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MAGAZINE

boulevard | August 2025

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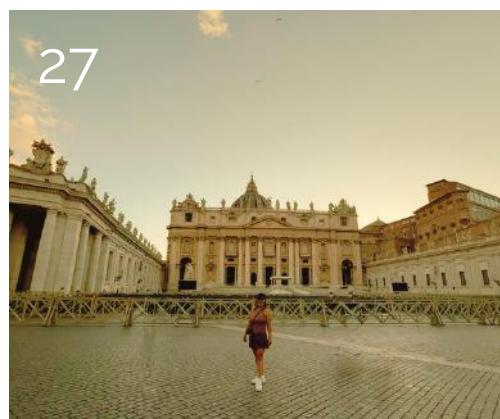
Celebrating the artists, makers, and characters who give the 757 its soul — starting with Georgia Mason, the original mermaid painter whose colorful legacy still swims through Norfolk's streets.

111 **Day Trip**

A curated guide to the region's most charming destinations — with history, flavor, and adventure packed into every mile

126 **Boulevard's Last Call**

This regular contest challenges our readers to identify the location and object in the photo. If you are the lucky winner then Boulevard will do something nice for you!



ON THE COVER:

Our cover photo this month is from the Thalia neighborhood in Virginia Beach. If you were here back in 1939, you could've gone to the grand opening of Steinhilber's restaurant, still open on its original site today. As the Sun starts to set earlier we are treated to some beautiful sunsets through the trees and here's one of them for you to enjoy.

Publisher's Note

From Summer's Glow to Autumn's Embrace

As I sit to pen this note for our August–October issue – the third in our sixth year

– I'm reminded of the unique rhythm that life at the beach follows. Here along the coast, time seems to have its own tide—ebb and flow marked not just by the ocean waves, but by the changing seasons and the energy that fills our boardwalks and boulevards.

This is the heartbeat of summer, the culmination of all the months of anticipation that precede it.

During these final weeks of peak season, the boardwalk teems with energy. Local shops and eateries are alive with visitors seeking that last taste of summer—fresh, cool treats, and memories to take home. For locals, this is both a rewarding and reflective time. We take pride in sharing our community's beauty and culture with travelers from across the globe, but we also know that change is on the horizon.

BERRY BRUNK
President | Publisher
berry@covablvd.com

CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHANIE SAELEE
Contributing Writer

RICK POLSTON
Contributing Writer

WILLIAM SUGG
Contributing Writer

JOEL RUBIN
Contributing Writer

ZACH MILLER
Contributing Writer

JAE SINNETT
Contributing Writer

KATE PITTMAN
Contributing Writer

BETH SULLIVAN
Contributing Writer

JOHN CADELL
Photographer

RACHITA NAYAR
Copy Editor

DON PERFECTO
Layout Designer

YURI SERNANDE
Chief Operations Officer

SUSIE BRUNK
General Manager

ADVERTISING
Berry Brunk
O | 757.715.7713
M | 360.333.7161
berry@covablvd.com

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One of the highlights of this late-summer crescendo is the annual East Coast Surfing Championship (ECSC). For decades, this event has been more than just a competition—it's a celebration of coastal heritage and athletic excellence. Watching surfers carve across the Atlantic waves is a reminder of the ocean's enduring allure. ECSC brings together generations, from pros competing at the highest levels to groms dreaming of their first big break. For a week, the shoreline becomes a festival of boards, music, and community spirit, as beachgoers gather to cheer on their favorites and revel in the camaraderie that defines surf culture.

As August ripens into September, the artistic soul of our region shines at the MOCA Boardwalk Art Show & Festival. Strolling through tents brimming with paintings, sculptures, and crafts, visitors find themselves immersed in creativity.

There's something magical about viewing art framed by ocean and sky—the juxtaposition of human imagination with nature's grandeur. This event is a testament to our area's thriving cultural scene, and it serves as a bridge between the exuberance of summer and the contemplative calm of fall. And, of course, no seasonal narrative would be complete without mentioning the Neptune Festival. Held at the end of September, it is a grand salute to the sea—a pageant of parades, sand sculptures, live music, and local flavors. The Neptune Festival is more than an event; it's a tradition woven into the fabric of our coastal identity. For many, it marks the last great gathering before autumn truly settles in, a final flourish of festivity beneath the lingering warmth of the sun.

