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A Luxury Weekend in Newport, Rhode Island

Posted By Jan Ross on Jun 28, 2015 | 0 comments

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When my husband and I recently spent a summer weekend in the charming town of Newport, Rhode

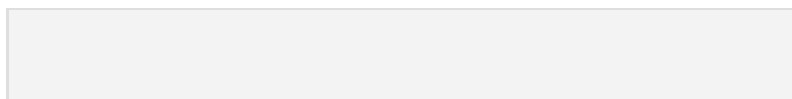
Island, our first view of this lovely and historic locale came through a dense, wet fog. As we drove over the bridge onto the island where Newport is located, we could catch glimpses of the harbor, the cobblestone streets, the little shops and the sprawling mansions.



The foggy Newport Harbor

Technically, Newport is located on Aquidneck Island and is one of the most famous New England resort areas. In fact, it's been a favorite resort area for a long time, beginning during the "Gilded Age" in the mid-nineteenth century, when wealthy families wanting to escape the summer heat began to build summer "cottages" on Bellevue Avenue near the coastline. The misnomer of "cottages" for these absurdly huge mansions was ridiculous. The wealthy families tried to outdo each other in building the most opulent homes you can possibly imagine, and many of these are now open for tours, which we planned for the next day of our visit.

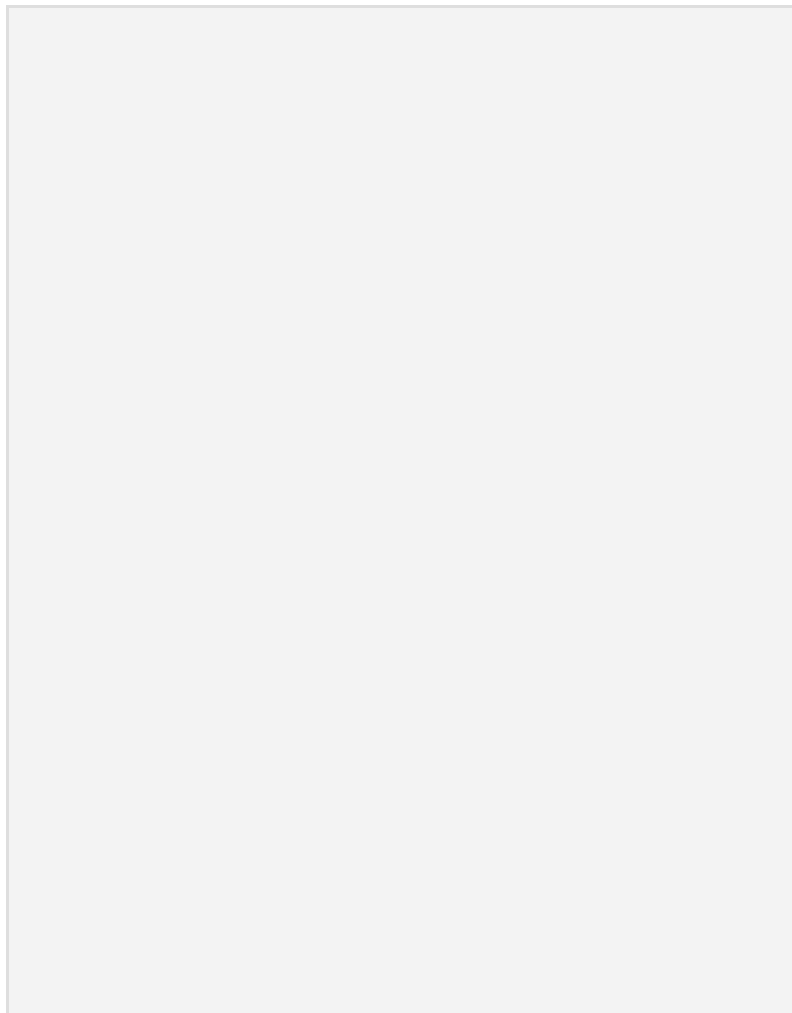
We were distracted from the unpleasant weather as we pulled into the driveway leading to the front entrance of the beautiful red brick façade of the [Vanderbilt Grace Hotel](#) because we were way too impressed by this gorgeous, luxurious boutique hotel to worry about a little fog.





The Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

This attractive place is actually a vintage Newport mansion originally built by Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, of the famous Vanderbilt family, and is one of the few original private homes from the 1900s which operates as a luxury hotel. We were sufficiently impressed by this distinctive lineage as we walked in to the beautiful lobby which was lushly furnished and decorated.





Front doors to the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel



Foyer of the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

After checking in, we headed up to our room, full expecting a very nice hotel room, but we found a sumptuous suite with a separate bedroom area,

a comfy living room and a wonderfully handy little kitchenette. Not only was our suite supremely impressive, they had one touch that we have never seen at any other hotel – a complete, tiny aromatherapy station. How unique and lovely!

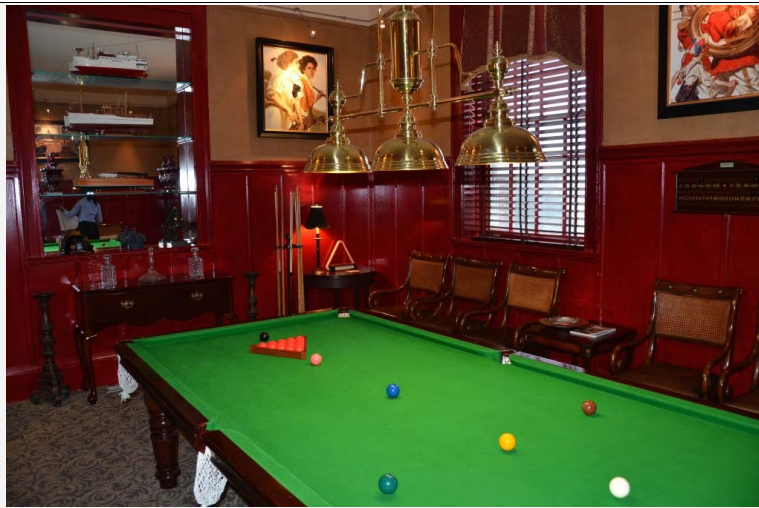


Suite at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

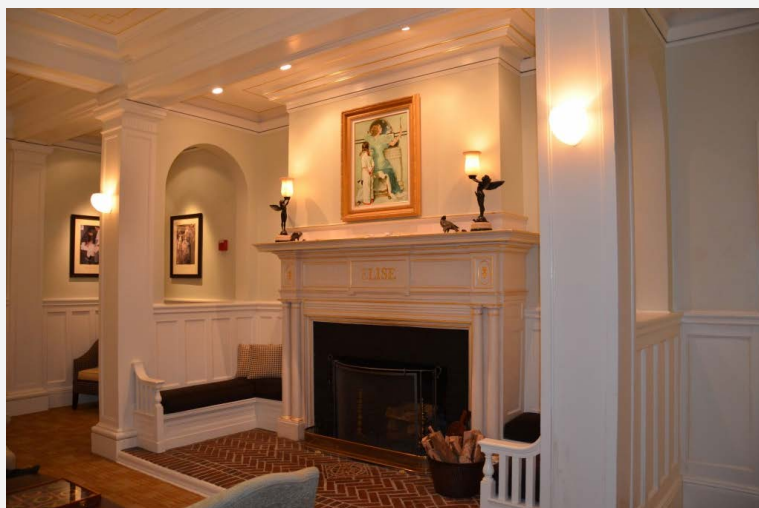


Aromatherapy at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

The Vanderbilt Grace has 33 rooms and luxury suites as well a spa, fitness center, billiards room and an indoor and outdoor pool. We dropped off our belongings, ooh and aahed over our suite for a while, then took a tour of the hotel. There were dozens of fireplaces and cozy little nooks for reading and relaxing.

