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Best of New England

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THE SEASHORE**

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FROM A MASTER GRILLER**

**THE LAID-BACK JOYS
OF A MAINE CABIN**

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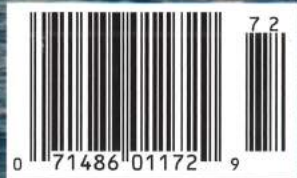
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RHODE ISLAND

ATTRACTIONS

ART MUSEUM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION

As architecturally splendid as its Newport neighbors, Vernon Court isn't a frozen-in-time mansion attraction. It's a living, evolving estate that reflects the passions of owners Laurence and Judy Goffman Cutler. Chief among those passions is exhibiting their collection—the largest of its kind in the world—of masterpieces by beloved American illustrators such as Norman Rockwell and Maxfield Parrish. Here, these remarkably relatable commercial images get their due as both art and a chronicle of American culture. The museum has also received accolades, though, for showcasing the creative works of Mother Nature: namely, the champion trees within its Frederick Law Olmsted Park and Arboretum. 492 Bellevue Ave., Newport. 401-851-8949; americanillustration.org

BOOKSTORE SAVOY BOOKSHOP & CAFÉ

A landmark brick building, a bookstore owner, a billionaire: They're the pivotal characters in the 2016 origin story of this Westerly haven for bibliophiles. After the Royce Family Foundation funded an exquisite renovation of the decades-closed Savoy Hotel, Annie Philbrick, owner of Bank Square Books in Mystic, Connecticut, brought this literary hub to life. The only way to coax children out of their own über-adorable reading cabin downstairs is to send them searching for fairy worlds hidden behind teeny doors upstairs. Settle into a leather armchair with a hot drink and baked treat, and your inner child may beg you to stay, too. 10 Canal St., Westerly. 401-213-3901; savoybookshopcafe.com

CITY TOUR PROVIDENCE RIVER BOAT COMPANY

It's a swamp-land-to-shining-city story, and for more than 25 years captain Tom McGinn and his crew have told Providence's tale on pontoon boat tours. A relaxing, affordable, and efficient way to experience the city, these 45-minute daytime and sunset excursions offer plentiful photo ops as you glide up and down the Providence River. "There's no one alive who's ever seen the river cleaner than it is now," says McGinn, who'll explain how the river's aquatic life has rebounded. Book a month in advance for WaterFire nights, when these open-air boats are the best seats in the house. 575 S. Water St., Providence. 401-580-2628; providenceriverboat.com

GENERAL STORE HACK AND LIVELY GENERAL STORE

Don't let the horse silhouette emblazoned on the white clapboard barn fool you. Yes, this Hope Valley landmark was a livery stable from 1888 until 1912, but for the past 40 years its floorboards have been trod by savvy shoppers. The sheer variety of colorful wares impresses: Gifts for all ages and interests cram every nook and even dangle from the ceiling, so don't forget to glance up—that is, if you can pry your eyes away from the rows of glass jars filled with more than 100 kinds of old-school candies. 1006 Main St., Hope Valley. 401-539-7033; hackandlivelygeneralstore.com

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE HEARTHSIDE HOUSE MUSEUM AND HANNAWAY BLACKSMITH SHOP

The past is kept playfully, passionately alive in Lincoln at "the house that love built," a stately fieldstone mansion where volunteers don period garb for themed events and tours. Down the street, observe artisans at work inside the restored blacksmith shop on weekends, or even preregister for a two-hour class. You'll forge a hook to start, but by the time you begin a second project of your choice, you may find you're hooked on this traditional art. 677 Great Road, Lincoln. 401-726-0597; hearthsidehouse.org

NATURE EXPERIENCE CLAY HEAD PRESERVE

This 190-acre Nature Conservancy preserve at the northeast tip of Block Island feels like the end of the world, with landscapes as wildly majestic as any you'll find on the New England coast. Hike along the near-deserted beach or atop soaring clay bluffs, then wander the serpentine network of inland-reaching spur trails known as the Maze. Come autumn, the dense, undisturbed vegetation provides respite for migrating songbirds. Corn Neck Road, Block Island. 401-331-7110; nature.org

PADDLING OUTFITTER THE KAYAK CENTRE OF RHODE ISLAND

Tentative first-timer? Pro paddler? The enthusiastic team at this harborside outfitter—open year-round in the heart of timeless Wickford Village—wants everyone to explore the one third of Rhode Island that is liquid regardless of where they fall on the water sports spectrum. In addition to sales and rentals, there's private or group kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding instruction for all levels, plus expert-led tours as adventurous as navigating coastal waters or as serene as casting gentle ripples on a pond. 9 Phillips St., Wickford. 401-295-4400; kayakcentre.com

LODGING

ADVENTURE LODGING MAXWELL MAYS COTTAGE

"When I am holding a brush, I own the world. Little by little, I find I can invite you in too," wrote Providence-born painter Maxwell Mays in an artist's statement. Eight years after his death, you're invited to leap into Mays's favorite landscape à la Mary Poppins. Mays gifted his cherished 300-acre Coventry farm to the Rhode Island Audubon Society, which has made the property's two-bedroom fieldstone guest cottage available to rent. From your base in the midst of what is now the Maxwell Mays Wildlife Refuge, you can bird-watch, hike, paddle Carr's Pond in provided canoes, sip coffee on the screened porch, and relish the solitude. 2082 Victory Hwy., Coventry. 401-949-5454; asri.org/services

