

# Trip Dispatch: Teeing up Rhode Island's eclectic, historic golf scene

Rhode Island's best public courses make for one fun golf adventure.

By Jason Scott Deegan | June 25, 2024



Meadow Brook Golf Club makes a strong case as Rhode Island's best public golf course.

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island - You never know who you'll encounter as a single playing a muni in a different state.

I won the golf lottery at [Triggs Memorial](#) when I was paired up with Joe, who books the first tee time every morning five times a week in the summer. He likes to play 18 holes in less than two hours. He sometimes runs between shots to keep the pace moving along. I had a flight home to catch, so my window of three hours to finish suddenly felt excessive.



Rhode Island turned out to be just as friendly a golf destination as Joe was as a playing partner. Not many golfers think of Rhode Island when they're dreaming of a summer golf vacation, but after a five-day golf adventure around the state, I'd thoroughly recommend it.

True to its size, Rhode Island - the smallest U.S. state geographically - only has about 60 golf courses. Most of the state's best are private, although there are enough unique public and resort experiences worth piecing together for a great trip. I ended up playing the state's best public course ([Newport National](#)), best muni (Triggs Memorial), best short course ([The Preserve](#)), plus the [Exeter Country Club](#), and my favorite, [Meadow Brook Golf Club](#), located next to the state's only "golf resort" (more on that later).

Rhode Island will enjoy a rare moment in the golf spotlight this week when [Newport Country Club](#) - the state's top course - hosts the 2024 U.S. Senior Open Thursday through Sunday. This is Rhode Island's version of the golf Super Bowl, the chance to showcase its Atlantic Ocean views to legions of golfers around the country.

For the record, I did play Newport CC, too. But since 99.9 percent of golfers can't access such an exclusive club, I didn't include that experience in this



story. If you plan on watching the U.S. Senior Open this weekend, definitely check out my preview.

Okay, let's tee it up in the Ocean State!

## Day 1: Staying and playing at The Preserve



Dining inside the Maker's Mark Hobbit House is one of the signature experiences at The Preserve.

Jason Scott Deegan/GolfPass



When you're picked up at the airport in a Bentley by a resort staffer, it sets a pretty high standard. Nothing about The Preserve falls short of that lofty first impression.

As the name suggests, The Preserve is an outdoor paradise spread across 3,500 acres in the tiny town of Richmond. It's part resort, part hunting reserve and part fantasy land, all the vision of equity owner Paul Mihailides.

Mihailides was one of the East Coast's premier golf course developers around the turn of the century before pivoting to chase his love of shooting and the outdoors. His fantastic 18-hole, par-3 course gets very little play because only members and resort guests have access to it. To call the Mountain Course at The Preserve a short course does the experience an injustice. It's one of the best par 3 courses in America. Many of the holes are meaty, requiring carries to hilltop greens over rock outcroppings or ponds. Designed by Robert McNeil in 2015, the 3,000-yard, par-54 routing rises and falls with natural rolling terrain over a footprint that was once

home to architect Tripp Davis' first design. That big course closed years ago, as it was too penal for such a tumultuous piece of property. For those who want a similar challenge, the Mountain Course does offer a cross-country routing where certain corridors match up different tees and greens to play as a par 34 over nine holes. I would have loved to give it a try, but wisely opted instead for an afternoon relaxing at the fabulous Oh! Spa inside the Hilltop Lodge.

For two nights, I dined at Double Barrel Steak, a restaurant known for the appetizer of hanging thick-cut bacon flame-cooked right at your table. Guests can also try clay shooting, hiking, kayaking, ziplining, fishing, driving a Bentley SUV on a trek through the wilderness or the chance to dine in a Maker's Mark Hobbit House. The houses are popular for groups and families celebrating special occasions such as graduations, anniversaries, birthdays, etc.

Additional luxury accommodations include single-family homes, townhomes and tiny homes that are also in the real estate pool. The Preserve sold a 4,000-plus square-foot home for \$10.9 million in 2023, to give you a sense of the luxury of the community.