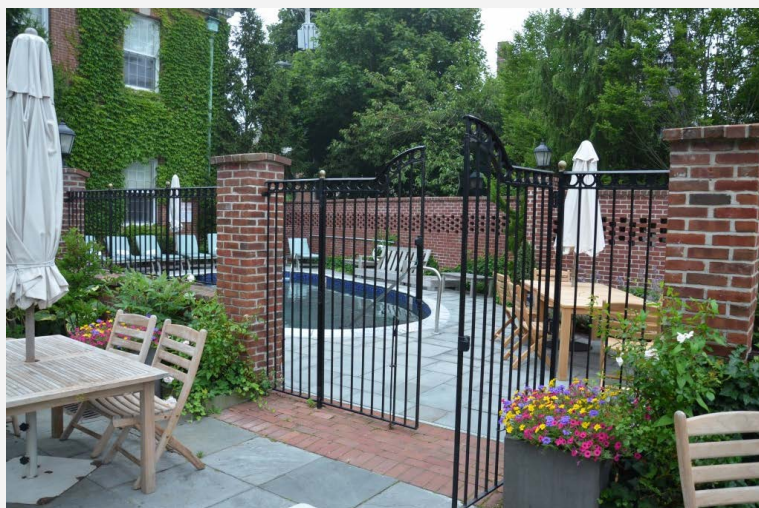


The Billiards Room at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel



Cozy fireplace nook at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

The outdoor pool and patio area would be much more welcoming on a warm and sunny day, but we could still appreciate the charm.



The outdoor pool at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

We wanted to take in the view of town from the upstairs deck, but the weather precluded that so we just took a stroll down through town to the very foggy harbor. We weren't terribly hungry when dinner time rolled around, so decided to have a light dinner at [The Conservatory](#).

This is a cozy yet casual venue on a glassed-in porch which overlooks the grounds and Newport's historic Trinity church. If we had stayed longer, we would have checked out Muse, the more formal restaurant, where the renowned New England chef, Jonathan Cartwright, uses the best local ingredients in a menu which changes throughout the seasons. But we had a delicious dinner at The Conservatory. My lobster pasta dish was perfect for a light dinner and was hot and scrumptious.



Entrance to The Conservatory at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel



The Conservatory at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel



Delicious lobster pasta at The Conservatory at the Vanderbilt Grace Hotel

We had a busy, full day planned the next day and, luckily, it dawned beautiful, bright and sunny. We were able to get a unique view of the city from the water by booking a cruise with [Classic Cruises of Newport](#) on the Rum Runner II, a high-speed motor yacht which is a classic speedboat that had actually been used for smuggling years ago. The narrated cruise is a great way to see some of the mansions along the coast and the watercraft that fills the harbor, from huge yachts to small sailboats. We did spend a little time wandering around the dock area trying to find the right place to board the [Rum Runner II](#) so allow some time before

your cruise as there are several docks and it can be a challenge finding the right one.



Rum Runner II

Classic Cruises offers a variety of tours throughout the summer on both sailing and power boats; these include sunset harbor cruises and cruise tours which offer views of Newport Harbor and Narragansett Bay.

We had chosen the cruise on the Rum Runner II which would “evoke the intrigue and luxury of her smuggling days along the waterfront” because that sounded perfect! We clambered aboard the comfortable speedboat and sat back, ready to enjoy our cruise.

The boat was built in 1929 during the height of Prohibition when smuggling illegal liquor into harbors was a great, if risky way, to make money. Built for two

New Jersey mobsters to evade the Coast Guard, she has settled into the life of a quiet tour boat in Newport and we were thrilled to be enjoying the sights from her deck. As we eased away from the dock, we were immediately impressed with the gorgeous boats that filled the harbor.



