



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)



The Breakers

It was very short ride to get here from The Waves. And parking was easy: very large lot, right across the street, and, best of all, **free**.

Pulling into this elite Ochre Point Avenue “neighborhood” was like entering a new world. The architecture all around is incredible.

Ochre Point itself is a jutting geographical feature on the east side of Aquidneck Island where the most famous mansions were built. The waves of Easton Bay break across the base of the dramatic boulders, while a tabletop landscape sits on top of those rocky cliffs. In 1885, Cornelius Vanderbilt II bought this 14-acre property, but the



existing mansion burned in 1892. Construction on the opulent Italian Renaissance Palace style Breakers began the next year and was completed in 1895.

The result: 70 rooms, five floors, more than 62,000 square feet of living space, all in sumptuous décor dominated by Italian and African marble. This mansion kicked the acclaimed “Gilded Age” of Newport into high gear.

Man, those Vanderbilts sure did like livin’ large, didn’t they? This is the same family that built the “little mountain escape” called Biltmore Estate in North Carolina (1889-1895). That one is a clearly grander – both edifice (250 rooms, with 135,280 sq.ft. of living space) and grounds (originally 125,000 acres!) – but, after all, The Breakers was just the “summer cottage.”

The parking was free, but the touring was not. This is where I should have done a little deeper research. The major mansions here are operated by the Newport Preservation Society, and if you plan on touring more than one of them, you can get a good price break.

To tour one property, you pay \$25 (The Breakers is a tad more, \$29), but to tour two with the Duo package, you pay just \$38. And the Trio would give you three for \$46.

You can purchase a Society Membership for \$115 and get all the tours you want for both you and a guest without paying anything more.

I did not know any of that, though, so I paid the full \$29 price for my self-guided Breakers tour. At the time,



though, I did not anticipate touring more than one mansion, so I doubt I would have taken the discount even if I had known about it. This was planned as a single-day trip with a return to my Walpole MA base camp once the sun went down.



Anyway, I declined the headset rental, eschewing the historic information audio feed and contenting myself with visuals and photos.

The grounds were very impressive, but I saved them for later and headed inside. The entrance room (above) was grand indeed.

Signs, poles and velvet ropes steered me in the right direction, and off I went.

Prior to my Eurohopping Tour in 2017, I had no real experience with mansions. That year, though, I toured Versailles -- the palace of the Sun King in France -- and the Vatican. Both wowed me, but the former was beyond gaudy, and the opulence that the Catholic Church was showing off at the latter seemed borderline sinful.

Several years later, my first feature stop of Road Mode '22 (my first summer of my retirement life) was at Biltmore House & Gardens in North Carolina. Fourteen months after that, I toured the Hearst Castle on the California coast. So, I had the mansion pattern figured out by now.

We tourons get steered through room-after-room, one floor at a time. The grandest of them all -- the Great Room, or the Banquet Hall -- come early when our zeal is still fresh. Later comes a succession of bedrooms (Versailles must have had 100 of them). And the tour concludes with the servants' quarters, so we can at least relate with *something*.

So, with all that said, here's about 9000 words' worth of photos for you:













I spent about an hour inside, then a bit more than a half-hour reveling in the absolutely gorgeous weather outside. That yard between the mansion and the cliff is huge, and the grass was perfect. And to look around and see this amazing palace looming over it all, well, that was purdy dang cool.

I took a couple hundred photos, both indoors and out. They, along with all the ones I snapped on the next day, are worth a look:

<https://rickmackenzie.smugmug.com/240610-11-Newport-RI>



Originally, I was going to tour this place and skedaddle back to Massachusetts, but Newport had sunk its hooks into me. The weather forecast for tomorrow was even better, if that would be possible: mid-70's, 0% chance of rain, and – best of all – almost no wind. A great day for cliff walking, *and for drone flying*. Ooooh, yeahhh.

It was late afternoon, so I asked GooGirl where the nearest Planet Fitness was, headed there for a workout and shower, and found myself a suitable hotel for the night.





