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# 7 Unique Foods You Can Only Find In Rhode Island



ROBIN CATALANO

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PEPPER BISCUITS (PHOTO CREDIT: HELANEYS BAKERY)

When I first moved from Rhode Island to upstate New York, I stopped in a local bakery, stepped up to the register, and cheerfully ordered party pizza. The aproned man behind the counter leaned forward with a quizzical look. He asked me to repeat my request. At his blank expression, I explained, "You know, the kind with a medium-thick crust covered in room-temperature tomato sauce and a sprinkling of Parmesan? The kind that's baked in a rectangular pan and cut into strips?"

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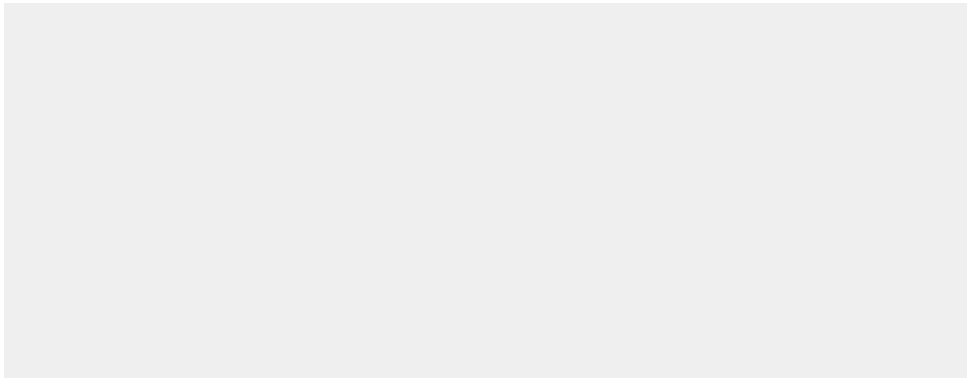
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“Oh, you mean Rhode Island pizza!” he said.

In the 20-something years I'd lived in Rhode Island, it had never dawned on me that the foods I'd grown up with were considered oddities to people in other states. In fact, many of my favorite treats from childhood — hot dogs smothered in ground beef and onions, crisp biscuits with the savory snap of fennel and black pepper, icy lemonade dotted with bits of frozen citrus peel — things I could get on practically every corner of the Ocean State, were considered entirely foreign beyond state borders.

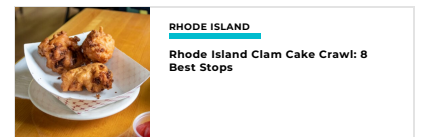
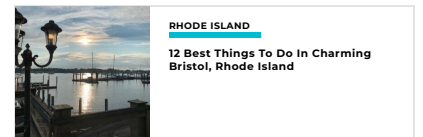
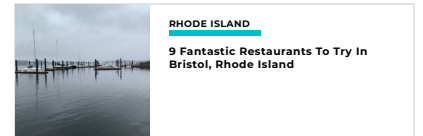
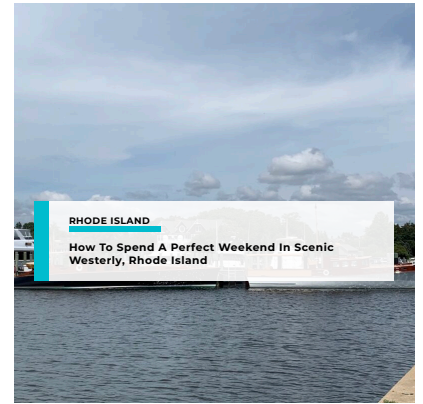
Even today, I often find myself pining for my home state's gastronomic eccentricities. I've learned to make a few at home, but let's face it: They're just not the same as when I buy them from a roadside shack with the perma-smell of French fries, or from a dark and moody deli where the staff banter in Italian with the regulars seated on rotating stools in front of a circa-1960 Formica counter. The solution? Frequent visits, where I load up on favorites like these.



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## 1. Clam Cakes

This is perhaps the king of only-in-Rhode-Island foods. Yes, you can find a smaller, denser version in



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neighboring Massachusetts, and a hockey puck-shaped take all the way up the coast in Maine. Having sampled them both near and far from my home state, I can unequivocally say: If you're not eating the Rhode Island clam cake, you're not eating the true clam cake.

Not a cake at all, this humble fritter is made by mixing a dough of flour, water, baking powder, salt, chopped fresh clams, and clam juice. Some restaurants and clam shacks also add their own proprietary blend of spices, or a bit of sugar or beer. The dough is either ladled or shot with a dough gun into a hot oil bath, where it develops its magical mix of crispy shell and tender, cakey interior.

