

“Look for the road everyone’s on, and don’t follow”

Just off Rhode Island, writer Shonquis Moreno ditches city life and takes a freewheeling path

BLOCK ISLAND IS WORTH the trouble it takes to get there, and that’s saying a lot. In the past, the train and ferry schedules seemed almost purposely out of whack, and when I missed the last boat, I’d justify the extra expense of the 12-minute flight in a tiny six-seater with the view I got of the island’s swagging green hills, dotted with lily-padded ponds and lined with 300 miles of low stone walls. But I’ve made it to my boat this morning, and 10 miles off the mainland, I see the island’s slender profile skim out of the ocean’s mauve haze and thicken against the horizon, where taupe bluffs take on weight under a green froth of trees. I’ve never felt Brooklyn evaporate out of me so precipitously as when I first spot the North Light at its lonely post on the island’s tip and the cheerful solidity of the gray or brick-red mansard roofs that crown Old Harbor.

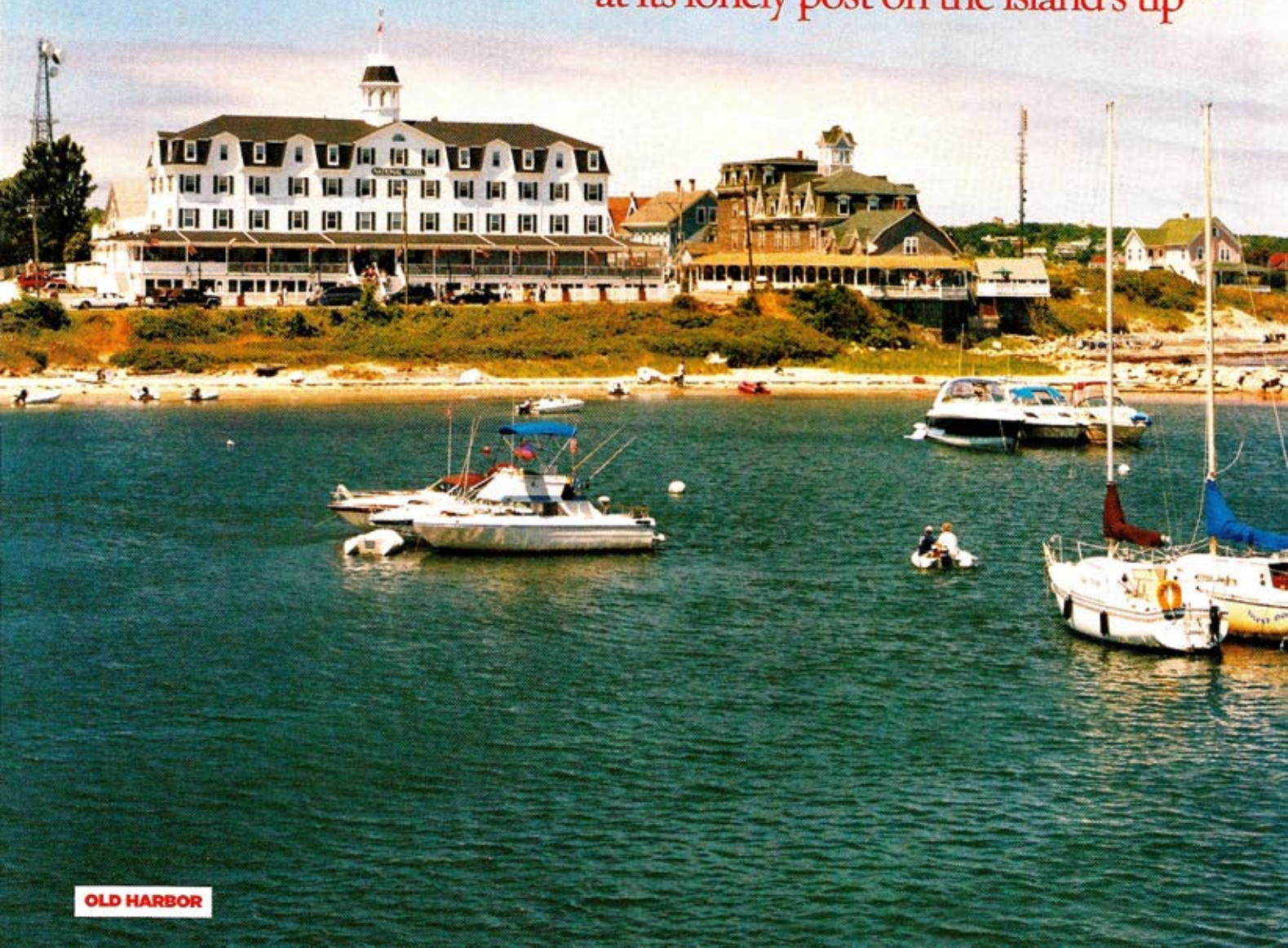
Since the 1800s, “BI” has had its share of rum-running, piracy, shipwrecks, and spectral hauntings. Today, the resort community’s year-round population upward of 900 jags to 20,000 during summer. (Crowds diminish drastically >

