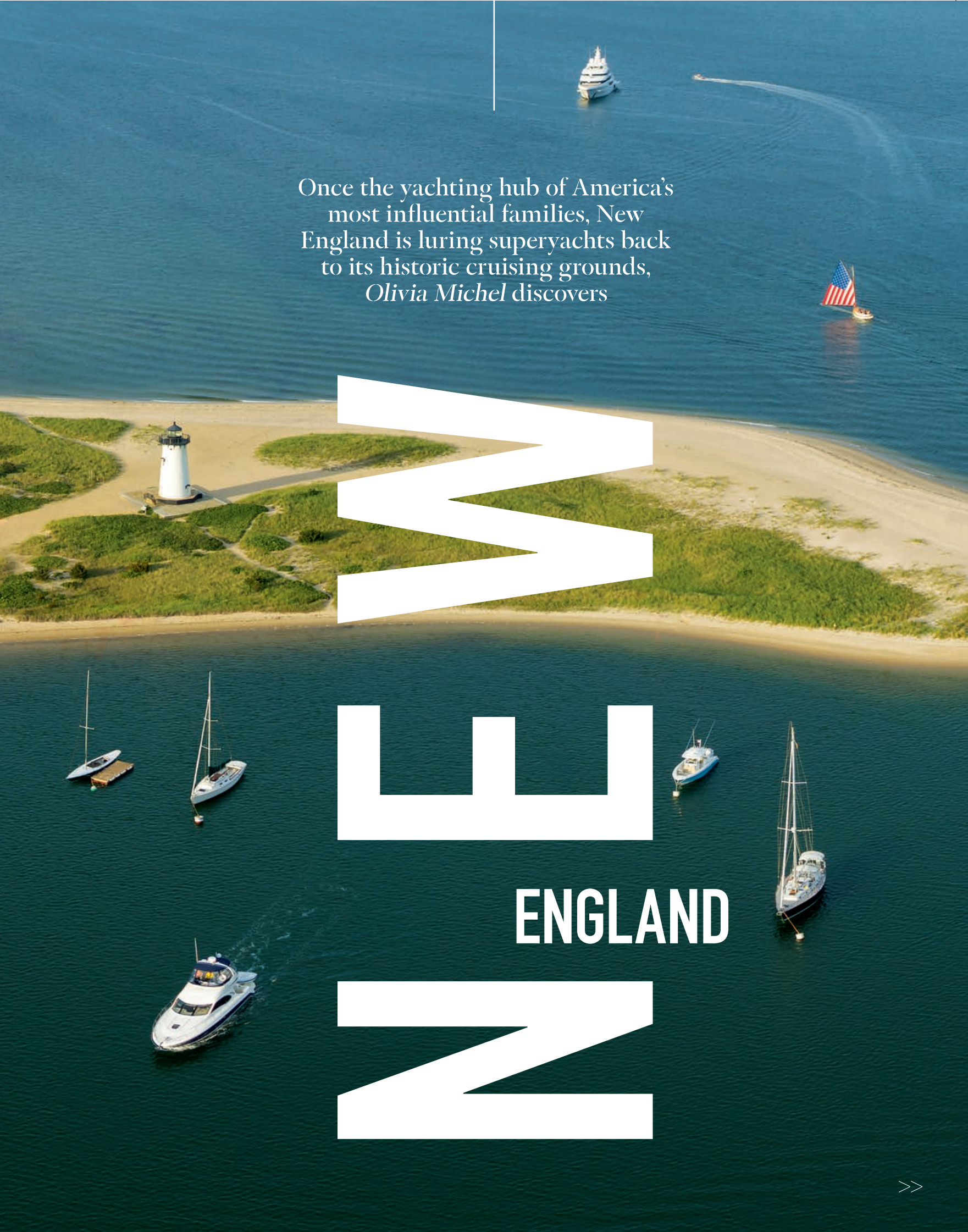




VOYAGE

# OLD HAUNTS, O

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Once the yachting hub of America's  
most influential families, New  
England is luring superyachts back  
to its historic cruising grounds,  
*Olivia Michel* discovers

# NEW ENGLAND





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“We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea – whether it is to sail or to watch it – we are going back from whence we came.” Spoken by US president John F. Kennedy (pictured above), these words echoed across the foyer of The Breakers mansion in Newport in 1962. A passionate yachtsman who would escape to sea during his presidency for respite, Kennedy was a guest at a celebratory America’s Cup dinner inside the city’s most magnificent Gilded Age home when he uttered the words that still resonate with sailors today. It is only fitting that JFK would express his love of the sea in the place he enjoyed sailing most: the New England coast.

Running along North America’s eastern shore from Maine to Rhode Island, New England has a long and significant connection with the sea. The landing site of the Pilgrims’ *Mayflower* and the birthplace of the America’s Cup regatta, the region was once the summertime playground of the most powerful families in the US, inviting billionaire bankers, Boston Brahmins and First Families to its shores for the summer sailing season.

