



newport, rhode island

Jackie Cooperman **catches the fresh breeze blowing through New England's venerable harbour town.**

When Hurricane Bob howled towards Newport in 1991, ageing tobacco heiress Doris Duke covered her marble-floored solarium with hay, sheltering her camels Baby and Princess, who weathered the storms from the luxuriant perch of Duke's century-old mansion, overlooking the Atlantic. Duke's extravagance and practicality typifies Newport: a grand old New England town once best known for its Gilded Age mansions, glamorous parties and elite yachting, then as an industrial naval base, and now a newly cosmopolitan destination and a pleasingly mellow alternative to showy beach communities such as The Hamptons.

"Newport's really happening right now," says fashion designer Janet Russo, who closed her eponymous Manhattan boutique and moved to Newport after the September 11 terrorist attacks. "I couldn't have opened my store here 10 years ago, but Newport has become so much more sophisticated."

The current wave of sophistication has historic precedents. Founded in 1639, Newport was at once progressive – with the nation's oldest synagogue, library and first permanent Quaker settlement – and nefarious, as an outpost of the slave and rum trades. In the late 1800s, industrialists

built immense summer estates where they threw lavish parties. Among other excesses, trees were decorated with live monkeys and "top dog" parties were thrown for canines, who were fed veal fricassee.

Though many family heirs still summer in Newport, the Gilded Age ceded to rather grim economic realities by the 1950s. "Newport until the 1970s was very industrial, with smoke stacks impeding views," says Paul Miller, curator for the Preservation Society of Newport County. "But the town reinvented itself as a resort when the Navy closed its bases in 1973 and a great deal of urban renewal took place."

Indeed, Newport has the largest collection of pre-colonial buildings in the US,

and its streets showcase three centuries of preserved architecture. Beginning in 1968, Doris Duke bought and restored over 80 historic buildings, many pre-Revolutionary, and Newport has several extremely active preservation societies. Some of the most noteworthy façades are in the historic neighbourhood called the Point, where Bridge Street is home to both a vintage gardening furniture shop – called Cottage and Garden – and an appealing contemporary gallery, Suydam + Diepenbrock, run by jeweller Didi Suydam and her sculptor husband, Peter Diepenbrock.

You don't have to be a member of one of Newport's great

families to live like one. Along the city's famed Cliff Walk, a three-and-a-half-mile stretch of beach (some of it rather rugged) lined by many of Newport's impressive mansions, sits The Chanler. Built in 1865 as a congressman's summer retreat, the 20-room Chanler reopened two years ago after extensive renovations. The original mansion has 14 guest rooms with decks overlooking the ocean; the other six "rooms" are private dwellings with their own gardens, outdoor saunas and Jacuzzis. Beach and golf butlers are on hand.

Another luxury property, Castle Hill Inn & Resort, is a 10-minute drive from the centre of town, but offers rooms directly on its own private beach. Guests and locals sip cocktails on the lawn as the sun sets over Narragansett Bay.

Back in the centre of town, the La Farge Perry House provides very well-pedigreed bed-and-breakfast lodging. The house overlooks a garden of magnolia trees and lilacs, has five gracious Victorian rooms and offers bespoke breakfasts prepared by Midge Knerr, a former pastry chef at New York's La Côte Basque restaurant.

Should you want breakfast with the locals in town, head for Broadway, where once-empty storefronts now house innovative



Above: a fiery sunset over Newport Harbor. Below: Castle Hill Inn & Resort.

how to spend it

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restaurants. You're just as likely to see a Campbell's Soup heiress as local high school students eating at Norey's, an old diner converted to a smart new American eatery, which is also a great choice for dinner, or Jack and Josie's, a café where customers browse the internet or flick through design magazines as they eat muffins and sip fresh smoothies and cappuccinos.

Two of the town's oldest buildings, the synagogue and the Redwood Library & Athenaeum, are currently under renovation and are due to reopen in December. For now, visit the synagogue's chapel and exhibit across Touro Street, a short stroll south of Broadway. Built in 1763, the synagogue houses a copy of George Washington's 1781 letter to the congregation, extolling the US's freedom of religion.