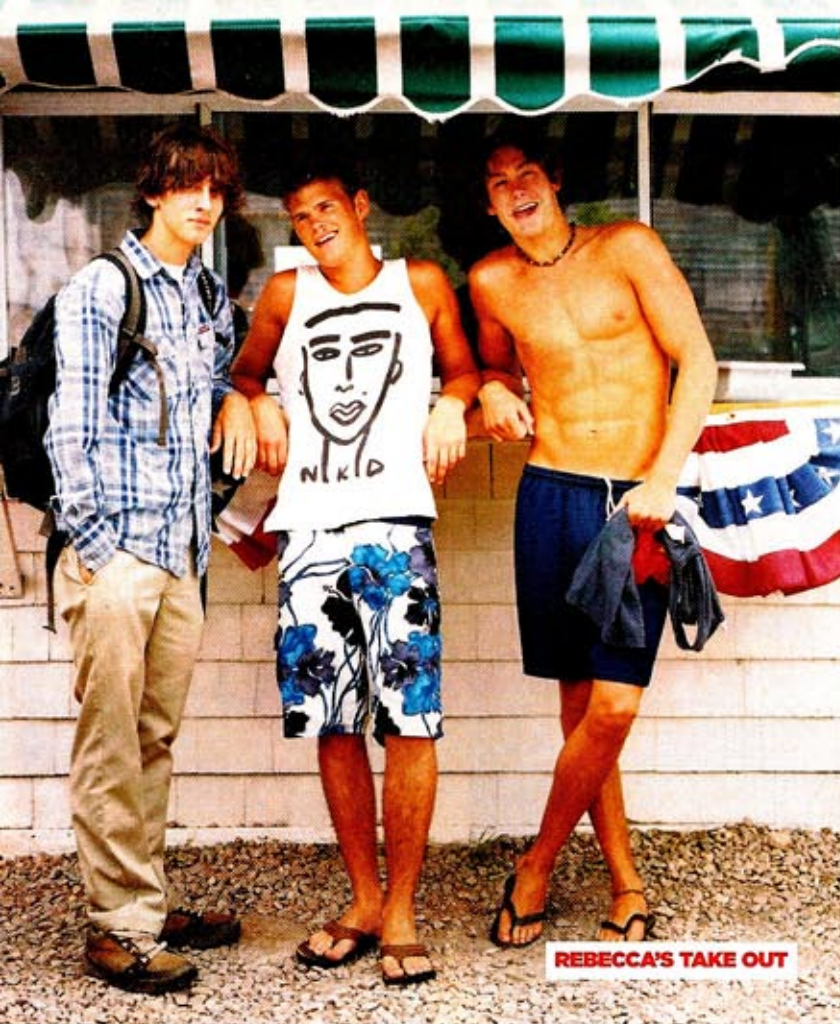


RENTING A BIKE is the best way to see the island’s 365 freshwater ponds and pedal between entrances to the Greenway, where you can take an afternoon hike through 25 miles of trails. **A PATH CUT THROUGH** the dunes leads from the North Light to the Atlantic.



