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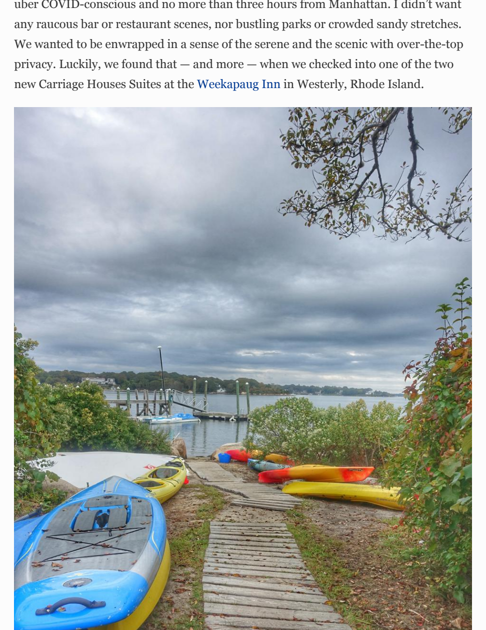
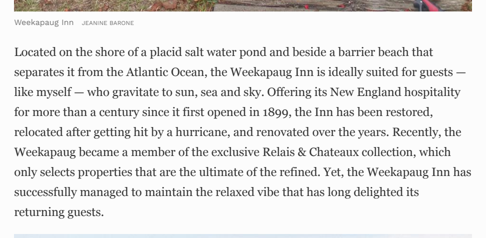
For Endless Sky, Sea And Sand, Book This Relaxed But Luxe Rhode Island Resort

Jeanine Barone Contributor
ForbesLife

For me, it's the little things that count. And that's especially the case now when we're all trying to stay safe and well (and sane) as the pandemic rages on and the days grow shorter and darker. For someone like myself who craves sun drenched beaches, lakefront picnics, morning kayak adventures, and peaceful bird watching walks, 2020 has been a difficult and frustrating year. After all, I'm a New York City resident and travel journalist who normally spends much of the year on the road, indulging in myriad outdoor activities that energize my spirit. So, several months ago, I developed a pandemic travel plan for mental and physical well being: Each month a friend and I would rent a car and spend several nights in a luxe, nature-based locale that was also uber COVID-conscious and no more than three hours from Manhattan. I didn't want any raucous bar or restaurant scenes, nor bustling parks or crowded sandy stretches. We wanted to be enwrapped in a sense of the serene and the scenic with over-the-top privacy. Luckily, we found that — and more — when we checked into one of the two new Carriage Houses Suites at the Weekapaug Inn in Westerly, Rhode Island.


Weekapaug Inn JEANINE BARONE

Located on the shore of a placid salt water pond and beside a barrier beach that separates it from the Atlantic Ocean, the Weekapaug Inn is ideally suited for guests — like myself — who gravitate to sun, sea and sky. Offering its New England hospitality for more than a century since it first opened in 1899, the Inn has been restored, relocated after getting hit by a hurricane, and renovated over the years. Recently, the Weekapaug became a member of the exclusive Relais & Chateaux collection, which only selects properties that are the ultimate of the refined. Yet, the Weekapaug Inn has successfully managed to maintain the relaxed vibe that has long delighted its returning guests.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Luxe Accommodations

Among this boutique property's 33 guest rooms are the two airy Carriage House Suites that just debuted in September. Walking up the flight of stairs to the open-plan Great Room (with living/dining/kitchen areas), I'm immediately struck by the sun flooding this many windowed space that's graced with a soaring ceiling. Not only are the pair of Carriage House Suites completely separate from the Inn's other guest accommodations — something that assures privacy galore — but they are the only guest quarters with scenic views of both the pond and the salt marsh cove. With the seemingly never ending sight of sun and sky as well as the opportunity to savor the sunrise from the dining area and the sunset from the opposite side of the Great Room where a spacious deck is accessed by tall sliding glass doors that come off the living room, it's as if this accommodation was designed just for me — a self described nature lover who spiritually wilts when not saturated with natural light. Even one morning during our stay that starts off storm laden, unlike when I'm in most urban environs, I derive peace from the moody weather as I gaze at the rain splattering the salt marsh cove.