Continuing south to the corner of Spring and Church Streets, visit Trinity Church. Built in 1726 and architecturally significant, it has the country's only triple-deck central pulpit still in use. The church is also a salute to many of the town's prominent families, with stained glass windows dedicated to the memory of industrialist Cornelius Vanderbilt, and wall plaques paying tribute to Commodore Perry and various Potters, Taylors and Pells.

Nearby, in the Newport Art Museum, you can glimpse Newport's former residents in a set of black-and-white photographs that spans social classes high (retired Senator Claiborne Pell) and low (the late lobsterman Louis Jagschitz). Part of the museum is housed in an 1864 Stick Style home designed by the architect Richard Morris Hunt, with an atrium



of carved mahogany, ash, oak and walnut.

Having rounded off the morning in classic American style, stop for a contemporary Mediterranean lunch at

Pasta Beach, opened two years ago by former model and Rhode Island native Susie Rapolo. Her Sardinian chefs prepare delicious wood-oven pizzas, salads and pastas.

Now is the time to let your sails fill with Newport's invigorating shopping breeze that gusts up and down Bellevue Avenue. CK Bradley offers an edgier take on the preppy look with her print canvas bags, cocktail dresses and ribbon belts. Nearby,

Top left: Clarke Cooke House, Bannister's Wharf. Top right: racing yachts in Narragansett Bay. Above: a stained-glass window at Trinity Church.



on Mill Street, Janet Russo's new shop mixes her feminine, well-tailored dresses – popular with actresses such as Sarah Jessica Parker – with other designers' detailed accessories such as crocheted Lorenza Gandoglia bags and fanciful jewellery by local designer Isabelle Lirakis.

Next door, House displays everything from hammered silver trays to Kerry Cassill printed linens and marble-topped Louis XVI-style cupboards. William Vareika Fine Arts, back on Bellevue Avenue, specialises

Hear Consuelo Vanderbilt lament her marriage to the Duke of Marlborough, engineered by her mother for \$10 million.

in 18th through to early 20th century American paintings, drawings and prints, with an extensive collection of work by local artists such as John La Farge (1835-1910).

Further south, the line of Newport's great mansions begins. The Breakers, built in 1895 for the Vanderbilt family, is the most famous, but even with a private tour, the home is crowded with busloads of visitors. Opt instead for private tours of Rosecliff (where *The Great Gatsby* was filmed), The Elms or Marble House; the latter two also offer fascinating audio tours. At Marble House, so-called because 500,000 cubic feet of marble was used to build it, you'll hear Consuelo Vanderbilt lament her unhappy marriage to the Duke of Marlborough, engineered by her mother, suffragist Alva Vanderbilt, who paid the destitute Duke "a much-needed \$10 million".

The Elms, built in 1901 for a Philadelphia industrialist, was purchased by the

Preservation Society of Newport County in 1962, with the threat of demolition just weeks away. Its conservatory has trellis-covered mirrors reflecting the outdoor gardens, a regal marble fountain and a marble table inlaid with an image of the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence.

Unwind after all that sightseeing with a massage at the new SpaTerre in the Hotel Viking on Bellevue Avenue. Book the Volcanic Earth Clay Ritual, a clay body mask followed by a Balinese body and foot massage.

Newport's playground for the rich was, and still is, the ocean – the city was home to the America's Cup until 1983. Bob and Elizabeth Tiedemann of Seascope Yacht Charters offer passing sailors the pick of their collection of historic yachts for private, catered tours of an hour to overnight.

At Bannister's Wharf, just west of Bellevue Avenue, you'll find two of Newport's

culinary institutions. The Black Pearl's clam chowder, brimming with chunks of clam meat and sprigs of dill, is said to be the city's best. Next door, the Clarke Cooke House is a sailors' magnet. Owned by yachtsman David Ray, the 18th century Clarke Cooke House has a pretty, formal restaurant called The Porch, a sushi bar and an informal grill, The Candy Store. There are also two dance spaces, the Boom Boom Room, and the elite, often velvet-roped SkyBar, where Newport's smart yacht set cavorts on summer nights.

