



Online Traveler | Little Rhody has big treasures

By Roger Petterson

Associated Press

Size isn't everything. If you don't believe it, pack your bags and spend some vacation time in historic Rhode Island.

For one thing, it's the home of some of the ritziest summer cottages ever built. Plan on visiting the Newport Mansions - www.newportmansions.org - modest little houses from an era when some of the wealthiest families believed that extravagance was a virtue.

Click on "The Mansions" to learn about carefully preserved estates including the Breakers, the palatial summer home of the Vanderbilts, or Rosecliff, modeled after France's Grand Trianon at Versailles. You'll need to look through "Visitor Information" for tickets, schedules and directions, which includes a helpful tip on parking the car at the visitors center and riding a trolley to the stately homes. The Newport Mansions Wine & Food Festival is coming up at the end of September (see "10 for the Road" at right), and all those gardens will be featured in the Newport Flower Show in June.

The town of Newport - www.gonewport.com - sits at the southern end of an island between Rhode Island Sound and Narragansett Bay, making it attractive to boaters from all over. Get acquainted by trying their "Virtual Tour."

When you're not admiring mansions, you can go boating, fishing, hiking and even scuba diving; click on "What To Do" and then "Recreation" for tips. The "Entertainment" section of "What To Do" can direct you to nightlife including jazz and folk clubs. And explore the calendar for exhibits, concerts, tours and the 8th Annual Harvest Festival in November. The Newport Web site also has detailed maps under "Getting Around."

After seeing all the boats in the harbor, you might want to visit the Museum of Yachting - www.museumofyachting.org - for photos, models and history. Then you can visit some of the Rhode Island Lights - <http://lighthousegetaway.com/lights/ri.html> - the beacons that once guided sailors along the coast.

On the mainland west of Newport, the South County Tourism Council - www.southcountyri.com - covers the southern end of the state to the Connecticut state line. Click on "What to Do" for directions to canoe outfitters, whale watching, the Great Swamp wildlife area, beaches, and historic landmarks.

After the coastal part of Rhode Island, head north past Providence to the Blackstone Valley - www.tourblackstone.com - an area of towns that are touted as the birthplace of the American industrial revolution. But it's not all towns and old factories. Go to "What to Do" to see what the valley offers in

the way of river tours, farms and vineyards, biking, train tours, and the Pawtucket Red Sox.

The state's biggest city is Providence - www.pwcvb.com/Visitors - which has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years. Look for the link to "Gallery Night" for the once-a-month free time at galleries, museums and historic sites, and look below that entry for "Historic Tours." Plan to stay out at night for the frequent WaterFire event - www.waterfire.org - that lights up the downtown area with floating bonfires. On the Providence Web site, click on "Visitors" in the upper left corner for other attractions, a map, and directories of the city's restaurants and places to stay.

There's always more to fill your time. Rhode Island's official tourism guide - www.visitrhodeisland.com - has travel discounts and promotions. For further explorations of the scenic corners of this small but varied state, try out their links for Nature Trails, Heritage Trails, Jewels of the Bay (for Narragansett Bay), and still more tourism promotion regions. And take a look at "Seasonal Events" for happenings such as the 19th Annual Taste of Rhode Island food celebration on Sept. 29-30.



Now there's a site where you can check out hotel rooms before you book. www.TVTrip.com will show you videos of hotels in 13 European cities.

What's hot. High-quality videos show exteriors, lobbies, dining areas and guest rooms, including bathrooms. You can choose hotels by price range from no dollars (no dice) to \$600 a night. Listings include TripAdvisor ratings and comments and Google maps showing location. I saw some surprises, including London's Kensington Close Hotel & Spa at \$187 a night.

What's not. To check availability, you're sent to partner sites, and TVTrip.com gets commissions for bookings. I couldn't get the rate on dates I tried in September.

- Vani Rangachar,
Los Angeles Times

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