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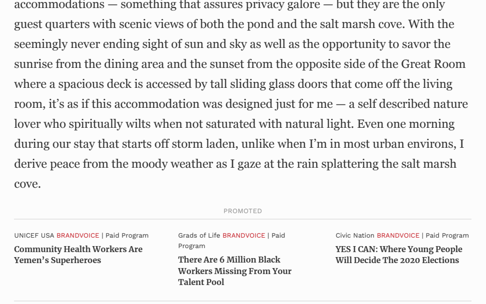
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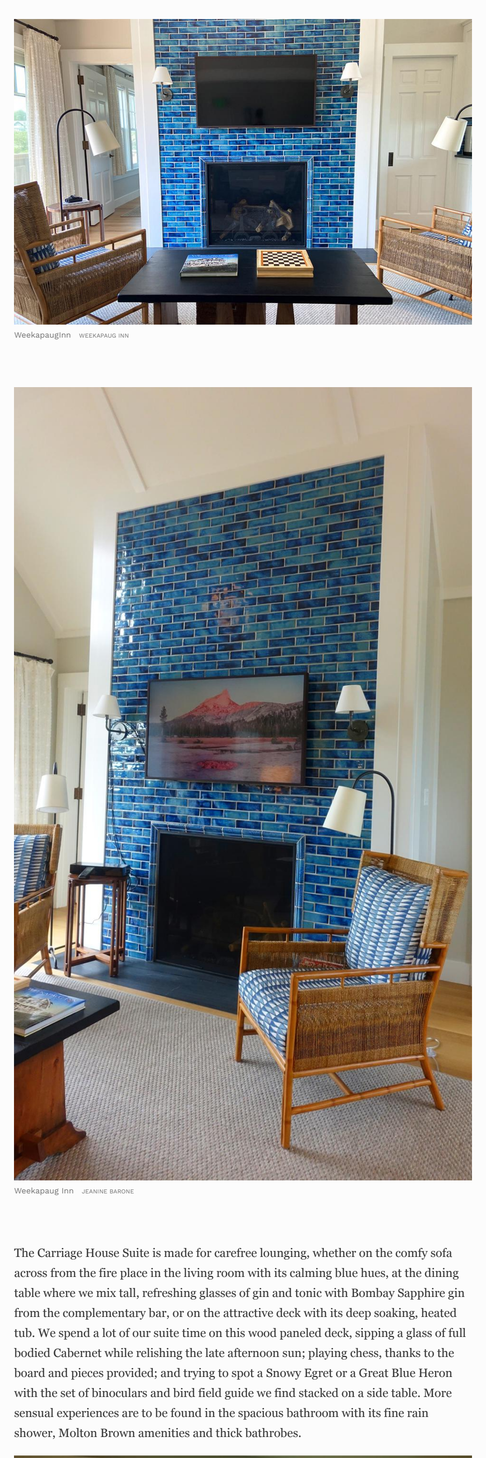
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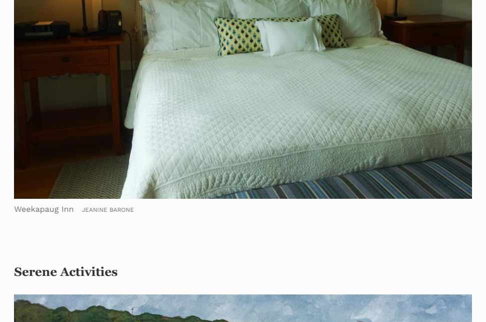
The Carriage House Suite is made for carefree lounging, whether on the comfy sofa across from the fire place in the living room with its calming blue hues, at the dining table where we mix tall, refreshing glasses of gin and tonic with Bombay Sapphire gin from the complementary bar, or on the attractive deck with its deep soaking, heated tub. We spend a lot of our suite time on this wood paneled deck, sipping a glass of full bodied Cabernet while relishing the late afternoon sun; playing chess, thanks to the board and pieces provided; and trying to spot a Snowy Egret or a Great Blue Heron with the set of binoculars and bird field guide we find stacked on a side table. More sensual experiences are to be found in the spacious bathroom with its fine rain shower, Molton Brown amenities and thick bathrobes.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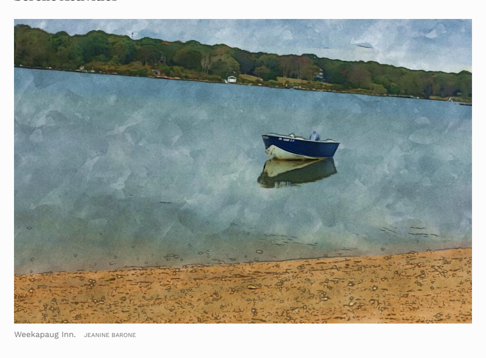
Serene Activities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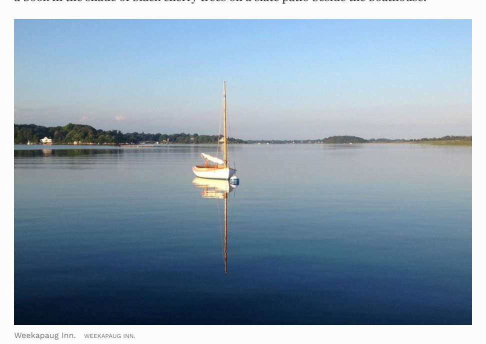
The property's meticulous landscaping with winterberry holly, groundsel trees, eastern red cedar, beach grasses and many other varieties of flora is so captivating that I feel the need to explore each and every nook and cranny. Each morning, I relax with a book in the shade of black cherry trees on a slate patio beside the boathouse.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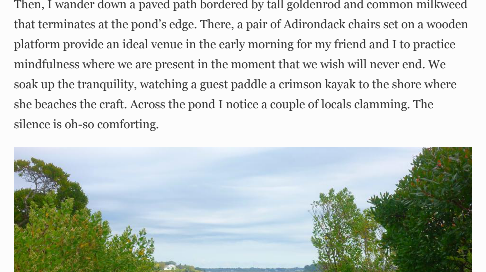
