



LIFE

A RHODE ISLAND PEARL

With a grand hotel—and a certain pop princess-in-residence—Watch Hill is the state's new capital of luxe

BY ALYSSA GIACCOBE

Many people claim that Rhode Island is where the American summer vacation was born, and as a native, I believe them. Of course, with its sprawling mansions and moneyed extravagance, Newport usually gets most of the attention in the warm weather months. But locals know that the state's sleepier South County coastal region offers its own mostly understated elegance in the form of hidden beach colonies, dairy and oyster farms and refreshingly few pretenses.



Having for years done a very good job avoiding being labeled a destination, Watch Hill (the state's last coastal town before crossing into Connecticut) has lately attracted its share of attention, thanks in large part to Taylor Swift, who **plunked down \$17 million** on a mansion here in April. But the real shift for the town came earlier with the 2011 reopening of the **Ocean House**. When Wall Street financier Charles Royce bought the historic hotel in 2005, it was neglected and mere storms away from floating out to sea. Some \$140 million later, it's Rhode Island's most upscale resort, boasting a windswept beach with private cabanas, a sprawling croquet lawn (pack your whites!) and immaculate views of Narragansett Bay and Block Island Sound. Royce is an architecture buff, and the hotel was rebuilt with many of its original 1860s details, including the lobby fireplace (where the bricks were numbered to ensure they'd be reassembled in precisely the right order), the ornamented oak elevator, and much of the original wicker furniture (which Royce had restored and refurbished). Other features are thoroughly modern, like signature suites with as many as four levels (and **a few still for sale**, like a 2,400-square-foot 3rd floor home away from home that you can add to your personal collection for \$3.9 million), personal iPads for every guest and a 10,000-square-foot spa complete with a heated pool and squash courts.



For those who want something a little more, say, Swift-like this season, the Ocean House has rolled out a cottage program, offering guests a private residential experience with the convenience and daily

maid service of hotel living. The star is the Pink House, a Bermuda-style, six-bedroom cottage with a private beach and a heated pool, billiards room, six fireplaces for warding off the evening Northeast chill, and unobstructed views of Block Island Sound. Just a few steps from the main hotel, the quainter, two-bedroom Old Schoolhouse cottage was exactly that: a 19-student classroom built in 1852 which now serves as a beach bungalow well-suited to honeymooners or small families.

Also new this summer is the hotel's Avondale Farm, a 10-acre private farm that complements the list of local growers (some 50 strong) from which the hotel sources its ingredients; the farm is also



a great place for private dinners. But the real pearl? Later this season, the hotel will team with Salt Water Farms in nearby North Kingstown to create the pinnacle of private label amenities: signature Ocean House deep-water oysters. We can't wait.

While you're in Watch Hill, here are a few other spots to hit:

The Pink Anchor

94 Bay St. 401-596-2129

For gifts, beach totes, stripes.

Olympia Tea Room

74 Bay St., 401-348-8211

For lobster rolls, local craft beer, Taylor Swift sightings

Watch Hill General Store

5 Bay St., 401-596-7500

For everything else you could possibly need