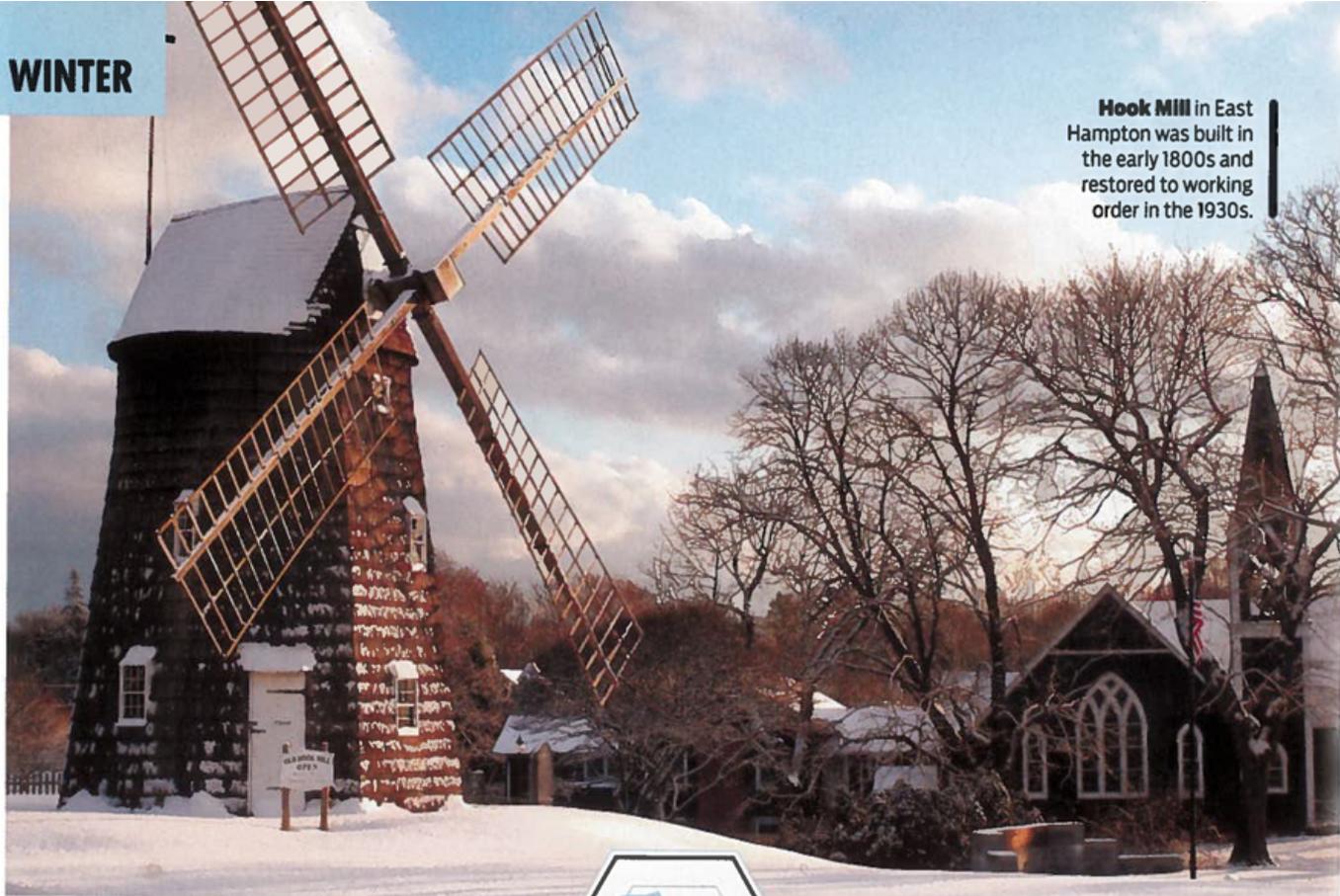


HIGH SOCIETY, *off-season*

Summering in the Hamptons can be so crass.
Wintering is much more civilized.

BY JAKE LEMKOWITZ FOR USA TODAY





Hook Mill in East Hampton was built in the early 1800s and restored to working order in the 1930s.