Then, I wander down a paved path bordered by tall goldenrod and common milkweed that terminates at the pond's edge. There, a pair of Adirondack chairs set on a wooden platform provide an ideal venue in the early morning for my friend and I to practice mindfulness where we are present in the moment that we wish will never end. We soak up the tranquility, watching a guest paddle a crimson kayak to the shore where she beaches the craft. Across the pond I notice a couple of locals clamming. The silence is oh-so comforting.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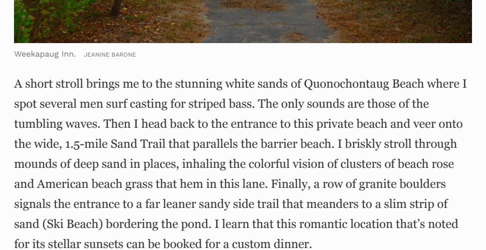
A short stroll brings me to the stunning white sands of Quonochontaug Beach where I spot several men surf casting for striped bass. The only sounds are those of the tumbling waves. Then I head back to the entrance to this private beach and veer onto the wide, 1.5-mile Sand Trail that parallels the barrier beach. I briskly stroll through mounds of deep sand in places, inhaling the colorful vision of clusters of beach rose and American beach grass that hem in this lane. Finally, a row of granite boulders signals the entrance to a far leaner sandy side trail that meanders to a slim strip of sand (Ski Beach) bordering the pond. I learn that this romantic location that's noted for its stellar sunsets can be booked for a custom dinner.