The Turning of the Tide

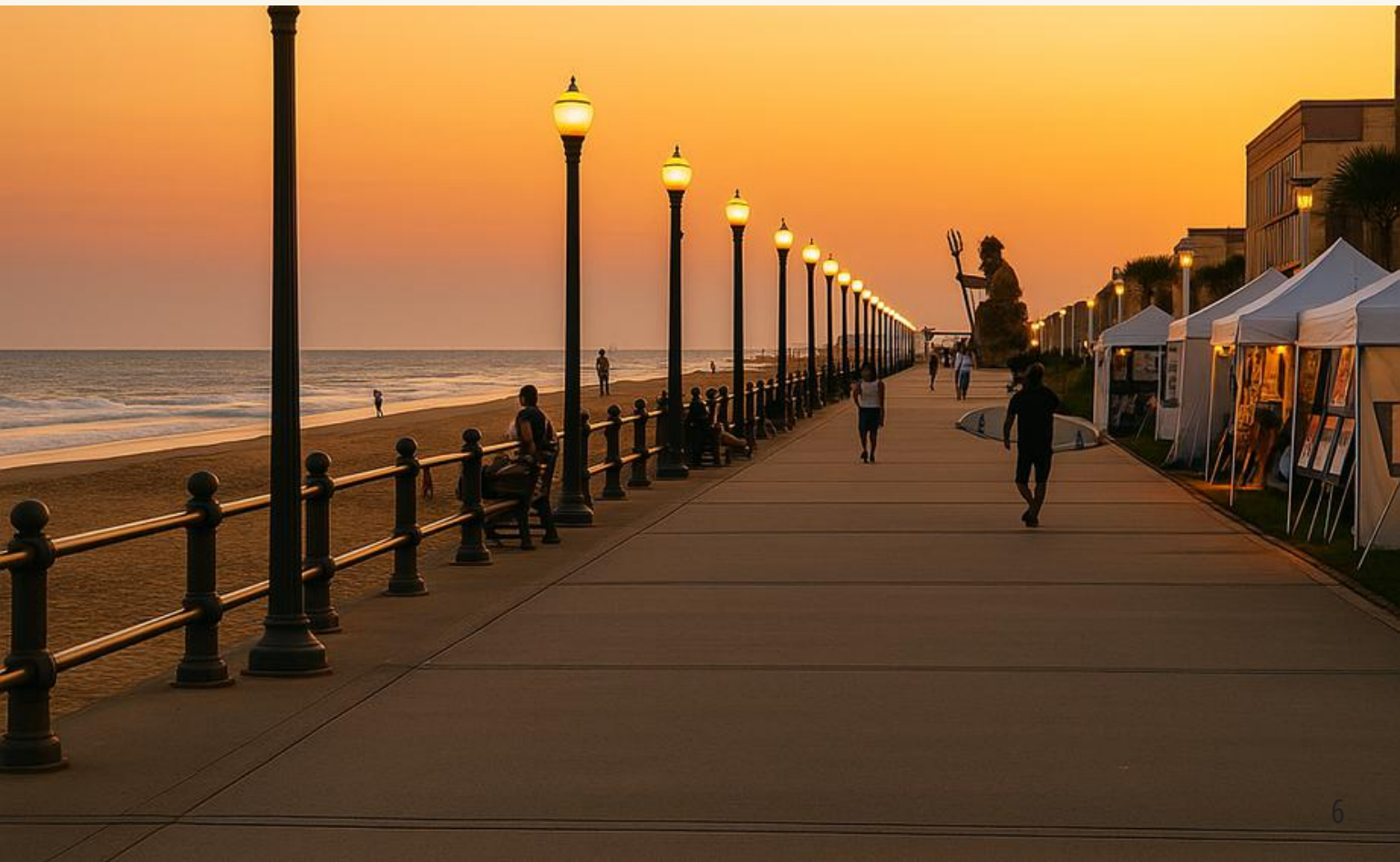
As September draws to a close, subtle shifts begin to unfold. The sun sets a little earlier each day, casting a softer light across the water. Mornings carry a crispness that hints at cooler days ahead. The once-crowded boardwalk begins to breathe again, its pace easing as vacationers pack away their beach chairs and head for home. For locals, this is a sacred time—a quiet reclaiming of our shores. There's a beauty in this transition that's hard to capture in words. The oceanfront, once alive with the chatter of thousands, now offers moments of solitude and serenity. Walks on the beach become meditative, accompanied only by the rhythmic sound of waves and the distant call of gulls. Restaurants and shops pivot toward a more relaxed cadence, greeting familiar faces who savor this season of reconnection. For those of us who call this coast home, autumn is a reminder that the true essence of beach life isn't found in crowds, but in the simple, enduring relationship between land, sea, and community.



Autumn at the Oceanfront

By October, the transformation is complete. The heat of summer gives way to cool breezes that carry the scent of salt and the promise of harvest. The ocean, ever-changing, reflects the deeper blues and grays of the season, its waves rolling with a quiet power that draws both surfers and contemplative souls to its edge. Bonfires flicker on the sand, and beach walks now require a favorite sweater—small comforts that make this time of year so treasured.

Local events continue to punctuate the calendar, though on a more intimate scale. Farmers' markets brim with autumn produce, craft breweries release seasonal brews, and cultural venues offer performances that speak to the reflective mood of fall. For many, this is the most authentic version of coastal living—free from the summer's frenetic pace, rich with opportunities to connect with neighbors and appreciate the natural splendor that surrounds us. The progression from late summer through October tells a story of balance—a movement from abundance to simplicity, from outward celebration to inward appreciation. It's a reminder that our coastal community thrives not just on tourism, but on resilience, creativity, and the enduring bond we share with this place.



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Publisher's Note

As you read through this issue of COVA BLVD, I invite you to embrace the beauty of this transitional season. Whether you're a longtime local or a visitor discovering our shores for the first time, there's a rhythm here that speaks to something universal: the joy of change, the comfort of tradition, and the quiet magic of nature's cycles. I'm proud to report that this issue is more than double the number of pages of our first one back in October of 2020. This growth has happened in part due to the committed team of writers and photographers who work for COVA BLVD. In this issue we cover the history of music that has arisen from Tidewater, the VIBE district's progress, a performance by The Glen Miller Orchestra at Sandler Center, and the new crop of entrepreneurs who are sparking our Innovation Economy. See our new departments titled, "Tidewater Tech Talk," and "Sip & Savor" as we add fresh new content categories to the magazine. As always we welcome all submissions, and if you would like to join our staff please drop us a line. Thank you for being part of our story. Here's to warm days that linger, cool nights that refresh, and the promise of a new season waiting just beyond the horizon.

