

How New England resorts compare with The Breakers

By Anthony Flint

| Globe correspondent

June 15, 2013



STEW MILNE

Golf Club at Equinox offers great Vermont views.

In the luxury resorts market, New England is in the midst of a respectable surge.

In Westerly, R.I., the Ocean House in Watch Hill and the nearby new Weekapaug Inn have made their mark as high-end beachfront destinations. In Vermont, renovations are complete at the stately Equinox. These are places where the towels are impossibly plush and the cheerful valets send you off with a bottle of ice-cold spring water for the ride home.

But how would these properties compare with those that have been at this a bit longer — say, The Breakers in Palm Beach? These resorts stack up nicely regardless of season.

THE BREAKERS

Rate: from \$299 weekdays June 1-Sept. 30, from \$379 per night weekends.

The lowdown: “The season” ends in April, but after that it’s easy to get a table at Café Boulud or a spot at the bar at the Taboo lounge. Plus the Atlantic Ocean doesn’t need time to warm up off Palm Beach, Fla.



The Breakers Beachfront in Palm Beach, Fla.

Built in 1896 by Palm Beach founder and oil tycoon Henry Flagler, remodeled in 1926 as an Italian Renaissance palace on the sea, the 540-room Breakers resort is the grande dame of Palm Beach. Spread over 140 acres, the rooms and common areas are part of an ongoing \$63 million renovation that required local landmarks approval. The holiday season is a tradition for many families, but off-season is a more affordable option. The fine-sand beach is dotted with private cabanas; the five oceanside pools seem to go on forever; and one restaurant has a playroom and aquarium to keep the kids in view while parents linger over after-dinner drinks.

Amenities: The beach, kids’ play areas, botanical gardens, manicured 18-hole golf course, five restaurants including the Flagler Steakhouse overlooking the links.

Things to do: Visit the Flagler Museum, which documents the man who essentially created Palm Beach and established a rail line down the east coast of Florida; shop on Worth Avenue;

rent a bike and roll by the former Kennedy compound and the Maritime Museum with President Kennedy's Cold War-era bunker.

The vibe: Ray-Bans and Jackie O sunglasses are prerequisite; cubic zirconium earrings that look like the real thing; dazzling shades of pink in trousers and shorts (and that's just the men); and of course, Lily Pulitzer.

Getting there: JetBlue flies nonstop Logan-West Palm Beach; \$20 taxi or Uber car to hotel; about four hours from Boston.

1 South County Road, 888-727-1649, www.thebreakers.com

THE EQUINOX

Rate: \$229 midweek, \$349 weekends; children under 13 stay free.

The lowdown: Being pampered at the Equinox in Manchester Village, Vt., is a four-season opportunity. Dating to 1769, commandeered by the Green Mountain Boys, and purchased in the 19th century by Franklin Orvis, the hotel was set to host the Lincolns just before the president's death. The white-and-green 195-room complex is classic Vermont, with carpets of green and layers of mountains in the distance. Guys in knickers fetch your car and quietly manage your bags, and the Tanqueray on the veranda comes with nuts in silver bowls. An ongoing \$20 million-plus renovation by HEI Hotels & Resorts includes interior design by Geoffrey Bradfield.

Amenities: Dreamy 18-hole golf course, spa and swimming pool, falconry, fly-fishing lessons at Orvis down the street, off-road adventure driving in Land Rovers, Chop House, Marsh Tavern, Falcon Bar, Green Mountain coffee and old-fashioned cider doughnuts in the morning.

Things to do: Outlets, Bromley summer park, Hapgood Pond, Swedish fish at the Vermont Country Store in Weston, farmers market in Londonderry, antiquing, Equinox skyline drive, hike to lookout rock.

The vibe: Equestrian attire and riding britches a common sight in the lobby; Brooks Brothers, literary agents, and hedge fund managers; dogs all around, attributable to the pet-friendly policy

Getting there: 147 miles Route 2 to Interstate 91 to Route 30 to Route 11; about three hours from Boston. 3567

Main St., 800-362-4747, www.equinoxresort.com

OCEAN HOUSE & WEEKAPAUG INN

Rate: \$275-\$600.



STEW MILNE

Guests of the Ocean House in Watch Hill, R.I. enjoyed a drink on the huge deck that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean.

The lowdown: A grand Victorian summer destination since 1868, the original building was razed in 2003 and painstakingly rebuilt, so it looks like it's always been there. The gambit by a group of investors with Watch Hill ties, led by mutual fund magnate Charles Royce, was to reestablish the New York connections with the area. The \$146 million project reduced the number of rooms from 135 to 46 plus 23 condo residences, expanded outdoor space and landscaped beach access, but maintained the warm yellow facade and other historical details. The place oozes luxury from the moment you pull up to the valet, and the stretch of beach is one of the most wonderful in New England. No wonder they sell out on most summer weekends, even (or perhaps especially) at \$600 a night. Royce and company also have renovated the Weekapaug Inn, a few miles away by London-style taxi shuttle. The family-owned property dating to 1899 is a more subdued and slightly more affordable alternative.

Amenities: The beach is the center of the universe here, but at the Ocean House there's croquet, a putting green, the Forbes 5-star OH! Spa, squash courts, surfing, fishing, culinary education and wine tasting, access to a golf course in next-door Stonington, Conn., and the resort's 32-foot wooden yacht, the Dandy. The five on-site restaurants emphasize local food and farm-to-table dining.

Things to do: From croquet to beachcombing, there really isn't much reason to go off campus, but the nation's oldest flying horse carousel and great ice cream are a short walk away in Watch Hill.

The vibe: Nantucket meets Newport meets the Hamptons: J. Crew and Ralph Lauren, with a healthy dose of New York glitterati — all just 25 minutes from Cranston.

Getting there: 98 miles down Interstate 95, about an hour and 40 minutes from Boston. 401-315-0579, www.oceanhouseri.com; 888-813-7862, www.weekapauginn.com

Anthony Flint can be reached at anthony.flint@gmail.com.