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Everywhere You Should Stop Along Coastal Rhode Island's Scenic Route 1A

Because good things indeed come in small packages (and small package ocean).

By Jared Sharples Published on 03/08/22 at 3:00 PM

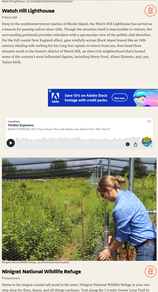
It's no secret that Rhode Island is our most pint-sized state—after all, you could cram about 210 Of Rhodes into Texas and still have room left over for a few spare Newports. While the Ocean State may be small in stature, what it lacks in acreage it makes up for tenfold in delicious seafood, charming coastal towns, and breathtaking natural beauty, all of which can be encountered firsthand on a road trip down Scenic Route 1A.

Measuring in at just over 30 miles, the highway starts off in the Connecticut-adjacent town of Westerly and terminates just minutes from historic Wickford Village, leisurely meandering through quaint coastal towns, sandy beaches, and lush forests. It's a perfect weekend getaway for those you're sure to return home with visions of quahogs and coffee milk dancing in your head.

Living Sharks Museum

Westerly

This museum highlights the complex relationship between humanity and the ocean's most misunderstood—and perhaps most feared—predator. Upon arrival, visitors acquaint themselves with prominent shark-related media frenzies of yore, ranging from the 1916 New Jersey massacre attacks to the *Jaws* phenomena, a period in which "shark-infatuation" was at an all-time high. Along with vintage ephemera, the exhibit's also home to a sizable collection of shark teeth with lush descriptions of each specimen's provenance and characteristics. Once the fun facts may not be the cutthroat contender, expect to walk away with a newfound appreciation for these beaminched beasts of the deep.



Watch Hill Lighthouse

Westerly

Deep in the southwestmostermost reaches of Rhode Island, the Watch Hill Lighthouse has served as a beacon for passing sailors since 1856. Though the structure itself is inaccessible to visitors, the surrounding grounds are perfectly pleasant for a picnic overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Known for the full-tested New England office, gaze wistfully across Block Island (lie on 19th-century whaling with waiting for her long lost captain to return from sea, then head down stream north to the historic district of Watch Hill, an ultra-rich neighborhood that's home some of the country's most influential figures, including Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, and, yes, Taylor Swift.

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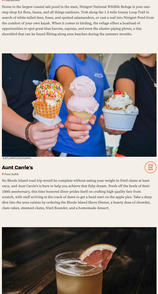
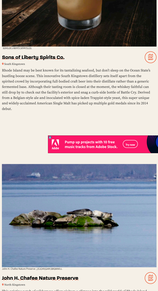


Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge

Charlestown

Home to the largest coastal salt pond in the state, Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge is year-one-stop-shop for fish, fowls, and all things outdoors. Trek along the 1.5-mile Grassy Loop Trail in search of white-tailed deer, foxes, and spotted salamanders, or cast a reel into Ninigret Pond from the shoreline or from a boat. The refuge's 2,000 acres of land and water offer ample opportunities to spot great blue herons, osprey, and even the elusive piping plover, a bit shorebird that can be found flitting along area beaches during the summer months.



Aunt Carrie's

Narragansett

No Rhode Island road trip would be complete without eating your weight in fried clams at least once, and Aunt Carrie's is here to help you achieve that fishy dream. Fresh off the hooks of their nearby fishing boats, these bivalves are breaded and fried to a golden crunchy perfection, served with tartar sauce and a side of fries (or, if you dare, a side of fried clam cakes). Pair the meal with a glass of Narragansett Lager, a local beer that's been brewed on the regular since 1890. Take a deep dive into the area cuisine by ordering the Rhode Island Shore Dinner, a hearty dose of chowder, clam cakes, steamed clams, Fried Rhombus, and a Scrumptious dessert.

Sons of Liberty Spirits Co.

Pawtuxet Village, Providence

Rhode Island may be best known for its tantalizing seafood, but don't sleep on the Ocean State's burgeoning craft beverage scene. Sons of Liberty Spirits Co. distills its delicious, artisan spirits (some by incorporating old Yankee craft lore into distillation rather than a generic fermented base. Although their tasting room is closed at the moment, the whiskey SoVeLd can still drop by to check out the facility's exterior and snap a cool-vibe bottle of Bottle Cap. Derived from a Belgian style ale and inoculated with spice baker Trappist ale yeast, this super unique and widely acclaimed American Single Malt has picked up multiple gold medals since its 2014 debut.

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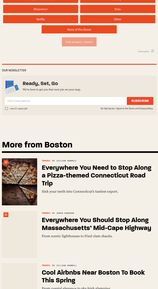
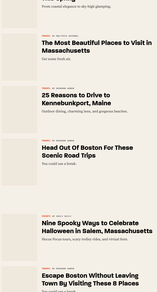


John H. Chafee Nature Preserve

Jamestown

This pristine patch of wilderness offers visitors a glimpse into the wild world of Rhode Island, with some of the state's most adorable critters hunkering in the reeds just beyond the shoreline. Grab your binoculars and set out along Bone Point Trail, a 1-mile path carved into the dense mass of New England forest. Once you've hit the coast, pace out toward the bottom in search of the Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Cormorant, and Black-crowned Night Heron—all of which can be spotted year-round and are considered peak-and-spotting seasons, but Bone Point's *picturesque* heritage and endearly serene vibes permit year-round.



Wickford Village

North Kingstown

Kick of 2022 already? We know the feeling. Transport yourself back to the colonies with a trip to Wickford Village, one of the state's top destinations for perfectly preserved old-timey architecture. Dotted with 18th-century homes and boasting a charming waterfront along the tonic-quaint streets, one particularly interesting attraction is the Old Narragansett Church—the humble house of worship dates to 1707 and is considered the oldest surviving Episcopal church in the entire northeastern United States. After you've had your fill of yesteryear, head to local favorite Tavern by the Sea for a hefty lobster roll paired with gorgeous views of Wickford Cove.

Jared Sharples is Associate Reader for Thrillist.

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