I've learned to make clam cakes at home, and they're pretty good. Not as good, mind you, as those made by the state's many clam shacks, which are best savored straight out of a greasy paper bag, and without any dips or sauces. You can find clam cakes, from decent to great, all around Rhode Island. But my favorites are from [Iggy's Doughboys & Chowder House](#) on Oakland Beach, [Aunt Carrie's](#) in Narragansett (Open April – September), and [Dune Brothers](#) in [Providence](#).

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*Editor's Note: You can read more on clam cakes in Robin's article [Rhode Island Clam Cake Crawl: 8 Best Stops](#).*



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## 2. Stuffies

Another clam-tastic Rhode Island specialty food, stuffies elevate the quahog, the state's most famous native clam species, with a flavorful mix of herbs and breading. The clams are lightly steamed, and their meat removed and diced. The clam meat is then mixed with crushed Ritz crackers, chopped celery and onion, and grated Parmesan. It's seasoned with Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, melted butter, and herbs. Some chefs add bacon or jalapenos to the mix for extra flavor. The empty quahog shells are stuffed with the mixture, and baked till golden and crispy on top.

Some people like to drizzle more melted butter over their stuffies. I prefer to squeeze a bit of lemon juice on top, then dig in.

Stuffies are widely available at restaurants around Rhode Island, especially seafood-focused venues. My top choices include [Champlin's Seafood Deck](#) in Narragansett, [Amaral's Fish and Chips](#) in Warren, and [Anthony's Seafood](#) in Middletown.

## 3. Snail Salad

Also called scungilli, its Neapolitan name, snail salad is a cold, marinated mix of chopped or sliced Atlantic conch (sea snails), herbs, and vegetables. The texture is somewhat similar to a grilled, marinated calamari, but the flavor of the snail is a bit sweeter. This is another one of those dishes you can find in other parts of the Northeast, but it's never quite as good as the type sold in Rhode Island (New Jersey's is a close second).

A mainstay of the Italian-American Christmas Eve Feast of the Seven Fishes, snail salad is made by boiling the meat of the snail, then marinating it in a mixture of olive oil, celery, onion, garlic, and spices. This step is essential; marination is what gives the meat its tenderness. Many traditional recipes use vinegar as the acid in their marinade. My father believes vinegar makes the snails tough and instead uses lemon juice.

The recipe is served at room temperature. It might also be served chilled, about a half-hour after removing it from the fridge. Refrigeration makes the oil congeal, so allowing the dish to sit at room temperature mitigates it.

Snail salad is an appetizer at a variety of restaurants. Try it at [Pauly Penta's Gourmet Italian Deli](#) in North Providence, [Johna's Italian Restaurant](#) in Johnston, and [Andino's Italian Restaurant](#) in Providence.



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HELANEYS BAKERY

#### 4. Pepper Biscuits

While they're sometimes overshadowed by the wine biscuit, another savory snack so beloved in Rhode Island that some bakers have asked for special legal provisions so they can make them in larger quantities, the pepper biscuit remains the favorite in my house. This crunchy Italian import is in such demand here that if I make a trip to Rhode Island without picking up at least a few bags, my husband will give me side eye for days.

This ingredient list of the humble pepper biscuit — flour, water, olive oil, black pepper, and fennel seeds — might not sound like anything to write home about. But the magic happens in twisting long logs of dough into braided rounds, then baking them until they're golden and firm. A soft, chewy biscuit is not a real pepper biscuit. It should have a satisfying snap and a savory explosion of fennel and pepper.

[Helaney's](#) is the current champion of the pepper biscuit. They're sold in many stores around the state, including the excellent independent franchise [Dave's Fresh Marketplace](#), and also online.

**Pro Tip:** Many of Rhode Island's Italian-American specialties can be found on [Federal Hill](#). This neighborhood has historically been home to a variety of immigrants, and Italians put a distinctive stamp on it that has lasted till this day. In addition to snail salad, pepper biscuits, and wine biscuits (the pepper biscuit's wine-infused cousin), you'll find all manner of imported pasta, olive oil, vinegar, wine, and charcuterie, plus prepared foods. Don't miss the pastry and cookies, from zeppole to *sfogliatelle* and pignoli.

