

The Ocean House at Watch Hill, Rhode Island

No Expense Is Spared

By [Anitra Brown](#), About.com Guide

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Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk into a Victorian hotel soon after it was built, when all the grandeur was sparkling and brand new? Now you can, at the Ocean House at Watch Hill, on the coast near Westerly, Rhode Island.

Originally built in 1868, the Ocean House was a grand oceanfront beach resort where families from New York City, Boston and Philadelphia came to summer. Its glory days long over, the Ocean House had to close in 2003 after fire regulations changed. Wealthy investors (philanthropists is the better word in this case) hoped to restore the hotel, but it was too far-gone to repair.



Ocean House, Watch Hill, Rhode Island is a recreation of the original property built in 1868

Ocean House, Watch Hill

A \$146 Million Recreation of Victorian Splendor

So they carefully salvaged architectural details from the interior, stayed true to the exterior, and razed the hotel. What went up in its place is a spectacular replication -- like the original, only better. Its 49 guest rooms are larger and have all the amenities luxury travelers expect. It took five years and, gulp, \$146 million. Now it's a Relais & Chateaux property that everyone who can, should visit.

It also built 23 private residences, available for sale or rent, as part of the hotel. Ocean House is still easy access from Boston and New York City, by train, and the high season is still summer. But it's open year round, and there is enough going on to make it a romantic getaway any time of year.

Anitra Brown - "In Residence"

One of the charms of the Ocean House is that they echo a certain Victorian style in their service. When I opened the door to my room, a package of homemade scones and delicious lemon curd was waiting for me, with a welcome letter that was addressed, "Anitra Brown, #303, in residence". It made me feel like I should relax after my journey, and this was going to be my home for a few days.

The room has a Victorian feel, with careful craftsmanship like the tiles used in the bathroom and the elaborate wooden ceiling. But these rooms are much larger than the originals, appealing to modern tastes. You should definitely make some time to take a

bath, and you can pull back the windows so the bath opens onto the room, another modern conceit.

Something unusual, however, is the fact that there is a bottle of water, sodas, and snacks -- and you can have them for free! And when you try to tip the staff, they say it's included in your resort fee.

OH! Spa = Ocean plus Harvest

I was there to check out OH! Spa, a 12,000 square foot spa with seven spacious treatment rooms and a fabulous place to relax after your treatment. Chaise lounges overlook the sea, so you can lay back and enjoy the view. It's almost like being on an ocean liner.

O stands and H stands for harvest (hence the OH!) and those two elements are reflected in the lines they use, like Phytomer and Ocean, both made with marine ingredients, and Farmaesthetics, a natural line that uses herbs, flowers, grains and oils and tries to keep the chemicals to a minimum. The founder, Brenda Brock, is also a Rhode Island native.

I had a "Deep Relaxation Massage," a 60-minute service that is very reasonably priced for this level of spa. I liked that Roberta, the therapist, offered me a choice of several different [essential oils](#), including relaxing lavender and uplifting grapefruit. This is done for most, but not all of their massages. She put a few drops on a cloth and attached it under the cradle -- a nice touch I've never seen before. Usually the therapist holds their hands under your nose for a few moments. It was a high quality oil, and with more time to inhale I got more of it into my system.

Deep Relaxation Massage a Knockout

The massage began with a nice warm heat pack on my back while the therapist, Roberta, worked on my legs. The primary focus of this massage was my back, neck and shoulders, where there was more [deep tissue massage](#). The touch was lighter and more relaxing on my arms and legs, like a [Swedish massage](#). I was drifting off by the time I was on my back, but I seem to remember some wonderful warm towels on my feet. This is a great massage, and one of their most popular. You can also get a Traditional Massage, which is Swedish, a Beach Stone Massage ([hot stone](#)), and Muscle Ease (deep tissue).

I liked the Phytomer products in my Treasures of the Sea facial and the fact that the therapist gave me an awesome hand, arm and foot massage. (I passed on the warm electric booties.) But she was a massage therapist first and I felt her facial massage was not at the level of a top esthetician. I would probably ask for someone who was an esthetician only, or felt that her primary strength. It's rare to be equally good at

massage and facials, and there are some dual therapists here. It also offers [body treatments](#) using Red Flower products, which are lovely.

OH! Spa is a gorgeous spa, with a lap pool, a full gym and an exercise studio with "virtual classes." You choose the workout you want when you want it (spinning?), a big screen comes down, and an instructor is there to help you through it. If you don't like it, switch. There are also occasional live classes like beach workouts and yoga by the full moon.

But the best time to go for spa enthusiasts is during one of their [Wellness Weekends](#), when there are extra classes and instruction like yoga, circuit training, making aromatherapy bath salts, a mini-facial with the Ocean + line, smoothie classes from the resident "Food Forager," and a special spa lunch. You can go for the day or the weekend.

Plenty To Do

They also have other themed weekends for people with other interests, and no matter when you go there will something interesting going on, often complimentary. It might be a tasting with the sommelier (wine steward), a mineral make-up class, a cheese tasting, a guided tour of the Ocean House (highly recommended).

There are also wonderful collections of illustrations all over the hotel, but none more charming than the collection of famous artists and authors (Sam Shepard, Tom Wolfe) who drew pictures of themselves when asked by someone who worked at a famous club and bookstore in NYC.

Besides the beautiful beach, there's a croquet lawn. Westerly is charming, and the Mystic Aquarium is not far down the road. Seasons Restaurant has an excellent wine list (it's hard to find Krug by the glass!) and you can either sit in the Atlantic Terrace (great ocean views), a cozy booth or banquette (nice fireplace) or at the bar overlooking an open kitchen.

This is such a spectacular, unusual property that I recommend everyone who can try to get there, even if it's just for a day, or a meal. The Sunday brunch is packed, I hear. And if you stay there, you can go home with some wonderful little mementos -- a trio of silver shells that are the turndown gift.

They really know how to lay on the charm here.

Ocean House, Watch Hill, Rhode Island: Type of Spa: [resort spa](#)

Location: 1 Bluff Avenue, Watch Hill, Westerly, Rhode Island
Telephone: 401-584-7000 (hotel), 401-584-7070 (spa)
Website: [Ocean House, Watch Hill](#)

