



The Inn at Hastings Park; (right) rooms have a modern colonial feel; (below) dining by the fire



States of mind

A tour of the thinking person's favourite corner of the USA

by Nick Scott



Colonial-era hotspots, literary and cultural intrigue, culinary flair in abundance ... The pocket of land and sea where New York State, Massachusetts and Rhode Island convene is surely the most storied and stimulating corner of America. Add to that a newly reinvigorated hospitality scene, and there's never been a better time go and investigate. Here's our suggested itinerary ...

STOP ONE

The Inn at Hastings Park, Lexington

The state of Massachusetts is named after one of the many native tribes who once roamed, foraged, hunted, farmed and fished along a craggy coastline now dotted with towns which these days are painted almost as often as they're photographed. For modern Americans, though, the town of Lexington, 11 miles to the north-west of Boston, has a significance that is entirely post-colonial: it was here that an armed conflict between Britain and its thirteen

colonies in America broke out, thus leading to the town's proud moniker today, 'Birthplace of American Liberty'.

The best place to take in all the historical splendour the town offers, for our money, lies to the town's west, 15 miles from Boston and a short walk across Lexington Common National Historical Site from Buckman Tavern, whose front door still proudly displays a bullet hole from the skirmish that launched the war in 1775. The Inn at Hastings Park is a thoughtfully restored, soul-restoring boutique hotel, whose 22 rooms are set within three grey clapboard buildings – the Main House, originally made in 1888 as a private home; the Isaac Mulliken House, a residence built in 1841 for a local politician; and The Barn, which was once Mulliken's carpentry shop – set around a courtyard.

The décor is all Yankee Doodle-debonair, paying subtle homage to the colonial era, but with modernist accents prevailing throughout: wooden furniture which

Photos: (The Inn at Hastings Park) Andy Ryan

could be mistaken for being 19th century, for example, has bright orange pleather upholstery while hand-printed wallpaper bears the kind of modernist patterns one finds in the most recently, lavishly and tastefully renovated of English country manors. That said, a local flavour prevails – most of the aesthetic accents were conceived by local designers, and the Brahms Mount throws on the womb-like beds are hand woven in Maine on antique looms.

Of all the guest rooms, we recommend the King Suite – a sun-drenched, two-room space on the top floor of the Main House overlooking the eponymous park, with elegant French doors dividing two sleeping areas: expect the finest Frette cotton linens, a grand fireplace and a marble bathroom with a rain shower.

If you can draw yourself away, once you've packed in some calories in the form of the delectable triple-stacked vanilla pancakes and pure maple syrup on offer here, the hotel will lend you a bike to do the Minuteman Bikeway, an 11-mile trail that weaves throughout the neighbouring towns. Those with a yen for transcendentalism will instead cycle the six miles to Walden Pond, where Henry David Thoreau spent two years of solitude and self-reliance before publishing his experiences in *Walden* in 1854.

A stay in The King Suite at The Inn at Hastings Park costs from \$600 (around £490) a night. innathastingspark.com

STOP TWO

Ocean House, Rhode Island

Just under 100 miles to the south of Lexington – break the journey in half at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in the state capital, Providence, if the works of American artists such as Paul Revere, Andy Warhol and Kara Walker are of interest – on some cliffs that sit near the tip of a tongue of land jutting into the Atlantic towards Long Island to the south-west you'll find what was, in the early 1900s, a summer home for wealthy New Yorkers: Ocean House.

From many of this butter-coloured, 150-or-so-foot tall Victorian building's grand terraces, wraparound porches and 247 windows, you can see Montauk, Block Island and the Atlantic, and in places take in three states in a single vista – Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York (nearby Fishers Island, despite being closer to the mainland than Long Island, is considered part of The Empire State).

Deemed too decrepit to be restored by Charles M. Royce, a long-time summer resident who purchased the property in 2003, Ocean House underwent what was effectively a rebuild – one with painstaking attention paid to preserving what had stood before. The original design was adhered to, right down to window placements and interior hues, and around 5000 artefacts salvaged from the original building – the main lobby fireplace made



of beach stones, the oak elevator cab, mahogany balustrades, Victorian light fixtures, an exterior balcony ensemble with a Palladian window which presides above the front door can be found gracing a 152,000-square-foot space which many regular visitors deem to be more splendid than the original.

Lounging around the chairs and cabanas scattered on and near the white-sand beach sipping sparkling rosé appears to be the activity *du jour* during *Robb Report UK*'s visit, but there's also a putting green, squash courts, an indoor saltwater pool and a screening room, plus activities including yoga and croquet lessons on the vast, baize-like lawn from eminently likeable US professional Stephen Morgan.