## 5. Autocrat Coffee Syrup

Ubiquitous in grocery stores when I was growing up, Autocrat Coffee Syrup has been sold in Rhode Island for more than a hundred years. It was a near-daily treat in our house, with a couple spoonfuls stirred into a glass of cold milk or, if we were feeling really decadent, drizzled over a bowl of ice cream or whizzed into a milkshake.

We weren't alone. Coffee milk is the official state drink of Rhode Island, by vote of the state legislature in 1993. The milkshake version is also known as a cabinet, purportedly because [the man who first made the drink kept his blender in a kitchen cabinet](#). For years, we Rhode Islanders would order cabinets in out-of-state diners and ice cream joints. Instead of a milkshake, we got a lot of raised eyebrows — as memorialized in illustrator Don Bosquet's famous "Grinder and a Cabinet" cartoon ("grinder" is Rhode Island-ese for a submarine sandwich).

There is nothing nutritionally redeeming about coffee syrup; its ingredient list includes lots of no-no's, like high fructose corn syrup and caramel color. And yet I still keep a bottle in my fridge. It's just that tasty.

There are other coffee syrup brands on the market these days, but Rhode Islanders are loyal to Autocrat. Most grocery stores, such as Shaw's, sell the syrup. You can also [buy it online](#).

## 6. Party Pizza

Known by a wide variety of monikers — bakery pizza, strip pizza, and tomato pie, to name a few — this Rhode Island favorite is a descendent of *sfincione*, a street food sold in Sicily. It's found, in slightly different iterations, in several other Northeastern states with a large percentage of Italian immigrants and their offspring.

The pizza is made by stretching dough out to the edges of a rectangular pan, covering it with herbed tomato sauce and a sprinkling of grated Parmesan or pecorino Romano, and baking it till the crust turns golden. It's allowed to cool before serving; party pizza is *always* served at room temperature. The crust is medium-thick and something like focaccia, with a crispy outside and a chewy, breadlike top. The sauce also leans toward the thicker side and has a mild sweetness.

Party pizza is almost exclusively sold in Italian bakeries, rather than in pizza parlors. In my opinion, [DePetrillo's](#), which has several locations, is the best. [D. Palmieri's](#) in Johnston and [Antonio's Bakery](#) in Warwick also make delicious versions.



LEE SNIDER PHOTO IMAGES / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## 7. Del's Lemonade

Much imitated but never duplicated, Del's is a sweet, slushy treat. While there's nothing especially magical about crushed ice, lemon juice, lemon peel, and sugar, the way it all comes together makes Del's frozen lemonade the quintessential Rhode Island drink. (Sorry, Autocrat Coffee Syrup.)

The company has said that the original recipe dates back to Naples in the 1840s, when the founder's great grandfather combined snow with sugar and lemon juice to sell at the local market. His son brought the recipe with him to the United States in the early nineteenth century. His son, Angelo DeLucia, engineered a machine that could reproduce the frostiness without snow. A legendary business was born as a roadside stand in Cranston. You can now find [Del's stands and trucks](#) all around the state in warmer seasons, selling the original lemon recipe plus a variety of fruity summer flavors, like watermelon and cherry.

**Pro Tip:** Now that my tastes are more grown-up, I find Del's a bit too sweet in its natural form. But that's why vodka was invented. Pour two fingers in a highball glass, fill with frozen lemonade, stir, and sip. Hot-weather beverage perfection.

### Further Reading:

- [12 Best Things To Do In Charming Bristol, Rhode Island](#)
- [Beautiful Coastal Rhode Island Road Trip: Providence To Westerly](#)

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ROBIN CATALANO

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A specialist in coastal travel, the northeast U.S., and Spain, Robin is a travel journalist and the writer behind the travel blog [Once More to the Shore](#). Her work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Travel + Leisure*, *TIME*, *Smithsonian*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *AFAR*, *Hemispheres*, and a range of other publications... [New England by Robin](#). Now living in the Hudson Valley, Robin understands the call of the sea, and the allure of rock-strewn beaches and shrouded forests.

## How To Spend A Perfect Weekend In Scenic Westerly, Rhode Island



SANDI BARRETT

SEP. 7. 2021



WESTERLY HARBOR (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

Sparkling ocean waters, long sandy barrier beaches, sumptuous local seafood, gorgeous vistas, and coastal adventures add up to a perfect summertime getaway. Spending a weekend in scenic Westerly, [Rhode Island](#), whether it is with a group of friends and family, or a romantic escape, you will love the Westerly experience. A visit centered around the exclusive Village of Watch Hill, the Village of Misquamicut, and the greater Westerly area, this getaway is sure to be one of your favorite adventures.

