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THE 2015 WINTER TRAVEL GUIDE

Even though it happens without fail, I never take it for granted, mostly because it still feels like some sort of mind trick. I almost never sense it's happening. Still, I pull into my driveway after a week away, or even just a couple days, and everything's changed. There's a renewed appreciation for the meticulously curated comfort of home, but there's also a keen awareness of a much larger world humming all around me. I don't know how something can seem both foreign and familiar, but it does. And it leaves me feeling grain-of-sand small, yet undeniably connected. This is the power of travel. A long weekend at a cozy inn a few hours away or a surreal circuit through a hyperactive city on the other side of the world, both hold the potential for transformation. In other words, there's no such thing as a small trip.

—SCOTT EDWARDS

DIAMOND HEAD STATE MONUMENT, HAWAII

I took this when I was on Oahu in January 2012 shooting an ad campaign. We were out in a yacht on Mamala Bay that day. It epitomizes the dramatic contrast between manmade developments and natural wonders that was Hawaii everywhere I looked. —JOSH DEHONNEY

Detachment, Served Two Ways

We're all struck by the need to unplug. But who wants to sacrifice the creature comforts for peace of mind? Isolation means something different entirely, though, at sister inns along the Rhode Island coastline. For starters: The food is locally foraged, farmed and fished, and not by you. **By Scott Edwards**



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The nor'easter that followed us up the coast finally enveloped us on our second day. A cold morning mist evolved into a sustained downpour in the afternoon. That night, just after we were seated in front of a black picture window that reflected the quiet activity of the sparsely populated dining room behind us, a bolt of lightning lit the horizon violet.

Planted on a manicured perch well above the Block Island Sound, every ensuing flash fueled a sense of invincibility. Though, even without the storm's outbursts, it was easy to appreciate the restaurant as a safe harbor. The warm beige walls, the dim pendant lighting, the methodical, synchronized servers, it all encouraged quiet contemplation.

Wind-swept rain drilled the window, but once the first course arrived, it felt like just another extension of the experience, albeit, an elaborate one, but the meal itself was nothing less: a deliciously edited plate of local clams, crab and sea urchin swimming in a puddle of cauliflower purée, Massachusetts yellowfin tuna paired with a cocoa nib-and-pistachio crumb (the last traces of which I wiped up with my finger) and room temperature-butter-soft, slow-roasted short ribs and a pan-roasted rib steak sourced from a nearby Massachusetts farm.

We were sent back to our room with a small bag of dark chocolate toffee and a couple short sleeves of macaroons, all made at the hands of pastry chef Adam Young. Maybe invincible isn't quite right, because there wasn't the least bit of edge to our moods by that point.

Alone again, I lit the gas fireplace and pulled the drapes back from the windows and the French doors that opened onto our own terrace. We wrapped ourselves in the thick complimentary robes, then in each other and, with our snacks within easy reach, we watched the storm thrash away until we dozed off.

The spectacle of Ocean House alone is enough to transport you to a far more decadent lifestyle than most of us lead. Even among the cedar-shingled mansions that line the narrow, winding streets of Watch Hill, an



exclusive coastal community in Rhode Island, and Taylor Swift's imposing vacation home that presides over all of them from atop a craggy bluff, Ocean House is the obvious centerpiece.

The original hotel dates back to 1868. Its current owner snatched it from a developer who planned to raze it, then spent the next couple years trying to salvage it. But it was too far gone. So the building was leveled and resurrected almost exactly as it was, to the extent that 5,000 pieces of the original, from the front desk to the elevator, were removed ahead of the demolition, restored and reinstalled. The giant lobby fireplace was rebuilt—*twice*—rock by rock, every one returned precisely to its former position. *Twice*. Construction started in 2006 and was expected to last two years and cost \$50 million. It lasted four and ran nearly five times that.

The Ocean House that stood in the end was less a replica than it was a modern expression of luxury cast in a historic mold. The attention to detail is simply too astute to allow it to pass as anything short of purely authentic. For one, the lobby, the long hallways and the rooms—as large as it is, version 2.0 contains only 49 of them, nearly a third of the original allotment—are all outfitted with the owner's seemingly bottomless art collection. That kind of consideration trickled down all the way to a pillow monogrammed with an "E" that was discreetly placed on our bed. Seriously.

Basically, aside from meals at the hotel restaurant, Seasons, nothing was bugging us from our suite, which felt as cozy and intimate as a hug from mom.

Our three-day stay in Rhode Island began about seven miles east, where the Weekapaug Inn is tucked between Quonochontaug Pond (technically, a lagoon) and almost two miles of unspoiled beach in Westerly—more large, early-20th century, cedar-shingled homes, but here there's more of a family vibe than in Watch Hill. The summertime crowds are mostly contained by the public beach between the two towns. But in late October, several undaunted fisherman were the only signs of life beyond the inn.

