



Providence, Rhode Island City Guide

The capital city is the perfect walkable northeastern metropolis with equal parts history and culture

By Christine Chitnis

As the first colony to resist British rule, the small but mighty state of Rhode Island still knows how to pack a punch—and the capital city of Providence is the state's cultural hot spot. Thanks to Ivy League Brown University and the forward-thinking Rhode Island School of Design, the city has food, shopping, and art that rival its big-city neighbors. In fact, its close proximity to Boston (45 minutes) and New York City (three hours) makes Providence an ideal getaway for northerners seeking a rich weekend escape with a bit of everything—fresh pasta in Little Italy, strolls through neighborhoods of historic colonial and Georgian revival houses, and modern galleries filled with the works of the next big artists.

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Downtown

Thanks to a new shopping center, downtown Providence has recently enjoyed a rebirth. Drop by on any Saturday for the Providence Open Market on Westminster Street, various arts and crafts festivals rotating through Burnside Park, concerts at Kennedy Plaza and the area's biggest draw, Waterfire, where fire installations light up the three rivers that run through the city. If you can manage a night out, you'll find no shortage of cultural entertainment, including the [Trinity Repertory Theater](http://www.trinityrep.com) and the [Providence Performing Arts Center](http://www.ppacri.org).

RESTAURANTS

[Cuban Revolution](http://www.thecubanrevolution.com)

Enjoy authentic Cuban cuisine while honoring the revolutionary spirit of the '60s. Make sure to try the Che sweet-potato fries and the award-winning steak sandwich on fresh Cuban bread. *50 Aborn Street, (401) 331-8829.*

[Tazza](http://www.tazzacaffe.com)

This neighborhood cafe has good eats and a packed calendar of free music, movies, and art shows. Try the drinking chocolate, the chai, or the tomato, basil, and mozzarella panini. *250 Westminster Street, (401) 421-3300.*

White Electric Coffee (<http://whiteelectriccoffee.com>)

Don't miss the ginger scones, organic oatmeal, and hearty lunchtime salads at this hipster joint decked out in local art. *711 Westminster Street, (401) 453-3007.*

STORES

Heir Antiques (<http://www.heirantiques.com>)

Keep your eye out for quirky vintage anatomical prints at this gothic-cool antique store brimming with covetable home goods. *65 Eddy Street, (401) 331-5680.*

Rocket to Mars

This funky secondhand shop is a cult favorite with a wide selection of retro men's and women's (and occasionally kids') clothes and home furnishings. *144 Broadway, (401) 274-0905.*

Touched by Green (<http://www.touchedbygreen.com>)

Everything you and your little ones need to live a greener life, including sustainable jewelry made by Colombian artisans and soft knits woven from Peruvian alpaca wool. *271 South Main Street, (401) 223-4420.*

Bambini (<http://www.bambini-online.com>)

Make sure to chat up the owners of this upscale baby boutique to get expert advice on sprucing up your nursery. *251 South Main Street, (401) 490-6952.*

ACTIVITIES

Waterfire (<http://www.waterfire.org>)

The river comes alive with fire installations, live classical, jazz and opera music, and gondola rides. *Memorial Boulevard.*

Providence Children's Museum (<http://www.childrenmuseum.org>)

Float boats, build tunnels, construct fountains, and splash around while learning about fluid dynamics with Water Ways, the museum's biggest hands-on draw. *100 South Street, (401) 273-5437.*

Roger Williams Park Zoo (<http://www.rogerwilliamsparkzoo.org>)

Don't miss the groundbreaking Marco Polo Trail, an interactive exhibit that traces the explorer's three-year journey through Asia. *1000 Elmwood Avenue, (401) 785-3510.*

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The East Side

The most prominent neighborhood in this area, College Hill, is home to Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and the vibe is very East Coast academia. Highlights include the Providence Athenaeum Library, RISD's brand new arts-filled Chace Center, the Blackstone Boulevard bike path and Brown's majestic Van Wickles Gates. You can also take a stroll down Benefit Street to explore the gorgeous 18th- and early-19th-century historic homes that peacefully coexist with the surrounding college campuses. When the troops get weary from all that walking, head farther east to the Blackstone neighborhood and join

the crowds at Seven Stars Bakery for a sinful pastry and freshly brewed coffee.