See you on the beach,



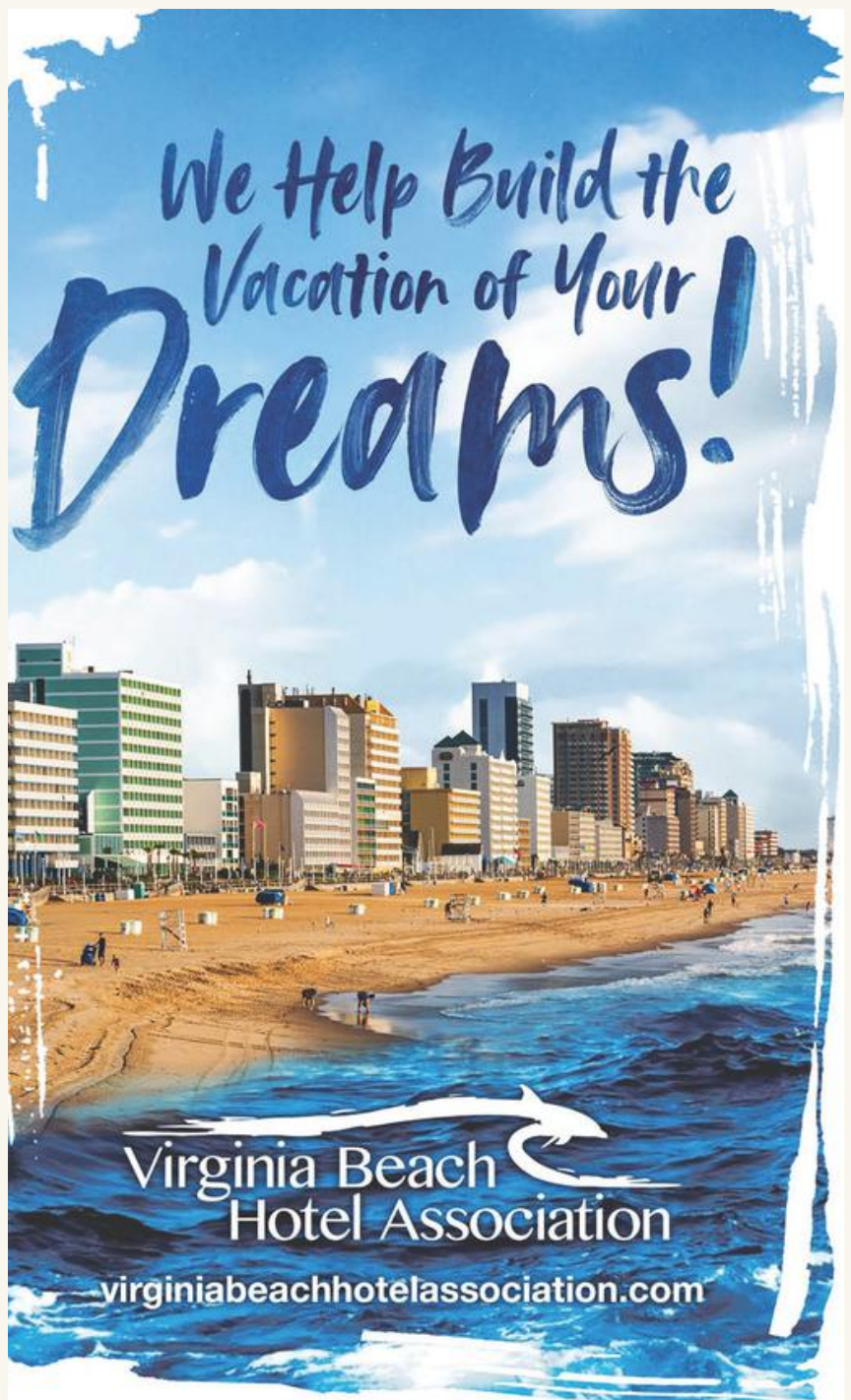
BERRY BRUNK
President/ Publisher

757.340.3625
berry@covablvd.com



SUSIE BRUNK
General Manager

360.333.7162



In the Mood

The Glenn Miller Orchestra

By: Rick Polston

Nostalgia & Upcoming Event

The Waterside Festival Marketplace stands out as a cherished venue in Hampton Roads, drawing music enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds. On a magical New Year's Eve in the early 1980s, the air was filled with the vibrant sounds of a local band, serenading the crowd with the energetic rhythms of big band music. Beneath the expansive tent, couples of all ages swayed and twirled, lost in the revelry as the night unfolded. Classics like "In the Mood," "Take the A Train," "Chattanooga Choo Choo," and "String of Pearls" became the evening's soundtrack, weaving a tapestry of nostalgia and joy.



*Glenn Miller Orchestra at the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York, c. 1940
Photograph by William P. Gottlieb,
courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Glenn Miller: Got the World in the Mood

Yet, it was the timeless melody of "In the Mood" that electrified the atmosphere, compelling nearly everyone to rise from their seats and join the lively dance on the crowded floor.

