



Beaches make the perfect getaway, especially when they're close to New York City. Pictured here, Watch Hill in Rhode Island.

One-tank beach getaways

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By MALERIE YOLEN-COHEN. Special to Newsday

Is there anything that says "summer vacation" like packing the family into the car and hitting the road for cooler, calmer environs? No airports, no security lines and -- once you get off Long Island -- very little traffic, hopefully. Within a four- to five-hour drive is a wide array of natural attractions -- from lakes to beaches to mountains -- that make for an easy weeklong vacation, or even a long weekend.

Our once-a-month summer series continues with beaches in nearby states. Sure, Long Island isn't exactly lacking for coastline, so a beach trip "off-Island" must have its own special appeal. The following five -- known for their Victorian charms, boardwalk bliss and celebrity entertainment -- fit the bill.

Watch Hill, Rhode Island



(Credit: Ocean House)

Watch Hill, Rhode Island; 150 miles from New York City

Sunsets are dramatic from the edge of this Rhode Island peninsula. Climbing the bluff that overlooks Watch Hill harbor and the Atlantic Ocean, you can almost see Victorian-era travelers as they hauled their steamer trunks to the portico of the bright yellow Ocean House, a grand resort constructed in 1868, and renovated as a distinguished 43-room Relais and Chateaux hotel.

Even if you don't stay at the Ocean House (rates begin at more than \$800 per night in season), treat yourself to a meal at its restaurant, Seasons, for exceptional food and views. Town beaches are clean and popular, especially Watch Hill, aka Carousel Beach. If you want to get away from the crowds, head out on the spit of sand called Napatree Point -- a Wildlife Preserve with no lifeguard, bathrooms or services.



(Credit: South Country RI / Myrna George)

Watch Hill, Rhode Island

DON'T MISS Grab for the brass ring on the historic Watch Hill Carousel. Since the late 1880s, this National Historic Landmark has been a Watch Hill summer memory for many.

WHERE TO STAY Besides the Ocean House (oceanhouseri.com), you can bed down in the newly renovated Pleasant View Inn (pvinn.com), directly on the beach just 2.5 miles away (summer rates begin at \$300 per night).

INFO visitwatchhill.com