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BEYOND THE BORDER »

OCEAN HOUSE AND WEEKAPAUG INN

Find classic New England coastal flair on the Rhode Island coast. BY NANCY DEPALMA

THE CALIFORNIA COAST MAY GET ALL THE PRESS, but those on the *right* coast know that nothing beats New England. Few places capture the natty spirit of New England better than Ocean House and its sister property, Weekapaug Inn. Only a short distance from each other, these two hotels with different styles are a bit like the Kate and Pippa Middleton of resorts; Ocean House is the regal and more traditional one, while Weekapaug Inn has a sporty flair. Perhaps the best part about these two is their willingness to share; stay at one property and you are entitled to the amenities of the other.



Weekapaug Inn shares a relaxed sophistication.

Resting on a gloriously green patch of lawn right on Quonochontaug Pond with the Atlantic Ocean in the distance, Weekapaug Inn looks like that shingled beach manse that your great aunt never left you in her will. “Weekapaug is a true retreat. We’re tucked away here ... even Rhode Islanders don’t know about it,” says Simon Dewar, innkeeper.

Originally opened in 1899, the inn was closed in 2007 for renovations and reopened in 2012. While a sense of history pervades,

everything about this property is sparkling. The 31 guest rooms all share a winsome beach cottage ambience. “We have old-fashioned service here,” adds Dewar. “It’s all very genuine.” Indeed, the top-notch service comes without a hint of pretense, though no detail is overlooked. Room keys are hitched to a wooden pear, which isn’t designed to simply evoke a smile; “they float,” says Dewar.

From big dinners and movies outside on the lawn to elegant meeting spaces that capture

Weekapaug’s brand of coastal chic, this inn is well-suited to events, meetings and retreats. A nearby private beach is the perfect spot for an alfresco clam bake, while the Restaurant also features private dining space (or full buyout) with upscale New England cuisine.

Nature-based activities are a hallmark of this property which just so happens to employ an in-house naturalist. Mark Bullinger, an amiable New Englander who was coaxed out of retirement to lead the inn’s programming,

PHOTOS: WEEKAPAUG INN; (OPPOSITE) OCEAN HOUSE



Stunning ocean views from the appropriately named Ocean House

arranges everything from guided bike rides and kayak/stand-up paddleboard races to boat rides and fishing excursions. Team-building activities are not only plentiful here, but they're also especially rewarding under Bullinger's watchful eye. Groups of 12-18 participants can participate in Bullinger's "Amazing Race"-style activity. Armed with assignment sheets and maps, participants traipse through the surrounding beaches and the resort's property. "I want people to know something about this area when they leave," he says.

Newport's mansions are a 50-minute drive, and Bullinger takes great care in assuring each group is entertained. It extends to those who may not be directly part of the meeting or event but have come along. "We have done beach glass jewelry-making sessions for spouses," he adds. Don't miss a boat ride, as there isn't a bird he can't spot or name. When the sun sets, Bullinger pulls out the inn's telescope to share the sparkling nighttime sky with guests.

While Weekapaug is the ideal base for retreat-style groups, Ocean House is the pull-out-all-the-stops charmer. The only Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond resort in Rhode Island, this elegant property tops a number of "Best" lists annually. Pull up to the resort and you'll instantly see why—it's like something out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel with its creamy white columns and butter-yellow façade. Ocean

House opened in 1868 and enjoyed a long history of welcoming guests before undergoing a rebuild-restoration from 2004-2010. There are 3,000 artifacts, including an original fireplace in the lobby," says Candice Traskos, director of communications. "We wanted it to feel like it's been here forever," she adds. From five-star service and elegant accommodations (49 guest rooms and 18 suites) to seemingly limitless amenities, Ocean House knows how to impress.

Don't mistake Ocean House's breezy elegance for an inability to get down to business, as this resort features a wide variety (10,000 square feet!) of both indoor and outdoor event space. Several event lawns are available but the jewel in the crown is certainly the private beach fronting the hotel. This glorious stretch of sandy beach is ideal for receptions and events. Walk down the path and you'll stumble upon Dune Cottage with its deck overlooking the beach. From cocktails to dinners, this spot is just perfect at sunset.

Need to schedule a meeting but want something with a view of what's to come? Book the Harbour Room, a wood-paneled boardroom suitable for up to 12 guests, which just so happens to overlook a putting green. Prefer mallets to golf clubs? The croquet lawn terrace overlooks the emerald-green professional lawn that practically begs you to don the whites. The Seaside Ballroom is a 2,700-square-foot space complete with ocean views.

Ocean House has six distinct dining outlets. Afternoon tea is a nod to yesteryear, and an Afternoon Tea experience can be arranged as a meeting break in a Signature Suite for a more private atmosphere. Small groups (up to six) are able to enjoy a Chef's Counter experience with an eight-course tasting menu and a front-row seat to the kitchen's action.

Planners need not scramble for ideas for post-meeting entertainment. Unwind in the lap of luxury at the 12,000-square-foot OH Spa. In addition to eight private treatment rooms, the ocean-view spa features a lap pool, fitness center, yoga studio and relaxation room. Catch a flick in the intimate Screening Room, where red seats and traditional movie snacks have a classic Hollywood feel.

From cheese and wine tasting to cooking demonstrations, The Center for Wine and Culinary Arts is packed with culinary-minded programming for groups. Paul McComiskey, director of culinary education, encourages the group to get in on the action. "We do competitions—like a flatbread competition with 65 people to get people working together." 🍷

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