This iconic piece undoubtedly embodies the spirit of the significant band era, evoking memories that linger long after the music fades.

Prepare to be swept away as "In the Mood" resonates through the air, invoking the unmistakable magic that only the timeless music of the big bands can deliver. This November, Virginia Beach will be graced by none other than The World-Famous Glenn Miller Orchestra, a legendary ensemble renowned for its dazzling performances. With its rich harmonies and unforgettable melodies, this concert promises to be a spectacular start to the holiday season in 2025—one that will linger in your memory long after the final note has faded.

The Show

Step back in time and get “In The Mood” for an unforgettable evening of swing music!

The legendary Glenn Miller Orchestra, hailed as the most iconic big band of all time, makes its grand return to Virginia Beach at the exquisite Sandler Center. On November 5, immerse yourself in the enchanting sounds of this world-famous ensemble as they bring to life their most beloved hits, including the timeless classics:

“In The Mood”
“Chattanooga Choo Choo”
“American Patrol”
“A String Of Pearls”
“Little Brown Jug”
“Pennsylvania 6-5000”
“Tuxedo Junction”
and their signature theme song
“Moonlight Serenade”

With a talented 15-member orchestra, complete with captivating lead singers and a vibrant vocal group, the performance promises to replicate the magic of the big band era just as it was over 80 years ago when Glenn Miller himself conducted the ensemble.



Vocal leads Erik Stabnau and Jenny Swoish keeping the big band sound alive

Photo courtesy of The World-Famous Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Prepare to be transported back in time as the exhilarating blend of jazz fills the air, evoking nostalgia and excitement with every note.

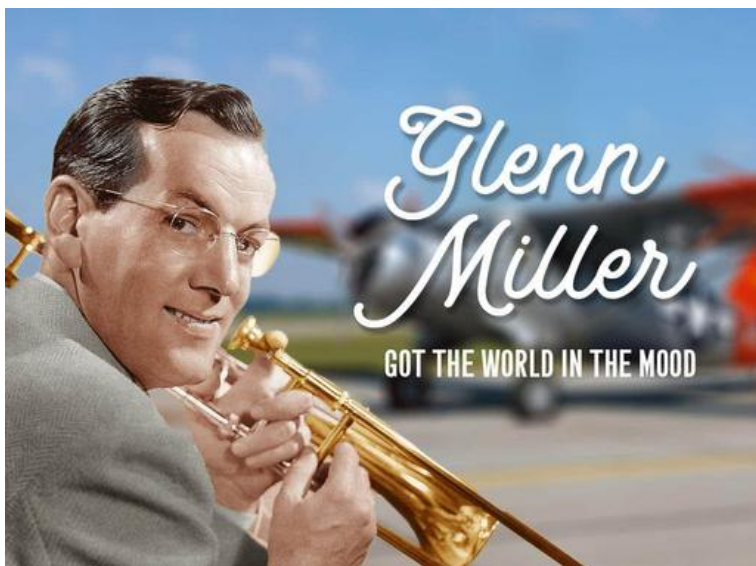


The Glenn Miller Orchestra continues its legacy on tour in 2025.

MILLER'S LEGACY

Touring tirelessly since 1956, the Glenn Miller Orchestra performs over 200 concerts and dances each year, captivating audiences worldwide with its rich catalog of musical classics. Each show creates a tapestry of sound that has resonated with generations, resonating with both avid fans and new listeners alike.

Join us on November 5 at 7 PM at the Sandler Center, located at 201 Market St, Virginia Beach, VA. Tickets are priced at \$91.50, \$71.50, \$61.50, and \$51.50 (plus ticketing fees) and can be purchased online at sandlercenter.org, by phone at (757) 385-2787, or at the box office. Don't miss this chance to experience the magic of swing music as only the Glenn Miller Orchestra can deliver!



The Glenn Miller Orchestra during a performance in New York, capturing the essence of the swing era

The Miller Sound Lives Forever!

Take a step back in history and immerse yourself in the enchanting world of the Glenn Miller Orchestra. After years of perfecting his craft as a gifted writer and sideman, Glenn Miller took a courageous leap in March 1938 by forming his very own band, thus igniting a musical legacy that continues to resonate today. Renowned as one of the most iconic bandleaders of the Swing Era during the 1930s and 40s, Miller's profound influence transformed the landscape of dance music, elevating him to a household name.

THEN, NOW, FOREVER: THE MILLER SOUND



Ray McKinley leads The New Glenn Miller Orchestra in a high-fidelity RCA recording – a vivid revival of swing for a new generation.



Major Glenn Miller rehearsing the Army Forces Band, 1943

With an impressive repertoire of hit records, the captivating allure of his radio broadcasts, and the magnetic presence of live performances in majestic theaters and vibrant ballrooms, Miller captured the hearts and imaginations of audiences around the globe. His music became a soundtrack to an era, characterized by its irresistible rhythms and soulful melodies.

In 1942, at the pinnacle of his success, Glenn made the selfless decision to disband his beloved orchestra and enlist in the Army, where he went on to form the celebrated Glenn Miller Army Air Forces Band. This extraordinary ensemble spread joy and camaraderie among servicemen across Europe, delivering exhilarating live shows and engaging radio performances that uplifted spirits during tumultuous times.

Tragically, on December 15, 1944, Major Glenn Miller embarked on a flight that vanished over the English Channel, leaving behind a profound legacy. The release of the celebrated film *The Glenn Miller Story* in 1954 reignited public interest, prompting the Miller Estate to revive the beloved Glenn Miller Orchestra.