Sailing ship in Newport Harbor

One of the best things about our tour was our tour guide, a young woman who had been raised in Newport and shared all the fascinating history of the area. It didn't take long to realize that this was a great introduction to the famous Newport mansions. It's hard to imagine a lifestyle in these behemoth houses!



Newport mansion overlooking the harbor



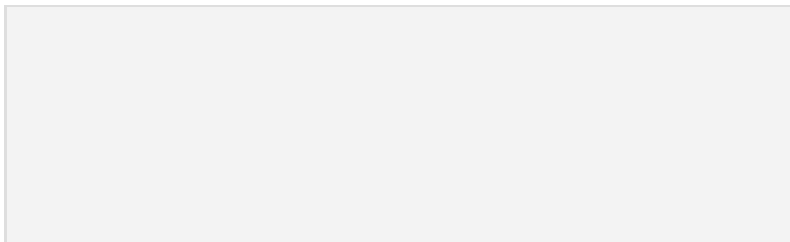
Another beautiful Newport mansion

Most of the mansions have been preserved and are open for tours, but a few have gone through renovations and been re-purposed; some have been transformed into condos.



Condos on Newport Harbor

We headed out of the tranquil harbor into Narragansett Bay past more scenic sights. On the other side of the bay, we cruised by Fort Adams State Park, a large coastal fortification that was active from 1841 through the first half of the 20th century.





Small Newport lighthouse



Island home and the Newport bridge

Finally, it was time to head back to the dock where we disembarked to enjoy the Newport mansions from the

land side.

After our cruise, it was time for lunch and we were excited to try our first lobster rolls. We loved them so much that we ordered them everywhere we went for the rest of our New England trip. [Benjamin's Restaurant and Raw Bar](#) was the perfect place for our first foray into the world of lobster rolls. Located near the harbor, the restaurant has the freshest seafood imaginable and a nice view of the city and the harbor.



The famous lobster roll

For those of you who don't know about lobster rolls, they are a traditional New England delicacy made of fresh lobster cooked in butter, then mixed with mayonnaise and (sometimes) diced celery or scallions and served on buttered and toasted rolls. They are scrumptious, addicting and you should have one immediately when you are in the area.

In the afternoon, we hopped on one of the comfortable trolleys from Viking Tours. They leave every half hour or so from the Visitors Center – you can check the schedule online – and there are several different tour packages available, many of which include tours of the Newport mansions. Plan to spend a little time in the Visitors Center during your visit, as you can pick up pamphlets, maps and ask for help and

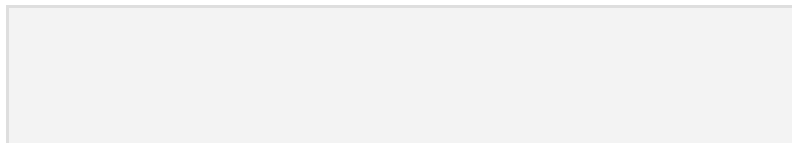
guidance on what to see and do in the area.

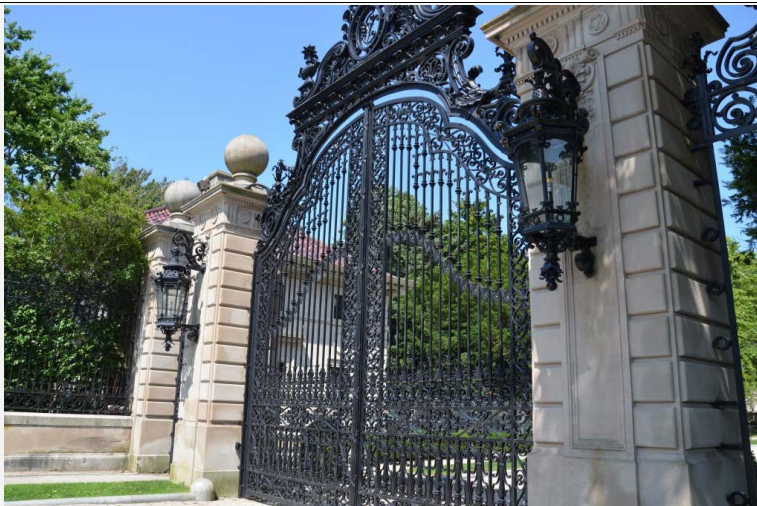
We were on the trolley with several other tourists and enjoyed our excellent narrated tour of the area. Since we were working with Discover Newport on a press trip of the area, one of their representatives kindly took us around on a drive along Ocean Drive, a scenic byway often referred to as “The Ten Mile Drive” or just “The Drive” by locals. Winding along beside the ocean, it’s a gorgeous, scenic drive which is completely different from downtown Newport and demonstrates that there is a lot to see on this island.