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REBECCA'S TAKE OUT

on weekdays.) I've learned that BI is not a place that happens to you; it demands (and deserves) the same constant, sympathetic probing as a dear friend. Author and historian Robert Downie, who has made it home for more than 30 years, tells me: "All you have to do to find the secret map of special places on Block Island is to go past what is visible. Go around the bend in the dirt road, take the path through the beach grass that seems to go nowhere, look for the road that everyone's on, and don't follow."

My first task, then, is to rent a bike. For the next two days, it will be my primary mode of transportation. There are 17 miles of beaches—white sand dominating the east side, rocky coves the west. I'll swim from June until October and, whenever I get too cold, head to the Gatsby-ish Spring House Hotel, where jazz bands used to play—today it's zydeco or rock 'n' roll—on a steep lawn overlooking the ocean. With a snifter of cognac, I retreat into the warm embrace of an overstuffed armchair.

For an island that measures only 7 by 3 miles, BI has a disproportionate share of good food, from Eli's to higher-end hotels. In the mornings, meals at bed-and-breakfasts hit the spot (especially David Morrison's savory crêpes at The Old Town Inn), but I like to stop at the Orange Cat for an espresso. The café has a gazebo on the back patio, but during Prohibition it was a "teahouse" serving whiskey from china cups. In the afternoons, I eat at Bethany's Airport Diner, where colorful regulars hunker down at a low counter on red vinyl stools and order grilled >

JUST OFF THE BOAT, visitors cross Water Street for their first taste of island fare at Rebecca's Take Out.

BEHIND THE ORANGE CAT CAFÉ, where islanders drank whiskey from teacups during Prohibition, a blue and pink courtyard looks more Caribbean than Eastern seaboard.



THE LOVINGLY RESTORED Empire Theater arcade used to be a fudge shop. **BACK IN TIME:** Lobster Girl and Gull Boy greet visitors in front of the arcade.



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1. Atlantic Inn
2. Bethany's Airport Diner
3. Block Island Depot
4. Block Island Historical Society
5. Eli's Restaurant
6. Empire Theater
7. Eylandt Antiques
8. Glass Onion
9. Green Diamond Lobster
10. Hotel Manisses
11. Hygeia House
12. Narragansett Inn
13. North Lighthouse
14. Orange Cat Café
15. Old Town Inn
16. Payne's Dock/Mahogany Shoals Kayak Rentals
17. Payne's New Harbor
18. Ruling Passion
19. Rustic Rides Farms
20. Southeast Lighthouse
21. Spring House Hotel

GET THERE To connect with ferries, Amtrak services New London, Connecticut; Westerly, Rhode Island; and South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Ferries (some high speed) run from Newport and Point Judith (the only car ferry), Rhode Island; New London; and Montauk, New York. Scheduled planes fly from Westerly. On the island, it's possible to rent bikes (less than \$50 for two days), a moped, or a car, but you can also take taxis or walk.

FERRIES
 ■ From Connecticut: New London High Speed Ferry, 860/444-4624 or goblockisland.com
 ■ From Long Island: Viking Ferry Lines, 631/668-5700 or vikingfleet.com
 ■ From Rhode Island: Island High-Speed Ferry, 877/733-9425 or islandhighspeedferry.com; Interstate Navigation, 866/783-7996 or blockislandferry.com

AIRLINES
 ■ New England Airlines (regular service), 800/243-2460
 ■ Resort Air (chartered flights), 401/466-2000
 ■ Action Airlines (chartered flights), 800/243-8623

SLEEP
 ■ V IS FOR VICTORIAN: \$\$\$
ATLANTIC INN, 800/224-7422 or atlanticinn.com. On a hill above Old Harbor, the 21 rooms of this 1879 inn come with a colorful garden and good views, but a private bath and telephone is it as far as modern amenities go. Executive chef Edward Moon heads up the laudable kitchen.
SPRING HOUSE HOTEL, 800/234-9263 or www.springhousehotel.com. At 150, it's the oldest hotel on the island. This icon has a wraparound veranda and Adirondack chairs ready for some ocean gazing.