On June 6, 1956, under the skilled direction of drummer Ray McKinley—who had become the unofficial leader of the Army Air Force Band after Glenn's disappearance—the reformed orchestra took the stage for their inaugural concert, marking the start of a new era in big band music. Today, the ensemble continues to enchant audiences, faithfully performing the original arrangements that made Miller's sound legendary, drawing from both the civilian band and the Army Air Force Band libraries. Just as it was in the dazzling days of the 1930s and 40s, the Glenn Miller Orchestra remains the most sought-after big band in the world, captivating fans with timeless melodies and unforgettable rhythms.



Directed by Larry O'Brien, the Glenn Miller Orchestra brought its timeless big band sound to live audiences in the 1980s with signature energy and precision.



The Glenn Miller Orchestra performing in the 1950s under the direction of Ray McKinley, showcasing classic swing arrangements on a stylized television set.



Ray McKinley directs the Glenn Miller Orchestra in the 1950s, continuing the legacy with energetic performances.

TODAY'S ORCHESTRA, TIMELESS SOUND

Glenn Miller conducts his iconic ensemble during the height of the Swing Era, defining the sound of the 1940s.

The Glenn Miller Orchestra is a remarkable, fully self-contained big band. It boasts a dynamic lineup of saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and a rhythm section, complemented by two talented solo vocalists and the harmonious voices of The Moonlight Serenaders. Join us for a night of nostalgia and swing!

www.glennmillerorchestra.com

A typical program includes all of Glenn Miller's biggest hits as well as many of his lesser-known songs. The library features contributions from the best composers and arrangers of the era, including Jerry Gray, Bill Finegan, Billy May, and Glenn Miller himself. Glenn Miller and His Orchestra are responsible for more hit records than any other band of the time, with 17 number-one records and 59 top-ten hits. "Chattanooga Choo Choo" earned the first Gold Record ever awarded for breaking one million sales within a year of its release. In addition to extensive touring and recording, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra starred in two successful films in the early 1940s: *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Orchestra Wives* (1942).



The present-day Glenn Miller Orchestra continues the legacy, delivering big band classics to audiences around the world.



From trumpet fanfares to trombone harmonies, today's band members embody the timeless Miller sound with precision and pride.

Erik Stabnau: The New Sound of Swing

The heartbeat of any great organization resonates deeply with its leadership. At just 33, Erik Stabnau embodies this truth as a talented tenor saxophonist, charismatic singer, and visionary director, all fueled by a lifelong passion for big band music. Hailing from Rochester, New York, Erik was immersed in the enchanting sounds of Glenn Miller from a young age, and he soon found himself drawn to the vibrant, rich arrangements of legendary figures like Duke Ellington and William James "Count" Basie.

Erik's musical journey began at the illustrious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, where his talents flourished not only on the tenor sax but also through mastering the delicate tones of the flute and clarinet. After completing his studies, he pursued a master's degree in Audio Arts from Syracuse University, deepening his understanding of music's technical and artistic dimensions.

In 2017, Erik joined the prestigious Glenn Miller Orchestra, and as the ensemble regrouped in the wake of the pandemic, he was appointed director in 2021. His leadership has infused the group with renewed energy and innovative vision. A gifted vocal artist, Erik is often affectionately regarded as a "crooner," a term of endearment reserved for exceptional vocalists, past and present. Above all, Erik's unwavering love for every facet of music and performance shines through, making him a dynamic force in the world of big band music.