Trip PLANNER



GET
THERE

- **East Hampton, N.Y.** is about 105 miles from Manhattan and can be reached by car (via state Route 27 East), train, or bus. The Hampton Jitney (hamptonjitney.com) requires reservations. Hop aboard in Manhattan for the nonstop ride. The Long Island Rail Road (mta.info/lirr) connects Manhattan to Montauk with stops along the way.
- **Newport, R.I.** can be reached by car, train, or bus. Boston Logan International Airport is a 90-minute drive from the shore. Buses and Amtrak trains depart from Providence, Newport-bound. The ride takes about 45 minutes.
- **The Vineyard** can be reached by air or sea. The island has two airports—one that services private planes and one for the rest of us. Cape Air runs direct flights from Boston, Providence, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Ferries travel from the mainland daily.

closely resembles an artists' colony than a playground for the rich.

► EXPLORE

East Hampton was once home to Pollack, Warhol, Rothko, and many other groundbreaking American artists. That legacy continues in spaces like the **Watermill Center** (39 Watermill Towd

Rd., 631-726-6110, WaterMillCenter.org), which describes itself as a laboratory for performance.

The center's residency program selects emerging artists to stay and present public showings of their work. This winter's residents include composer, performer, and sound artist Samita Sinha and Australian performance troupe Wet Weather Ensemble.

Long Island is not exactly known for its wine production, but it should be. The East End produces some very good bottles. While the North Fork is home to the bulk of Long Island's vineyards, the Hamptons have a few of their own.

Wölffer Estate Wineries (139 Sagg Rd., Sagaponack, 631-537-5106, Wolffer.com) is the distinct leader of the pack. Find out for yourself at one of the winery's tastings, held daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Fridays during the winter, stop by for live music, cheese, charcuterie plates, and wines by the glass.

► EAT

Nick & Toni's (136 N. Main St., 631-324-3550, NickAndTonis.com) has earned it-restaurant status by serving consistently exceptional food since 1988. In the winter, you still need to call ahead for a table, but you're almost guaranteed to get a seat.

Ask for a table near the wood-burning oven and order the addictive, locally ►►

EAST HAMPTON, NEWPORT, AND MARTHA'S VINEYARD

are the types of fashionable vacationlands that make "summer" a verb—and something of a competitive sport. In the name of leisure, crowds jockey for a spot on the beach, a dinner reservation, and, above all, to see and be seen.

But in the winter these high-profile destinations transform into chic, quiet getaways. Prices are slashed, the atmosphere is downright pacific, and anyone can get a table at the best restaurant in town.

Winter is the perfect time of year to take to a trip to these famed locales. Discover why residents and discerning travelers cherish this secret season.

EAST HAMPTON, N.Y.

On the far end of Long Island's South Fork, East Hampton is the summer getaway of choice for New York's well-heeled weekenders. Famous as it is for picturesque beaches and a vibrant social scene, it's infamous for traffic and high prices.

But winter there offers the best of both worlds: The crowds are gone and the style remains. January through March offers a glimpse of a subdued and bygone East Hampton, one that more

WINTER

sourced zucchini chips to start your meal. Every Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday during the winter, Nick & Toni's offers a three-course prix fixe menu for \$30.

A bubbling-hot bowl of French onion soup and a satisfying beer on a cold, snowy day—there's really nothing else you need to know about **Rowdy Hall** (10 Main St., 631-324-8555, RowdyHall.com) except that you can purchase a discounted ticket for the movie theater next door with your meal.

► STAY

What makes an ideal winter retreat? Hot spiced cider and freshly baked cookies available on demand, sumptuous breakfasts, and gas fireplaces in every room sound like a good place to start.

The **Mill House Inn** (31 N. Main St., 631-324-9766, MillHouseInn.com) offers all of this and a DVD library with popcorn service. Room rates for January through March start at \$225 during the week and \$295 on the weekend. This may seem high until you consider that summer travelers may pay \$500 more per night.

NEWPORT, R.I.