The hotel also boasts a Center for Wine and Culinary Arts: classes, which take place in a 3000-square-foot space modelled on an 19th-century barn, include Oyster and Clams; Tasting and How-Tos, New England Clam Chowder, and – here's one to beef up your dinner-table banter arsenal – Old versus New World Wines.

You might also choose to borrow one of a four-car fleet of Mercedes-Benz, and drive around the Edward Hopper-esque streets

that surround a neighbourhood that isn't short of a few regular celebrity second-homers, or if the ocean looks too inviting to resist altogether (but taking one of the free-for-all kayaks or paddleboards out for a ride doesn't appeal), Barton & Gray is a local mariners' club which offers fantastic boat charters – chilled wine and jovial insights from the captain included – all around the peninsula.

Book well in advance – at least six months – and you may be able to secure the choice pick of Ocean House's 49 rooms, 18 suites and seven cottages: Tower Suite, a four-level space with a magnificent spiral staircase, emblazoned in nautical blues and soothing creams, which is surely contender for Best Hotel Suite on the Eastern seaboard. At its summit is the Crow's Nest, a kind of snug overlooking the living area, complete with daybed and bath. A ladder goes even further to a widow's walk at the building's highest point.

A stay in the Penthouse Suite at Ocean House costs from \$6000 (around £4900) a night; a stay in the Tower Suite costs from \$2200 (around £1800) a night.
oceanhouser.com



(clockwise, from bottom left) Ocean House's twisting staircase in its Tower Suite; the hotel at sunset; a pool made for lounging in all seasons

STOP THREE

The Wauwinet, Nantucket

A wind-swept outdoor experience on the New Bedford to Nantucket ferry will make up a large part of your journey 100 miles east to a beautifully appointed hotel, fresh from a multi-million dollar refurbishment, whose doors have been darkened by well-heeled guests since the late 1800s.

Nestling at the northern extremity of the remote island that provided Herman Melville inspiration to write *Moby Dick*, next to the Coskata-Coatue Wildlife Refuge, The Wauwinet – nine miles from the island's main town – is swanky and yet blissfully unfussy, with its solid wooden floors and furnishings, soothing neutral hues, eclectic furniture and luxurious flourishes such as the custom Pratesi by Rivolta linens and capacious bathrooms with Carrara marble herringbone flooring.

If you've got a good book on the go, you'll face a hard choice between a spot on the blissfully non-crowded beach, the usually empty library and just out on the lawn, rabbits hopping around you in the mist, for an early morning read. Whale spotting, lobstering or surfcasting excursions and cooking lessons are popular pastimes here, as are picnics, invariably involving clam chowder and/or boiled lobster, on the beach.

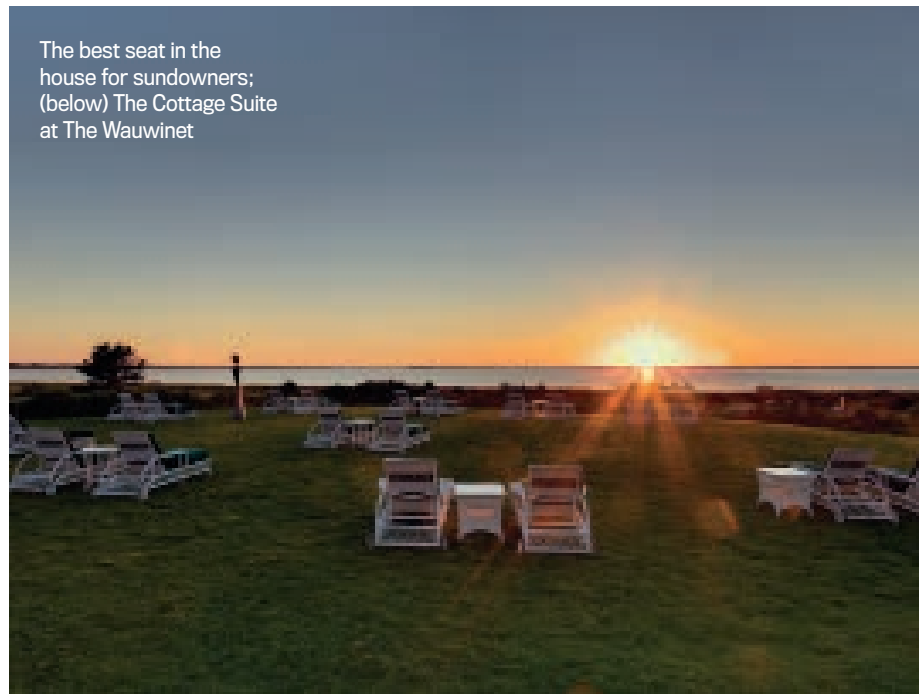
Later on, a saunter down the cobblestone streets of downtown Nantucket (attractions include the Nantucket Whaling Museum and Cisco Brewers) might conclude with a wander around the labyrinth boat jetties. Here, the feeling that you're in one of the most prosperous little nooks of the planet – despite a slightly kitsch tinge to the town



(above) The Wauwinet on moody Nantucket; the neutral tones of the newly decorated guest rooms



The best seat in the house for sundowners; (below) The Cottage Suite at The Wauwinet



typified by the risqué, tourist-shop T-shirt references to a certain limerick about a man from this particular state – becomes palpable.

