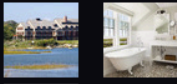


how to spend it

TRAVEL | THE RECONNOISSEUR

A New England hotel with old-school charm

The lavish renovation of a cosy, picturesque inn only adds to its rustic appeal



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CHRISTINA OHLY EVANS

I am no great fan of change, especially where classic hotels and favourite holiday spots are concerned. So when I learnt about the planned \$20m renovation of the beloved Weekapaug Inn in coastal Rhode Island, I groaned. A longtime spot for family reunions and beachy holidays, it was delightfully low-tech (make that no-tech), with an absence of televisions, phones, air-conditioning and just about any other modern amenity in its simple wood-panelled rooms.

What it always had in spades, however, was incredible charm: a shingle-style main building (perfectly weathered by time), large communal dining tables, croquet games on the expansive lawn and the possibility for endless walks along the picturesque Quonochontaug Pond. In short, it possessed an entirely casual vibe that I was sure would be destroyed – or at least altered – by big city developers or the like.

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I'm happy to report – after my recent stay – that the warm ambience of the Weekapaug Inn remains in tact and the entire guest experience has only been enhanced, and in subtle, sophisticated ways. The new inn has 27 guest rooms plus four two-bedroom Signature Suites, all with understated furnishings from the old property as well as newer pieces – sumptuous beds, state-of-the-art bath fixtures. The cosy New England feel thrives. Fenway Cottage is its new, fully-kitted-out fitness and wellness centre, complete with an outdoor 23m heated lap pool (virtually unheard of in this part of the world).

What hasn't changed one bit is the wonderful white-sand beach, while the views of neighbouring Block Island and Montauk on Long Island remain breathtaking. Sailing on the three-mile “pond” in one of the inn's restored Beetle Cats – locally made, gaff-rigged 4m wooden boats – is actively encouraged, as is borrowing bicycles to explore the area. A resident naturalist is also on hand to lead anglers to the best saltwater spots, while culinary classes and croquet clinics at its sister property, Ocean House in Watch Hill, are also on offer.

One of the most delightful changes at the inn relates to the food. Meals were always simple and straightforward – think big breakfasts, lunches of local lobster with drawn butter – but new farm-to-table menus offer imaginative interpretations of such New England classics as clam chowder and grilled tuna steak. I love the stone patio for al-fresco dining, but have my eye on the sprawling fireplace for a return trip in cooler months.

Here, at the Weekapaug Inn, I can truly disconnect, read good books, curl up and enjoy the views – it's simple. It is an old-school hotel in the very best sense, and the makeover is elegant, not tarty. The only thing I worry about now is that this well-kept secret (an hour and a half from Boston, two and half hours from New York City) will spread like wildfire.

Weekapaug Inn, 25 Spray Rock Road, Weekapaug, RI (+1401-322-0301;
www.weekapauginn.com); rooms from \$250 off-season, \$550 peak season.