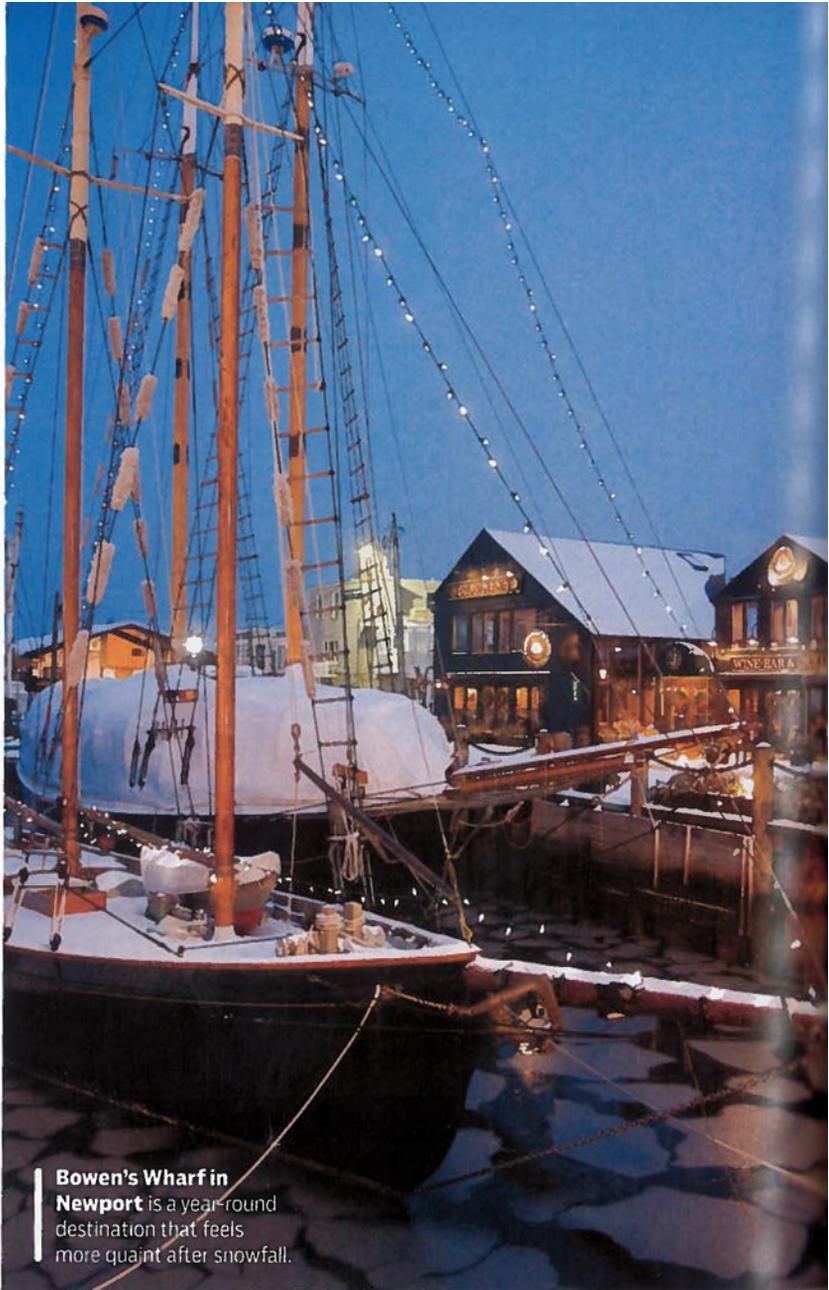
Newport possesses a harsh coastal beauty that is unique to New England. Its setting helped make Newport the premiere American resort town of the early 20th century. A lot has changed since that gilded age, but unflappable Yankee luxury remains the town's dominant aesthetic. Newport is still the sailing capital of the country, after all.

Yet during the winter, with the yachting crowd in dry dock and the summer homes empty, Newport mellows. There's great food, nature, and history at every turn. And you can even find a parking spot on Thames Street.

► EXPLORE

Newport's mansions were the summer retreats of America's blue-blooded aristocrats and industrialist barons, who referred to their palaces as summer cottages. (No wonder Newport is where novelist Edith Wharton perfected her detached upper-class irony.)

Three of the most popular homes—**The Breakers, Marble House, and The Elms** (NewportMansions.org)—are open to the public all winter. Wander the myriad rooms and get caught up in a Gatsbyesque fantasy world of marble ballrooms and mahogany libraries. From January through March, the Preservation Society of Newport offers a winter >>



Bowen's Wharf in Newport is a year-round destination that feels more quaint after snowfall.



The grandest of Newport's summer cottages look regal in winter. Tours of **The Breakers**, a Vanderbilt home, are offered year-round.

passport that provides discounted admission to all three houses, \$28 for adults and \$9 for children.

Traveling with kids? The **Newport Winter Festival** (NewportEvents.com/winterfest) is an ideal family destination. Scheduled for Feb. 17-26, the festival features a ton of events, including polo on the beach, ice skating, live concerts, special deals at restaurants and shops, and the nighttime illumination of Ballard Park, Newport's only nature preserve.

