



## ***Providence Journal***

### ***Rose Island Lighthouse offers peace and great water views***

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NEWPORT As romantic as a lighthouse holiday may be, three guests of the Rose Island Lighthouse have stayed there alone this winter. "They were writers or readers," said David McCurdy, executive director of the Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation. He doubles as the skipper of Starfish, a beamy Down East Maine lobster boat the foundation uses to transport people and provisions out to the island.

Most of the guests are couples and families with children older than 5. Younger children aren't allowed because old lighthouses are not child-safe, McCurdy said.

Only the wind's whistle and an occasional gull's screech break the silence of winter on the 14-acre island.

During the summer, the place is alive with tourists on day trips to the living museum. A ferry boat from Jamestown to Newport makes four stops there each day. During the winter, only Starfish steams out there for the 10-minute trip from Newport.

Rose Island is a place to savor solitude.

The lighthouse foundation has lowered the cost of a night's stay in the museum downstairs from \$165 to \$100 during the winter and early spring. The price will be good through the end of April.

The upstairs apartment, which is generally rented on a weekly basis, costs \$700 a week through the end of April; if apartment guests choose to work six hours a day, their rent is deductible from income taxes, McCurdy said. It is equipped with almost everything guests have at home, including running water, a normal toilet, and a bath and shower. There is a boom box with a CD player and a marine radio for calling the ferry. There is no dishwasher and no TV.

Nightly guests, whose accommodations are mostly in the museum downstairs, have a double bed, two bunk beds, and a small bed where the original lighthouse keepers could rest during the night as they maintained the light. An old Victrola and scores of old 78 rpm records provide entertainment.

Upstairs and downstairs, guests receive clean sheets and towels. Before they leave, they are expected to change the bed linens.

Everyone brings their own food and beverages, although bottled water is available for drinking. The other water for daily living is rainwater from the roof, collected in a 3,000-gallon cistern in the cellar.

A hand pump brings water to the first floor, and a small windmill provides electricity. When the air is still, a generator does the job. Smoking is allowed on the beach, but it is discouraged in other areas of the island and prohibited in the lighthouse, according to McCurdy.

On weekdays, overnight guests, called “keepers” in lighthouse vernacular, generally arrive at 3 p.m. and depart at 10 a.m. the next day, weather permitting. Weekend keepers arrive at 10 a.m. and depart the next at 10 a.m. the next day.

Sometimes, when the wind exceeds 30 knots, their departure must be delayed a day. “A lot of keepers look forward to that happening,” said McCurdy. (The foundation keeps a closet stocked with emergency provisions.)

War and weather have shaped Rose Island. The British built a battery there during the Revolutionary War. In 1794, the new American government commissioned a French engineer to design a fortification to protect the Bay. Old barracks still stand. In 1820, the quarters were used to quarantine victims of an Asiatic cholera epidemic.

The lighthouse was built in 1869, and first shone its light over the Bay in January 1870.

In 1898, the Portland Gale flooded the pasture on the northern end of the island and left the rocky tidal flats that are visible today.

Rose Island was used during World Wars I and II as part of the Navy torpedo station where explosives were stored. After World War II, the island (except for the lighthouse) was declared surplus by the government.

Since then, nature has been slowly creeping back, repossessing the island. Thick vines cover much of the place’s military past.

Today, hundreds of nesting birds are the only full-time inhabitants of the torpedo station. Among the unusual birds are oyster catchers, snowy egrets and glossy ibis. Though exploring is prohibited during nesting season, McCurdy said, “It’s pretty cool to come out and see all the baby birds.”

There are no mammals, and, therefore, no ticks. During the winter, dozens of harbor seals sun themselves on the rock off the island’s eastern shore.

The light operated until 1970, when it was abandoned and vandalized after the Newport Bridge was built. The Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation was organized in 1984 to restore and operate the lighthouse on behalf of the City of Newport which received it from the U.S. Government at no cost.

Though the Foundation keeps Rose Island open year round from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., it’s easiest to access during the summer months, when the Jamestown Ferry operates on a daily schedule and the distance is an easy paddle from Goat Island. During the rest of the year, Starfish, a 32-foot Jarvis Newman lobster boat, takes visitors and volunteers to the island.

More information about staying in Rose Island Lighthouse is available online at [www.roseislandlighthouse.org](http://www.roseislandlighthouse.org). School and group tours are offered by appointment from April through October. Individual public tours are limited to July and August when guides are on site.

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