



Newport's Celebrated Architecture and Sights Are Extra Beautiful This Time of Year

From Gatsby-esque mansions and ghost tours to dazzling displays, the best things to do in Newport, Rhode Island this fall and winter.

By [Caroline Boden](#), and [Jared Ranahan](#)

Updated on 10/17/2023 at 2:55 PM



Rosecliff Mansion | Photo credit: Wangkun Jia/Shutterstock

**TWO DAYS
AWAY**

Newport is a feast for the senses; a veritable banquet of salt air, dappled light, ocean breezes, and creaking floorboards. With 400 years of artistry, history, innovation, and seriously historic rebellion, this Rhode Island city has grown exponentially beyond being just a port town. From tradesmen and pirates to a history of leading the way for independence, this sailboat city is often overlooked in its value and American legacy.

Newport may be best known for its stunning [Gilded Age mansions](#) that were once home to famous families, but beyond its excessive exterior, the city and its surrounding area offer an enviable range of activities and destinations. Here are the best things to do in Newport.

Travel time:

2 hours and 15 minutes from Boston by car.



Breakers Mansion Christmas Newport | Breakers Mansion Christmas Newport, photo courtesy of Discover Newport

If you don't do anything else: Celebrate the holidays

Come the holiday season, the historic charm of the Classic Coast transforms into a scintillating wonderland of twinkling lights and evergreen aplenty. Experience festive events throughout December as part of **Christmas in Newport**. This festival, which began in 1971, is 31 days of celebrations hosted by residents and shopkeepers who raise thousands of dollars for charity. Highlights include Holidays at the Newport Mansions—with The Breakers, Marble House, and The Elms decorated for the season—and the **Newport Illuminated Boat Parade**.

Surrounded by lights and singing carolers, the **Bristol Christmas Festival Weekend** is a holiday market filled with festivities fit for the family. In European styled huts, guests can find meaningful gifts for their loved ones or enjoy a snack or two, while kids can tell Santa what they wish for.

Fill your days

Where to see Gilded Age mansions in Newport, RI

During the Gilded Age, America's wealthiest families—we're talking Vanderbilts, Kennedys, and Astors here—spent their summers living lavishly in gorgeous mansions along Newport's dramatic seaside cliffs. The famed, Versailles-inspired **Rosecliff Mansion** reopened to visitors last month after a \$7.4 million renovation. But the crown jewel is undoubtedly **The Breakers**. Built in the 1890s, at the behest of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the 70-room palace is recognized as a national historic landmark and features a staggering collection of sculptures. Starting mid-November, expect to see it **glistening in holiday lights**.

Things to do outdoors in Newport, RI

Let the crisp sea air and stunning natural beauty of the [Cliff Walk](#) sweeten the deal of skipping the gym. With 3.5 miles of sweeping ocean views, this seaside trail is Newport's top spot for breaking a sweat in style.

If you're in the mood for a challenge, the craggy and unpaved stretch of trail from Reject's Beach to Belmont Beach is your best bet, while the paved northern portion provides a gentler experience for the less adventurous. Even if you're not in the mood to get physical on this walking tour, be sure to make a quick stop at the Ruggles Avenue entrance, where you'll immediately be met with a dazzling panorama of the Breakers mansion.

Pedal the rails that track along the coastal tip of Aquidneck Island, which encompasses Portsmouth, Middletown, and Newport at [Rail Explorers](#). It's an activity for the whole family to enjoy. The fall kicks off the seasonal and foliage-filled Sunset Ride, Fireside Tours, and Evening Lantern Rides. Riders are encouraged to bring refreshments and marshmallows for a campfire stop on their jaunt.

Where to take scenic drives in Newport, RI

A far cry from its Miami Beach counterpart, Newport's answer to [Ocean Drive](#) is home to ten straight miles of classic New England seascape without a single palm tree in sight.

