



travel



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The best things to do and see in Newport

Lilit Marcus, CNN • Published 23rd June 2017

(CNN) — Many of those clichés about postcard-pretty coastal New England towns got their start in the same place: Newport, Rhode Island.

The town is best known for being a summer getaway for America's aristocracy during the Gilded Age, with wealthy families like the Vanderbilts, the Dukes and Astors all owning summer homes there (they say "cottage," we say "ginormous mansion") and throwing glamorous parties.

Although more of the luxurious estates are museums than homes these days, Newport hasn't lost its seaside charm -- especially in the summer. Here's our guide to the best things to do, eat and explore both indoors and out.

Touring the mansions



The Elms: pretty grand for a "summer cottage."

Most of the great Gilded Age piles are along leafy Bellevue Avenue, which makes it easy to explore several in just one afternoon. If you only have time for one, head to **The Breakers**, the onetime home of the Vanderbilts.

Many "coming out" debutante balls for wealthy young women were held here, and many of these American heiresses would go on to marry into Europe's noble families.

Cora Crawley from "Downton Abbey" was inspired by those women, most famously Jennie Jerome, a posh American girl who married Lord Randolph Churchill and was the mother of none other than Winston Churchill.

Its latest offering is a "Beneath the Breakers" tour that focuses on the lives of the many servants who kept the household running.

Other highlights of the mansion tour include the sunken garden at **The Elms**, Stanford White-designed **Rosecliff**, and French-inspired **Chateau-sur-Mer**, widely considered the first of the great Newport homes.

You can buy a two-house ticket, which gives access to The Breakers and one other home of your choice, for \$27, or a five-house ticket for The Breakers plus four others for \$35.

Stretching your legs

Beyond house-hopping, Newport has a huge sporting history.

The town is home to the **International Tennis Hall of Fame** and holds the distinction of hosting the most America's Cup yachting race more often than any other place on earth.

Even if you're not quite ready to race yachts, there are dozens of places to take sailing lessons or rent a boat for a day or afternoon trip around the peninsula.

If you'd prefer to stay on solid ground, Newport's iconic **Cliff Walk** is what it sounds like -- a marked trail along the rocky coastline, where you can legally walk across private property to admire both the famous mansions and the stunning 70-foot drops down to the sea.

The best-known stop along the Cliff Walk is 40 Steps, which are -- you guessed it -- 40 narrow steps leading down to an observation deck that's absolutely perfect for photo-taking.

Every summer, music fans from around the world flock to **Fort Adams State Park** for the Newport Jazz Festival and the Newport Folk Festival, but the park is also a beautiful place to visit year-round, with a hiking trail, swimming spots and places to picnic.

Eating, drinking and more eating



The White Horse Tavern dates to 1652.

It seems criminal to come to Newport without trying some seafood.

On Sayers Wharf, **Moorings** is a shellfish-centric classic where you're as likely to spot locals as visiting celebrities.

Try the popular lobster sandwich on a croissant, the daily risotto (which often has shellfish in it) and the scallop bisque. If you're allergic to crustaceans, it's hard to go wrong with the steak.

For a more laid-back experience, head to **Jo's American Bistro** for Italian-inflected dishes like butternut squash agnolotti and lobster fra diavolo.

Newport's **annual restaurant week**, where eateries offer special prix fixe menus at lunch and dinner time, is held every spring, so keep an eye open for new openings and good deals.

Newport is also ideal for visitors with a sweet tooth. Newport Fudgery on Thames Street regularly has lines out the door, while local institution **Kilwins** is the best place to get toffee and peanut brittle as gifts for friends back home -- plus ice cream to go for you (the banana fudge pie flavor is a don't-miss).

At night, check out the **White Horse Tavern**, a 17th-century establishment believed to be the oldest bar in America. Try a Rhode Island beer from a brewery like Narragansett or Revival alongside a bar snack like a duck-wrapped Scotch egg.

Where to sleep and relax



Gurney's Newport

Like Newport itself, the town's hotels are elegant but understated.

The newest addition to the hotel scene is **Gurney's**, which has a respected sibling property in Montauk, Long Island.

The new location makes sense -- Montauk is known for being a more reserved part of the Hamptons, just as Newport is to the rest of New England.

The property, located on Goat Island just a short bridge walk or drive away from downtown, has two pools (one indoor, one outdoor), an outpost of Manhattan's beloved Italian restaurant Scarpetta and a strictly enforced policy that keeps noise down after 9 p.m.

For a retreat in the middle of it all, look for the **Grace Vanderbilt**, an intimate nautical-themed property (think more grays and blues, fewer things with sailboat and anchor prints) on quiet Mary Street just off the main drag of Thames Street (unlike its English namesake, this one is pronounced "thaymes").

Despite the central location, the hotel blends in with the neighborhood and is a perfect home base for exploring the town.

The quiet, stately property blends in with the neighborhood, and locals are just as likely to sip Champagne and watch the sunset from the rooftop bar as hotel guests are.

If it gets cool out after dark, don't worry -- staff can provide warm gray blankets on request.

Further afield, the **Castle Hill Inn** is in a -- what else? -- renovated onetime mansion along the coastline, and between the cozy rooms and breathtaking scenery it's no surprise this place is often named one of the most romantic hotels in America.

And beyond

Newport's island location doesn't keep it isolated.

Between June and October, a **Newport-Providence ferry** makes it easy to explore Rhode Island's capital, which doubles as an artistic college town full of world-class restaurants.

You can visit the **RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) Museum**, say hi to elephants at the National Register of Historic Places-listed **Roger Williams Park Zoo**, stop in for dinner and cocktails at **Cook & Brown Public House** and be back in Newport the end of the night.

If you have a car, the famous Ocean Drive is home to more of Newport's mansions (granted, these are usually private homes that you can't visit, but you're totally allowed to gawk).

You can continue from there to Brenton Point State Park, which is beloved for the omnipresent kites that children fly along the water and for its craggy waterfront, for a picnic.