

# HARRODS

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MAGAZINE

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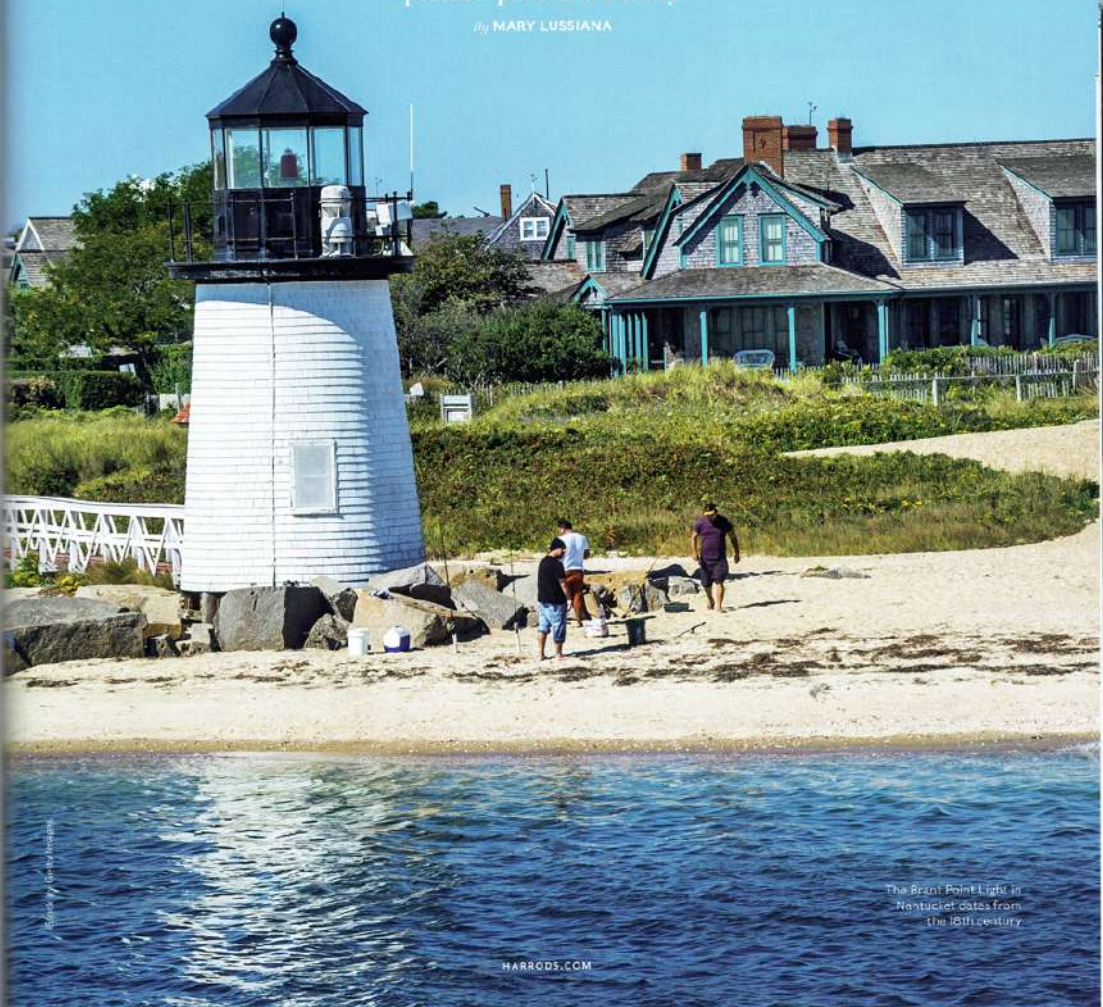
*Exclusive interview celebrating  
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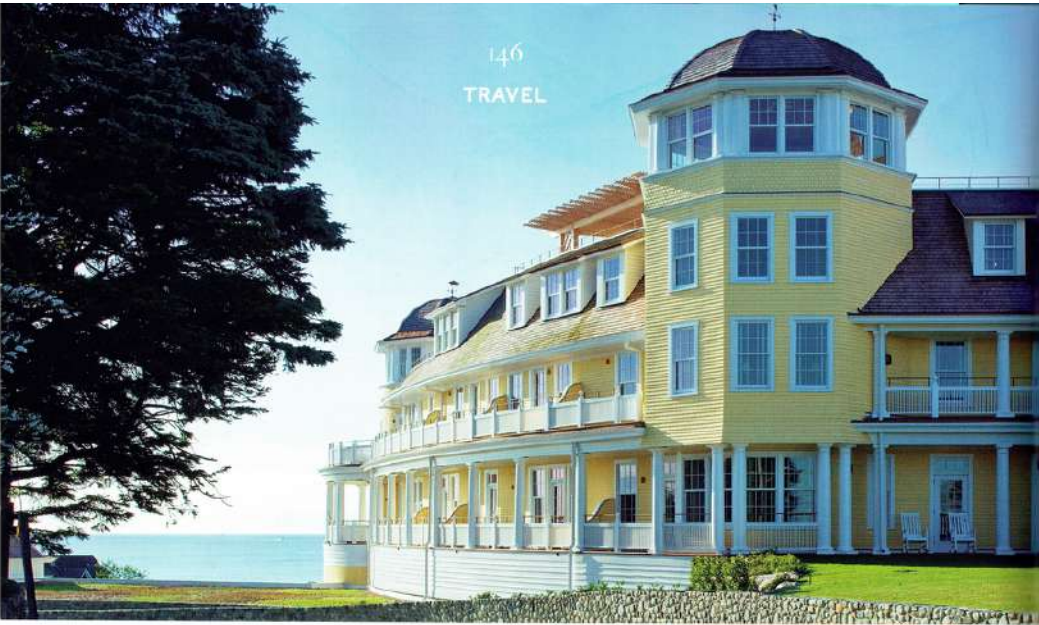
Harrods