BUDGET B&B THE HENRY COLLINS INN

In a Play-Doh-blue 19th-century Italianate building that was once a print shop, you'll find five spacious rooms that are remarkably wallet-friendly by Newport standards. Sure, the frilly pillows, busy wallpaper, and tiny TVs scream "Grandma's house." But when guests pause to tap out their thoughts on the antique Olivetti typewriter in the lobby, they rave about home-baked breakfast pies and this pet-friendly inn's out-of-the-way yet convenient location. 12 Collins St., Newport. 401-848-0708; henrycollinsinn.com

CITY B&B CHRISTOPHER DODGE HOUSE

Built in 1858, this Providence mansion strikes the right balance for guests who appreciate the individuality of a bed-and-breakfast yet crave privacy. Its elegant architectural details are complemented by handcrafted reproduction furnishings; its sun-splashed dining room is an inviting place to linger over locally roasted Borealis coffee and cooked-to-order selections such as waffles topped with fresh fruit. Upgrade to a "prime" room for more space, a gas fireplace, and midnight-snacking convenience: These bedchambers share a floor with the common room, which is stocked round the clock with home-baked pastries. 11 W. Park St., Providence. 401-351-6111; providence-hotel.com

FAMILY LODGING NEWPORT BEACH HOTEL & SUITES

When you're bringing a posse of little ones to the beach, you want a spacious room that's

CHOCOLATE SWEENOR'S CHOCOLATES

The rich, sweet aroma hits you as soon as you walk in the door, as intoxicating as the visual smorgasbord of all that chocolate: truffles, turtles, filled chocolates, chocolate sea salt caramels, white bark, dark chocolate-covered cranberries, and more. Once you've recovered your equilibrium (and made your own selections), you can do a little gift-shopping among Rhode Island-themed novelties like chocolate lobsters and quahogs, beautifully presented in bags or boxes. All chocolate here is made by hand, with no preservatives. 43 Hillside Road, Cranston, 401-942-2720; 21 Charles St., Wakefield, 401-783-4433; sweenorchocolates.com

CLAM SHACK EVELYN'S DRIVE-IN

On a summer day, taking a seat by the water for perfectly seasoned and fried clam cakes feels like a little bit of heaven. Nowhere is this truer than at Evelyn's, a postcard New England clam shack that sits on Nanaquaket Pond in Tiverton. Clam strips and clam cakes are the menu's A-listers, but don't overlook the other delicious seafood options (try the lobster chow mein). Classic ice cream shakes round out the experience. 2335 Main Road, Tiverton, 401-624-3100; evelynsdrivein.com

FARM-TO-TABLE DINING PERSIMMON

A six-time James Beard Award nominee for best chef in the Northeast, Champe Speidel changes his menu based on what's at the farms. A meal might include New England lamb rillettes, beignets made with local greens, and corn bisque, or a spectacular bowl of homemade pasta with sweet peas and lobster. And the desserts, which have included native strawberries with yogurt and vanilla panna cotta, are not to be missed. 99 Hope St., Providence, 401-432-7422; persimmonri.com

ICE CREAM THE SWEET SPOT

It's an unbeatable combination: creamy ice cream with bright flavors and an equally divine view from a patio with picnic tables right on the water. At this Narragansett scoop shop, you can watch the fishing boats and the Block Island ferry cruise by as you dig into any of the tart, fresh berry flavors or perhaps the chocolate fudge brownie, made with generous hunks of the star ingredient. Feeling adventurous? Order the Dirty Grasshopper, made with coffee, mint, and Oreos. As a bonus, this real-deal ice cream parlor is also a breakfast and pastry shop (try the ice cream-filled cannoli). 256 Great Island Road, Narragansett, 401-782-1646

LOBSTER ROLL WEEKAPAUG INN

The setting—on a rolling lawn alongside Quonochontaug Pond in Westerly—only enhances what is already a first-class lobster roll-eating experience. As you listen to the sounds of the nearby ocean and watch the purple martins flit in and out of their birdhouse, you dive into lobster salad made with Meyer lemon crème fraîche and served on a toasted roll with butter lettuce. Even better, each comes topped with a heap of onion strings. 25 Spray Rock Road, Westerly, 401-322-0301; weekapauginn.com/dining/lawn

PIZZA NAPOLITANO'S BROOKLYN PIZZA

Everything about Napolitano's is delightful, from its outgoing owner-chef, Christie Flanagan, a New York sports fan in enemy territory, to its garlic knots, excellent fish and chips, and—most of all—delicious pizza. The thin homemade crust is tender-crispy and cooked to a delectable golden color. The sauce is bright and nonacidic; the mozzarella, flawlessly creamy. The pizza Margherita, topped with sweet tomatoes and julienned basil leaves, never disappoints. 100 East St., Cranston, 401-383-7722; 380 Atwells Ave., Providence, 401-273-2400; napolitanosbrooklynpizza.com