

The Boston Globe

NEW ENGLAND TRAVEL

3 Rhode Island road trips to consider when you want to get out safely but start small

Exploring close-to-home destinations from the comfort — and safety — of your own vehicle is looking like a mighty fine option right now. In fact, industry travel experts are predicting a resurgence of the American road trip, as travelers, eager to get out after the shelter-in-place pandemic, hit the road.

We're thinking Rhode Island, the smallest state in the country, is perfect for a Sunday drive (or any day of the week). It measures a mere 37 miles east to west; if you hopped on Interstate 95, you could drive the 48 miles north to south in less than an hour. But why rush? It's better to shunpike on one of these lovely road trips, offering plenty of eye candy and interesting sites along the way. You can stop, or stay in your car; either way, enjoy the ride! (Note: At the time of this writing Rhode Island had announced a phased in reopening of parks, beaches, restaurants, and other sites. Be sure to confirm details in advance, as things change frequently.)



South county sojourn

Shoreline views, seaside towns, parks, preserves, and historic sites are highlights of this 33-mile or so drive, showing off the best of pretty South County. (Note: This ride is best when the state parks and beaches reopen, expected later this month.) Start in Wickford Village in North Kingstown, the real-life inspiration for the village of Eastwick in John Updike's 1984 novel, "The Witches of Eastwick," and the corresponding movie. North Kingstown is also home to the Gilbert Stuart Museum, set on 23 acres, with the artist's 1750 home, gardens, and trails (www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org). Follow Route 1A south toward Narragansett, considering stops at pristine and protected Moonstone Beach or East Matunuck State Beach, with swimming and picnic areas.

In Narragansett, take a detour on Ocean Drive, past beautiful mansions, down to the historic 1816 Point Judith Lighthouse, where you'll have sweeping Atlantic Ocean views. Work your way back to Route 1, heading south to Charlestown, with a string of beaches, including woodsy Burlingame State Park and Campground, with a freshwater pond and canoe rentals, the Charlestown Breachway, located on Block Island Sound, and East Beach, with limited parking but a nice, quiet spot for a beach walk.

Reconnect with Route 1A and take a short jog to Weekapaug, where you'll have views of saltmarshes leading to open ocean. Consider stopping at the Weekapaug Inn, where you can enjoy a beverage outdoors on the expansive lawn overlooking the water (www.weekapauginn.com).

Continue on Route 1A into the small town of Watch Hill, named when soldiers perched here to watch for British raiders during the Revolution. The summer resort town is filled with solid old Victorian homes and stately mansions (Taylor Swift has a summer home here); its small downtown has a cluster of shops and restaurants, and the Flying Horse Carousel, the oldest continuously operating merry-go-round carousel in the country, with hand-carved, hand-painted horses. We'd recommend a final stop at the sprawling Ocean House resort, where you can take a DIY art tour; the hotel displays more than 250 original works. Or simply grab drinks on the porch overlooking the ocean (www.oceanhouseri.com).