For those that want to explore more of the Ocean State, check out this [Beautiful Coastal Rhode Island](#)



[Road Trip: Providence To Westerly.](#)

## Things To Do In Westerly

Westerly and the surrounding area are home to some of the prettiest beaches in [New England](#). Options range from private beaches to state parks and everything in between. You will easily find a beach to suit your personal style. Add in a dash of shopping, golf, fun entertainment, wonderful restaurants, and beautiful scenery; you have a recipe for a picture-perfect getaway stay.



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THE ANDREA SEASIDE RESTAURANT AND BEACH BAR (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

### Private Beach With Libation Service

When you want to get away to the beach with a guaranteed parking spot along with food and beverage service, [The Andrea](#) is a wonderful option. The restaurant allows you to book a spot right at the water's edge for the entire day. A sandy spot accommodates four guests for a day filled with toes-in-the-sand fun. It includes a dedicated waitstaff to deliver your delicious seaside fare and favorite libations making it a relaxing day at the beach hangout.

### Ride The Merry-Go-Round And Enjoy The Beach

Since 1883, the [Merry-Go-Round](#) at Watch Hill has been entertaining generations of families. A tradition in the harbor, the carousel brings smiles to riders as they happily take their turn around the ring. Be

sure to snap a few photos; they will make precious memories of your visit.

The Merry-Go-Round Beach is a pretty, private beach that offers daily and seasonal passes. Located behind the carousel, it is close to all the Watch Hill shopping and dining. Merry-Go-Round Beach is a great spot for a family fun beach day.

### Spend A Day At Misquamicut State Beach

State beaches are a wonderful spot to plant your beach chair, umbrella, and bag of beach toys for a day of sandy fun in the sun. You can count on the state park to be a well-maintained space that is enjoyable for everyone, and [Misquamicut State Beach](#) provides guests with the perfect spot.

People love Misquamicut State Beach and you need to arrive early to get a coveted parking spot. You can, however, reserve your only [Daily Flex Pass](#) before you go. This gives you express lane parking privileges enabling you to get your toes in the beautiful water asap.

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### Drive In Movies With The Gang

The [Drive-In Theater](#) at Misquamicut runs classic, family-approved movies and streamed-in shows for a good old fashion night at the drive-in. Offered daily in season, the price is per carload. Pop some popcorn, put some soft drinks in the cooler, and pack everyone into the SUV for a throwback movie experience.



WATCH HILL YACHT CLUB (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

## Shop Watch Hill

With views of the Watch Hill Yacht Club, cute shops and restaurants line the picturesque harbor. Two-hour free parking is plenty of time to explore the shops and purchase those got-to-have items. High-end resort-wear shops like [Lilly Pulitzer](#), [Rochelle's Boutique](#), and others grace the storefronts, enticing you with trendy styles and luscious colors.

If you are the non-shopper in the crowd, grab an ice cream and watch the boats in the harbor, or grace one of the many benches along the way for a less fashion-focused experience. And be sure to check out these [5 Unique Boating Experiences To Enjoy In New England](#).





WINNAPAUG COUNTRY CLUB (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

## Golf With A View

Hit the links with a beautiful view at [Winnapaug Country Club](#). The 18-hole public course rewards golfers with gorgeous ocean views and skill challenging approaches. Seasonal membership options and single-round tee times offer residents and visitors the opportunity to play this beautiful course. Try not to get too distracted by the view, although it is a lovely spot to carry around a bag of sticks and chase a little ball.

[Weekapaug Golf Club](#) is a private, 9-hole course in Westerly that offers social memberships that include three yearly rounds, making it a great option for nearby travelers who want a private club setting.



NAPATREE POINT CONSERVATION AREA (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

### Explore Napatree Point Conservatory

Jutting out into [Narragansett Bay](#) at the end of Watch Hill is [Napatree Point Conservation Area](#). The beautiful sandy beach is a preserve and wildlife refuge that is open to the public. It is a lovely spot to enjoy a morning stroll, offering beautiful views of the harbor and the bay. For a peace break, bring your favorite book and a towel, and find a soft spot in the sand to read or simply enjoy the gorgeous view.

Saturday summer mornings at 9 a.m. you can join a [free guided walk](#). Led by a local naturalist, you will learn about the history and bird sanctuary that define the conservatory. You might even catch a glimpse of some of the endangered birds that make Napatree their home, including Piping Plovers, Osprey, and American Oystercatchers.



