

Send Off Summer in South County Rhode Island

The 40-minute drive from historic Watch Hill to beachy Narragansett includes oceanside accommodations and seafaring adventures that make South County a perfect post-Labor Day escape.

By Matthew Monagan Published Sep 21, 2016



From the Watch Hill Inn, you can walk to the 1807-established Watch Hill Light.

(Photo: Nicki Dugan Pogue, via Flickr)

Where to Stay

Get the full Watch Hill experience by staying at the **Watch Hill Inn** (from \$465), a gorgeous 21-room hotel located steps from the charming downtown; it's just a ten-minute walk to the sprawling Ocean House resort. You'll understand why the hotel is worth splurging for by booking a terrace suite — complete with a full kitchen, gas-burning fireplace, living

room, bath, and private terrace for watching the Instagram-ready sunsets over Watch Hill Cove. Guests also have full access to nearby deluxe sister properties the **Ocean House**, **Weekapaug Inn**, and **Spicer Mansion**. You can take a shuttle to the other hotels for meals like Thursday-night clambakes at the Weekapaug — or just commandeer one of the resort's free **Mercedes-Benz convertibles**. (After, go for a slow drive past Taylor Swift's nearby cliffside mansion.)



All the rooms at the Watch Hill Inn are suites; there's in-room full kitchens but also free breakfast in the mornings and wine and beer at night.

(Photo: Courtesy of Watch Hill Inn)

Take a step back into Rhode Island's surfing past at the 1960s-inspired **Break Hotel** (from \$199). The year-old 16-room boutique property is nestled right in the middle of a beachside Narragansett neighborhood — an area where legendary surfers such as Peter Pan plied (and continue to ply) their trade. Vintage photos of surfers adorn the hotel's colorful, vibrant interior, and rooms are spacious: The Sunset King includes a

fireplace, 50-inch Apple TV, lounge area, and balcony overlooking summer homes and ocean swells. Be sure to have a cocktail at the rooftop bar, then grab some grub at the Break's Chair 5 restaurant before exploring the dive bars and ice-cream parlors at night.

Get right in the thick of the trinket shops, famed restaurants, and bobbing yachts in the nearby Watch Hill Yacht Club when you stay at the **Watch Hill Harbour House** (from \$187). The 100-year-old, 12-room inn is located right on bustling Bay Street. Rooms are recently renovated and quaint, with central air conditioning and harbor-facing decks for great evening viewing or endless people-watching. Explore the town at night — just steps from your front door — with a cantaloupe martini at the revered **Olympia Tea Room** or an indulgent turtle sundae at the 125-year-old **St. Clair Annex**, then turn back toward the harbor to watch fishing boats glide across the horizon after a long day at sea.

Where to Eat



The Matunuck Oyster Bar's bivalve supply comes from a backyard underwater farm.

(Photo: Courtesy of Matunuck Oyster Bar)

Slurp fresh oysters harvested right from the backyard at **Matunuck Oyster Bar**. The “pond-to-plate” seafood restaurant is located along Potter Pond in South Kingstown — where owner Perry Raso and crew dutifully care for a seven-acre underwater farm. Try the oyster sampler (\$22), an assortment of 12 local oysters from the raw bar, or the bourbon oysters (\$12) — a six-sample

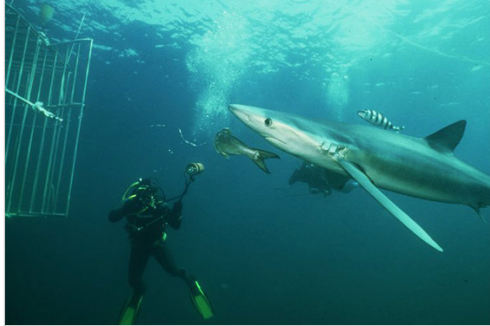
chipotle-sauce-infused creation. Choose the pistachio-crust Atlantic cod (\$20) for your entrée, a dish made with saffron basmati rice, toasted curry butter, and fresh greens from Raso's vegetable garden, located right outside his house. After you're finished, take one of the [restaurant's boat tours](#) out on the pond to discover where your meal came from.

Dine in elegance at **Seasons** at Ocean House. Reserve a table by the tall windows that overlook the expansive beach and Atlantic. For lunch, begin with the caprese salad (\$16), made with heirloom tomatoes and burrata. Next, order the half-sandwich-half-soup special (\$18) and pair the New England clam chowder (enhanced with applewood-smoked bacon) with the toasted Connecticut lobster roll. Share the Illanka ganache with a friend for dessert — a combination of tropical cremeux, blood-orange sorbet, and Valrhona single-origin chocolate — as you take in the seaside view.

