

## travel

## NEWPORT, THE GREAT ESCAPADE:

Ships, Shops,  
and Sunset Music

BY MERLE EXIT

It was smooth sailing as the sun shone on the *Madeleine* in Newport's Narragansett Bay. The breeze blew back my curly hair as I was given the opportunity to steer the boat while focusing on one of Rhode Island's many mansions. Shortly after the 72-foot schooner docked I was invited aboard the *Freedom*, a 12-meter 1980 America's Cup winner. A group of avid sailors from England chartered the boat and each participated in its glorious journey.

All except moi. "Sideways" would be a better title for the journey than the award winning movie as the vessel speeded along the waters. Orders of "you

need to move" were accompanied by more elderly people assisting in my walking. But, both excursions brought great joy rather than regurgitation.

Cobblestone shopping wharves and colonial streets led me past the Touro Synagogue, the oldest still-in-operation synagogue in North America, which was founded by Sephardic Jews. It was under renovation, but I had visited the site several years ago.

The Hydrangea House, located along historic Bellevue Avenue was one place that I would be resting my body. An inn with seven rooms of luxurious décor and lavish service, most with their own Jacuzzi'd bathrooms, would be my mini-getaway. I was not only impressed by my quarters hav-

ing a flat-screen tv, fireplace and remote-controlled air conditioner, but also by the next morning's sumptuous breakfast of morsels such as raspberry-pancake fritas and corn-bread-stuffed sausage balls.

I walked along Bellevue Avenue to tour the International Tennis Hall of Fame Museum. I heard that the U.S. Women's Open was going to take place here June 26 to July 2, 2006. However, that wasn't about tennis but about golf, and not at the Tennis Hall of Fame, but at the Newport Country Club. Annika Sorenstam, Se Ri Pak will join Meg Mallon, Juli Inkster and Karrie Webb. I highly recommend booking now as the ticket prices are going to increase on January 1, 2006.

Mansions. Been there, done most. I keep asking why I would pay someone to remind me of what I can't afford. This time around I was interested in two of them: the Elms and Rough Point.

It was the Elms Lunch and Garden Tour, rather than the mansion itself, that drew my attention. The tour of the elegant restored gardens and grounds of the Elms was just perfectly compatible with the day's climate. Lunch on the terrace transported my imagination to the possibility of having lived there. An

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extremely knowledgeable representative of the Preservation Society was on hand to share her expertise.

Rough Point was the Newport home of Doris Duke, "heiress, preservationist, animal lover and art collector." The mansion is a display of both fine art and different period furniture. There is an annually changing exhibit, with the present one called, "Jet Set to Jeans, the wardrobe of Doris Duke." It contrasts her public designer outfits with her jeans, comfortable clothes and barefoot private life. A courtesy van and same-day tickets are available at the Newport Gateway Visitor's Center at 23 America's Cup Avenue in downtown Newport.

Hearing the sound of the alarm buzzer, I awoke jumped out of bed and pushed every possible button to make the early morning noise cease. No button would turn it off, and I considered simply pulling out the plug. But then, I awoke from

the dream of shutting it off. I was at my second accommodation, Yankee Peddler Inn, one of five Historic Inns of Newport. Located on Touro Street, the inn has quite comfortable rooms and a rooftop deck overlooking the city. The inn that may have the best view is Harborside Inn at Christies Landing and the more unique one would be Jailhouse Inn, a modernized former jailhouse.

With a city of events, the one that I was privy to was the annual Snapple Sunset Music Festival held at the Newport Yachting Center. Singer/pianist Peter Cincotti and jazz trumpeter Chris Botti were on the bill that evening. I was familiar with both artists as I had seen Cincotti as an opening act for kd lang, and Botti having made several appearances on the Caroline Rhea show.

The tented VIP area had food and local wines from Greenvale Vineyards, Newport Vineyards and Sakonnet Vineyards & Winery. Beach Bum Don's was on hand to have us indulge on "the best chocolate chip cookies on the planet!" Examples: Rum Coconut, a hint of butter rum, coconut flakes and slices almonds; BVI Toffee, white chocolate chips, pecan and soft English toffee bits; Cherry Almond, almonds instead of walnuts with chunks of dried sweetened cherries. If I were smart I would have gotten my exercise by walking back to Queens instead of taking Amtrak.

Newport has become the newer P-town scene with its *Gay & Lesbian Travel Guide*. The guide lists both gay-friendly and gay-owned businesses. Aside from Hydrangea House, Inn Bliss at 10 Bliss Road sounded like a great place. Nick and I had a great conversation. Too bad the place was booked that weekend. For further information on Newport go to [www.GoNewport.com](http://www.GoNewport.com). ▼

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