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Rhode Island Bucket List: The best things to do this fall

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Whether they're vacationing or a lifelong Rhode Islander, everyone knows that fall is a beautiful time in southern New England.

Rhode Island is known for its beautiful beaches and fall foliage but there's so much more to do in the area during our beautiful fall season. We've put together the definitive list of the best things to do in Rhode Island, from old classics to lesser-known gems.

The Jack-o-Lantern Spectacular at Roger Williams Park Zoo

Jack-O-Lanterns are clustered in tight groups as well as up in trees along the Wetlands Trail at the Jack-o-Lantern Spectacular in Roger Williams Park Zoo. *Sandor Bodo, Providence Journal*

The event, held at Roger Williams Park Zoo since 2001, is one of a kind. If you've never gone or haven't been in several years, it's well worth a visit. One of Rhode Island's premier events, tickets this year are $21 for adults, $17 for children ages 2 to 12. Current Zoo members save $2 off adult and $1 off child tickets. Children 1 and younger are admitted free.

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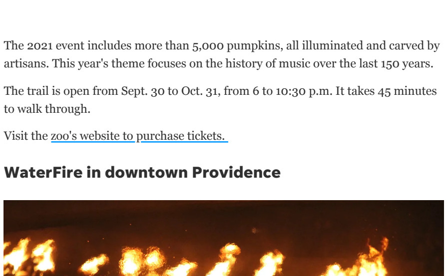
The 2021 event includes more than 5,000 pumpkins, all illuminated and carved by artisans. This year's theme focuses on the history of music over the last 150 years.

The trail is open from Sept. 30 to Oct. 31, from 6 to 10:30 p.m. It takes 45 minutes to walk through.

Visit the zoo's website to purchase tickets.

WaterFire in downtown Providence


Providence Journal file photo of WaterFire *Glenn Osmundson, The Providence Journal*

While WaterFire holds events throughout the year, many believe that the fall is the best time to go. Something special happens when New England's crisp fall air combines with the glow of WaterFire.

WaterFire is currently asking that everyone, vaccinated or not, wear masks while attending.

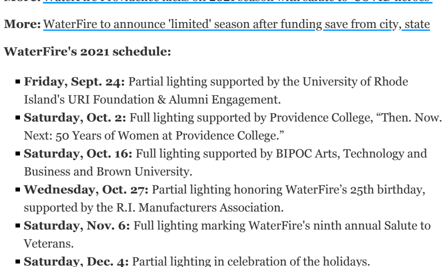
More: WaterFire Providence kicks off 2021 season with salute to 'COVID heroes'

More: WaterFire to announce 'limited' season after funding save from city, state

WaterFire's 2021 schedule:

- **Friday, Sept. 24:** Partial lighting supported by the University of Rhode Island's URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement.
- **Saturday, Oct. 2:** Full lighting supported by Providence College, "Then. Now. Next: 50 Years of Women at Providence College."
- **Saturday, Oct. 16:** Full lighting supported by BIPOC Arts, Technology and Business and Brown University.
- **Wednesday, Oct. 27:** Partial lighting honoring WaterFire's 25th birthday, supported by the R.I. Manufacturers Association.
- **Saturday, Nov. 6:** Full lighting marking WaterFire's ninth annual Salute to Veterans.
- **Saturday, Dec. 4:** Partial lighting in celebration of the holidays.

Fall festivals around Rhode Island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Photos: Taking a peek at RI's Fall Festivals
The start of Autumn Festivals began recently with the Johnston Apple Festival and the Gaspee Days Fall Festival

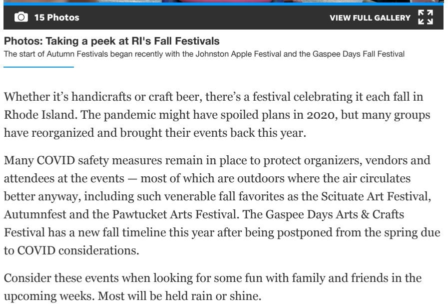
Whether it's handicrafts or craft beer, there's a festival celebrating it each fall in Rhode Island. The pandemic might have spoiled plans in 2020, but many groups have reorganized and brought their events back this year.

Many COVID safety measures remain in place to protect organizers, vendors and attendees at the events — most of which are outdoors where the air circulates better anyway, including such venerable fall favorites as the Scituate Art Festival, Autumnfest and the Pawtucket Arts Festival. The Gaspee Days Arts & Crafts Festival has a new fall timeline this year after being postponed from the spring due to COVID considerations.

Consider these events when looking for some fun with family and friends in the upcoming weeks. Most will be held rain or shine.

For a full list: Mark your calendars: Fall festivals make a comeback in RI

Find out what apples tasted like 100 years ago at Sowams Cider Works in Warren


Some of the varieties used by Cider Works, Warren, in their hard cider. Gold Rush, with stem, Calville Blanc D' Hiver, Esopus Spitzenborg, Roxburry Russet, Bramley, (front) Lady Apple, Liberty, Hudson Golden, and Winesap. (Center right) *Steve Szydlowski, The Providence Journal*

The tasting room at Sowams Cider Works is open year round, but August through December is the only time that you can stop in to purchase the heirloom apples that owner Spencer Morris grows at his orchard in Touisset.