■ REMARKABLY REVIVED B&BS: \$\$\$
HYGEIA HOUSE, 401/466-9616 or hygeiahouse.com. The Hygeia has sweetly florid rooms and thick quilts. Take a double at the rear of the B&B and look onto New Harbor.
OLD TOWN INN, 401/466-5958 or oldtowninnbi.com. Away from the hustle and bustle of downtown but close enough to walk. Breakfast crêpes start your day; afternoon hors d'oeuvres keep you going.

RENT A COTTAGE
 Call these real estate agencies to find your own BI cottage.
 ■ BALLARD HALL REAL ESTATE, 401/466-8883
 ■ BLOCK ISLAND REALTY, 401/466-5887
 ■ OFFSHORE PROPERTY, 401/466-5446 or offshorepropertylimited.com
 ■ SULLIVAN REAL ESTATE, 401/466-5521 or blockislandhouses.com

ILLUSTRATION: JEROME COOKSON

Sleep prices reflect lowest standard rate per night: \$: Under \$100 \$\$: \$100-\$150 \$\$\$: \$150+
 Eat prices reflect entrée costs: \$: Under \$10 \$\$: \$10-\$20 \$\$\$: \$20+
 B: Breakfast L: Lunch D: Dinner

EAT
 ■ THE GRAND HOTELS All of the grand hotels serve great dinners. Make reservations at least a day ahead during high season.
HOTEL MANISSES: CONTINENTAL B INCLUDED, L \$-\$\$, D \$\$\$
 401/466-2836
NARRAGANSETT INN: B \$, D \$\$
 401/466-2626
ATLANTIC INN: CONTINENTAL B INCLUDED, D \$\$\$ 401/466-5883
SPRING HOUSE HOTEL: D \$\$\$
 401/466-5844
 ■ CUPPA JOE: B, L \$
ORANGE CAT CAFÉ, 401/699-6522. Don't stop at coffee—try the homemade pastries and cakes.
 ■ GREASY SPOON: B, L \$
BETHANY'S AIRPORT DINER, 401/466-3100. With a counter that recalls a simpler time, Bethany's serves burgers and fries, thick chowder, and grilled cheese sandwiches on paper plates.
 ■ PICNIC SUPPLIES: B, L \$
BLOCK ISLAND DEPOT, 401/466-2403. Stop by for homemade baked goods, fresh produce, sandwiches, and the daily newspaper.
 ■ GOT LOBSTER?
GREEN DIAMOND LOBSTER, 401/466-2997. Last of the year-round lobstermen, Jon Grant sells "bugs" off his boat 5-5:30 p.m. on the Dock at Old Harbor.

■ JUST PLAIN GOOD FOOD: D \$\$\$
ELI'S, 401/466-5230. Not much ambience, but tasty food and a good wine list. Get there early—no reservations.
 ■ TAKE A DRINK AT THE DOCK: \$
MAHOGANY SHOALS, 401/466-5572. Raise a glass to the views at this bar on Payne's Dock.

EXPLORE
 ■ HORSEBACK RIDING
RUSTIC RIDES FARM, 401/466-5060. Saddle up for two-hour beach or sunset trots for \$100-\$110.
 ■ KAYAKING
PAYNE'S NEW HARBOR KAYAK RENTALS, 401/466-5572
 ■ SAILING
RULING PASSION, 401/466-5131. Take a full-moon or wine-and-cheese sail on a 45-foot trimaran.

SHOP
 ■ BETTER BAUBLES
GLASS ONION, 401/466-5161. This Water Street shop used to sell penny candy; now it's beauty products, woven bags, Japanese purses, and block-printed books.
 ■ OLD THINGS
EYLANDT ANTIQUES, 401/466-9888. A dim clutter of shelves, Eylandt reflects BI's maritime history.

