

36 HOURS

NEWPORT, R.I.

On the surface, Newport is what it appears to be: the glamorous “sailing capital of the world,” with a new sailing museum to show for it. On the Narragansett Bay side, the harbor brims with America’s Cup boats and celebrity yachts. On the Atlantic side, a rugged coastline with enticing surf and Gilded Age mansions. In between, picturesque streets are lined with boutiques, bars with tipsy brides-to-be and one of the nation’s largest collections of Colonial buildings. Recently, locals have been reframing Newport’s nautical narrative with additions like art galleries and an L.G.B.T.Q. pride center, and by unveiling, if gradually, the town’s leading role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. But lesser-known stories about Newport can still be found, and with the city’s compact grid, free trolley system and bike-friendly hotels, wanderers without cars can capture the essence of both worlds.

LAUREN MATISON



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIZABETH CECIL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Friday

3:15 P.M. | SAIL LIKE A CHAMP

Next to Bowen’s Wharf, board a 12-meter America’s Cup boat for a two-hour, family-friendly sail (\$90) up Narragansett Bay. The America’s Cup Charters fleet includes the US 22 Intrepid, known for winning the cup in 1967 and 1970. Cruising through the harbor, you may spy a white egret coasting off the bow and catch a fishy whiff in the warm breeze. Guests can pitch in, taking the wheel or trimming the sails, or simply relax with a can of sparkling water. The knowledgeable crew sprinkles in tales about points of interest such as the 1870 Rose Island Lighthouse (where you can spend the night) and a red-roofed Victorian mansion where Jacqueline Bouvier grew up and where, in 1953, she and Senator John F. Kennedy held their wedding reception.

5:30 P.M. | WALK THE WHARF

Back on land, Bowen’s Wharf and Bannister’s Wharf mark the unofficial starting line for exploring Newport. Along the historic brick and granite quay, you’ll find moored schooners, seafood restaurants and 18th-century buildings. Grab a stool at the oyster bar at Clarke Cooke House, built by a sea captain in 1780, and pair a glass of Sancerre with freshly shucked oysters (\$3.50 each) from Nova Scotia, Maine and Rhode Island. Make time to locate the first Rhode Island Slave History Medallion on the Chandlery building behind the Bowen’s Wharf anchor, installed in 2020. Scan the QR code to read about the port’s history as a major hub in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

6:30 P.M. | ENJOY A LOCAL FEAST

In a sea of tourist-driven fast-casual restaurants, Thames Street Kitchen is an ever-classy farm-to-table buoy. The chefs Tyler Burnley and Chad Hoffer take full advantage of the small-scale agriculture on Aquidneck Island (home to the towns of Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport), where farmers are known to deliver produce off the back of a moped. Reserve a seat in advance at the bar to watch supper being prepared in the open kitchen. Order warm salted bread with cacio e pepe butter (\$4) to soak up the yolky sauce of the cavatelli with serrano ham and ricotta (\$18). Early reservations also mean top pick of shareable cuts of rib eye and strip steak (\$3 an ounce).

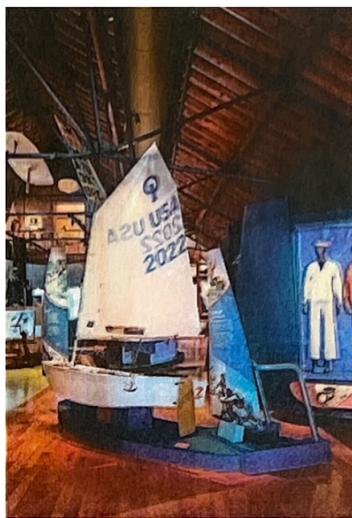
8 P.M. | RAISE A GLASS TO THE PAST

New bars seem to open with each regatta season, such as the speakeasy-styled Bar 12 and the tiki charmer Wharf Fish House. But the White Horse Tavern, a National Historic Landmark believed to be the oldest tavern still operating in the United States, is toasting its 350th anniversary. It was a meeting place of the colony’s General Assembly and Criminal Court for nearly 100 years (and was also run for a time by a rich pirate). Under the big wood beams, patrons sip vanilla-infused, smoked old-fashioneds (\$17). Across from the tavern, in Liberty Square, a Newport Middle Passage monument has been proposed to honor the Africans who died on slave ships and the enslaved workers who helped build the city.

