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February 2016




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
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Virginia Beach: Tons of things to do besides sunbathing

By Kim Foley MacKinnon



City of Virginia Beach / Craig McClure
The Fountain Plaza is abuzz with activity from dining and shopping to concerts.

Virginia Beach is widely known as a seaside favorite, with miles of sandy shoreline and attractions that beckon sunbathers, but it's so much more than a summer playground.

It boasts over 4,000 acres of city parks to explore. Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge is 9,108 acres with barrier islands, dunes, beach woodland, freshwater marshes, maritime forests, ponds and ocean beaches, and offers plenty of activities for nature lovers.

exhibits, and the Military Aviation Museum, with one of the largest private collections of WWI and WWII aircraft in the world.

DO


Boardwalk: Without a doubt, Virginia Beach's 3-mile boardwalk is one of its biggest attractions. It has been around since 1888, and though it may have changed in appearance over the years – it once was wooden – its popularity remains constant. The 28-foot-wide, paved promenade is a draw for pedestrians and beachgoers, and a separate bike path is always bustling with bikes and "surreys," foot pedal-powered vehicles. Most people stop by to admire King Neptune, a 34-foot cast bronze statue that stands at one end of the boardwalk. Sidewalk cafes, live music, bars and street performers keep everyone entertained. On Beach Street U.S.A., puppets, bands, jugglers, magicians and other live acts draw in crowds, and from Memorial Day to Labor Day, free concerts and theatrical productions take place seven nights a week.


Aerial Adventure Park at the Virginia Aquarium: Located on the grounds of the Virginia Aquarium, this newly opened park boasts multiple zip lines and aerial ropes challenge courses on 5 acres of forest. There are 170 platforms connected by bridge crossings, rope courses, zip lines and other challenges (like crossing a rope on a skateboard) on 13 treetop trails. Perhaps best of all for those who like to move at their own pace, the attraction allows you to do just that. After you have a safety orientation, you're on your own, so instead of waiting for a group, or for a guide to hook you in and out, you're on your way, soaring through the treetops wherever you want. For my teenage daughter, the freedom was thrilling and exhilarating.

First Landing State Park and Cape Henry Lighthouse: With 2,888 acres on the Chesapeake Bay, this is Virginia's most visited state park, with 20 miles of trails and a gorgeous 1.5-mile stretch of Chesapeake Bay beach. It's the perfect antidote to the bustling boardwalk scene. A registered Natural Landmark, it contains one of the most endangered habitat types in the world, the maritime forest community. Interpretive trails take you through a protected salt marsh habitat, freshwater ponds, beaches, dunes, forest, a tidal marsh and a cypress swamp. Close to the park is the Cape Henry Lighthouse, the country's oldest government-built lighthouse, which is now a museum. Built in 1792 to guide maritime traffic at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, it operated for almost a century before being replaced by the new cast iron lighthouse standing nearby. Visitors can head up to the top for amazing views.

EAT

Catch 31: While you can sit inside to eat at Catch 31, and certainly it's pretty enough, dining alfresco with King Neptune, the boardwalk and the ocean just steps away keeps the patio packed at this upscale seafood restaurant. Seating around the large circular tables, with fire pits in the middle, is communal and coveted. It's the perfect place to dine on fresh oysters and other seafood specialties.

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Waterman's Surfside Grille: At the other end of the boardwalk from Catch 31, at 5th and Atlantic, there's oceanfront patio dining, an outdoor bar and a menu focused on fresh seafood, steaks, ribs and burgers. The she-crab soup, a bisque made with fresh lump crabmeat, and the Chesapeake Bay lump crabcakes, are among the most popular dishes.

Doc Taylor's: For those willing to venture away from the boardwalk, all sorts of old-school beach restaurants beckon, one of which is Doc Taylor's, which was once a pink motel, as well as the practice and residence of the real-life Doc Taylor. These days, cures come in the form of comfort food and cold drinks. Everything from biscuits and gravy to sweet potato pecan pancakes are available on the hearty menu.

Sleep

Aloft Chesapeake   , 1454 Crossways Blvd.

Best Western Plus Oceanfront Virginia Beach   , 2809 Atlantic Ave.

Clarion Inn & Suites   , 2604 Atlantic Ave.

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ENHANCE

Read: Let's face it: most of us aren't into scholarly reading on vacation. The Beach Murder Mysteries series from Koehler Books taps right into that, with books set on the beaches we love. "The Case of the Russian Maids," set in Virginia Beach, is one of these fictional guilty-pleasure books.

Watch: The Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, a tourist attraction in its own right, makes a cameo in "Mission Impossible 3." Look for the four-lane, 20-mile-long bridge-tunnel.

Published: March 23, 2015



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Add your comments:

By: D. Cafarelli - Friday, July 17, 2015

Milford, MA

We plan on visiting Virginia Beach this fall. Looking forward to some quiet downtime on the beach.

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