RESTAURANTS

Farmstead (<http://www.farmsteadinc.com>)

Hundreds of cheeses and gourmet spreads, and the mac and cheese at the shop's restaurant, La Laiterie at Farmstead, make this place a foodie paradise. *186 Wayland Avenue, (401) 274-7177.*

Blue Elephant (<http://blueelephantprovidence.com>)

Kids will be in heaven when they order the ooey-goey French-toast sandwich or the triple-decker Peanut Butter Monster at this family-friendly breakfast, lunch, and dinner joint. *312 Wickenden Street, (401) 383-8149.*

Seven Stars Bakery (<http://www.sevenstarsbakery.com>)

This organic bakery is best known for its freshly baked breads, but the fair-trade coffee and pecan sticky buns are also worth a try. *820 Hope Street, (401) 521-2200.*

Apsara Palace (<http://www.apsara-palace.com>)

Find Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, and Cambodian cuisine for anyone that craves a diverse palette of flavors. The green curry, pad thai, and Chinese satay noodles are a few of the local favorites. *783B Hope Street, (401) 831-4722.*

STORES

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Works (<http://www.risdworks.com>)

A storefront devoted to the work of RISD grads including Chris Van Allsburg, author and illustrator of *The Polar Express*. *20 North Main Street, (401) 277-4949.*

Simple Pleasures (<http://simplepleasuresprovidence.com>)

You will find everything from John Derian to Marimekko at this shop housed in a charming little cottage. *6 Richmond Square, (401) 331-4120.*

Books on the Square (<http://www.booksq.com>)

This beloved independent bookstore offers story hours four days a week for children of all ages. *471 Angell Street, (401)331-9097.*

Mod Mama (<http://www.modmama.com>)

Local moms flock to this hot spot for modern goods from companies including Stokke, Quinny, Oeuf, and Tea. *16 South Angell Street, (401) 273-7800.*

Curatoriam (<http://www.thecuratorium.com>)

This store touts itself as one part natural-history museum, one part design store, and one part small-town gift shop. *199 Wickenden Street, (401) 453-4080.*

ACTIVITIES

RISD Museum (<http://www.risdmuseum.org>)

Stop by this renowned museum on Sunday afternoons for family workshops that allow children to study art in

the galleries and then create masterpieces of their own. *224 Benefit Street, (401)-454-6500.*

John Hay Library at Brown University (<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/about/hay/>)

Kids and adults alike will love this library's massive collection of 6,000 miniature toy soldiers representing armies from all over the world. *20 Prospect Street, (401) 863-3723.*

Kreatelier Kids Craft Classes (<http://kreatelier.com>)

Make everything from glittery felt party crowns to stuffed robots at this colorful storefront. *804 Hope Street, (401) 432-7995.*

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Federal Hill and Olneyville

Federal Hill is also known as Little Italy, and the main strip is Atwells Avenue, where you will find extraordinary Italian fare, authentic markets, and the beloved dessert hot spot, Pastiche. Once your bellies are full, wander the avenue and explore dozens of new galleries. Local favorites include Gallery Z, Chabot Gallery, and the Royal Gallery. Stroll a bit further west and you will discover the vibrant Olneyville neighborhood, which boasts a large cluster of artists' live-work studios and co-ops. While you're there, check out the [Steel Yard](http://www.thesteelyard.org) (<http://www.thesteelyard.org>), a fully equipped industrial-art studio cooperative offering a packed calendar of workshops and classes.

RESTAURANTS

Geppetto's Pizzeria (<http://www.geppetospizzeria.com>)

Enjoy their famous grilled pizza while listening to local songbirds belt it out in the hopes of bringing home the gold in Geppetto's own version of *American Idol*. *57 DePasquale Square, (401) 270-3003.*

Pastiche: Fine Desserts Cafe (<http://www.pastichefinedesserts.com/pastiche/home.html>)

Save room for something sweet from Rhode Island's best dessert spot. Be sure to try their amazing tarts, which always feature seasonal fruits. *92 Spruce Street, (401) 861-5190.*

Mediterraneo (<http://www.mediterraneocaffe.com>)

Sit outside when the weather turns nice and tuck into the sinfully delicious fettuccine alfredo. *134 Atwells Avenue, (401) 331-7760.*

STORES

Tony's Colonial Food Store (<http://www.tonyscolonial.com>)

Introduce your picky eaters to something new. Tony's has an incredible array of specialty oils, meats, cheeses, and pasta—all imported straight from Italy. *311 Atwells Avenue, (401) 621-8675.*

Venda Ravioli (<http://www.vendaravioli.com>)

Find more than 200 types of ravioli with unusual stuffings like artichoke or broccoli rabe. The lobster with gorgonzola is one of the most popular. *265 Atwells Avenue, (401) 421-9105.*

ACTIVITIES

Federal Hill Stroll (<http://www.providencefederalhill.com>)

Every June the galleries and restaurants located along Atwells Avenue offer delicious samples and discounts to all who wander the neighborhood. *Tickets are limited and must be purchased in advance*

(<http://www.federalhillstroll.com>).

Rhode Island Market Tours (<http://www.rimarkettours.com/tourdetails.htm#federalhill>)

This tour of the Federal Hill markets will make you feel as though you were strolling through the streets of Rome. (401) 934-2149.

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