Shoreline beside Ocean Drive

After our lovely and scenic drive, our press representative dropped us off for a tour at one of the most famous of the mansions in Newport, [The Breakers](#). This grandest and most well known of all the summer “cottages” in Newport was built by Cornelius Vanderbilt II in 1893. He commissioned renowned architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style villa inspired by palaces in Italy. The Breakers was purchased in 1972 by the Preservation Society of Newport and is now designated a National Historic Landmark.



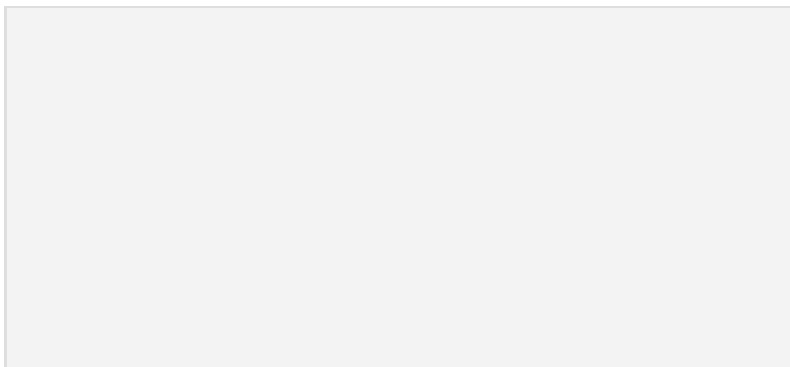


Gates to The Breakers

One of our favorite ways to take a tour is with individual audio, and The Breakers has their tours down to a science, with specific directions on where to turn, to look, and which buttons to push on the controls for the headphone. It's an easy and fun way to visit this amazing mansion, though it's hard to imagine a single family living here!



The Breakers





The back lawn at The Breakers

After The Breakers tour, we walked along the [Cliff Walk](#) which runs all along the coast behind the mansions for a little over three miles, most of which is an easy walk along a sidewalk with amazing views of the coastline and the back of many of the famous mansions.



Gate to the Cliff Walk



The Cliff Walk

The next morning, when we left the Vanderbilt Grace, the staff was horrified when they realized that we hadn't known about the Continental Breakfast that was offered and tried to bring us some fresh croissants for the road. When we politely refused, they insisted on bringing us fresh coffee to go, and when I indicated I might like some water, they rushed to provide me with ice water to take along. This was the final reminder of the personalized service at this wonderful hotel.

We were sad to leave Newport behind, but since we didn't get to experience nearly everything in this elegant and remarkable town, we will definitely return for another visit.



Written by: [Jan Ross](#) on June 28, 2015.
Last revised by: [luxebear](#), our reviewer, on April 30, 2015.

Author: [Jan Ross](#)

Jan Ross has been traveling the world



since she was an infant as her father was a career Marine Corps officer. She became a full-time travel writer in 2009 and travels the world with her photographer husband, writing and photographing their experiences for a variety of venues, both print and online. They have over 200 articles published and are always working on more. They find cruising a great way to see the world and take at least 2-3 cruises a year to a variety of locations. When they are not traveling, they spend time at home with their family in Kentucky.

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JULY 2015 Digital Edition