Start your journey off at the southern terminus of Bellevue Avenue, where the picturesque avenue awaits. As you head west, you'll be met with a wealth of stunning beaches and craggy cliffs alongside some of the most impressive residences found in Newport. Once you've reached the westernmost fringes of Aquidneck Island, be sure to stretch your legs at verdant Brenton Point State Park, then head up north to snap a photo of the iconic 1890s-era Castle Hill Lighthouse. For any visiting history buffs, a trip up to Fort Adams State Park is an absolute necessity. Established in 1965, this coastal military outpost has been a fixture of coastal Newport since 1799.



The Sailing Museum | The Sailing Museum, Photo courtesy of Discover Newport

Where to explore museums and tours in Newport, RI

Among the Colonial-era landmarks, several structures across the city stand as a testament to its lengthy history of religious freedom. The Great Friends Meeting House was built in 1699 as a hub for the local Quaker community, while the 1760s-era Touro Synagogue is recognized as the oldest synagogue in the nation.

A lantern-led tour of Olde Town with Ghost Tours of Newport will reveal some of the city's dark and haunted past. The deep history is impossible to ignore and this tour takes curious souls on a journey to explore the stories behind iconic locations such as the Artillery Company of Newport, the city's oldest prison, the Jailhouse Inn, Washington Square and more.

To get a peek at local hobbies and fascinations, any of the museum's offerings are sure to showcase just that. One of the latest additions to the coastal city is The Sailing Museum. Avid tennis fans might also know Newport was once the setting for the US Open and can visit the International Tennis Hall of Fame. For luxury car enthusiasts, there's the Newport Car Museum.



White Horse Tavern | Photo courtesy of White Horse Tavern

Eat, drink and sleep

Where to eat and drink in Newport, RI

Of course, no visit to downtown Newport is complete without a drink or meal at White Horse Tavern. Said to be the oldest bar and restaurant in the United States, this polished watering hole has been serving up ales, wines, and whiskeys to thirsty customers since the mid-1600s.

Ocean State's most lauded forays into the world of wine can be found just a few minutes northeast of the Historic District. Stretching over 110 acres, 60 of which are covered in grapes, the Newport Vineyards entertains over 10,000 people a year with its winery, restaurant, micro-brewery, and greenhouse. Sample some crisp riesling, pinot noir rosé, and rochambeau while overlooking fifty idyllic acres of fertile farmland. To accommodate guests with a hankering for farm-to-table meals, go for fireside cooked dinners featuring New England produce.

Fishing is a vital part of Newport's economy and menus will read of some Northeast seafood classics. There's hardly a wrong choice for dinner off of Thames Street. **The Mooring Seafood Kitchen & Bar** takes you up close and personal with the boats at the dock and it's truly a crime if you don't order a dozen oysters for the table. Food truck turned restaurant, **La Costa on Thames** offers Latin cuisine with a classic coastal twist. In Bowen's Wharf, in downtown Newport, **Wharf Fish House** melds tropicali-inspired flare with local elements for Lobster Sliders, Polynesian Pork Ribs, and Chowder Fries, to name a few.

At these restaurants and many more, guests can find special three-course menus with must-try discounts and deals this November during the annual **Newport Restaurant Week**.

Where to stay in Newport, RI

For the Gilded Age treatment, try the **Castle Hill Inn**, a property from the Relais & Chateaux group perched on 40 verdant acres along Newport's westernmost coast. While there, grab drinks on their scenic lawn or share some s'mores and holiday merriment while cozying up by the lit fire pits. To experience the life of a lightkeeper, **Rose Island Lighthouse** on the nearby 18-acre island, Rose Island, lets you escape the hustle and bustle for a little while. This isle paradise possesses many charming qualities. Greet the dawn of each day with a spectacular sunrise and for those who are only looking for a quick trip, the island welcomes visitors each day from 10 am–4 pm for a boat tour through historic Newport Harbor with panoramic views of seals resting on Citing Rock and the Newport Bridge.