They're sister hotels, but Ocean House and The Weekapaug Inn were designed from their inception through their respective rebirths—the



THE OCEAN HOUSE LOBBY (TOP), INCLUDING THE FIREPLACE, EXACTLY AS IT WAS, AND A SUITE (ABOVE) RIFE WITH PERSONAL TOUCHES. OPENING PAGE: THE OCEAN HOUSE PORCH (TOP), WITH VIEWS OF THE SOUND—AND TAYLOR SWIFT'S VACATION HOME. AND, MORE SERENE VIEWS FROM INSIDE.



OCEAN HOUSE (ABOVE) AND THE WEEKAPAG INN (BELOW). GOOD LUCK GUESSING WHICH ONE'S BEEN AROUND THE LONGEST. AND, A SPARE BUT TRANQUIL SUITE (BOTTOM) AT THE WEEKAPAG. WHY WOULD YOU WANT A FLATSCREEN WITH A VIEW LIKE THAT?



latter, which was built in 1899, reopened in October 2012 after a stripped-to-the-studs renovation—to cater to distinctly different experiences. Every nook of Ocean House speaks to the spoils of opulence. The inn, though plush by today's standard, remains somewhat true to its spartan history, which is filled with people taking up residence there for weeks, even months at a time, to disconnect. Most rooms don't have a TV. (Ours did.) And none have a phone. They're equipped instead with intercoms that link to the front desk.

But, that front desk is prepared to indulge every whim (within reason). Why, then, bother with the outside world? Suspicious at first, we needed to settle in some to appreciate the instant calm that comes with such utter dependence. When we got to Westerly, the nor'easter was still somewhere over New York, so we dropped our bags and took advantage of what was likely to be the last of the sun.

Mark Bullinger, the resident naturalist (and, unofficially, historian and tour guide), led us around the animated pond (lagoon) aboard the inn's electric wooden boat, *The Quonnie Queen*. Fifty yards out from the dock, a guy stood waist-deep on a sandbar clamming. Further out, among an outcropping lousy with blue herons, we saw a seal bobbing in the water, the first for either of us outside of a zoo. But the excitement soon ebbed, and then I was nudged toward sleep by an unseasonably warm sun, the subtle undulation of a tranquil pond and the soothing rhythm of Mark's easy narration. An hour removed from a four-hour drive (including a stop for lunch), I was asleep among three strangers and my wife.

From then on, we wanted for nothing. So attentive were our caretakers that when I mentioned to the front-desk guy, as he deposited us in our suite, that it was our anniversary, everyone we came into contact with over the next three days wished us a happy anniversary. Our waitress at dinner that night even toasted us with champagne.

The only potential pitfall from feeling like everything (within reason) is at your disposal, as I see it, is overindulging. Which we did very enthusiastically at dinner that first night. (And, really, if I'm being honest, at every meal we ate over those three days.) But we have no regrets. Every bite, right down to the pumpkin spice truffles we were handed as a parting snack, was savored. And, in our defense, the course that sent us over the top was one sent out by the chef under her own generosity: scratch-made tortelloni stuffed with white corn polenta, charred Anaheim chili, chèvre and tiny Rhode Island mushrooms and squid ink-and-saffron tagliatelle. We probably shouldn't have devoured them completely, in hindsight. The waitress's expression said as much.

I passed on the chance to take this trip when I was invited last winter. Why would I want to

TOP: COURTESY OF OCEAN HOUSE; MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: COURTESY OF THE WEEKAPAG INN



RESIDENT NATURALIST (AND KNOW-IT-ALL) MARK BULLINGER (RIGHT). COMPLIMENTS OF THE WEEKAPAUG KITCHEN: (TOP) BRAISED RABBIT WITH HOUSEMADE GNOCCHI AND (ABOVE) BEEF DAUBE WITH BLUE CHEESE YORKSHIRE PUDDING.

go north in the winter? According to that logic, October didn't make any more sense. But it felt perfectly timed. Summer, naturally, and Christmas week are the peaks of the season, but even then, Mark said, Westerly and Watch Hill rarely feel crowded. We were all but on our own, which only seemed to heighten our presence, both in our eyes and those of the countless others who shadowed, but never intruded on, our every move.

The Weekapaug Inn, 888-813-7862, weekapauginn.com; **Ocean House**, 888-552-2588, oceanhouseri.com



PACK SMARTER

Start with a list. About a week out, I create one on my phone so that I can amend it as I think of what I'll need.

Avoid temptation. It's easy to stare into your closet and imagine wearing everything at some point. It's less easy to lug it all through the airport. Follow my formula for streamlining: three bottoms (pants, shorts, skirts), nine tops, a sweater or a light jacket, several pairs of underwear and socks, two pairs of PJs, two gym outfits and two pairs of shoes, including sneakers. That'll carry you through a week. And if you have access to a washer and dryer, pack half of that.

Remember the return trip. Going there's the easy part. Everything's clean and organized. Managing dirty laundry along the way and coming home is the real chore. Pack a garbage bag. It'll serve as your hamper on the go.

Seriously, don't forget the return trip. Planning on doing a lot of shopping? Bring an extra carry-on and pack it with stuff you won't be bringing back, like snacks, magazines and toiletries. —LAURIE PALAU

Laurie Palau is the owner of the New Hope-based simply B organized (simplyborganized.com), a home and life organization service.