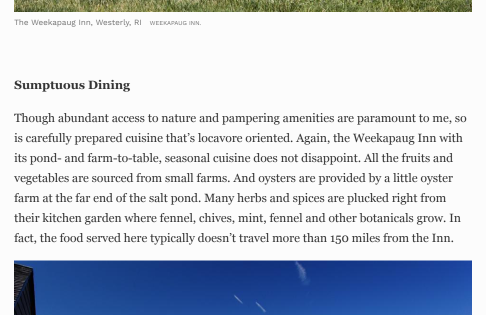

The Weekapaug Inn WEEKAPAUG INN

To experience more of the Atlantic Ocean, another day I jog along one of the recommended trails in the area. This almost three-mile breathtaking route starts just outside the Inn on Spray Rock Road, which merges onto Wawaloam Drive, paralleling the turbulent ocean. I stop at an observation point where I spy Block Island, though I'm told that when it's especially clear, I might even spot Montauk, Long Island. Jogging along, I swing my head left to right, taking in the massive, post storm swells as well as the stately mansions on the other side of this photogenic drive. When the route heads through the interior of this exclusive area, I find myself on wee lanes that wiggle this way and that, before looping around back to the alluring pond.

Weekapaug Inn JEANINE BARONE

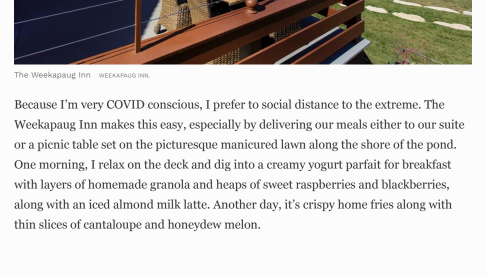
More Treasured, Nature-Based Activities

The Weekapaug Inn has so much respect for its prime, bucolic location that it employs Teddy Beahm as a full-time naturalist who's an enthusiastic wealth of information on flora and fauna, and who guides a variety of expeditions to get acquainted with the area's invertebrates, fish and birds. For example, you'll likely encounter at least four species of crabs (blue, rock, green and spider) on the Tidal Pool Walk. During spring spawning season, you'll don waders and a headlamp to spot horseshoe crabs, which have existed on the earth almost unchanged physically or physiologically for hundreds of millions of years. In the summer, you'll learn how to crab or pull a seine net to shore where you'll likely discover hundreds of minnows, menhaden (bunker fish), and maybe even baby striped bass. The one-hour guided bird watching activity can suit the guest's preferences and may be done via a boat tour of the pond or a jeep trek along the San Trail. Either way, in the fall or winter you may spot several species of gulls (such as the Ring-billed Gull), Grey Herons, Great Egrets, and many others. With access to a telescope and a spotting scope, stargazing is available year-round. Recently, the brilliant harvest moon was especially impressive.


The Weekapaug Inn, Westerly, RI WEEKAPAUG INN

Sumptuous Dining

Though abundant access to nature and pampering amenities are paramount to me, so is carefully prepared cuisine that's locavore oriented. Again, the Weekapaug Inn with its pond- and farm-to-table, seasonal cuisine does not disappoint. All the fruits and vegetables are sourced from small farms. And oysters are provided by a little oyster farm at the far end of the salt pond. Many herbs and spices are plucked right from their kitchen garden where fennel, chives, mint, fennel and other botanicals grow. In fact, the food served here typically doesn't travel more than 150 miles from the Inn.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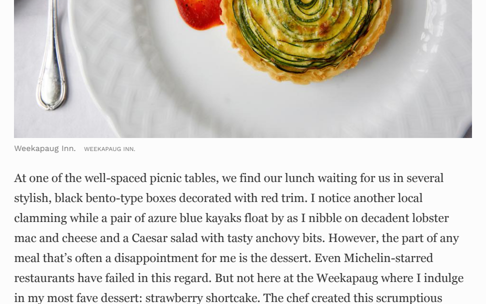
Because I'm very COVID conscious, I prefer to social distance to the extreme. The Weekapaug Inn makes this easy, especially by delivering our meals either to our suite or a picnic table set on the picturesque manicured lawn along the shore of the pond. One morning, I relax on the deck and dig into a creamy yogurt parfait for breakfast with layers of homemade granola and heaps of sweet raspberries and blackberries, along with an iced almond milk latte. Another day, it's crispy home fries along with thin slices of cantaloupe and honeydew melon.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At one of the well-spaced picnic tables, we find our lunch waiting for us in several stylish, black bento-type boxes decorated with red trim. I notice another local clamming while a pair of azure blue kayaks float by as I nibble on decadent lobster mac and cheese and a Caesar salad with tasty anchovy bits. However, the part of any meal that's often a disappointment for me is the dessert. Even Michelin-starred restaurants have failed in this regard. But not here at the Weekapaug where I indulge in my most fave dessert: strawberry shortcake. The chef created this scrumptious delicacy with short dough sweet biscuits that sandwich vanilla chantilly.

