

RHODE TRIP

BY LESLIE BANKER

JAMESTOWN

An Edible Itinerary

Spending a summer day in Jamestown feels like you're stepping back in time. On the island there are no drive-through fast food chains, no mega-superstores and no sign of the crowds that inhabit many a picturesque seaside town in the summer. Jamestown (a.k.a. Conanicut Island) has for many years set an idyllic scene as a summer getaway for people from near and far. An old-fashioned relaxed, barefoot and freckled feeling of summer comes to life in Jamestown as you explore the charming village and take note of the bustling waterfront. Before it was a summer resort though, Conanicut Island was primarily a place for agriculture where fields were filled with corn, sheep and cattle. What's in Jamestown now is a mix of working farms, delicious

food, and interesting sites to see—all with local flavor and flourish. So buckle up and get ready to explore Jamestown for a summer day.

A good adventure starts with a good breakfast and Slice of Heaven in the center of town is just the place for it. Proprietors Steven and Maria Liebhauser opened the restaurant six years ago and offer breakfast, lunch and dinner in a cheery sun-filled space with skylights and picture windows looking out onto Narragansett Avenue.

I had trouble deciding what to order given the tempting choices. There are trays filled with fruit tarts and torts that are made fresh each day in the Slice of Heaven kitchen. Heartier fare includes French toast, omelets, oatmeal, pancakes, breakfast burritos, and bagels with

salmon. I settled on a latte and an apple tart. The latte is made with Rhody Fresh Milk, meaning it comes from local Rhode Island dairy farms including Dutra Farm in Jamestown. The tart has thinly sliced apples with a sweet glaze.

I chatted with Steven Liebhauser and he said that he makes hand-made gelato throughout the day in the summer. I make a mental note of this for later as fresh gelato is, in my opinion, “good” in the way that paradise is an “okay” place to visit.

You don’t simply drive from point A to point B in Jamestown so much as you tootle around at moderate to slow speeds taking in the water views, the shingle style architecture and the rolling green hills. So, after breakfast I decide to meander out to Beavertail lighthouse at the southern tip of the island. The first lighthouse was built on this site



in 1749. That lighthouse burned down, another one was built, and again it burned down (the British set it on fire during the Revolution).

There is now another lighthouse standing in its place with a museum that is open during the summer. The view from this southern tip of the island is worth the trip alone. Newport lies across the Bay and, on a clear day, Block Island is visible on the horizon. You can explore the area around the lighthouse walking over rocky terrain—keep in mind though that the fresh sea air can stir up an appetite for lunch.

I decide to head back toward town for lunch at The Village Hearth Bakery which is in a yellow house on Watson Avenue just opposite the playground. There are Tibetan prayer flags flying out front. Inside Andrea Colognese and Doriana Carella tend to the wood-fired oven. Before they opened The Village Hearth, they lived in Boston; Andrea worked at a bakery and Doriana worked in restaurants.

After building a mud oven for baking in their backyard, they decided to start their own proper bakery and so five-and-half-years ago The Village Hearth opened for business. Everything is made on site. In the summer herbs are fresh from their garden and locally grown produce is used when it’s available. Honey for sale is collected from

hives just a few streets over and the coffee comes from New Harvest, the Fair Trade micro-roaster in Pawtucket.

The choice for lunch includes panini sandwiches, calzones with sun-dried tomatoes, focaccia topped with mixed roasted vegetables, and pizza by the slice. For dessert I see homemade macaroons, chocolate chunk cookies and rustic fruit tarts. Additionally, there are loaves of freshly baked bread and a fridge full of homemade egg pasta and polenta. I take one panini sandwich, with roasted veggies on hours-fresh bread, and a macaroon for later. Out in front of the bakery there are a few chairs where one might sit and have a sandwich. On Sunday evenings you’ll see people lined up out the door of the bakery and sitting in the chairs out front, waiting for the fresh baked pizzas that have become legendary in Jamestown.

Heading north from the Village Hearth you pass the Jamestown windmill, which served as a grist mill for grinding corn, oats, wheat and rye from 1787 until 1896. The windmill was recently restored by the Jamestown Historical Society and is open for visitors on summer weekends in the afternoons.

Just past the windmill on the left you come to Watson Farm, a working farm with two miles of walking trails that are open to the public three afternoons a week from June through mid-October. An afternoon at Watson Farm is not to be missed if you want a peek into Jamestown’s history and how a traditional family farm is run.

The farmhouse was built in 1796 by Robert Watson but the land had been used for agriculture before that by the Watson family and even earlier by the Narragansett Indians. For five generations the Watson family lived and worked here until 1979 when Tom Carr Watson bequeathed the 265 acre farm to Historic New England, a preservation organization, with the stipulation that it be preserved in perpetuity and remain a working farm. Don and Heather Minto now run the farm which produces grass-fed beef and lamb, as well as wool.

On the self-guided tour of Watson Farm, you will check in at the barnyard and possibly see the guinea hens and ducks scabbling about, then wander over a grassy hill through pastures filled with grazing cows and continue on the path down towards the Bay. Three-quarters of a mile of the farm runs along the shoreline; this is a perfect spot to pause on your walk and, say, eat a macaroon from The Village Hearth, which is so tasty I don’t think I can do it justice without sounding ridiculous.

The path will then take you through a swamp and into an old orchard with apple and pear trees whose lower branches are neatly munched by the grazing animals. Birds, butterflies, frogs and turtles can be seen and heard all along the way.