# *A New England* JOURNEY

From Rhode Island to Nantucket, this region offers fascinating history, exceptional food and picture-postcard beauty

By MARY LUSSIANA





**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The pool at the White Elephant in Nantucket; Aphrodite yacht; the White Elephant hotel; Nantucket is easily explored by bike; **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP** Ocean House in Watch Hill, Rhode Island; yachts line the harbour in Nantucket

Set wide the window. Let me drink the day," wrote American novelist Edith Wharton – a New England resident for many years – in her 1902 poem *Vedius in Zante* (1564). Wharton's words came to mind as I looked out from the distinctive yellow façade of the region's iconic seaside hotel, Ocean House in Watch Hill, Rhode Island, onto a crescent of deserted private beach that the sun was just beginning to warm. In the distance was Watch Hill Lighthouse, and the waves were rolling in, white foam spattering the rocks.

Later in the day, I asked to see the hotel's imposing Tower Suite, designed in nautical blues and whites, and the Morgan Suite – an essay in gleaming wood and brass fittings with inbuilt bunk beds that would delight any child. Looking out from the window down onto the emerald-green lawn, a croquet game was underway. Good-looking couples in spotless whites milled around, mallets in hand, while across the road in the soaring clapboard church, a wedding was taking place.

Such images somehow sum up the feel of New England; all is right with the world. There are neither louts nor litter; picture-perfect green strips of lawn roll up to

unblemished white clapboard houses. There are no blots on the horizon and no stress – unless you consider the internal debate of whether to have another lobster roll for lunch a source of anxiety. Harmony reigns.

Few regions in America have a longer or more impressive history than New England. Rhode Island is the smallest state in the US, at a mere 48 miles long and 37 miles wide, but it punches above its weight in terms of historical landmarks. Many of these are the 19th-century mansions in Newport – extraordinary architectural displays of wealth by families such as the Vanderbilts and Astors – think copies of 16th-century Italianate palaces. They were ironically referred to as

*"These mansions... were referred to as 'cottages' by the elite who summered there"*

'cottages' by the elite, such as Wharton, who summered there. In the captivating Watch Hill, there is a more unusual historical exhibit – America's oldest working carousel, which dates from the 1870s and has its horses suspended on chains. Take a stroll

through the village and you'll encounter similarly charming sights – inviting delis where golden retrievers sit patiently outside awaiting their owners, shops that brim with a beach-chic, driftwood vibe, and gleaming yachts lining the harbour.

If you stay at Ocean House, which

dates from 1868 (though it has since been meticulously rebuilt), you can hop on one of the hotel's Hinckley yachts and cruise the waters. Even better, see if you can twist the arm of the improbably named Captain Kirk and set sail on the Aphrodite, the 74-foot private yacht of Ocean House owner Charles M 'Chuck' Royce. Another piece of history that Royce has saved for future generations, it is, like the hotel itself, a beauty.

Launched in 1937, it was originally a commuter yacht for Wall Street financier Jock Whitney, and was used by celebrities including Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn and Laurence Olivier. After Pearl Harbor, Whitney offered the boat to the government for war service and it was commissioned as a Coast Guard auxiliary vessel, often ferrying President Roosevelt along the Hudson River. It then changed hands and fell into disrepair

the best clam chowder in New England.

From Rhode Island I took the ferry to Nantucket. Lines of pretty grey cedar-clad houses with white widow's walks perched on the roofs came into view and, for me, it was a case of love at first sight.

The area's history is fascinating. Sperm-whale oil lay behind its initial wealth and growth – a hard but profitable business – and a visit to the well-curated Whaling Museum is an interesting, if sobering, experience. On Nantucket, whaling evolved from its genesis in 1712 into a global shipping empire – at the height of the industry there were 736 American ships hunting whales all over the world. Then, in 1846, a huge fire destroyed Nantucket's waterfront. This was followed closely by the gold rush, and the discovery of kerosene, which replaced whale oil in lamps. In 1869 the last whale ship left the harbour and, thankfully, tourism gradually began to replace whaling as Nantucket's raison d'être.

And boy does it do it well. It has history – the Quakers have a long-standing presence here. It has crafts, such as the Nantucket lightship baskets and the painted quarterboards that grace the houses. And it has charming places to stay, such as the White Elephant (don't miss the lobster

*"Nantucket was, for me, a case of love at first sight"*

carbonara), an easy stroll from the tempting boutiques, including Murray's Toggery Shop. Murray's has been selling its Nantucket Reels Collection – clothing that fades to preppy pink – since the fifties.

Equally charming is the 19th-century inn. The Wauwinet, in the northeast of the island – an elegant essay in grey shingles and white trim. Take the scenic route there, past endless beaches and the well-preserved

village of Siasconset, where properties date from the 18th century, to arrive in time for sunset and its signature cocktail – a Pain Killer – followed by butter-poached lobster and lemon soufflé in Topper's restaurant. The cocktail is something of a misnomer, however; for here, as with everywhere in New England, life is utterly pain free. ■

**Aer Lingus operates a twice-daily service from London to Boston via Dublin, with fares from £199 each-way; aerlingus.com. Rates at Ocean House start from \$400; oceanhousesri.com. Rates at the Weekapaug Inn start from \$345; weekapauginn.com. Rates at the White Elephant start from \$200; whiteelephanthotel.com. Rates at the Wauwinet start from \$195; wauwinet.com. All rates are per night on a room-only basis.**

*Mary Lusiana contributes to The Telegraph, The Times, Tatler and Condé Nast Traveller*