

South County Staycations

By Bob Curley

South County is one of the best beach destinations in New England and like Cape Cod and Newport, only gets better after Labor Day when most of the tourists depart and leave the locals to enjoy the beaches minus the crowds and traffic. Add easy-to-get dinner reservations at even the most popular restaurants and off-season hotel rates, and September and October become the best time of year to enjoy a South County “staycation” whether you’re planning a romantic getaway or some quality time by the shore with the kids.

Romantic Rhody

“A lot of people think you have to get in the car and drive out of state to get away, but we’re fortunate that we live in Rhode Island and it’s beautiful,” says South County hotelier John Bellone, owner of the Breezeway Hotel in Misquamicut and the [Hotel Maria](#), a new boutique hotel that opened on the beach last summer. The hotel’s spacious, mid-century inspired decor and laid-back luxury is best captured in the four 4th-floor Seascape Suites, which each have two bedrooms, two baths, a living room and kitchen – maybe more than you need for a romantic getaway, but you can’t beat the ocean views from the spacious balconies.

Mediterranean cuisine is served nightly through mid-September at [Maria’s Seaside Cafe](#) (and on weekends after that); hotel guests can order room service through the restaurant or make their way downstairs for a leisurely Sunday brunch that features bottomless Bellinis. Offseason rates starting September 2 make Hotel Maria affordable as well as romantic: expect to pay 30-40 percent less than you would in the summer, with rooms starting around \$200 nightly.

Get Active

[The Break](#) in Point Judith is a boutique hotel with 16 stylish rooms and rooftop bar, Chair 5, with indoor/outdoor seating and ocean views. It’s also situated within easy biking distance of three of Rhode Island’s best beaches – Narragansett, Scarborough, and Roger Wheeler – making it a delight for an active getaway. And you can pack light: the hotel will lend you bikes and equip you with beach towels and backpack chairs for a day on the sand.

Other nearby options for active outings include [Fisherman’s Memorial State Park](#), which hosts a popular Sunday morning farmers market through the end of October, and the fishing village of Galilee with its restaurants, bars, fishing charters, whale watching tours, and the ferry to Block Island. The hotel concierge can arrange for kayak paddles on the Narrow River and surfboard rentals or lessons at Narragansett Beach.

When you need a break from the action, The Break has a heated outdoor saltwater swimming pool that’s open year-round and a small spa and fitness room. Starting October 1, Rhode Island residents can get 10 percent off room rates and a \$25 food credit for stays on Sunday-Thursday nights; staying two nights earns 20 percent off the second night, three is 30 percent off the third night, and staying four nights gets you 40 percent off the fourth night.

Fall in the Family

Fall is back-to-school time, and while that makes it tough to squeeze in an extended vacation, it's a great opportunity to reconnect with a family staycation. Misquamicut's [Breezeway Resort](#) has hotel rooms, studios, suites, and a cottage to accommodate families of all sizes, and stays include continental breakfast, WiFi so the kids don't feel disconnected from their friends, and free loaner bikes that you can use to pedal to the beach (just three blocks away), the Watch Hill lighthouse, and the Atlantic Beach amusement park, which stays open 'til late October. Rates after September 2 start at \$169 nightly.

Westerly's historic [Weekapaug Inn](#) has been welcoming families since 1899, and the Relais & Chateaux hotel's history of refined but kid-friendly hospitality has been enhanced in recent years by a \$20 million renovation that included creating more spacious rooms and adding lots of on-resort activities, including a resident naturalist to lead nature hikes, motorboat outings on Quonochontaug Pond, and endless kids' activities organized by staff at the resort's boathouse recreation center, including moonlight kayak paddles and seal-watching expeditions. And don't miss the fall pasta nights at the Inn's restaurant, with three courses of fresh salad, homemade bread, and pasta served family-style, followed by passed desserts. The resort offers a 10 percent discount on stays in October and November (some blackout dates and restrictions apply).

Cottage Life

Rhode Island may be a small state, but that doesn't stop countless urban residents from keeping a summer cottage by the beach in the summer, even if it takes a trip of under an hour to make the transition from work life to vacation mode. If you want to do South County like a local, pack a bag for a weekend at the [Point Break Cottages](#) in Matunuck.

Owned by Kevin Finnegan, founder of the [Ocean Mist](#) beach bar, the half-dozen cottages are arrayed along the Matunuck shoreline and can accommodate two to eight people, depending on the unit. All of the cottages are connected by boardwalks and walkways, says property manager Emily King, so groups traveling together "don't have to hike down the street — everyone is right there."

Some of the cottages are open year-round, others are seasonal. All have TVs and Wifi, and all are a short walk from the Ocean Mist, where cottage guests can enjoy live music and the beach bar's excellent daily breakfast, or get a free pizza from Finnegan's [Matunuck Pizza Pie Co.](#) across the street. "You have a lot around you," says Emily, who estimates that about half of her guests stay because they want to attend a show at the Ocean Mist (ask about discounted or complimentary tickets), while the rest just come down for a beach getaway. Offseason rates at the Point Break Cottages go into effect on October 1, with prices starting as low as \$125 per night.

Luxury Lodgings

Westerly's [Ocean House](#) is the pinnacle of luxury lodging in Rhode Island; in fact, this exquisite reimagining of the classic grand New England beach resort consistently ranks among the top hotels in the world. The hotel is an icon of Victorian elegance with wide porches wrapped around the bright yellow-and-white exterior of the main building, which sits behind the sand dunes of Watch Hill. Guest rooms match the early 20th century elegance of the resort, with refined furnishings and cheerful coastal colors; the grand deluxe rooms have private oceanfront terraces and marble baths with soaking tubs.

Dining options range from informal lunches on the veranda and the oceanside [Dune Cottage](#) to multi-course dinners at the AAA 5-Diamond Coast restaurant where you'll want to dress your best to match the elegant atmosphere. The hotel's [Oh! Spa](#) is a destination unto itself, with 15,000 square feet of indoor space given over to treatment rooms, a pool, fitness center, salon, and classrooms for yoga and other movement sessions. Signature services include couples' massages in a

private suite with a hydrotherapy tub and beach-stone shower. The resort has an extensive calendar of events from art clinics to lobster bakes and boat cruises, and when it's time to explore, you can borrow one of the resort's Mercedes-Benz convertibles and hit the road.

The Ocean House's popularity makes deals hard to come by, but room rates do drop off from summer highs in the fall. If you're looking for a more budget-friendly option, the nearby [Watch Hill Inn](#), a sister property, offers a 15 percent discount for September and October stays; the hotel has just 21 suites, offers in-room dining and spa services, and affords guests access to all of the amenities at the Ocean House.