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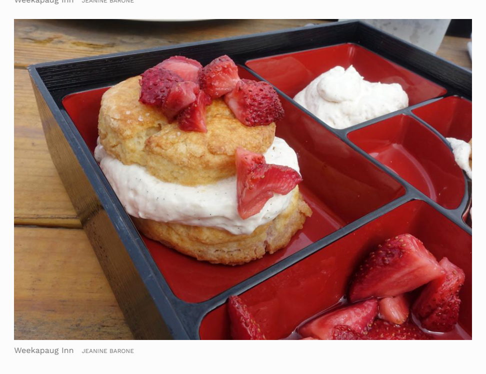
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Despite a chilly breeze, we decide to have our dinners on the expansive lawn that's especially inviting at night when there's nothing to distract us but the sounds of the sea and the bright full moon. We both order plump Little-neck clams with cocktail sauce, and mustard crusted salmon with a side of delicata squash. And, because I'm feeling a bit hedonistic, I can't resist the mouth-watering chocolate chip cookie that's baked in a cast iron skillet and served with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce. (It's crunchy and moist, the only way I like it.)

With the cornucopia of sensory delights, the Weekapaug Inn makes it hard to leave.

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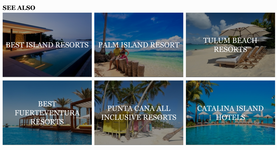

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This All-Women Team Wants To Facilitate Farming Education With One Of The World's Favorite Pastimes: Gaming

Brianne Garrett Forbes Staff

Leadership

I'm a Forbes reporter and the editorial lead for Forbes) The Culture.

When two gaming experts and one social networking founder came together to solve one of the biggest issues in agriculture technology—the intersection of human health and animal health—the result was exactly what you might think: an app.

But make no mistake: "We're not just playing games here" says Ariel Yi Chi Chang, 2020 30 Under 30 honoree and founder of GeGe Design.

During the Forbes Under 30 Agtech+ Hackathon this past weekend, Chang, along with her teammates, Ashley Deese, 2019 30 Under 30 honoree and manager of digital media at Smithsonian and Kemishia Sorzano, Forbes) The Culture member and founder of Social Tea, were one of three teams tasked to come up with solutions for sustainable agricultural and animal health practices. Their proposal was Happy Herd: an app in which users care for a farm the same way a farmer would. Users manage their currency to select animals, monitor their overall health and make decisions around nutrition.

It might sound like longstanding apps like Farmville, but the three-fold mission is aimed at serving a bigger purpose: It's meant to increase public awareness and education around farming, funnel funding into agriculture advocacy groups and nonprofits (70% of the proceeds from the game goes directly to these companies) and implement data collection from user methods to help cultivate more sustainable practices for farmers.

There's an increasing desire among the public, according to the Department of Agriculture, to ensure animals are being raised in humane conditions and, eventually, receive humane treatment during slaughter. Happy Herd wants to tap into that curiosity.

"We don't have enough public awareness of how big of a challenge it is [to raise farm animals]," says Chang. But, "by educating consumers, there will be increased public awareness and support for the industry."

They want partnering agricultural organizations to benefit, too. Upon successful completion of the game, users can receive a "certificate of adoption" from app-affiliated independent farms to apply lessons from the app to real-life advocacy.

Indiana Soybean Alliance CEO and board member of event sponsor AgriNovus Indiana, Courtney Kingery, one of the hackathon judges, posed an interesting question to the group: If the point of the game is to ultimately raise healthy animals to eventually become healthy food, will the slaughtering process be integrated into the game?

The team had already thought of that. They don't intend to pretend, but the point of the game isn't to dissuade people from eating meat, either, says the team. Their app would depict the animals leaving the farm—the rest is implied.

For the all-women, all person of color trio merging gaming and ag tech—two industries dominated by white men—in 48 hours and in three different time zones, attention to detail was prime. From creating mini simulations of the game to identifying the real-life organizations Happy Herd would partner with, they decided they could really be onto something.

"I don't usually have all female game designers around me," says Chang. She hopes it's not the last time.

Team members: **Ariel Yi Chi Chang**, Founder, GeGe Design; **Ashley Deese**, manager of digital media at Smithsonian; **Kemishia Sorzano**, Founder, Social Tea.

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Brianne Garrett

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