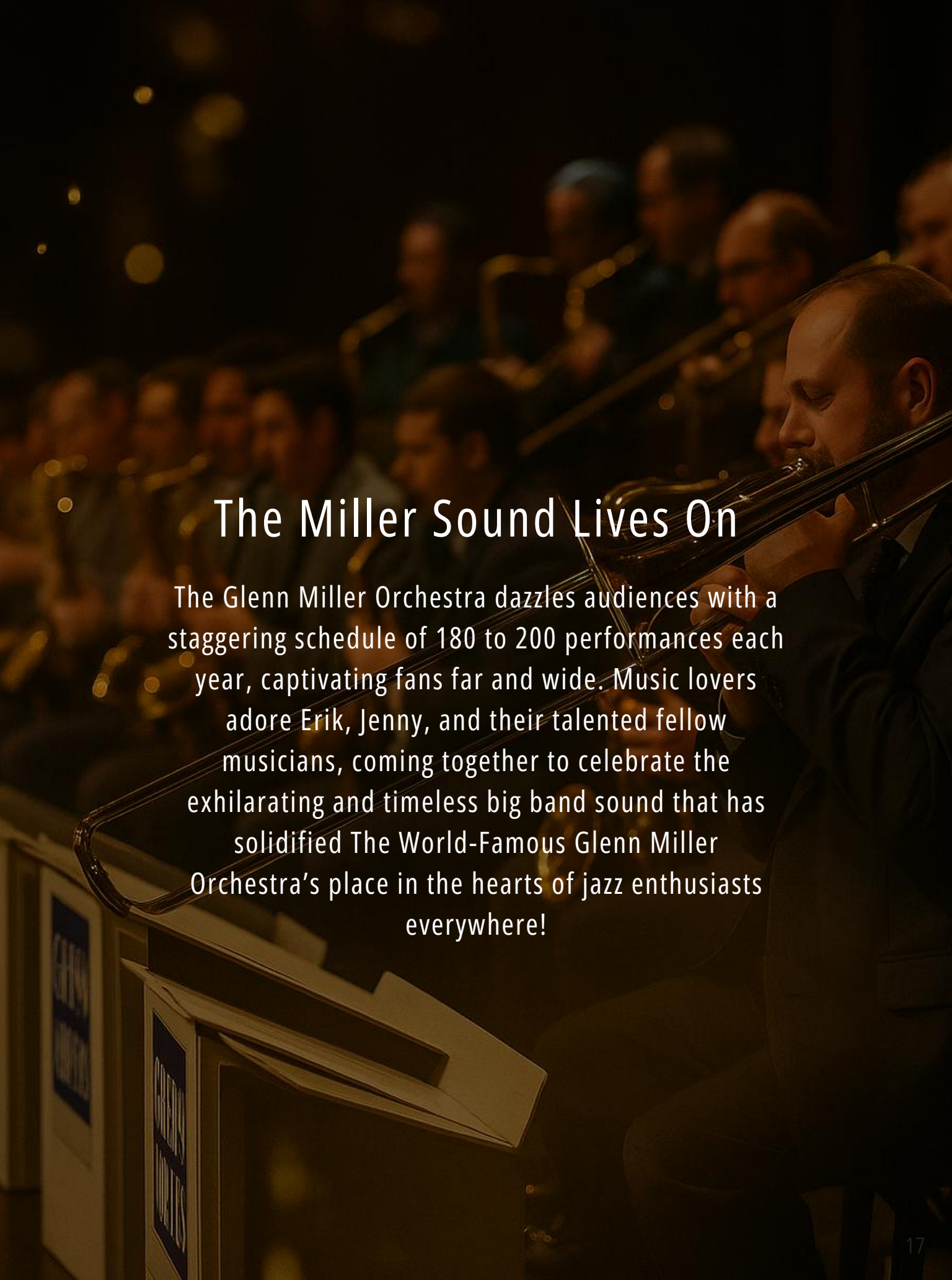
Today's Orchestra, Timeless Sound

The Glenn Miller Orchestra, like all others, will often experience change in personnel. Currently, the orchestra has some of the finest musicians in the land. The Rhythm Section: Nathanael Smith - piano; Federico Rodriguez - bass; and Dean Schweiger - drums. The Woodwind Section: Kevin Sheehan, Elliot Scozzaro, Erik Stabnau, Evan Burrus, and Kyle Cervantes - saxophones. The Brass Section: Ashley Hall, Joe Young, and Will Schmalbeck - trumpets. George Reinert, Derek Kwong, and Jason Bennett - trombones.

Every great band deserves an outstanding female vocalist, and the Glenn Miller Orchestra is proud to feature the remarkable talent of Jenny Swoish. An award-winning vocalist and songwriter hailing from the sun-soaked shores of Southern California, Jenny captivates audiences with a vocal style that echoes the timeless elegance of legends like Judy Garland and Doris Day. She masterfully crafts melodies that honor the classic sounds of her musical predecessors while skillfully weaving in a contemporary flair that resonates with today's dynamic music scene.

When not enchanting audiences with the orchestra, Jenny calls the vibrant city of Nashville, TN, her home. Her debut album, **Tonight...In Dreamland**, is a beautiful testament to the enduring power of classic songs, proving that the magic of music never truly fades and that dreams can indeed blossom into reality.



A close-up, side-profile shot of a male musician with a beard, wearing a dark suit, playing a trumpet. He is in the foreground, slightly out of focus. In the background, other musicians and the audience are visible, creating a bokeh effect with warm, golden lights. The overall atmosphere is that of a live jazz performance.

The Miller Sound Lives On

The Glenn Miller Orchestra dazzles audiences with a staggering schedule of 180 to 200 performances each year, captivating fans far and wide. Music lovers adore Erik, Jenny, and their talented fellow musicians, coming together to celebrate the exhilarating and timeless big band sound that has solidified The World-Famous Glenn Miller Orchestra's place in the hearts of jazz enthusiasts everywhere!



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Creating a Market for Live Jazz

Jae Sinnett



"Getting past Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Herbie Hancock, Diana Krall and Samara Joy and outside of major markets like New York City, the overwhelming majority of self proclaimed jazz appreciators struggle with living jazz artists familiarity. There are many other marquee stars such as Gregory Porter, Diane Reeves or Joshua Redman but again, away from NYC and a few other major markets even they aren't as identifiable. This is particularly problematic for live jazz performances. Probably 90% of those in Hampton Roads that go to see Wynton Marsalis for example, won't attend another jazz event the rest of the year but yet proclaim to be jazz lovers. Simply look at numbers as I do all the time. It's interesting, in my personal experience of being involved in this industry on many fronts for decades, one of the very few jazz artists I knew personally that consistently made presenters money was the great Charlie Byrd. Why? Charlie never overcharged. He mastered the art of getting good wages knowing what he could realistically sell and always left room for presenters to profit. You don't have to be over paid to be paid well. Presenters always MADE money on Charlie and wanted him back over and over. That's the idea. Artists today demand large sums of money they can't recoup for the presenter but yet many presenters still pay but the artists aren't brought back. Success is based on how little you lose but if they lose too much the narrative becomes jazz doesn't make money. Balance is key and trust me, it's not just jazz.

