

Traveling with Jewish Taste® Rhode Island: Tiny But Big

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



In 1636, Protestant theologian Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for what leaders there considered heretical views. His detractors thought the ideas of freedom of religion and church-state separation outrageous. So, he settled near the Narragansett Bay and named his site Providence in thanks to God. Williams developed the initial settlement into what is now called the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and he did it while dealing fairly with the Narragansett Indians, from whom he purchased the land by the bay. His critics derisively called the settlement "Rogue's Island." Williams had the last laugh.

To learn more about the tiniest state with the longest name, take a tour of the State Capitol. It's easy to find; it's the building with the noted statue "Rhode Island

Independent Man" topping the dome.

The majority of Rhode Island's one million residents live in Providence, and the city boasts nine synagogues in the metropolitan area, ranging from Reform to Chabad. But, the highlight of Jewish Rhode Island is located in Newport and given the state's history of religious freedom I highly recommend a side trip to Aquidneck Island. This is home to the Touro Synagogue, a National Historic Site. The Touro attained this distinction by virtue of being the oldest synagogue in the United States and also one of the most architecturally and historically significant buildings of its time. The Georgian edifice is magnificently preserved, but it is the building's history that is more impressive than its architecture.

Fifteen Sephardic families fleeing the Inquisition founded Congregation Jeshuat Israel in 1658. They dedicated the Touro Synagogue building in 1763, only to see it used as a hospital by the British during the Revolutionary War. Over time the Rhode Island General Assembly met there, the State Supreme Court held sessions, and General George Washington visited a town meeting there in 1781 to plan the last phase of the Revolution. In 1790, President Washington wrote a letter to the Jews of Newport, in which he proclaimed, "Happily the government of the United States...gives to bigotry no sanction...to persecution no assistance." This letter is enshrined at the Touro and is a point of pride among the congregants, as well as among the local townspeople.

The building reverted to synagogue use in 1850 and is still in operation today. The congregation holds an annual reading of the letter, which this year will take place on August 21. While the event is open to the public, seating is limited so reservations are required.

I love walking through the College Hill neighborhood of Providence around Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where immaculately preserved Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian houses preside graciously among tree-lined streets. When school is out and students are home on vacation, the streets become a quiet haven for tourists. When you need a break from walk-

ing, stop on Thayer Street – the business district of College Hill – where you'll find restaurants, cafes, stores, and street vendors.

While on College Hill, visit the RISD museum. This wonderful institution offers both excellent exhibitions and a permanent collection that features items ranging from costumes and textiles to painting and glass to furniture and silver – from antiquity to the present. World renowned glass artist and former RISD professor, Dale Chihuly, mounted one recent exhibition in honor of the new museum wing.

Another stop on your visit must be Federal Hill, "the heartbeat of Providence" known for its shopping, dining, and nightlife. And, the heart of the hill is Atwells Avenue. You'll know you're there when you see the arched gateway with the giant pinecone hanging from it. This is the place to find dozens of restaurants to feed the hungry visitor. While the vast majority of the restaurants along the avenue are Italian (this is the Italian neighborhood), you can also find Mexican, Jamaican Caribbean, Indian,