Saturday

10 A.M. | LEARN THE ROPES

The Sailing Museum, which opened last year in the historic Armory building, is a high-tech interactive voyage. You’ll design your own sailboat and race alongside fellow museumgoers. Exhibits cover ocean conservation and barrier-breaking seafarers like Bill Pinkney, the first African American



Clockwise from top, Newport Harbor; the lawn at Castle Hill Inn; the Sailing Museum, which opened last year; ravioli with serrano ham and ricotta at Thames Street Kitchen. Newport has a long and colorful history: it was founded in 1639, and was occupied by the British from 1776 to 1779.

to sail solo around the world, and Maureen McKinnon, the first woman to win gold in the Paralympic Sailing Olympics in 2008. Check out the America’s Cup Hall of Fame, which displays models of the winning boats, and use the touch screen to discover sailing organizations nationwide.

11 A.M. | EXPLORE ON TWO WHEELS

The first national bike organization, the League of American Wheelmen, was born in Newport in 1880. Newport, which is mostly flat, remains a bike-friendly town, ideal for breezy cruising. Pick up a rental at Ten Speed Spokes, then pedal away from downtown and out along peaceful roads, past mansions and the Ida Lewis Yacht Club on Lime Rock, where Lewis, a lighthouse keeper, rowed out to rescue more than 18 people between 1842 and 1911, including soldiers from a nearby military compound, now Fort Adams State Park. Fort Adams, which offers expansive bay views and guided walking tours (\$20) and will celebrate its 200th anniversary next year, is home to the public sailing center Sail Newport and annual summer concerts like the Newport Folk Festival and Newport Jazz Festival.

NOON | LUNCH ON A LAWN

Pedaling two miles past Fort Adams along Newport’s bucolic southwestern edge, turn right at the sign for the Castle Hill Inn, built in 1875 as a summer home for the pioneering deep-sea oceanographer Alexander Agassiz. While locals prize the hotel’s grassy knoll for sundowners, a midday reservation on the patio at the Lawn restaurant brings plenty of close-up boat watching. Enjoy Point Judith calamari (\$19) and a large gratin pan of rigatoni al forno (\$32) with eggplant confit, tomatoes, olives and goat cheese. If it rains, the floor-to-ceiling windows in the dining room beautifully frame Narragansett Bay. On a sunny day, recline post-feast in white Adirondack chairs as boats tack across the water. Afterward, follow the hotel’s short private trail that leads to the Castle Hill Lighthouse, tucked into a cliff and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1 P.M. | RIDE INTO THE GILDED AGE

Pedal south on Ocean Avenue, along breathtaking bluffs and past Brenton Point State Park, until you reach the secluded Bailey’s Beach. There’s powdery white sand, few, if any, people and no place to park a car. From there, a four-minute spin north on Bellevue Avenue will bring you to the

Beaux-Arts style Marble House (entry, \$25), which cost \$11 million to build between 1888 and 1892 (\$7 million was spent on marble). It was William Vanderbilt’s 39th-birthday present to his wife Alva, who would make this home an unofficial command post of Rhode Island’s suffrage movement. The free self-guided audio tour offers information about rooms like the Versailles-inspired grand salon. Suffragists drank tea from “Votes for Women” chinaware in the Chinese Tea House, which, today, serves a \$35 prix fixe afternoon tea on weekends.

3:30 P.M. | TAKE IN EXHIBITIONS

Ride north a couple of miles (or hop on the bike-friendly #67 trolley) along Bellevue Avenue until you arrive at the Newport Art Museum, a wonder founded in 1912. Newcomers like CUSP Gallery and the Matriarch store are keeping the community’s creative soul afloat, as well as the longtime art co-op Spring Bull Gallery and the local artist Chris Wyllie. Also make time to see the “Pride: In Retrospect” exhibition, showcasing 50 years of queer history, at the Newport Pride Center, a new inclusive space and resource for the L.G.B.T.Q. community.

6 P.M. | LEVEL UP FOR DINNER

Bypass the crowd outside Scales & Shells, an Italian seafood institution since 1987. Instead, enter a door on the corner of Thames and Goodwin Streets that leads you to its new sister restaurant upstairs, Upscales. Neither restaurant takes reservations, but an early arrival at Upscales, which is the more laid-back of the two, may grant you the coveted balcony table overlooking Thames, where a hungry horde may still be huffing by the time you’ve finished the Lavender Bees Knees cocktail (\$14) and started on the lobster ravioli (\$29).

7:30 P.M. | HIT THE HIGH NOTES

Move west on Thames past the booming Midtown Oyster Bar until you reach a little-known historic site on Pelham Street, the first street in the United States to be illuminated with a gaslit lamp, in 1805. Above the lamppost is a sign for Dueling Pianos, a rollicking piano bar show with roots in the ragtime era of the 1890s. On the building’s third floor, grab a drink with sparkling harbor views from the lounge area. At 8 p.m., two singing pianists will perform requested songs. (Standing-room tickets range from free to \$20. Tables for five start at \$100.)