## Day 2: Teeing up Exeter Country Club



*The most memorable shot at Exeter Country Club requires hitting over or around a covered bridge.*

For golfers wanting more, Exeter Country Club, a Geoffrey Cornish creation from the 1960s, resides less than a half hour away. It's held on to its old-school vibes with a tiny pro shop located in a building separate from the clubhouse restaurant.



The 6,921-yard golf course sports a wonderful flow of interesting holes. There's some elevation change, although not so much that you can't walk it (our playing partners did). No homes encroach on the site. A large water hazard creates drama on its two best par 4s - the short dogleg-left 13th (pictured above) and the long 16th.

## Day 3: Moving day to Newport



Shadows follow golfers during an early morning round at Meadow Brook Golf Club.

Jason Scott Deegan/GolfPass



As difficult as it was to leave The Preserve's pampering, when Newport calls, you answer.

First came a crack-of-dawn round at Meadow Brook just down the road from The Preserve. Its proximity actually gives The Preserve the ability to call itself a golf resort. Between the Mountain Course, Meadow Brook and Exeter CC, golfers can set up a nice weekend itinerary.

At 7,468 yards, Meadow Brook's a big ballpark with a split personality. Some holes run through narrow chutes in the forest, but the back nine opens into an expansive meadow where water hazards lurk on both par 3s (the 10th and 17th) and the demanding par-4 finishing hole.

We made it to Newport National in time for a quick bite before an afternoon tee time. Thankfully we caught the best weather of the trip that afternoon. Arthur Hills designed the 7,244-yard course to handle wind and any sort of weather rolling in off the ocean. The topography is pancake-flat with few

trees. All the strategy is packed into carrying wetlands or hitting the topsy-turvy greens in the right quadrants. A few holes decorated with stone walls add to the feeling that you're tackling a windswept links. The only disappointment is the lack of real ocean views.



Summer sunsets in Newport, R.I., are magical.

Jason Scott Deegan/GolfPass



Staying and playing in Newport - whether it's National or the Country Club - delivers the perfect summer weekend. Staying at the Newport Marriott Hotel & Spa allows easy walking distance to downtown restaurants and bars. Many sit on the edge of piers or docks, so it can be tricky to navigate the narrow streets on the waterfront, although that's part of allure ... just wandering aimlessly.

A classic New England lobster roll and a stunning sunset combined for the perfect nightcap while dining at The Mooring, a restaurant specializing in seafood. I also had a chance to sample homemade pizzas and pastas at the Italian-themed Bar'Cino the following night after playing Newport CC. Although it's not on the water, the tasty food makes it worth the stop.

## Day 4: Departure day at Triggs Memorial





Most critics of Triggs Memorial say it has great "bones" as a Donald Ross original, but its conditioning can be hit or miss because it gets so much play.

Jason Scott Deegan/GolfPass



All I heard all week was how Triggs Memorial still had "good bones"; the 6,522-yard Donald Ross course just needed a little more TLC. Maybe I got lucky catching it early in the day and early in the season before the summer heat and heavy play tears into conditioning, but I found it in wonderful shape. Course staff have been working to restore bunkers one at a time. Only one fairway bunker was completely torn up, affecting the tee shot on the difficult eight hole. I could also tell the course can get swampy on a few low-lying holes after heavy rains. Otherwise, the variety of the holes, their Ross green surrounds and the chance to watch Joe running around the course made for a memorable day. I'm not alone in my affinity for Triggs.

"Has to be one of the best 6,500-yard courses in the country. These greens and greenside bunkering are pure diabolical Ross," gushed 'hornedwoodchuck', a regular GolfPass user who has left more than 900 course reviews.

New Englanders love sports, and their passion for golf is no different. Unfortunately, their golf season feels too painfully short. That's why, when the sun shines, all the local Joes golf their brains out until the eventuality of winter returns.