With other destinations off limits in recent years, New England’s coastal states have now seen something of a revival with the yachting set. Nearly 350 superyachts headed to New England last August, an increase of more than 60 from pre-pandemic years. Some of the standout vessels spotted taking in the charms this coastline has to offer included 75-metre *Huntress*, 87-metre *Fountainhead* and 60-metre *Perseus 3*. And far from finding mere relics of the past, owners and

charterers discovered that New England’s old outposts are now being refreshed and refurbished to keep up with modern demands.

Following in the wake of the superyacht fleet, I find myself standing in the hallway of The Breakers, where JFK delivered that iconic speech. I marvel at how the elaborate architecture of this lavish home competes with the natural beauty of the Atlantic Ocean on its doorstep. An opulent symbol of New England’s glamorous Gilded Age, the home was constructed for Cornelius Vanderbilt II with funds derived from the family’s prosperous shipping business, and its rooms – each decked with gilt furnishings and dripping crystal chandeliers – still hold a collection of trophies from Harold Stirling Vanderbilt’s celebrated sailing career. The Breakers has now been transformed into a museum, but 10 minutes away visitors will find another historical Vanderbilt home in which to rest their head, now under new management and with an exciting revamp underway.

Rumoured to have been designed as a hideaway for the mistress of Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, this 1909 red-brick home has since been reformed into a handsome boutique hotel known as The Vanderbilt. The original façade and indoor swimming pool remain unchanged, but since being taken over by Auberge Resorts in 2018, the 33 rooms and atmospheric common spaces have been gradually renovated to bring the establishment up to date without totally painting over the building’s unique past.

“We are beyond excited about how the property looks now,” enthuses front office manager Elena Pupazan. “The interior designers, SWOON, tried to keep the same Gilded Age decor and the style and look of Newport’s downtown mansions,” she elaborates. The rooms are covered in hand-drawn wallpaper and vintage portraits and its ornate parlour houses a hidden speakeasy bar. The dining room is the most recent part of the renovation to be completed, now finished in a rich, moody colour palette, accompanied by a cosy red-brick fireplace and a backlit cocktail bar. The younger generation that populates Newport is out in force as I dine alongside professional types in cocktail dresses and sharp blazers. With the ocean minutes away, fresh seafood dominates the menu in the form of tangy, lemon-drenched mussels or a plate of the day’s catch served up with briny samphire and browned butter.

For foodies looking to get more hands-on there is also the option to learn how to shuck fresh Rhode Island oysters with specialists from the nearby Matunuck Oyster Farm. This is just one of a handful of specially curated experiences offered by the property – many of which naturally highlight Newport’s connection with the sailing community. Nautical options include racing on America’s Cup schooners around Narragansett



PHOTOGRAPHY: HARBOUR VIEW HOTEL/DAN CUTRONA PHOTOGRAPHY: HARBOUR VIEW HOTEL/ELIZABETH CICIL AUBERGE RESORTS COLLECTION: AP/SHUTTERSTOCK



Above: a 1909-built red-brick mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, once owned by businessman and scion Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, is now a boutique hotel known as The Vanderbilt. The decor has been reinterpreted for the modern era (left and right) while remaining sensitive to the building’s history



Above and left: Harbor View Hotel in idyllic Edgartown, Martha’s Vineyard. The 130-year-old establishment is home to the Bettini restaurant (below), which serves up fresh seafood and pancakes



The hotel dates back to 1891, but a recent multi-million-dollar renovation has ensured the resort is far from resting on its laurels





Above: President Kennedy waves to the crew of Weatherly while watching the first race of the 1962 America's Cup from on board the USS Joseph P. Kennedy Jr, off the coast of Newport, Rhode Island



Bay – the waters where JFK would often sail on his yacht *Honey Fitz* – or going behind the scenes at local shipyards that are restoring classic yachts.

The Vanderbilt is, of course, not the only legacy that remains in Newport. From the Astor, Forbes and Roosevelt families to JP Morgan and Howard Hughes, this harbour town was once descended upon by numerous American moguls, who would berth their spectacular sailing yachts and steamships on the waterfront between May and October. In the past couple of summers, 70-metre *Freedom* and 95-metre *Kismet* are just some of the superyachts that have dropped anchor on the city's doorstep.

When Newport's harbour becomes a little too bustling, the quieter island of Martha's Vineyard – favoured by US presidents past and present, from Ulysses S Grant to Kennedy, Clinton and Obama – is less than 30 nautical miles away. The former whaling island is rich in history like much of New England, but new blood is giving the Vineyard's historic hotels a fresh face influenced by modern tastes, enticing superyachts such as 56-metre *Baba's* (pictured above) and 40-metre *Cetacea* back to its cruising grounds last season.

The Harbor View Hotel dates back to 1891 but new ownership, followed by a recent multi-million-dollar renovation, has ensured the resort is far from resting on its century-old laurels. All of the rooms inside the quintessential, weathered-wood building have been refurbished with what general manager Scott Little describes as a “nautical fit and finish” – think crisp white linens, splashes of marine blue fabric and glossy wood furniture that keeps the focus on the sights

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and sounds of the ocean out front. Visitors who chose to stay in the main complex – where Steven Spielberg and his crew lodged to film *Jaws* in 1974 – or who rent one of the white-picket fenced Victorian Captain's Cottages, will be treated to an experience that rivals the summertime offerings of some of the Mediterranean's best grande dame hotels.

