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Virginia's Eastern Shore: Clamming, Kayaking, Wineries & More

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The narrow peninsula of Virginia's Eastern Shore attracts cool breezes and a summer population seeking relief from the heat inland.

The shore has all the standard beach activities but correspondent David Latt goes off the beaten path and seeks out four experiences unique to this coastal community.

Barely 9 miles across, Virginia's Eastern Shore is the narrowest, southernmost portion of the Delmarva peninsula. With Chesapeake Bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, the narrow strip of land is packed with activities.

Guided boat rides and kayaking expeditions go to inland waterways and barrier islands. For more fishing, boats also travel the bay and the barrier islands.

If you are a bird watcher, you can sit in a constructed blind, binoculars in hand, waiting for the arrival of a flock of canvasback ducks. Hunters have been known to use those blinds, too. Well-maintained bike paths take you deep into the woods or to secluded beaches.

I tried my hand at many of these activities and had four adventures authentic to Virginia's Eastern Shore that I would highly recommend.



KAYAKING AND CLAMMING

To really experience the Eastern Shore, you have to get out on the water. As my wife and I discovered, kayaking is a great way to explore the area.

Our guide Bill Burnham took us out on the salty water of Cherrystone Creek in **Oyster**, a small town on the seaside of the peninsula not far from Cape Charles. Burnham was there to reassure us about boating safety. When asked what we should do if the kayak tipped over, he answered, "Stand up. The water's only a foot and a half deep."



With Burnham as our guide, we set off to explore the portion of the creek where his friend, Bo Lusk, had his clam beds. We learned about the life of the salt marshes, oyster rocks, and clam beds that are so important to the area's aqua-farming.

As part of the kayaking tour, we also did a little clamming. Armed with short-handled claws and mesh bags, we paddled over to a clam bed and climbed out of the kayaks. With Bo's permission and Burnham's direction, we stuck our hands deep into the soft mud. Using the claw, we dredged the bottom, pulling up hard-shelled bivalves by the handful.

For someone used to buying clams from a supermarket, gathering them right out of the water was an amazing experience. Burnham pulled out his knife and deftly opened half a dozen clams so we could enjoy their briny sweetness, even as we stood calf-deep in the creek.



Kayaking on the Eastern Shore is possible eight months out of the year from April through November as both the air and water are still warm well into October.



NATURE PRESERVES

Private and government environmental conservancy efforts have made this Virginia's Eastern Shore the largest stretch of natural or undeveloped coast line on the entire Eastern Seaboard. There are several well-maintained nature preserves on the peninsula.

Near the entrance to the Bridge-Tunnel, the Eastern Shore of [Virginia National Wildlife Refuge](#) is on the southern tip of the peninsula. Open all year long with no entrance fees, the hiking trails on the refuge are one the best places to watch or photograph migrating songbirds, butterflies and raptors.

Just below the Delaware border is the [Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge](#) on Assateague Island, which has miles of bicycle and hiking trails, salt marshes, woodlands and unspoiled beaches. To get a real feel for the refuge rent or bring a bicycle. In one day, hikers and bicyclists can explore both woodland trails and coastal trails on expansive beaches. Sharing the trails are deer, wild ponies and dozens of species of birds.

WINERIES

Virginia is now the fifth-largest wine producing state after California (the clear leader), New York, Washington, and Oregon. With award-winning wines, Holly Grove and Chatham are making believers out of oenophiles who were previously convinced that only the West Coast and New York state could produce good vintages.

Less than 30 minutes north of Cape Charles, on the bay side of the peninsula, [Holly Grove Vineyards](#) and [Chatham Vineyards](#) are less than 5 miles apart on Route 13. Both have informal, outdoor seating with a view of their neatly tended vineyards. Visitors can bring picnic lunches and enjoy wine from the winery.



When you visit Chatham Vineyards, if winemaker Mills Wehner has time, he will take you on a tour of the vineyard and show you the house on the farm that was built in 1818 by Major Scarborough Pits. On his tour, he also points out each root stock and varietal like a proud father introducing a guest to his children. His dad may even give you a ride in his Model-T pick up truck and tell you how the family has been growing wheat and other crops since 1979. This is family farming, up close and personal.

MARS

Before crossing over the causeway to Chincoteague, you'll pass **Wallops Island**, home to [MARS](#) (Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport) where NASA and commercial rockets are launched. Go online for launch dates and join locals who put on their pajamas and have a clambake on the beach as they watch the massive rockets slowly rise off the launch pad before streaking across the Atlantic.

Even when rockets aren't lifting off into space, you can get a feel for the adventure of space travel by stopping at the NASA Visitor Center with its 3D theater and informational displays.

Check back next week for part two of David's roundup of local food finds in Virginia's Eastern Shore.

By David Latt for PeterGreenberg.com. Visit David on the Web at [MenWhoLiketoCook.com](#).