Ray, an 11th generation Rhode Islander, bought the wharf in 1975 and is credited with revitalising Newport's harbour. He gets sentimental when talk turns to the sea. "We have the nation's oldest synagogue and library, but the one thing that visitors must do is look at the harbour," he says. "It's the finest place to sail anywhere in the world. Standing here at five o'clock, you can see a dozen 12-metre yachts sailing by. You can get so close to the boats, you can see the colour of the sailors' eyes." ♦

THE HIT LIST

HOTELS

Prices are for two people sharing a double room, including breakfast.

Castle Hill Inn & Resort, 590 Ocean Drive (001401-849 3800); from £165.

The Chanler at Cliff Walk, 117 Memorial Boulevard (001401-847 1300); from £165. **La Farge Perry House**, 24 Kay Street (001471-847 2223); from £162.

RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS

Prices are for a three-course meal for one with a half bottle of wine.

Black Pearl, Bannister's Wharf (001401-846 5264); £69. **Clarke Cooke House**, Bannister's Wharf (001401-849 2900); £69. **Jack and Josie's** 111 Broadway (001401-851 6900). **Norey's**, 156 Broadway (001401-847-4971); £33.

Pasta Beach, 7 Memorial Boulevard (001401-847-2222); £33.

SHOPPING

CK Bradley, 28 Bellevue Avenue (001401-847 9777). **Cottage and Garden**, 9 Bridge Street (001401-848 8477). **House**, 152 Mill Street (001401-847 9879). **Janet Russo**, 154 Mill Street (001401-847-9816). **Suydam + Diepenbrock**, 9 Bridge Street (001401-848 9090). **William Vareika Fine Arts**, 212 Bellevue Avenue (001401-849 6149).

SIGHTS

For mansion tours of Rosecliff, Marble House, The Elms and The Breakers, contact **The Preservation Society of Newport County**, 424 Bellevue Avenue (001401-847 1000). **Newport Art Museum**, 76 Bellevue Avenue (001401-

848 8200), Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm, Sun 12pm-5pm. **Redwood Library & Athenaeum**, 50 Bellevue Avenue (001401-847 0292).

Seascope Yacht Charters, 103 Ruggles Avenue (001401-847 5007). **SpaTerre at the Hotel Viking**, 1 Bellevue Avenue (001401-847 3300). **Touro Synagogue**, 85 Touro Street (001401-847 4794). **Trinity Episcopal Church**, Queen Anne Square (001401-846 0660).

LESS THAN AN HOUR AWAY

You'll likely pass through Providence on your way to Newport, and Rhode Island's capital and seat of learning, founded in



1636, is well worth a stop. Ivy league Brown University, set amid colonial-period homes, is one of the country's most prestigious campuses. The museum at the nearby Rhode Island School of Design has over 80,000 works of art, while fine dining at, among others, Al Forno (001401-273 9760) on Main Street

and Nick's (001401-421 0286) on Broadway, is inspired by the presence of Johnson and Wales college which is devoted to the culinary arts.

WHEN TO GO

September and October, when the

summer crowds are gone but the weather is usually mild, are the best months to visit. Winters are quiet but atmospheric, and come August, the jazz and folk festivals swing into action.

HOW TO GET THERE

Continental Airlines (001800-523 3273; www.continental.com) flies five times a day from Newark to Providence (45 minutes by car from Newport), from £154. **US Airways** (00845-600 3300; www.usairways.com) flies five times a day from New York's La Guardia airport to Providence, from £155. **Leisure Limousine** (001401-683 2683) runs a car service from Providence airport. **Amtrak** (001215-856 7953; www.amtrak.com) trains run from New York's Penn Station to Kingston RI, about 15 minutes drive from Newport, from £60.