



Winter at Rose Island Lighthouse

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NEWPORT, R.I. – Stepping off the boat in the quiet fall air and onto the beach at Rose Island may just as well have been a world away. Consider it the ultimate staycation; a study in Rhode Island history; and still -after two decades – one of Newport’s best kept secrets. As a local, it can be easy to take this iconic yet somehow isolated landmark for granted. A jaunt over on a recent Sunday morning, however, has cast this place in a new light. Perhaps, I say to myself, it’s time to rediscover Rose Island; Getting away from it all without ever actually leaving town.

Every Sunday through Thursday during November, in a deal that is going to be extended throughout the month of March; guests can stay at the Rose Island Lighthouse on the first floor museum level for \$100 a night. “What makes this place different in the winter is that it’s so quiet. There’s no ferry running every couple hours, there aren’t constant crowds coming through doing tours. It’s great in the summer, but the offseason is really nice too,” explained Dave McCurdy, executive director of the Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation.



Dave McCurdy, executive director of the Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation.
(Photo by Meg O'Neil)

The offer is open to anyone who wishes to spend the night in one of the bedrooms on the first floor of the 1870 keeper's house. McCurdy continued, "We're trying to get locals to come out to the island. A lot of locals don't go out in Newport in the summer; they try to avoid the crowds. Something they tend not to come out until the season ends. It's nice to have the locals, because a lot of our business is word of mouth. We're a small foundation with not a lot of money for marketing so we try to get our local friends to tell their friends about their stay out here. I'll ask people how they heard about us – and it's all word of mouth." There's an even better deal starting in January for local businesses. McCurdy explained, "Beginning in January, we're going to be offering a free night for industry people. Those who work in restaurants and bars around town. The deal is they come out here for a night, have fun, and they talk nice about us and spread the word. It's worked out well in the past."

You may have heard the rumor that staying at the lighthouse overnight must be booked three years in advance. Simply not true, McCurdy says. "A lot of times on the harbor cruises, the guides will say something like, 'Oh that's Rose Island Lighthouse out there. You can stay there, but it's booked for three years.' It's not booked up like that, not true at all." Especially not true for the off-season. If you want to book a night in the peak season of summer, McCurdy recommends you starting booking a room now, but for a nice overnight in the winter, no need. Simply log onto to the website at www.roseislandlighthouse.org and you can check on the room availability page which nights are open. Find the night you like, and call them to book it at 847-4242. The best time to call is between 9 a.m. – 1 p.m., Monday through Friday to talk with a real live person.

"It's kind of hard to describe what we are out here, but I describe it as a Bed and Breakfast without the Breakfast," jokes McCurdy. Because there is no refrigeration, guests are to bring their own food and drinks in coolers. And don't think it will be too cold to stay out there this winter. "The winds can be rough, but it can be so calm too. Guests can have days out here in the middle of winter when you're warm in a sweatshirt. The lighthouse itself stays incredibly warm. Guests may need a few extra blankets, but those are provided to you."

Having never been to the island before, I was able to take a few hours and explore much of the picturesque landscape that surrounds the lighthouse and feel as though I was a whole world away outside of Newport. With the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives, it's sometimes easy to forget that we have a place as beautiful as this in our own backyard. With no televisions, or wireless internet to keep you company on the island, it's a place where guests can focus on stepping away from the modern amenities of today, and slipping into a simpler time, with a panoramic view from the top of the lighthouse that is almost impossible to comprehend unless seen with your own eyes. One glimpse of the guestbook, and you can read the personal accounts of guests from states all over the country who come into our town to spend their vacations. Why not take a break this winter, pack a cooler, a favorite bottle of wine, your main girl or guy, and head out to Rose Island Lighthouse for a Newport experience like no other.