Festivals are interesting. Most, not all, but most, aren't as dependent on butts in seats because they get so much underwriting and sponsorship support that doesn't have to be returned or recouped. You'll have artists asking for and getting say...\$20K... but only sell 200 tickets. Most ticket prices, not including Ticketmaster fees, generally run between \$25-\$50. Do the math.

It's insane really. Funny too with jazz because the bigger you get with the event the further away from jazz you get. That's why so many uh, jazz festivals, feature non jazz. Payouts ain't equaling returns. They want to go big. Jazz doesn't work too well big if you leave it as jazz or if you have tons of loot to spend and you're not worried about returns. Jazz today doesn't have the marquee strength for big. Have to bring in R&B or rock or whatever at big but still they want the sophistication of the jazz name.

What's the remedy? It's simple but yet not so simple. Keep it smaller and even then it's a challenge but your risks are lower. Folks have to take a chance and go see an artist they've never heard of or aren't that familiar with in sound. Take familiarity off the table. Learn to trust certain presenters that bring JAZZ to the area. After all, jazz today is mostly loaded with talent unfamiliar with most jazz appreciators. Those are the odds you'll more than likely be confronted with in wanting to enjoy live jazz performances."

THE BEAT GOES ON



Sounds of the 757: Hampton Roads' Rich Musical Legacy

When you think of American music royalty, you might envision New York jazz clubs or West Coast hip-hop. But tucked between the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay lies Hampton Roads, Virginia—a region whose rhythmic heartbeat has quietly powered the soundtrack of American culture for generations.

This coastal enclave—home to cities like Norfolk, Portsmouth, Hampton, Newport News, and Virginia Beach—has birthed a striking range of musical legends, from jazz and blues pioneers to hip-hop architects.

Ella Fitzgerald, born in Newport News in 1917, became the "First Lady of Song"—a jazz icon whose voice defined an era.

VOICES OF LEGACY



Ella Fitzgerald – “The First Lady of Song,” born in Newport News in 1917



Ruth Brown – “Miss Rhythm,” R&B trailblazer from Portsmouth



Robert Cray – Grammy-winning blues revivalist, raised in Newport News

It all began with the voice of a generation: Ella Fitzgerald, the “First Lady of Song,” born in Newport News in 1917. With her unmatched vocal agility and pure tone, she redefined jazz and became one of the most influential singers in American history.

Just across the water in Portsmouth, Ruth Brown—often called “Miss Rhythm”—helped lay the foundation for R&B and rock ‘n’ roll, influencing generations with her soulful blues and becoming a key voice in Atlantic Records’ rise.

As the decades turned, Hampton Roads’ sound evolved. Grammy-winning bluesman Robert Cray, raised in Newport News, brought blues back to the mainstream in the 1980s with his smooth guitar work and emotive storytelling. And then came the hip-hop era.



gettyimages
Credit: biffspandex

THE HIP-HOP ARCHITECTS



Missy Elliott – The genre-bending icon who made Portsmouth a global stage.



Pharrell Williams – The Virginia Beach visionary behind The Neptunes and N.E.R.D

"Hampton Roads doesn't just produce stars—it produces visionaries."

Few cities in America have shaped modern hip-hop and pop culture like Virginia Beach and Portsmouth. Missy Elliott, a force of creative genius, emerged from Portsmouth in the '90s and changed the game with genre-bending beats, futuristic visuals, and a bold voice for women in rap. Pharrell Williams, also from Virginia Beach, turned his hometown into a global creative hub, co-founding .

The Neptunes and N.E.R.D.—the sound architects behind hits for artists like Britney Spears, Jay-Z, and Justin Timberlake. Pusha T, another Virginia Beach native and half of the duo Clipse, brought gritty, lyrical storytelling to center stage, helping define the East Coast hip-hop aesthetic in the 2000s and beyond

Today, Hampton Roads continues to echo with creativity—from school band rooms and gospel choirs to the Something in the Water Festival, Pharrell's annual celebration of culture and unity in Virginia Beach. The region is more than a coastal escape; it's a living mixtape, with every city, bridge, and tide carrying the sounds of resilience, innovation, and soul.

Hampton Roads doesn't just produce stars—it produces visionaries. And if history is any guide, the next genre-defining artist might already be writing lyrics in a bedroom studio somewhere off I-64. Yes, absolutely — Hampton Roads, VA has produced a wide array of musical talent across genres and generations. Beyond legends like Ella Fitzgerald, Missy Elliott, Pharrell Williams, and Pusha T, there's a deep bench of influential artists who also hail from the region:



Pusha T – Lyrical force and one-half of the Clipse duo, born in Virginia Beach

NEXT WAVE VISIONARIES

HAMPTON ROADS DOESN'T JUST PRODUCE STARS—IT PRODUCES VISIONARIES. FROM OPERA TO TRAP, THESE NAMES HELPED SHAPE THE SOUND OF THEIR TIME.



Notable Musicians from Hampton Roads, VA

Timbaland (Timothy Mosley)– Virginia Beach

A globally recognized producer, Timbaland helped shape the sound of late-'90s and 2000s pop and hip-hop. He launched careers and produced hits for Missy Elliott, Aaliyah, Justin Timberlake, Jay-Z, and many more.

