



From Providence to Newport... Big Adventures Await in the Small State of Rhode Island

story *Laurie Wallace-Lynch*
photography *supplied*

The Venetian gondola glides effortlessly through the rippled waters as the young, handsome gondolier Rosario wields the giant oar with skilled precision, his taut muscles evident beneath his traditional black and white t-shirt. He steers toward the shelter of an arched Venetian bridge, pauses briefly, and then suddenly breaks into song. Rosario sings an age-old Italian love song, his strong, clear words echoing off the walls of this iconic bridge and the historic buildings beyond. No, it's not Venice—this is Providence, Rhode Island.

Operated by *La Gondola*, the company owns three authentic Venetian gondolas, which transport about 1,500 visitors and locals a year on a romantic journey. Providence is known as 'The Creative Capital of Rhode Island' and certainly it took some creative thinking to import two gondolas from Venice and having another made, using plans which are over 165-years old. But the tagline stems from the history of Providence, as well as from the city's vibrant arts community and culinary scene, thanks to the abundance of students who come to study at several renowned schools: *The Rhode Island School of Design*, *Johnson & Wales University* and *Brown University*, an Ivy League college founded in 1764.

"The Creative Capital goes back in history to that sense of independence and individuality and an appreciation of the arts," explains Kristen Adamo, vice president of marketing for the Providence/Warwick Visitors and Convention Bureau. "Providence was founded in 1636 when preacher Roger Williams was forced to flee from Massachusetts or face

religious persecution and founded Providence as a place where people could have religious freedom and independence."

Certainly there is a sense of freedom as young creative minds meet and mingle at sidewalk cafés set against a backdrop of buildings that are older than their great grandparents.

Artists perch on fold-up stools on street corners and sketch historic buildings like the 18th century *John Brown House Museum*, or sit on the floors of the *Rhode Island School of Design Museum*, inspired by the works of masters like Van Gogh.

In fact, one aspiring young artist created a work of art called *WaterFire* which now has become Providence's signature event, attracting thousands of people to the shores of

the three rivers which intersect the downtown core.

"WaterFire started out as an art project on New Year's Eve several years ago when Burnaby Evans, a *Brown* graduate, designed a sculpture that could hold fire, placed the sculpture in the middle of the river and then lit a bonfire on a bright winter's night," explains Kristen. "Today about 100 bonfires are set ablaze along the three rivers, lit by an army of volunteers in row boats. *WaterFire* happens on Saturday evenings as well as other designated days and is a multi-sensory art installation which combines art with music, food and festivities."

On the subject of food, Providence is a dream destination for foodies.

"The Providence food scene is thriving, strongly influenced by the students and alumni

PROVIDENCE RHODE



E ★ NEWPORT ISLAND



from Johnson & Wales University Culinary School who work at or own restaurants here,” says Kristin.

“Providence has a population of 170,000 people with compact areas with great restaurants and shopping.”

Chic restaurants mesh with artsy shops and upscale boutiques along Thayer and Wickenden Streets, which were within walking distance from our hotel, the beautiful Wyndham Garden Providence Hotel overlooking Narragansett Bay and India Point Park. We made daily visits to *The Coffee Exchange* where locals surf the net while sipping steaming hot cups of freshly brewed coffee. Just down the street is the quaint *Duck and Bunny* restaurant, famous for their crepes. We tried the nachos (which are actually crepes), chicken crepes with cranberry and the pizza—yup, it’s a crepe with pizza toppings! We liked the crepes so much we went back a second time and ordered the same meal again.

“A visit to Little Italy for a slice of homemade pizza is a must, as are the food tours offered by local chefs,” comments Kristen. Also on her list of top five things to do and see in Providence: a walking tour of the historic downtown to discover the abundance of well preserved historic buildings including the First Baptist Church in America, the “Mile of History” on Benefit Street on the East Side, to Federal Hill and a tour of the Rhode Island ➤

Clockwise from top left:
Newport coastline Cliff Walk
incl. *The Breakers*, owned by
the Vanderbilts. photo
Onne van der Wal

Providence skyline
photo Marianne G Lee

**Newport, harbour and
downtown waterfront with
Bannister’s Wharf and the spire
of the Trinity Church.**
photo Onne van der Wal

Gondola in Providence
photo Marianne G Lee





From top: 1962 America's Cup winner *Weatherly*. This 12m yacht can be chartered. Visit americascupcharters.com Photo by Onne van der Wal

Lobster rolls served at the Newport Marriott skiff bar Photo Discover Newport

Shopping at Bowen's wharf, Newport Photo by Erin McGinn

historic mansions which have been carefully preserved by the Preservation Society of Newport County, including *The Breakers* (a 70-room summer getaway for the Vanderbilt Family), *Marble House* and *Rosecliff*, built in 1902, where the original *Great Gatsby* was filmed.

The best way to see the mansions is to hop on a *Viking Trolley* and enjoy a guided tour of Newport and the surrounding area and then hop off to tour the mansions. Our excellent tour guide Jim, pointed out the *New York Yacht Club*, Fort Adams and the Harbor Park (where the Newport Jazz Festival is held each year), as well as the summer residence of President Eisenhower who summered in Newport for three years, playing golf each day at the nearby *Newport Country Club*. Jim also pointed out *Hammersmith Farm*, the childhood home of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy and *St. Mary's Church* where then Senator John F. Kennedy married Jacqueline Bouvier in 1953. Jim also noted the mansions along Bellevue Avenue which are owned by today's rich and famous, along with one of America's oldest tennis clubs, which is home to the *Tennis Hall of Fame*.

Conde Nast Traveler Magazine in a recent article called Newport "One of the Ten Best Small Cities in America". Newport has numerous great hotels, restaurants and quaint shops that you can spend days just wandering around. You will also find plenty of beaches, coastal drives, renowned golf courses and sailing excursions.

From the creative vibrancy of Providence to the idyllic summer haven of Newport, the small, beautiful state of Rhode Island offers plenty of big adventures to be discovered year round. **GL**

travelinks

goprovidence.com
pwcvb.com
discovernewport.org
newportmansions.org
visitrhodeisland.com



State House, and an afternoon spent exploring the notable art collections and exhibits at the *Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum*, named one of the 20 Must-See Art Museums in America by *Fodor's Travel*.

"We have 100,000 visitors a year," says Victoria Charette, marketing intern at the RISD Museum. "We are a teaching art museum connected to the *Rhode Island School of Design*. Everything we sell in our museum shop is made by RISD students or alumni."

Providence is quintessential New England where tradition is treasured. "You won't find fast food restaurants here, other than *Dunkin' Donuts*, which is from New England," says Kristen.

Another tradition which has been kept alive and well, is the Fourth of July Parade in nearby Bristol. Founded in 1785, it is the oldest Fourth of July Parade in America where town officials paint the streets red, white and blue and both parade participants and onlookers dress in patriotic garb. Many houses are also decked out in their finest as part of a contest for the most patriotic house. Tammy Mojkowski, who lives at 245 High Street, was this year's winner. Her lawn decorations included a mannequin dressed in her husband's military uniform plus a giant Pledge of Allegiance. "The Pledge grabs my heart strings—it needs to be said, and often," commented Tammy. The parade offers a glance at Americana, while our trip to Newport offers a glance back in time.

Newport is known as The Sailing Capital, home of America's most famous sailing race, the *America's Cup*.

It is also famous for the many historic mansions from the Gilded Age which hug the area's coastline. These were the "summer homes" of America's wealthiest families.

Visitors can purchase tickets and tour eleven

