The Breakers, which was built by the Vanderbilt family in 1895. This 70-room home-turned-museum offers a glimpse into the opulent period in American history that author Mark Twain dubbed “The Gilded Age.”

“There are many child-friendly aspects to the Newport Mansions, including tours of The Breakers and Marble House,” said John Rodman, director of museum experience for The Preservation Society of Newport County. “The Beneath the Breakers tour includes an underground tunnel and a secret entrance into the mansion.”



Families can explore the beaches that served as the backyards of the mansions.

Credit: 2020 Samantha Davis-Friedman

The 45-minute family audio tour — with the mansion itself as the narrator — challenges kids to discover secrets such as dragons in the dining room, dolphins under the stairs and lions in the music room. Plus, the tour teaches about the mansion’s architecture, design and decor in a kid-friendly style: Stories are told about the Vanderbilt children sliding down the staircase on silver trays, or recruiting the Fabulous Breaktinis — an imaginary troupe of “aerial artistes of architectural wonder” — to measure the 50-foot-high great hall.

Meanwhile, parents may opt for The Breakers Revealed audio tour, which follows the same route and timing as the family tour. (Admittedly, my college-age son and I preferred the kids’ version.)

Another fun place for families to explore is Green Animals Topiary Garden in the town of Portsmouth (almost 9 miles from Newport). The oldest and most northern topiary garden in the U.S., Green Animals features 80-plus pieces of topiary that include numerous animals, a sailing ship, teacups and more.



Green Animals Topiary Garden features 80-plus pieces of topiary.

Credit: 2020 Samantha Davis-Friedman

History buffs shouldn't miss Fort Adams, the largest coastal fortification in the U.S., which was built between 1824 and 1857 and then remained active through World War II.

Comprehensive 75-minute tours will take families from the heights of the fort's walls to the depths of its underground tunnels. Those who visit from Memorial Day through Labor Day can also take self-guided tours of the 1873 Eisenhower House, which served as former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's occasional "Summer White House."

Clients looking to step up their sightseeing game can undertake the Aquidneck Island Nature Collaborative's Family Passport Challenge. To win, they must visit at least five of the 11 sites on the challenge map; the map is available at the Discover Newport Visitor Center.

www.fortadams.org

www.newportmansions.org

Where to Eat

Anthony's Seafood Market & Restaurant in nearby Middleton offers fresh seafood and local favorites such as jumbo stuffed shrimp and chowders. Don't miss the "stuffies" — quahog clams stuffed with Portuguese chourico sausage, onions, peppers and spices. My family's top picks include the fish and chips and the lobster roll, but the Rhode Island broth-style clam chowder is also delicious. Not to worry: Kids who refuse to eat fish can order from the "land lovers" menu instead.

For sweet treats, head to Newport Creamery. For more than 90 years, this Rhode Island institution has served its award-winning ice cream by the scoop or between two chocolate-chip cookies (the Super Chipper) or two Oreo cookie wafers (the Cow'wich). For a truly authentic Rhode Island experience, order an Awful Awful. This curiously named milkshake-like concoction is only found in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts, and comes in 10 flavors — from classics such as chocolate and vanilla to kid-friendly favorites including cotton candy and bubble gum.

www.anthonysseafood.net

www.newportcreamery.com

Where to Stay

Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina's location on Goat Island, surrounded by Narragansett Bay, makes it the perfect choice for summertime activities. Watersports are available at the state-of-the-art marina, or children can swim in Newport's only outdoor hotel pool. When temperatures dip, the waterfront resort transforms into a winter wonderland, complete with heated and themed igloos and an outdoor skating rink where families can "skate by the sea" (available from mid-November to early March).

"Our property has become a haven for families visiting Newport, most notably for its proximity to downtown and the various amenities we offer throughout all four seasons," said David Smiley, general manager of Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina. "A definite favorite for our families at Gurney's Newport is our three resident goats — Cornelia, Cooper and Henry — all named after the Vanderbilt family."

www.gurneysresorts.com

The Details

Discover Newport

www.discovernewport.org