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Season

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WUTHERING HEIGHTS



A STRETCH OF BEACH IN
MADAKET, NANTUCKET



LOOKING FOR A NEW ENGLAND

*In an unforgettable trip from Boston to Nantucket,
Rachel Johnson discovers the quintessential playground
of the American East Coast elite*

It's long been an annual tradition for glamorous New Yorkers to escape the sultry city heat by fleeing to the cool Atlantic resorts of the East Coast. Which begs the question, why would the British follow in the footsteps of the Pilgrim Fathers and holiday there, when, let's face it, we have cooler Atlantic climes all year round? Allow me to posit an explanation.

If you hanker after the serenity of the Gilded Age, immaculate *Downton*-style service, emerald-green lawns sweeping to white sands and sparkling blue ocean, children on surfboards, beach picnics, open-top Jeeps, lobster rolls, wooden Adirondack chairs and spectacular sunsets, then the truth is New England does it so much better than the original England could ever hope to.

On arrival in Boston, via a highly rated Norwegian flight, we headed out to an Irish bar for a cold Samuel Adams beer before hitting the hay in the Taj hotel, known to locals as the Old Ritz, with its bronze lifts and shoe-shine service.

It stands right on Boston Common, where you can follow the Freedom Trail all the way to the crooked old house of Paul Revere, he of the famous midnight ride. Then we drove to the coast to stay in the beach hotel to top all beach hotels, Ocean House, Watch Hill, Rhode Island, which I can sum up in a single word: wow.

Ocean House is enormously pretty, and pretty enormous, a white and yellow clapboard pile with the Stars and Stripes fluttering above. It was here I realised that the East Coast isn't just about good, clean, preppie, patriotic fun in the Land of the Free. At its best, it offers a recreation of the American Dream childhood, crossed with an endless summer-camp atmosphere. Fathers pitch at their sons on the beach, clad in a smart uniform of shorts, polo shirts and baseball caps; mothers and their mini-me daughters dress in paisley beachwear from Lilly Pulitzer. (There is a Lilly Pulitzer store in Watch Hill, the small seaside town hard by the hotel – to put this in context, that's the equivalent of having

a Ralph Lauren in your local village.) The hotel has a café bar called Below Deck, which serves a whimsical assortment of candy, cake and ice-cream, and encourages families to make their own pizzas and watch movies on the beach. Kid heaven, or what?

Our next pit stop

was Newport, once the favoured holiday spot for the idle rich whose mansions still skirt the coast today. It is a delicious port, all picturesque streets and trolley buses, and the Vanderbilt 'cottage', the Breakers, which is the summa cum laude of ostentatious

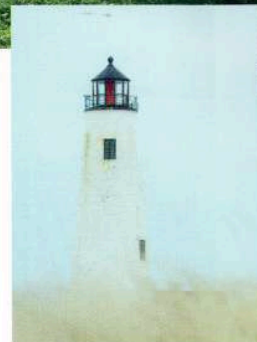
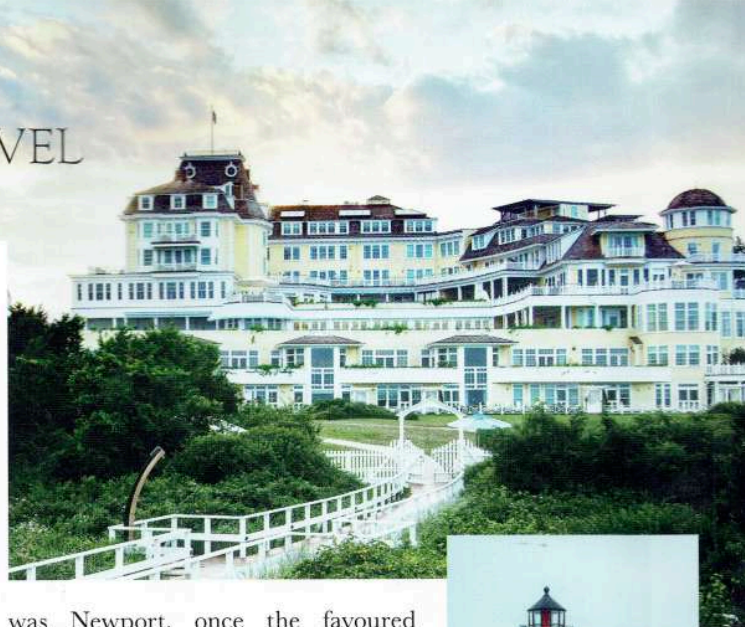
vulgarity. Then it was time to catch the fast ferry from

Hyannis to Nantucket, a pristine island of grey cedar houses, ponds, lighthouses and \$40 burgers. The deal in Nantucket, the summer playground of the wealthy, is that you don't show off. The longer your family has been coming here, the older your clothes and the rustier your wooden-sided station wagon, the better. As one old-timer told me: 'If you have a pool and new car, nobody will talk to you.'

We stayed at the Wauwinet, an inn by the sea where you sprawl on sunloungers and someone comes and puts a cocktail in your hand. It is home to the celebrated Topper's, one of the finest restaurants in the States, where we had oysters fresh out of the bay, homemade breads, smoked butter – and that was before our starters.

When 'on island', there are rules. Everyone says 'anything goes', but in practice women wear white jeans (but only until Labor Day, when they are banned) and men, pink chinos. And you have to go for evening cocktails at Galley Beach to watch the glorious raspberry sunset, lethal G&Ts in hand. When we were there, as the sun descended beneath the horizon, everyone on the beach clapped as if it was putting on a special performance just for them. This being Nantucket, where even the light comes expensively rose-tinted and gilded with nostalgia, who the hell knows? It probably was. □

Scott Dunn (020 8682 5030; www.scottdunn.com) offers seven-night tailor-made New England itineraries from £4,995 a person, based on two people sharing, with stays at Ocean House, Rhode Island and the Wauwinet in Nantucket, and includes international flights and transfers. Taj Boston (www.thetajboston.com), from £308 a room a night.



NANTUCKET HARBOUR. TOP: OCEAN HOUSE, RHODE ISLAND. ABOVE RIGHT: GREAT POINT LIGHTHOUSE, NANTUCKET

