

Jaunts with Shantella Sherman

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Jaunt: Verb: Make such an excursion or journey.
Noun: A short excursion or journey for pleasure.

Even with an uncertain economy, Americans have not lost their desire to travel. Many have, however, decided to take pleasure trips to destinations closer in proximity to their homes and for shorter amounts of time, instead of longer, more extravagant vacations. Typically referred to as “jaunts”, each month, The Washington Informer will provide readers with a look at some of the region’s best bets for quick excursions. Jaunts are usually reached by car or train in less than four hours and are best enjoyed when they include restaurants, accommodations, and local sites often overlooked by mainstream tourism guides.



Virginia’s Eastern Shore

A quick four-hour drive down US-50E / US-13S and across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, a cluster of islands create the perfect scenic getaway for romance, relaxation, and family fun. Visitors can get a quick bite to eat at the newly-renovated Chesapeake Grill, a casual, full-service restaurant that features a complete breakfast, lunch and dinner menu.

The restaurant, gift shop, and fishing pier are located on the southernmost island of the bridge-tunnel complex and owned by Christopher and Kellson Savvides. The shop, The Virginia Originals, offers customized gifts that showcase some of Virginia’s most celebrated specialties, including salt water taffy and jewelry made of Bay shells. Once across the bridge-tunnel, two of the Shore’s best resort towns are Cape Charles and Onancock.

Cape Charles

Located close to the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, Cape Charles was founded in 1884 as a planned community by railroad and ferry interests. Cape Charles was, for many years, the terminal for passenger and car ferry service across the Bay to Norfolk and Hampton. Cape Charles has one of the largest concentrations of late-Victorian era and turn-of-the-century buildings on the East Coast, with most of its structures built between 1885 and 1920.

The town has been designated as an Historic District on the Virginia Landmarks Register and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Amidst the old-world charm of Cape Charles are several haunts that will absolutely delight the senses. Our pick of accommodations “hands-down” is the Bay Creek Marina Resort.

Nestled between the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean, the Bimini Flats Suites at the Bay Creek Marina Resort offer the perfect spot for fishing, boating, golfing and relaxation. For couples, the Suites (made up of one- and two-bedroom houses) are the perfect size for romantic evenings with the Bay at your bedside. Two-sided fireplaces, wrap-around patio decks, full kitchens and Jacuzzi bathtubs add to the sheer decadence of these private beach properties.

Amidst the villas sits Aqua restaurant – featuring local produce and seafood and the best sunset view on the East Coast. For inquiries regarding Bay Creek Marina accommodations, please call 757-331-8750 or email vacations@baycreek.net. History buffs, be sure to check out the Cape Charles Museum; and for those looking for a bit of “kick” in the morning, stop by the Cape Charles Coffeehouse on Main Avenue, where a bit of Grand Marnier is added to the waffle batter!

Onancock

Perhaps the most relaxing jaunt to Virginia's Eastern Shore is to be had in the little town of Onancock, which was founded in 1680. A quaint hamlet of small shops, galleries and beach, Onancock is home to 1,500 residents and the best bed & breakfasts (B&B) in the nation. The North Street Market for the Casual Gourmet offers as wide a selection of gourmet, freshly pressed olive oils as it does wines from local vineyards.

Sample taps of olive oil sit alongside local and international cheeses, and locally produced dry goods, including Pure Indian Corn Meal from Pungo Creek Mills -- where the ears of corn are still fed into the vats one ear at a time. The jewel of Onancock, The Inn at Onancock, is a few blocks north of the market and is a stressed man's paradise.

Many B&Bs feel too much like staying at a distant cousin's house where you don't feel comfortable touching things or relaxing, but the Inn at Onancock is an exception to that. Owners Kris and Lisa LaMontagne provide personal attention, homemade meals, and great conversation to guests. In addition to the "beds that hug you" -- huge firm mattresses topped with an extra soft topper, guests are able to relax and rejuvenate in modern, spa bathrooms, side outdoor decks, and the LaMontagne's special Wine Down Happy Hour featuring Lisa's homemade gourmet hors d'oeuvres and local wines. For more information or reservations, go to www.innatonancock.com.

Most Memorable: Be sure to check out local artists and craftsmen in the area. Among our favorites was Mary "Mama Girl" Onley, whose mixed-media artwork is largely crafted from old newspapers. Onley, a native of Cape Charles, said that the ideas for her designs are inspired directly from God and include her signature Adam & Eve Beneath the Watermelon Tree piece. Onley's work is vibrant and original and each piece is a one of a kind. Even more exciting about Mama Girl art is that they can only be purchased locally! Mama Girl originals range in price from \$40-\$100 and make fabulous gifts.