



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



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Newport, Rhode Island (Day 1)



Ahhh, Rhode Island. Officially, the smallest of the United States was named State of *Rhode Island and the Plantations of Providence*, and carried that moniker till 2020, when common sense prevailed. That's too many syllables for such a small state.

RI is the "Ocean State", their motto is a monosyllabic "Hope", and their highest point is Jerimoth Hill with a nose-bleed-inducing elevation of 817 feet.

The state dog is the Portuguese Water Dog, the state flower is the violet, and the state tree is the Red Maple.

On May 4, 1776, Rhode Island became the first colony to renounce allegiance to King George III. The rest is history.

RI ranks 50th in land area (1545 sq.mi.), 45th in population (1,052,567), and 2nd (!) in population density (1,006 per sq.mi.). Only New Jersey is more dense (1,263 psm). Massachusetts (897), Connecticut (747) and Maryland (636) round out the top five.

All of those densities pale in comparison to the District of Columbia, though, which packs 11,107 people into each of its 68.3 square miles.

Little Rhody (alternate state nickname) is only 37 miles wide and 48 miles long, for a grid perimeter of just 170 miles. But it has 394 miles of coastline, ranking it 22nd in that category.

Rhode Island's most prominent feature is Narragansett Bay, where most of the state's coastline can be found. The Bay contains 30 islands, the most prominent of which is Aquidneck Island, where the city of Newport is located, on the southern tip. And that's what I'm here to tell you about.



I lived in eastern Massachusetts for more than half my life. Newport is less than a 90-minute ride from my former home. Yet I never took the trip down here. I had heard about the mansions, and I had read *The Great Gatsby* (well, kinda read it – more like skimmed it so I could bullshit my way through a paper on it in American Lit class), and it always seemed to be on my list of Places To Go, but it always got bumped in favor of some other place.

So, now was the time. Prepare the Bucket List for a strikethrough!

First question: where to start? I honestly had no interest in the city of Newport. I know it was the Home of The America's Cup for decades, but, eh, I'm not the yacht club type. I had mansion tours, the Cliff Walk, and Ten-Mile Drive to choose from. I had done my usual minimalist research – just enough to know what exists and if I might find it kinda cool or not, but not delving deep enough to take the discovery factor out of the actual visit – and chose Ten-Mile Drive (TMD).

If you're short on time, you could easily skip TMD. It's nice, yeah, with some low areas of rocky coastline and several very nice homes set well back from the winding road, but it won't wow you. I was kinda in the mood for some wows.

Ten Mile Drive



Now, if you are going to do TMD, do it first, like I did. As an opening act, it got my anticipation up. If you save it for last, it'll fall flat.

TMD starts at King Park with a pyramid-ish monument and a statue of some dude named Rochambeau. He was pointing over there, so I got back in Blue Maxx and headed over there.

The next point of interest was a Civil War era fort called Fort Adams with a tall ship docked next to it: the Oliver Hazard Perry.

It cost a few bucks to go inside the fort, and I've seen Civil War forts before, so I blew it off and drove onward.

A little while later, a big and fancy residence loomed



up on the right, behind a vast green field. It became obvious that this was not a private home, so I turned into the entrance to investigate.

It's called the Ocean Cliff Hotel, and it sits atop a cliff looking over Castle Hill Cove. Surprisingly, it's just a ★★★ property. It looks like at least a ★★★★. That puts it on par with select Best Western Plus's or an occasional above-average Courtyard by Marriott.

That's all? WTF? Is there no running water? Shared unisex bathrooms? Tepid Spam for breakfast? No Internet??

I didn't venture inside, so I'll never know. But it sure looks classy and cool from outside.

The next noteworthy sight was at the big bend on the corner of Brenton Point State



Park. There's a long parking lot that you can pull into if you want to get out and clamber around the seaside rocks.

But you better be ready for that lot because the entrance is upon you before you fully realize where you are,

and then, oops, you missed it and there is no place to pull over till you are beyond it.



You're about halfway through TMD at this point. You stay on Ocean Avenue as it curls along the shoreline, past Green Bridge, Cherry Lake, and Gooseberry Beach. There are some pretty impressive domiciles along the way. Unlike the big mansions that are open for tours, these edifices, I assume, are actually lived in. Must be nice, hm? Look at all those damn chimneys!

Then, though, I ran into some construction (not literally, thankfully). I was closing in on the south end of the Cliff Walk but the detour turned TMD into NMD and steered me inland.

OK, I figured, time to get to the Breakers. But, for some reason, a side street got my attention. I did not know where it would go, and I was not seeking any kind of a shortcut. Sometimes, though, I just do that: *This street looks interesting, Maxx, let's have a look.* He always agrees. I like his spirit.

The street was a narrow dead end. "No Parking" signs abounded near the end.

A couple of signs made reference to “cliffs” as well, so I deduced that this mansion on my right was “The Waves” (see photo, page 1), the final one of the Cliff Walk, and the signs were stating that parking the vehicle here while you go clamber on the rocks was not allowed.



So, of course, I parked Blue Maxx there and went out on the rocks for a good clamber. I told myself I'd just go far enough to snap a good coastal photo or two, but, naturally, a better photo kept awaiting me beyond that rock, then that one, then that one.



I probably went about a quarter-mile. I would've kept going, but orange tape, orange cones, orange fencing, and orange warning signs effectively said, “Stop right there, you crazy clamberer. Get back to your illegally parked van!”

A lengthy section of the famous Cliff Walk was closed for repairs. That sounds to me like part of the Walk fell down the Cliff, making that stretch too treacherous for us public people.

So, I returned to my illegally parked van. But *then* I noticed that the walking trail continued on to the west (mansion) side of the dead end. Off I went again. The rocks were wide and mostly flat, so the clamber was more of a stroll. Out on the ocean, a bunch of sailboats were silhouetted against the blue sky. Some kind of race was going on. Go figure. Boats racing in Newport. Ha.



Really nice spot, but there was so much more to be seen. Now, it was time to get to the mansions.

But, hey, it's not like these mansions are sore thumbs standing out from shanties. If the featured mansions were not here, I still would have been moved to my gawking point by the ones nearby. There are some amazingly fine homes here that get yawned at.