Sunday

9 A.M. | RÉVE UP FOR THE DAY

Beaucoup, a new cafe and boutique on Thames Street with a bright-yellow striped awning and robin-egg-blue Fiat parked out front, emits an irresistible joie de vivre, despite the neighboring gas station. The person responsible for turning a dingy old liquor shop into Beaucoup is Cheryl Guibone, the owner of the nearby home goods store Guibone Living. While you eat a warm spinach and feta feuilleté pastry and a cinnamon sugar scone (each \$5.50), your eyes may travel across the tables topped with surf magazines and a Porsche photography book, over the gingham settee and up to the giraffe sconces, colorful striped beach bags and handmade palm hats: a snapshot of Ms. Guibone’s travels to places like Marrakesh, Cartagena, Marbella and Paris.

10 A.M. | TRAVEL THROUGH TIME

At the Museum of Newport History (suggested donation, \$5), above the Newport Historical Society’s shop, dive into the city’s long, fascinating and complicated history. Learn how English settlers fled rigid Puritanism in Massachusetts and obtained settlement rights from the Narragansett tribe in 1638. You’ll learn that religious freedom was celebrated in the 18th century among Quakers, Jews and Congregationalists while nearly half the families owned at least one enslaved person. Take in revolutionary war artifacts and Gilded Age gossip, and climb into a covered wagon that plays mini history lectures. God’s Little Acre, the country’s largest intact Colonial African burial ground, is a 10-minute walk from the museum. Download the Action Tour Guide app for a self-guided audio tour of notable headstones, such as Duchess Quamino, the “pastry queen of Rhode Island.”

NOON | SPICE THINGS UP

On the way back downtown, get lost on Broadway, a refreshingly un-touristy slice of Newport with rainbow crosswalks, hipster coffee shops, craft cocktail bars, a record store and neighborhood haunts like Humming Bird. The delightful chef wife-husband team, Dezna Bowen and Abraham Parkes, have decorated the place with baskets, Jamaican hues and a Usain Bolt mural. Since 2018, the only Black-owned restaurant in the city has been feeding devoted denizens slow-braised oxtail and piquant jerk chicken dishes with perfectly crisp fries. While you sit in the window, savoring caramelized bites of fried plantains, a steady stream of clientele will come in to take golden beef patties for the road. Stay long enough, and you may do the same.

KEY STOPS

Bowen’s Wharf and Bannister’s Wharf, with an idyllic backdrop of boats and Colonial buildings, offer a traveler’s initiation into Newport.

The new **Sailing Museum** will enthrall skippers and landlubbers alike.

The Museum of Newport History illuminates the city’s long and complex past.

Ocean Avenue is a scenic stretch perfect for mellow pedaling along Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic coast, with beaches and mansions around every turn.

WHERE TO EAT

Thames Street Kitchen is a homey nook for supper.

Humming Bird is a Jamaican gem and the only Black-owned restaurant in Newport.

At **Clarke Cooke House**, savor the oyster bar, the chocolate roulade “snowball” dessert and the people-watching.

Upscales, above Scales & Shells, one of the first restaurants on Lower Thames Street, is a new culinary retreat.

Beaucoup is the new darling in Newport’s cafe scene, with great coffee from the Providence roaster New Harvest.

Castle Hill Inn sits on a 40-acre peninsula, a dreamy setting for lunch at the Lawn restaurant.

The **White Horse Tavern** may be the country’s oldest operating restaurant, celebrating its 350th anniversary this year.

Downtown, **Dueling Pianos** offers nostalgic tunes, generous pours and harbor views.

WHERE TO STAY

Forty 1° North offers harbor-view rooms, a waterfront bar and restaurant, free bicycles and a central location off Thames Street. Weekend doubles start at around \$550.

The **Beech Tree Inn and Cottage** has comfortable rooms (some with gas fireplaces, private balconies and Jacuzzis) in an 1890s Victorian B&B, where free on-site parking, a private garden and a lavish à la carte breakfast make the offbeat location near Broadway worth it. Weekend doubles from around \$350.

Bannister’s Wharf Marina & Guest Rooms, on the waterfront, is elegant and charming. Weekend doubles from \$375.

For **short-term rentals**, you may find more affordable options just outside Newport, in the towns of Middletown, Jamestown and Portsmouth.