Many are varieties that you won't find anywhere else, unless you have the ability to time-travel. Morris cultivates dozens of different kinds of apples, most of them rare and largely forgotten, including some that would have been common in Rhode Island more than 100 years ago.

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The results are some of the most flavorful hard ciders that you'll ever try, so you'll definitely also want to order a flight and sample a few of Morris' latest offerings before you leave.

More: RI Food Fix: 8 spots to pick your own peaches, apples and more

More: Local orchards in New England to go apple picking

Friday night high-school football games around RI

Rhode Island isn't exactly Texas when it comes to high-school football, but the passion for the game still makes it the No. 1 show in town every Friday night.

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More: Who are the future impact players in RI high school football? Here's 10 names to learn before they break out

More: What's in a name? Eric Rueb ranks RI's 10 best high school nicknames

Watching high-school football is more than watching a game – it's supporting your community and getting a chance to see the purest level of the sport. There's always a chance to see future stars – Hendricken's Kwity Paye was drafted by the Indianapolis Colts last spring, Hendricken's Xavier Truss is playing for Georgia right now and almost 20 Rhode Islanders play for URI this fall – but going to games isn't always about seeing the next big thing. It's about being with family and friends and creating memories that last a lifetime.

Seeing a great play or two in a great game is just an added bonus.

More: Kwity Paye working hard in Indianapolis to make sure his inspiring journey is just getting started

Drinks on the Castle Hill lawn in Newport

A window table in the dining room at Castle Hill Inn at the height of summer. Castle Hill was the first purchase by the then Newport Harbor Corporation. *The Providence Journal, File*

In a state that's known for its coastal beauty, it's hard to beat the sweeping views of Narragansett Bay from the historic Castle Hill Inn in Newport. It's why the Gilded Age hotel, perched on a secluded bluff looking out toward Jamestown, is one of the Northeast's top wedding destinations.

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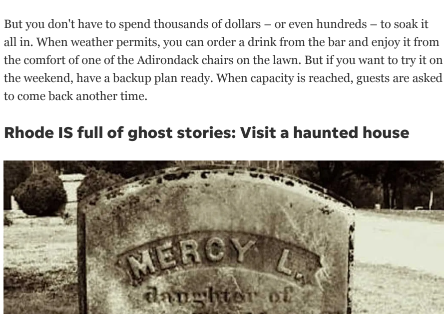
But you don't have to spend thousands of dollars – or even hundreds – to soak it all in. When weather permits, you can order a drink from the bar and enjoy it from the comfort of one of the Adirondack chairs on the lawn. But if you want to try it on the weekend, have a backup plan ready. When capacity is reached, guests are asked to come back another time.

Rhode IS full of ghost stories: Visit a haunted house



The grave of Mercy Brown in Exeter. Some say it is the final resting place of New England's last vampire. *Rob Duguay, The Providence Journal*

Rhode Island is chock-full of spooky places that any ghost hunter can explore. We've got haunted hotels, one of America's best-known vampire incidents and of course the world-famous "Conjuring" house.

Some highlights of Rhode Island's spookiest spots:

- Rhode Island's Vampire: Visiting Mercy Brown's grave
- Our generation Amityville: The Conjuring house
- Rhode Island's Vampire: Visiting Mercy Brown's grave
- Haunted portraits at the Redwood Library and Athenaeum?
- Rose Island Lighthouse ghost stories
- Providence's grandest hotel: The Biltmore haunting

More: How to visit Rhode Island's most haunted spots

More: RI's most haunted house: 'Conjuring' house for sale in Rhode Island for $1.2 million

Chase the fish migration in Narragansett Bay

John Kocharski of Rumford casts for Blues and Stripers at sunset at Barrington Beach on this last evening of summer. "Fall is my favorite season," he says. "The Blues and Stripers come all the way up the Bay." *Bob Thayer, The Providence Journal*

Each fall Rhode Island's coastal surface waters churn to froth as pods of migrating striped bass, bluefish, and bonito feast on schools of bait fish as they migrate south. There's nothing like spending a splendid bright day trying your luck as the pods move along the shore.

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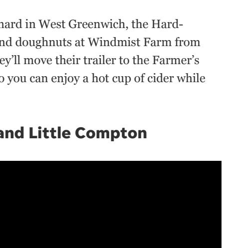
From Sakonnet Harbor in Little Compton to the Charlestown Breachway, there are plenty of stops along the way where a fisher can peer across the water and decide whether leaping out and making a few casts might pay off. All you need is a full tank of gas, a favorite surfcasting rod, a bag of plugs and plenty of coffee. Don't forget your saltwater fishing license. The action often starts before sunrise. Bring a book and a pillow for those slow waits.

Get cider donuts and cider slushies in Jamestown

The Hard-Pressed Cider Company is so popular that it's not uncommon to spend an hour waiting in line to order from the small trailer that's parked in Jamestown on fall weekends.