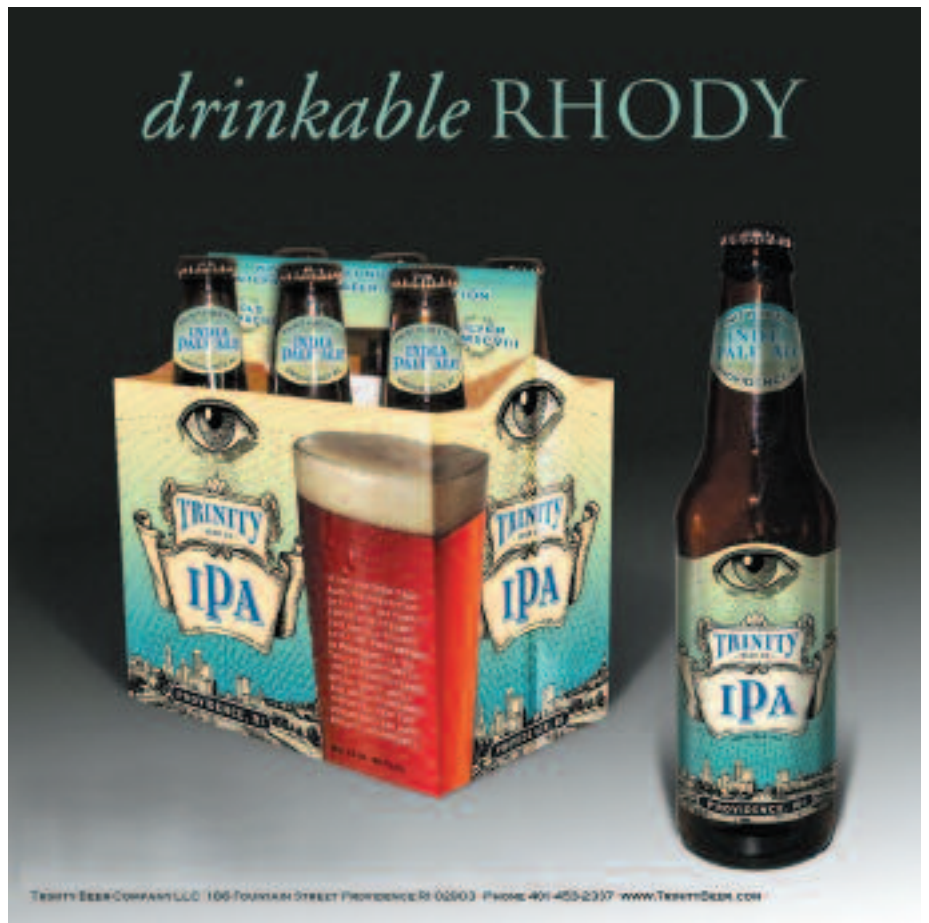
The cows and sheep are raised without any antibiotics or hormones, said Don Minto, adding that grass is a great way to convert solar energy into wool and meat. The beef and lamb from Watson Farm has an earthy and rich grass-fed flavor and can be bought at the Coastal Growers farmers’ market on Saturdays at Casey Farm, directly across the Bay, in Saunderstown.

After a full circuit around a true Rhode Island seaside farm, the next stop is the Trattoria Simpatico on Narragansett Avenue for a glass of wine and an appetizer to end the day. The restaurant has a charming

outdoor patio bar where jazz musicians play, weather permitting, under an old copper beech tree on Sunday afternoons and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. I spoke briefly with proprietor Phyllis Bedard who said that fresh local vegetables and herbs are used when available and that seafood is often local.

The menu changes seasonally; there is a raw bar, calamari with spicy tomato vinaigrette and red pepper remoulade, Caesar salad, pan seared scallops, rigatoni Bolognese or potato gnocchi with seared scallops to name a few of the enticing options. The outdoor atmosphere is relaxed and the Bay just a stones throw away. I decided on a glass of chilled white wine and a selection of littlenecks and oysters from the raw bar.

Sitting outside, with the warm breeze blowing and the sound of the jazz, I decide it's a perfect summer moment and at least part of why a visit to Jamestown feels like a step back in time—the shellfish, grass-fed beef, fresh baked bread and locally grown veggies are all more or less the same as what would have been on the table centuries ago. □



DATA POINTS

Slice of Heaven

32 Narragansett Avenue
401-423-9866
Open 7 days a week from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Village Hearth Bakery

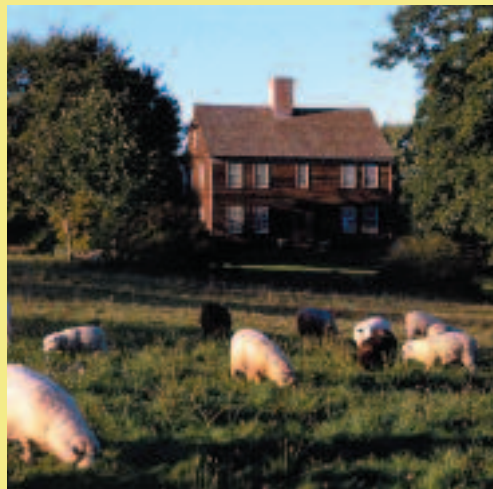
2 Watson Avenue
401-423-9282
Friday, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Sunday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and
4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Trattoria Simpatico

13 Narragansett Avenue
401-423-3731
Open 7 nights for dinner
Lunch Saturday and Sunday
Reservations suggested

Jamestown Windmill

North Road
Open on summer weekends from 1 p.m.
to 4 p.m.
jamestownhistoricalsociety.org



Watson Farm

455 North Road
401-423-0005
Open to the public June 1 through Octo-
ber 15 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sun-
days, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Coastal Growers Farmers' Market

Casey Farm
2325 Boston Neck Road, Saunterstown
Through November 3, 2007
Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum

June weekends, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
July 1 to Labor Day, 7 days, from 10 a.m.
to 4 p.m.
Labor Day through Columbus Day week-
ends, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information on the properties of
Historic New England visit:
historicnewengland.org