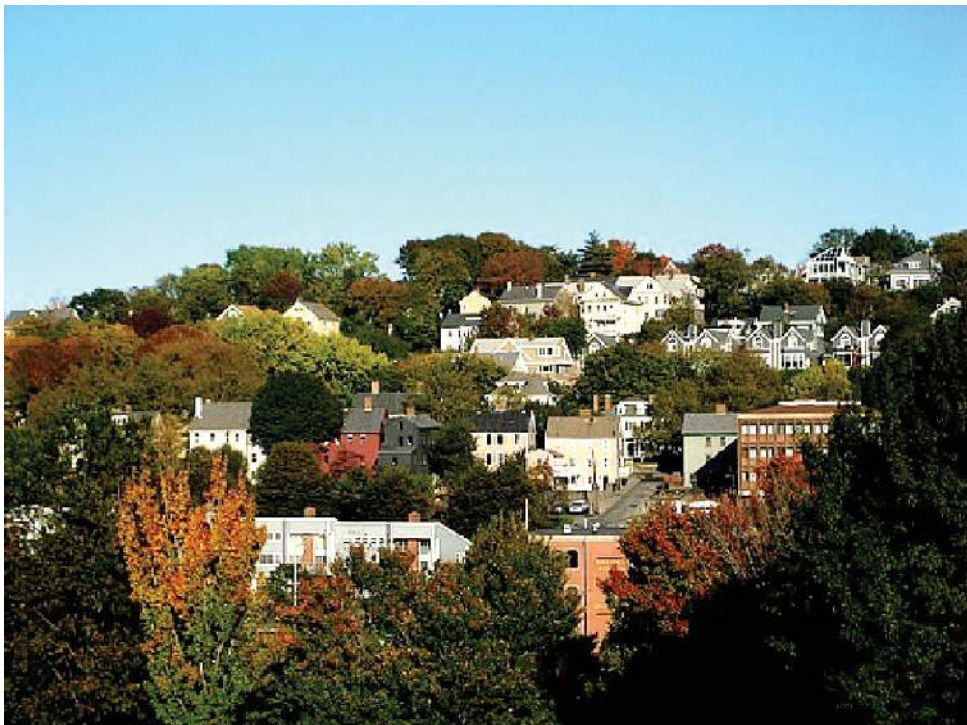
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Dale Chihuly glass at RISD



A wedding inside Touro Synagogue, oldest in the United States



The College Hill neighborhood of Providence

Italian Wedding Soup

Rhode Island is home to a large Italian population and many Italian restaurants, many found on Atwells Avenue on Providence's Federal Hill. This traditional "Italian Wedding Soup" is adapted for the kosher kitchen.



INGREDIENTS:

1 pound extra-lean ground beef	1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 egg, lightly beaten	1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
1/2 cup fresh bread crumbs	12 cups chicken broth
1 small onion, grated	1 pound escarole (or endive or spinach) chopped
1/2 teaspoon dried basil	1-1/2 cups sliced carrots
1 teaspoon minced garlic	1 cup orzo
1 teaspoon salt	

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a medium bowl, combine meat, egg, bread crumbs, onion, and seasonings. Shape into one-inch balls and set aside on a platter.
2. In a large stockpot, heat broth to boiling. Stir in the escarole, carrots, and meatballs. Return to boil; then reduce heat to medium. Cook about ten minutes, or until meat is almost cooked through. Add orzo and cook another 10 minutes or until the pasta is "al dente."
3. Stir frequently to prevent sticking.

Serves 10

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and Chinese cuisine among the thirty-five on the avenue.

A short drive from Federal Hill is the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. Chartered in 1951, it is the oldest local ethnic historical society in Rhode Island. The Association conducts research and collects documents, oral histories, and artifacts relating to the history of the Jews of Rhode Island, including the neighborhoods in which they have lived and the institutions to which they belong.

no kosher restaurants, one can find plenty of vegetarian and fish dishes from which to choose. As long as you are in "Little Rhody," you may also want to sample Newport Creamery's trademarked "Awful Awful," a thick and delicious blend of flavored syrup, milk, and a secret frozen ice milk mix. Also, Del's lemonade is a classic Rhode Island treat.

From May to October, a favorite Providence activity is "WaterFire," in which one hundred bonfires light up the three rivers of downtown Providence while music from around the

the Culinary Arts Museum at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, "dedicated to the preservation of the history of the culinary and hospitality industries." There you can see art and artifacts about food service and cookery.

After dinner you can choose from some excellent theater productions. The National Historic Site Providence Performing Arts Center offers Broadway touring shows and contemporary classics in a magnificently restored art-deco building.