Back at the hotel, expect superb service: The Wauwinet belongs to the Relais & Châteaux group, which means that the pre-arrival concierge should be in touch to find out your preferences – culinary preferences, preferred activities and so on – before you even arrive. By evening time, you'll be ready to hop aboard the Wauwinet Lady and take the short trip to The Wauwinet's restaurant, Topper's, where fresh New England seafood (try the Retsyo Oysters on the half shell, cultivated about 300 yards away) is complemented by 1450 carefully curated wines which have frequently seen the hotel sweep up the Wine Spectator Grand Award. The deck, with its heated

awning and views of the bay, is as pleasant a place for an autumnal dinner at dusk as any on the planet.

There are 32 guest rooms and four cottages across from the main building, but Anchorage House – a two-floor, three-bedroom construction, on a beautifully landscaped courtyard just across from the main building – is the prime choice. Expect an Atlantic-inspired navy and sand decor, nautical-themed watercolours, stylish but unfussy furniture from the California-based decor design company behind the building's refurb, Serena & Lily and the keys to a 2019 BMW 760L SUV for the duration of your stay.

A stay at Anchorage House at The Wauwinet costs from \$1895 (around £1500) per night. wauwinet.com

STOP FOUR

The Lowell, New York City

No trip to the north-east of the USA is complete without a visit – in this instance via a one-way flight from Nantucket – to the country's largest metropolitan area: home to almost 21 million people, 200 languages, almost 350,000 millionaires and 7.25 per cent of the world's gold. The Big Apple's offerings need no explanation, but we thoroughly recommend spurning the tower-block global hotel chains in favour of this 17-storey edifice, sitting proudly among the elegant brownstones on a quiet street that links Park and Madison Avenues, as your base the next time you go to explore.

Built in the twilight years of Prohibition, The Lowell – which is now owned by TV and film producer and beauty entrepreneur Dina De Luca Chartouni – has been through three major restorations, including one in 2007 which saw Michael S. Smith (whose work includes President Obama's White House, as well as the homes of Harrison Ford and Cindy Crawford) called in to re-do the rooms. So enamoured was camp Chartouni with the outcome, he was recently called in again to overhaul the public spaces.

What Smith dutifully created was a peaceful bastion of serenity, just one block from the edge of Central Park. It's tempting, each time you walk through The Lowell's art deco façade to be hit by an olfactory cocktail of orchid and hydrangea, to cross straight over the marble-floored foyer into either The Club Room (which is dotted with wingback club chairs, its walls lined with artworks and vintage books), or over to Jacques Bar: a place where oak panelling, velvet banquettes, mosaic marble floors and an antique mirrored ceiling conspire to transport you back to the roaring '20s, when the edifice in which you're ensconced was erected – especially when you're sipping a martini which I can unscientifically but emphatically assert to be the best Manhattan has to offer. The Pembroke Room, accessible via the lobby's grand marble staircase, offers an equally grand but more afternoon tea-ish vibe.

In creating one of the most appealing Penthouse Suites in the city, Smith has, clearly with one eye on the townhouses it overlooks, opted for a three-bedroom pied-à-terre which fuses American modernism with classicism from across the pond. The four private terraces overlook upper Manhattan, while a gourmet kitchen opens up into a bright dining conservatory. Wood-burning fireplaces (a rarity in Manhattan



(clockwise, from above) The Lowell's distinctive façade; Manhattan views; high tea; the Manhattan Suite; the Lowell Suite

but seemingly de rigueur at The Lowell), art and antiques, hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper and Selene marble baths contribute to a cosily convivial whole.

At the main restaurant Majorelle, meanwhile – a space inspired by a 12-acre botanical garden in Marrakech belonging to Yves Saint Laurent – local restaurateur Charles Masson and Belgian chef Emmanuel Niess whip up Mediterranean magic such as lobster with ginger and summer vegetables and a silky, rich saffron risotto.

As with The Wauwinet, expect to hear from the Guest Relations Team in advance of your stay: the bespoke experience they'll offer you, based on impeccable local knowledge and catholic connections, will ensure you round off this whole trip in the manner it deserves. **RR**

A stay at The Lowell's Penthouse Suite, which sleeps 4-6 adults, costs from \$18,000 (around £14,850) a night. lowellhotel.com