▶ EAT

Tallulah on Thames' (464 Thames St., 401-849-2433, TallulahOnThames.com) seasonally inspired cuisine is outstanding year round. But wintertime is when chef Jake Rojas cuts loose with rich and comforting fare like creamy gnudi made with locally produced ricotta, chestnuts, and roasted apple.

Through April, Tallulah offers a burger made from grass-fed beef every Wednesday night and a three-course prix fixe dinner for \$35 on Sundays. Note that the restaurant is closed this year from Jan. 1 to Feb. 10.

▶ STAY

The Cliff Walk, a seaside walking trail that winds along three miles of Newport's rocky shoreline, passes by some of this region's most impressive real estate. Located at the Cliff Walk's entrance, **Forty 1° North** (351 Thames St., 401-846-8018, 41North.com) is a modern boutique resort with the type of location and views once reserved for Astors and Vanderbilts.

The average winter room rate of \$300 is half of what you can expect to pay in July. And during the frigid, post-holiday months, the gas fireplaces, two-person soaking tubs, and fully loaded iPads in every room feel practically pragmatic.

The **Rose Island Lighthouse** (401-847-4242, Roseland.org) offers guests the adventure and whimsy of playing lighthouse keepers for the weekend. Just a 15-minute boat ride from Newport, Rose Island feels miles away from reality.

The fully operational lighthouse is a museum and hotel. The keeper's apartment features amenities like a wood-burning stove, a fully equipped kitchen, living room, and study complete with telescopes. It rents for \$225 a night. Guests are responsible for chores such as raising and lowering the flag daily.

Plenty of birds on the 2-acre island will keep you company, as will the harbor



■ Ferries aren't the only boats on the water during winter in Martha's Vineyard. This picturesque dock sits within view of the Vineyard Square Hotel.

seals that like to congregate on the rocks at low tide during the winter months.

MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASS.

Despite the craziness of its high season, Martha's Vineyard is a laid-back island community at heart. You just don't realize it until all those people wearing green pants and Black Dog shirts hit the road.

Winter in Martha's Vineyard is a time for bundling up, hunkering down, and enjoying a slower pace of life. Many of the Vineyard's shops, bars, and restaurants close, but the ones that stay open take on an inviting communal atmosphere.

You can actually get a ferryboat reservation at the last minute during the winter, so there's no need to plan your trip months in advance. Just don't come without a car. January is no time to be riding around on a rental moped.

▶ EXPLORE

Closing in on its 100th birthday, the **Capawock Theatre** (43 Main St., Vineyard Haven, 508-696-9200) is an island establishment. The little one-screen movie house shows a mix of second-run blockbusters and indie flicks. At the Capawock, there's a high likelihood that the projector will malfunction during the show, but the technical difficulties only add to the theater's personality.

The last Saturday in January, Martha's Vineyard celebrates the deep, dark heart of winter with its big, annual Chilifest Big Chili Contest, a benefit that features mariachi bands and beer. The cook-off is held at the Portuguese American club in Oak Bluffs.

▶ EAT

The best burger on the island was once an off-the-menu insider's secret at **Atria** (137 Main St., Edgartown, 508-627-5850, AtriaMV.com). Now it's on the menu year-round. Skip the more formal dining room and cozy down by the fireside in Atria's basement bar with a warming cocktail and a \$17 hamburger that is truly magnificent. On Sunday nights, you can get two burgers for the price of one. Go for the Classic or try the Frenchy, served with St. Andre cheese, crispy prosciutto, baby arugula, and cabernet-roasted onions.

Art Cliff Diner (39 Beach Rd., Vineyard Haven, 503-693-1224) has been the Vineyard's reigning breakfast champion. In the summer, this means hour-long waits and artificially heightened expectations. The wintertime is when you can walk right in and appreciate Art Cliff for what it is: a fantastic breakfast diner, nothing more or less. See why with dishes like the drunk-sailor pancakes made with rum raisins and pecans and the chorizo breakfast tacos.

▶ STAY

The recently renovated **Vineyard Square Hotel** (38 N. Water St., 508-627-4711, vineyardsquarehotel.com) is at the center of posh Edgartown. It has fantastic harbor views and excellent winter rates, with standard rooms starting at \$155 and suites at \$275 per night. Spacious quarters, some with fireplaces, earn Vineyard Square the off-season stamp of approval. The onsite restaurant is closed through April, but exploring the island's restaurant scene is half the fun. ■