Surrounded by intricate and gilded plasterwork, columns of

imported marble, and huge crystal chandeliers, this season's shows include "Lion King," "In the Heights," and "Blue Man Group." And, the Trinity Repertory Company features new plays, classics, and musicals in what the *Boston Globe* has called "American Theater at its best." "Trinity Rep's" productions this year include "The Crucible," "Yellowman," and "Steel Magnolias."

Rhode Island – tiny state, big offerings.

Carol Goodman Kaufman, an organizational psychologist and writer, is the author of Sins

of Omission: The Jewish Community's Reaction to Domestic Violence (*Westview Press, 2003*). She serves on the National Board of Hadassah and chairs the Jewish Community Relations Council of Central Massachusetts. Kaufman divides her time between Worcester, West Stockbridge, and the world.

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The Atwells Avenue arch leads to shopping, dining, and nightlife



'WaterFire,' lights up the rivers

The Association also publishes an annual journal, *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.

Between the abundant seafood in the Ocean State and the influence of Johnson and Wales University's culinary training, one can't go wrong when dining in Rhode Island. While there are

world accompanies the moving sculptures. A word of warning: If you want to enjoy "WaterFire" while dining, you must make your reservations months in advance.

If eating delicious meals isn't enough to satisfy your gastronomic desires, plan a visit to



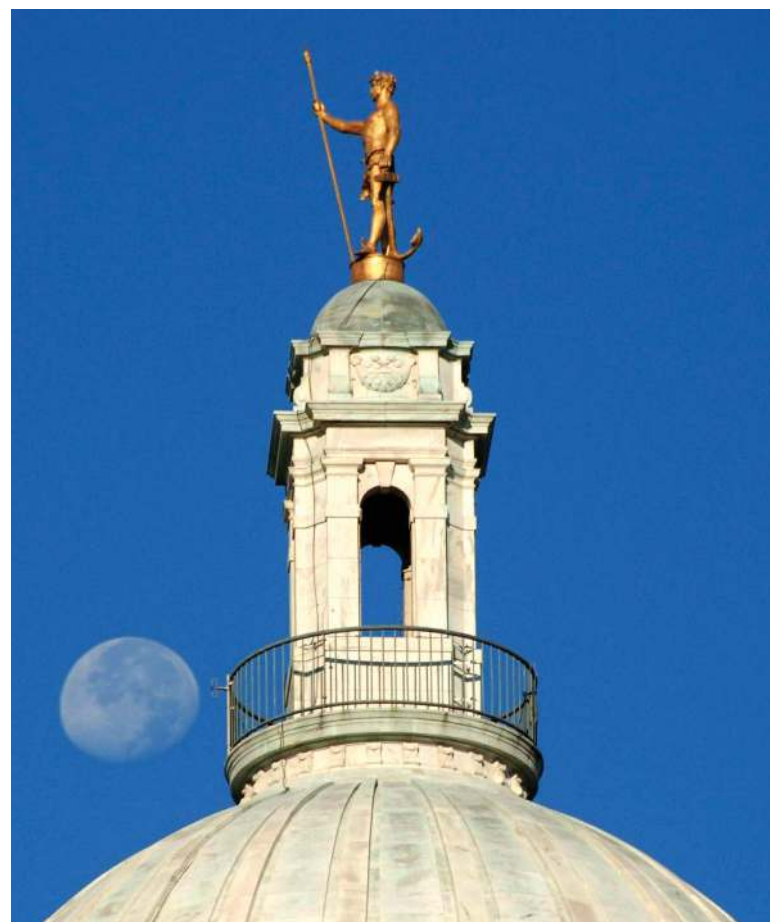
The Lion King's 'Rafiki,' on stage



Cracker Jack toy in the advertising section of the Culinary Arts Museum at Johnson & Wales University



'Awful, Awfuls' – aren't!



'Rhode Island Independent Man' tops the capitol dome

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