The Bettini restaurant, backdropped by Edgartown Lighthouse, functions as the hotel's social hub. The menu here offers an innovative take on New England cuisine – during my visit I'm treated to locally sourced seafood served up in the form of creamy tuna tartare seasoned with soy sauce and bursting with rich flavours, followed by a classic cheesecake that's tweaked with fresh thyme-infused blueberries. The delights continue as after a morning stroll along the gently creaking boardwalk, where I watch the sunrise turn the sandy beach a dusty-rose colour, I return to Bettini for a stack of fluffy pancakes drenched in thick maple syrup from the fellow New England state of Vermont.

The hotel attracts its fair share of visiting superyachts. “In any given summer there may be 400 boats in the nearby waters,” says Little. “In our peak season we get maybe 10 or 20 luxury yachts up here.” Recent visitors include 63-metre *Scout* and 70-metre *Martha Ann*, and Little impresses that the hotel aims to cater to those “looking for equal accommodations [on land] to what they have arrived on”.

For those who've left their yacht elsewhere, Harbor View offers day charters with local captain Scott Morgan on board his classic 16-metre Hatteras *Alewife*. Originating from a long line of Martha's Vineyard sailors, Captain Morgan knows the island's beauty spots intimately, and spurned Florida and the Bahamas to return to his beloved New England.

“There are four harbours on the Vineyard, and each one of them is completely different,” explains Captain Morgan. “Menemsha is the old fishing village which is just beautiful, while Oak Bluffs is a funky party harbour – Saturday in Oak Bluffs harbour is just amazing. Vineyard Haven is more industrial – that's where the steamships to and from the mainland stop. And if you're on a yacht that's more than 30 metres, Edgartown is where you'll want to anchor – I think the onshore activities appeal more to the superyacht crowd who want to have a more upscale experience.”

After a jaunt to the islands, superyachts in search of familiarity can return to the coast of Cape Cod on the mainland. These cruising grounds favoured by the Kennedys offer something of a time capsule, being perfectly preserved since the region's glamorous heyday. Many of the names that have peppered the annals of American history can also be found in the



Lewis Bay Lighthouse, Hyannis, Cape Cod



Classic New England-style cottages at Cape Cod's Chatham Bars Inn, where all ocean-view master suites (above) feature a private patio or deck from which guests can take in the sweeping views



JFK and family on board Victoria in Hyannis Port, 1959. Below: Chatham in Cape Cod



It seems that JFK's vision has come true – this entire stretch of coastline still offers a special kind of respite



logbooks of Cape Cod's historic hotels, and the demanding natures of such elite clientele has ensured that these resorts continue to uphold high reputations centuries later.

One New England hotel that has hosted names of note is Cape Cod's Chatham Bars Inn. Both Henry Ford and William Rockefeller have visited this charming resort, draped in the region's characteristic weathered shingle and white paint. Though the property has since expanded, its heritage is wholly embraced. It feels like I am stepping back in time as I walk beneath the rustic wooden beams and lantern-shaped chandeliers of the Main Inn, heading out to the veranda to take in timeless views of the North Atlantic with a cinnamon-spiced margarita in hand.

“We try to keep a sense of the history,” explains Beth Patkoske, Chatham's senior marketing manager, as she points out the original concierge

desk from 1914. Historical emblems are dotted throughout the Main Inn, from the antique 1869 music box in the South Lounge to a star-spangled Norman Rockwell painting in Stars, a fine-dining restaurant.

The Inn has all the archetypal components of this region. Summer days are spent sunbathing along the private beach, lined with swaying pampas grass and overlooking the waters of Aunt Lydia's Cove. Bobbing close by, the hotel's fleet of blue-hulled boats await guests for a day of sailing, fishing or whale watching offshore. The Inn's Sacred Cod tavern also offers a taste of typical New England cuisine: buttery lobster rolls, rich clam chowders and sea-brined oysters are caught from local waters, complemented by seasonal produce from the resort's private farmstead.

The views from Chatham, which overlook sandbars frequented by local seals, also have a

significant history as part of the Cape Cod National Seashore. JFK, who was raised 30 minutes away in Hyannis, campaigned to protect 17,000 hectares of Cape Cod's landscape as a senator, signing the bill to create a national park shortly after becoming president. His aim was “to preserve the natural and historic values of a portion of Cape Cod for the inspiration and enjoyment of people all over the United States”.

It seems that JFK's vision has come true – this entire stretch of coastline still offers a special kind of respite. New England is predicted to see another bumper superyacht season, and those yachts that do make the trip will find a destination that's been refined by the tastes of yacht owners for centuries. The region continues to cater to this specific set of visitors – perhaps with the ambition that they too will be remembered as a part of New England's nautical history. ■