Sip ice-cold craft beers and enjoy the state-renowned hand-cut fries at **The Charlestown Rathskeller** — an 80-year-old former speakeasy restored in 2014. Hidden in the woods of Charlestown, the bar features a rotating list of 12 drafts and more than 50 imported bottles, including everything from Hofbrau Drunkel (Germany) to Bell's Two-Hearted Ale (Kalamazoo, Michigan). The food is simple Central European fare: Get the beef Stroganoff (\$18; braised beef tips, fresh mushrooms, onions, and green peas, over egg noodles), but save room for the fries. Each potato is cut and cooked to order — they've been prepared in that style since the days when New Englanders (illegally) flocked here during Prohibition. Try them

plain (\$5) or with short-rib gravy (\$8.49). Some of the structures and murals from the 1930s remain, but the rules have changed such that you're free to enjoy a beverage and listen to live music in their biergarten all day.

What to Do



If you're not a certified diver — or just don't want to swim feet from a shark — there's a tour to view sharks on a see-through raft.

(Photo: Courtesy of Snappa Charters Shark Cage Diving)

Go face-to-face with 13-foot sharks at **Snappa Charters Shark Cage Diving** (\$255). Captain Charlie Donilon, who's been running tours since 1976, will take brave souls (who are certified divers) a few miles off the Rhode Island coast to dive into the water with mako, blue, and basking sharks. For those fearful of being underwater, Donilon offers "Playpens" — a see-through raft. The company also runs a unique shark-tagging

program (\$150): Participants can help catch a shark, tag it with a satellite tracking system, and follow its movements online. Along with helping to preserve the sharks' way of life and protect their environments, it's an exhilarating experience — particularly if you're lucky enough (definition of lucky may vary) to pick up a **20-foot great white shark**.

Maneuver along junglelike canals and explore Rhode Island's teeming nighttime wildlife scene with the **Kayak Centre's** diverse selection of guided tours. True adventure seekers should try the Great Swamp Tour (\$75), a day trip through the lush, vine-draped vegetation, beaver dams, and rock canyons that make up the 3,350-acre swamp — the largest in New England. White cedars, otters, mallards, and rare neon-yellow warblers also make their home there. At night, do the Moonlight Paddle (\$40), a trip along the Wickford waterfront and cove that's lit only by glow sticks and the moon. Keep your eyes open for seals and your head down, because, well, bats.

Space lovers can get an amazing glimpse of the Charlestown sky (**one of the darkest** along the Eastern Seaboard) at **Frosty Drew Observatory**. The viewing station is open every Friday night (for free) throughout the year, and on clear evenings the rings of Saturn, Jupiter's moons, Venus, and the rare zodiacal light have been observed. After stargazing outside, grab a seat in the Sky Theater to learn about what you've been looking at. Experts from the Observatory and NASA and astronomers from around the country hold summits and lectures on topics as varied as asteroid impacts and space missions and the **dark emptiness of black holes**.

Expert's Tips

*David Turano, owner of Charlestown's **Fantastic Umbrella Factory** (and leader of a local ska-*



The beautiful, three-mile East Beach in Charlestown is essentially undeveloped.

(Photo: LeanneMarie1215, via Flickr)

reggae band), talked to us about his must-see South Shore locales.

Corner Thai Cafe in Merchants Square on Beach Street in Westerly is my favorite restaurant. Great pad Thai and curries. And heads up, it's BYOB. Another great spot is **the Hilltop Cafe** on Industrial Drive in downtown Westerly. Great home-style southern-Italian food — you've got to try the

spezzi (chicken gizzards and hearts in hot pepper sauce).

East Beach in Watch Hill is by far the best beach in South County. Big beach, great sand, and no commercial outlets on or near the beach. Also, there's Napatree Point, a one-mile stretch of pristine beach with ocean on one side and Little Narragansett Bay on the other.

The best place to watch the sunset is definitely in Watch Hill Village on Bay Street. There's a pure western view of the sun dropping into the sea. A great night would be taking in the sunset and a **Watch Hill Sunset Concert** featuring top musicians from around the country.

Resources

For local news, restaurant reviews, events, and going-ons about town, check out **the Independent** (serves Narragansett, North Kingstown, and South Kingstown).

Scan top-ten lists for the best places to go in Rhode Island and get ideas for the best family-friendly eating or local sporting competitions at **the Rhode Less Traveled**.

Bottles & Cans & Clap Your Hands gives beer lovers key insights into the suds scene throughout the Ocean State. Where's the next fall beerfest? Where can I get a Narragansett Hefeweizen? What is a Narragansett Hefeweizen?