Hard Pressed Cider Company's doughnuts. *The Providence Journal*

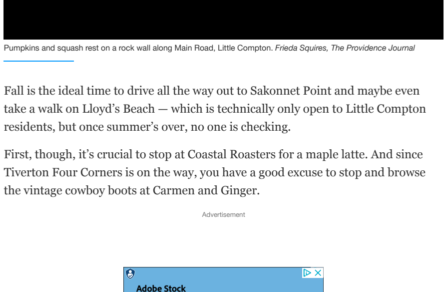
But true cider doughnut enthusiasts agree that the wait is worthwhile. Besides, there are worse places to kill a morning than Windmist Farm, where belted cows graze beneath scenic vistas of the Newport Bridge. Bring some friends you haven't seen did a while, and you'll hardly mind the line.

More: Need a Rhody food fix? Here are 5 doughnuts to savor

More: Delicious apple cider doughnuts await you at R.I. farms

A small family-run operation with an orchard in West Greenwich, the Hard-Pressed Cider Company only sells cider and doughnuts at Windmist Farm from Labor Day to Thanksgiving. After that, they'll move their trailer to the Farmer's Daughter in Wakefield until Christmas, so you can enjoy a hot cup of cider while picking out your tree.

Take a day trip to Tiverton and Little Compton


Pumpkins and squash rest on a rock wall along Main Road, Little Compton. *Frieda Squires, The Providence Journal*

Fall is the ideal time to drive all the way out to Sakonnet Point and maybe even take a walk on Lloyd's Beach — which is technically only open to Little Compton residents, but once summer's over, no one is checking.

First, though, it's crucial to stop at Coastal Roasters for a maple latte. And since Tiverton Four Corners is on the way, you have a good excuse to stop and browse the vintage cowboy boots at Carmen and Ginger.

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Before you head home, you'll want to stop at Walker's Roadside Stand, which is overflowing with fall bounty. You can pick up pumpkins for your front porch, along with enough fresh, local produce to fill the fridge.

The world famous pumpkin weigh-off at Frerichs Farm in Warren

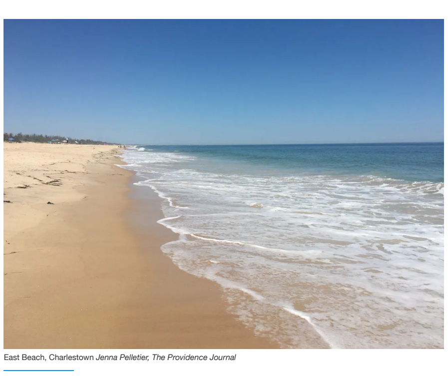
The annual Great Pumpkin Weigh-Off will again decide the largest pumpkin in Southern New England on Oct. 9th at Frerichs Farm in Warren. *David DelPoio, The Providence Journal*

It'll be one of the highlights of the annual Southern New England Giant Pumpkin Growers Weigh-off at Frerichs Farm in Warren — taking place Saturday, Oct. 9th.

The main show, of course, is the weigh-off itself, with dozens of pumpkin growers competing not just for regional honors — but possibly a world record. That's because Southern New England has proved itself a global center for giant pumpkins, with three records in the last decade.

The weigh-off has become a signature fall event in Rhode Island. Years past have included activities ranging from pumpkin-coach rides to pumpkin carving to pumpkin climbing — some are almost as big as small cars. There will also be activities including a corn maze, Western town, dragon ride and pirate ship, as well as live music.

Visit Rhode Island's pristine beaches without the crowds (or the fees)


East Beach, Charlestown *Jenna Pelletier, The Providence Journal*

Going to the beach in the fall? It's one of Rhode Island's best-kept secrets. September and October are full of warm, sunny weather perfect for a day at the beach. The best part is that the summer crowds have dispersed so you won't have to wrestle or show up early for the perfect spot to lay down your towel. It's also worth noting that most beaches stop charging a fee after Labor Day, so it's a great affordable way to get outside in the fall.

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Be safe out there: while most beaches stop charging visitors, they also stop staffing lifeguards. Remember to swim responsibly.

More: Rhode Island Beaches 2021: Your guide to the best beaches in the state

More: The little-known story of why Narragansett can charge you admission at Town Beach

If it's too chilly for a swim the beaches can be a great place for a hike along the coast and taking in some of Rhode Island's best views.

Tag your Christmas tree at your local tree farm

This Christmas Tree was decorated by a family who plans to take it home in a few months at one of Rhode Island's tree farms. Kris Craig, *The Providence Journal*

Everyone wants to enjoy the fall and not rush the holidays in, right?

Well, try this: take a nice fall walk at a Christmas tree farm in October. You can enjoy the crisp air and the aroma of the trees as you leisurely pick the perfect one for your home.

More: The pandemic is changing Christmas tree shopping in RI. Here's what you need to know.

Bring the kids! They love to put some (weatherproof) decorations on your pick to personalize it.

At Butterfly Farm in Lincoln, you can get fresh vegetables too. Once you select a tree, you can pick the date in December for pickup, and they will cut it down for you and have it ready for whatever weekend you want to put it up.

There are Christmas tree farms all over Rhode Island and you can take your pick.

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