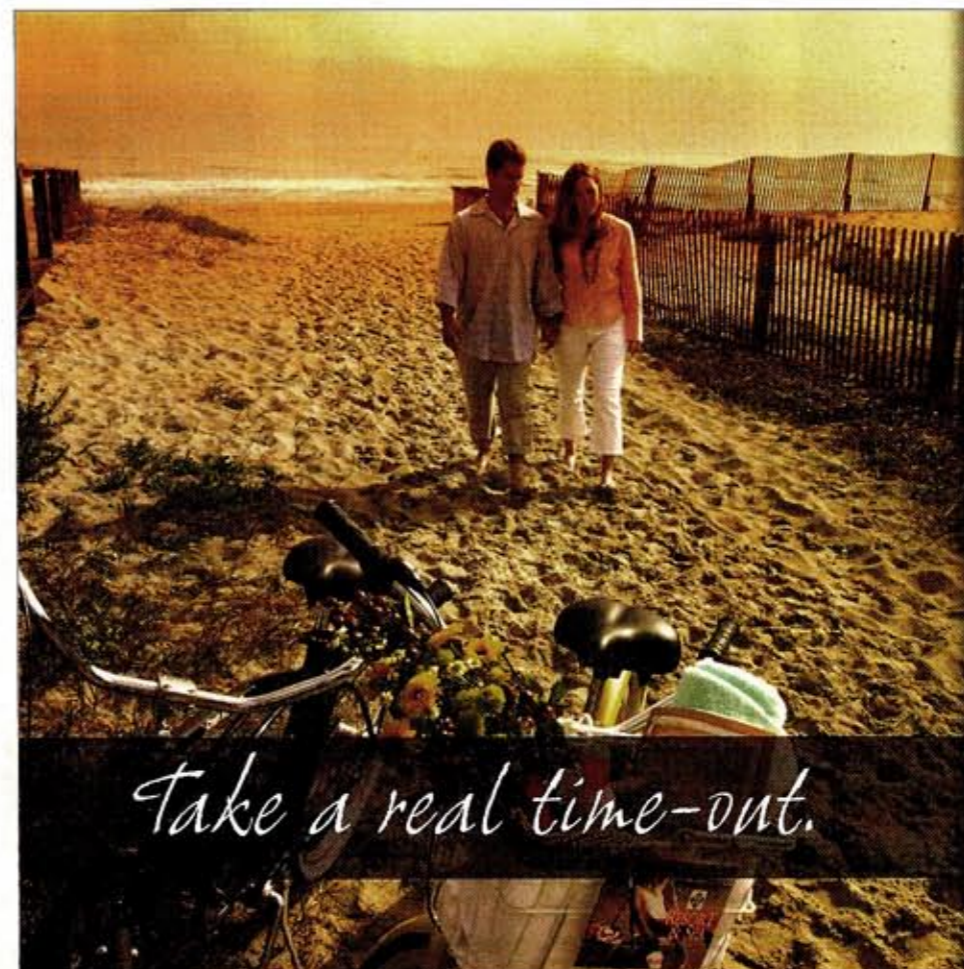
WHEN IT RAINS
 ■ BLOCK ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 401/466-2481. You'll find a time capsule, a real house filled with relics of island life on sea and land.
 ■ EMPIRE THEATER, 401/466-2555. A renovated 19th-century roller-skating rink ("2 Hours of Fun for 30 cents"), this theater shows first-run movies. Just like at an old-time cinema, you sink into a plush crimson seat while listening to the pianist, who plays before every show.

READ UP
BLOCK ISLAND: THE LAND and BLOCK ISLAND: THE SEA. Author Robert M. Downie came to BI as a summer worker at 18 and forgot to leave. The island's de facto historian for more than 30 years, his twin books offer some of the finest anecdotal history you'll get about an American island.

■ BLOCK ISLAND TOURISM INFORMATION, 800/383-2474 or blockislandchamber.com

WEATHER
 The water warms up by July. August and half of September are generally comfortable. It's always wise to bring layers for evenings and windy days. ■

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