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### Kick Your Heels Up At Foxwoods Casino

Ready to get dressed up and paint the town, [Foxwoods Casino](#) is in Mashantucket, [Connecticut](#), a 30-minute drive north of Westerly. The casino is home to over 3,500 slot machines and almost every game

you would love to play, including high stakes bingo. Foxwoods will rival any contemporary [Las Vegas](#) casino in style, size, glitz, and games. If you want to add an exciting night (or day) of gaming fun and great food, then Foxwoods should be on your Westerly weekend to-do list.



CLAM FRITTERS AND LOBSTER BISQUE AT THE ANDREA (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

## Best Restaurants In Westerly

Great seafood shacks, secluded private dining, vacation-required midday frozen treats, and fine dining restaurants dot the Westerly landscape. You will enjoy an assortment of foodie-focused and fun options for your getaway dining enjoyment.

### The Andrea Beach Bar



From clam fritters to lobster bisque, this beachside bar is hard to beat. [The Andrea](#) has an expansive umbrella-adorned patio overlooking a swath of sandy beach with a panoramic ocean view. This is the closest you will get to dining right on the beach, without dining on the beach. Actually, they have a dining-right-on-the-beach option; their exclusive beach reservation service (see Private Beach With Libation Service above). Order local favorites like their creamy lobster bisque. For a fried option, check out the clam fritters or their fish and chips, both local favorites.

### **Gelato Cafe**

Delicious frozen treats are an integral part of every oceanside getaway. [Pompelmo Gelateria](#) serves up the authentic Italian delectable gelato for your sweet tooth satisfaction. Classic Italian flavors like Nutella and pistachio sit alongside more unusual varieties like Cake by the Ocean and dark chocolate sorbet. Skip lunch, grab a cone, and enjoy your favorite flavor while watching the ships in Watch Hill Harbor.

### **The Pondhouse Private Dining**

Unique dining experiences with exceptional cuisine can be a challenge to discover. [The Pondhouse](#) at the Weekapaug Inn offers an upscale yet rustic private dining exploration in their open air pond-view pavilion. Selections from the three-course menu, Champagne pairings, gorgeous views, and private seating for up to four makes for a relaxing culinary adventure.

Dining at the Pondhouse is like having your own private chef and waitstaff cater to your culinary wishes while you sit back and enjoy the shimmering water views.

### **Ella's Food & Drink**

Plan a romantic, date night dinner at [Ella's Food & Drink](#). Stunningly plated and expertly crafted, the menu at Ella's is extraordinary. Selecting your meal should be done slowly over a beautiful glass of wine and a nibble of calamari, cheese and crostini, or other delightful starters.

Choosing dinner is a difficult task when the menu is filled with decidedly delicious options. The squid arrabiata, Crabby Scallops, and Duck A Deux Facons will require some serious consideration. Ella's also offers wonderful dishes for the less culinary adventurer like a 14-ounce New York strip or classic shrimp & grits.





WEEKAPAUG INN BEACH RESORT (PHOTO CREDIT: SANDI BARRETT)

## Best Hotels In Westerly

### Weekapaug Inn Beach Resort

Enjoy beautiful coastal luxury at the [Weekapaug Inn](#). It is a wonderful venue for your stay in this oceanfront playground. Located in Weekapaug on Quonochontaug Pond, the Inn is a summer oasis with beautiful views at every turn. It will easily become your favorite hideaway.

### Watch Hill Inn

Providing oceanfront views in the heart of the action is the [Watch Hill Inn](#). Their “simple” stays encompass a casual luxury that you would want and expect from an oceanside getaway. Alternatively, you can opt for one of their “suites” or a “seriously suite” stay where you will live — if only for a weekend — on a posh upper floor with an exquisitely lux design.

### Ocean House

[Ocean House](#) is a stately, old-style New England beach property with a long history of providing guests spectacular views and first-class amenities. You can explore the history of Ocean House and everything it has to offer in our recent [property review](#).

**Pro Tip:** Westerly, Rhode Island, is one of those picturesque, coastal towns that is steeped in the gilded past of summer beach resorts and luxurious living. Your visit can be as down to earth or high toned as you envision. Either way, you will love spending a weekend in scenic Westerly.

If you wish to explore more charming destinations like Westerly, check out these [nine quaint Rhode Island towns](#).

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**SANDI BARRETT**

Sandi is a freelance writer who specializes in travel, food, wine, and bespoke fashion. After a long career in marketing, she has semi-retired and enjoys traveling with her husband, visiting her three daughters, babysitting her grandchildren, designing women's clothing, and teaching fashion. Sandi's goal...

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