Chris Richardson – Chesapeake

An American Idol finalist (Season 6), Chris gained national attention and has since collaborated with artists in pop and R&B circles.

Clipse (Gene & Terrence Thornton – No Malice & Pusha T) – Virginia Beach

Known for sharp lyricism and gritty storytelling, Clipse were pivotal in East Coast hip-hop. Produced by The Neptunes, their music helped define early 2000s rap.

VOICES OF THE NEW WAVE

YOUNG CRAZY – NORFOLK

An up-and-coming voice in Southern hip-hop, Young Crazy is gaining momentum as part of the new wave of talent representing Norfolk and the 757.



Young Crazy – Norfolk’s rising voice in Southern hip-hop.

LEX LUGER – SUFFOLK

A groundbreaking hip-hop producer who helped popularize the “trap” sound, especially through collaborations with Waka Flocka Flame and Rick Ross.



Lex Luger – Suffolk producer who popularized the trap sound.

JAY PHAROAH – CHESAPEAKE

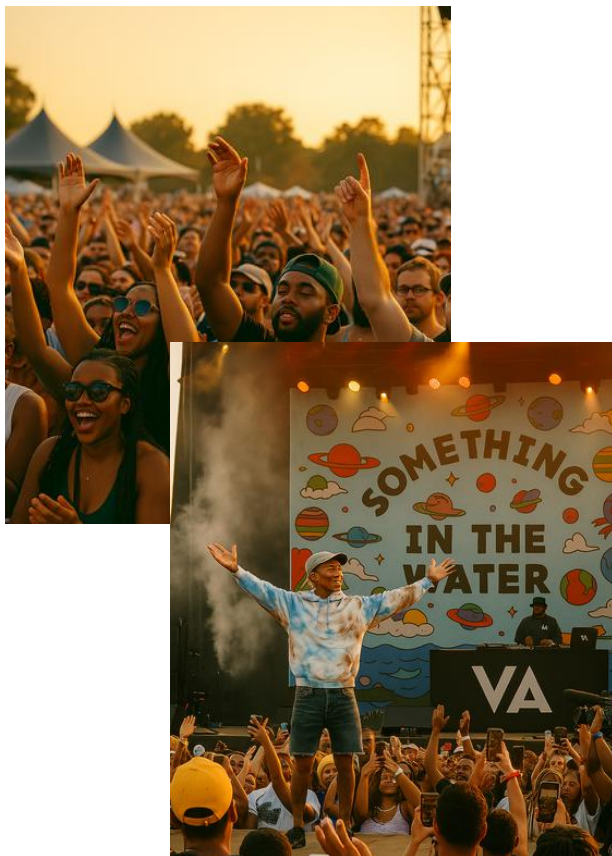
While primarily known for comedy (***Saturday Night Live***), Pharoah is also a skilled rapper and impressionist with musical chops often showcased in his performances.



Jay Pharoah – Chesapeake’s SNL star and musical impressionist.

CLASSICAL ROOTS & GOSPEL SOUL

Hampton Roads' musical diversity doesn't stop at mainstream genres. The region also boasts classically trained artists like Patricia Brooks, an acclaimed opera soprano from Portsmouth. The area's many historically Black churches and military bases have fostered vibrant gospel and military band traditions, further enriching the region's musical fabric.



SOMETHING IN THE WATER: A CULTURAL MOMENT

Pharrell's Something in the Water Festival, launched in 2019 in Virginia Beach, has become a celebration of not just music—but culture, community, and creativity rooted in the 757. Featuring A-list performers, entrepreneurs, artists, and change-makers, it's a homegrown tribute to the region's creative genius.

The Beat Goes On

So what is it about Hampton Roads that breeds so much talent? Maybe it's the crossroads of culture, where military families bring global influences and a deep tradition of storytelling fuels musical experimentation. Or maybe it's something in the salt air—something in the water—that keeps inspiring generation after generation to find their voice and share it with the world. From Ella to Missy, from sax solos to studio beats, Hampton Roads continues to make music that matters. And as new artists rise and legends return home to give back, one thing is clear: **The 757 doesn't just play the music—it writes it.**

Jet Setter

CIAO

Italia



Milan A LOVE LETTER IN FASHION, FLAVORS, AND LA DOLCE VITA



Milano Centrale

FROM SEATTLE SKIES TO MILANESE STREETS

Mama Mia, Milano! Where to even begin? Italy always knows how to steal a heart, but Milan? Milan feels like a city that wakes up each morning, wraps itself in couture, spritzes on confidence, and steps out ready to dazzle. Known as Italy's fashion and design capital, Milan isn't just beautiful, it's bold, creative, and always ahead of the curve. Historic palazzos share streets with modern skyscrapers, centuries-old trattorias sit beside sleek cocktail bars, and there's always a new designer window to admire. We landed after a dreamy business-class flight from Seattle to Milan via Munich. Even jet lag feels elegant when you're sipping bubbles in the sky. And the timing couldn't have been better. It was Fashion Week, Milan at its most dazzling.

DESIGNER DREAMS AND ROOFTOP TOASTS

I met up with my beautiful friend and designer Chau Saenz, who was treasure hunting at Lineapelle, a global leather and accessories show where tomorrow's handbag dreams begin. Chau's designs already turn heads, and I proudly travel with two of them that draw compliments everywhere. Staying at the Hyatt right in the stylish center of Milan puts us in the perfect spot for adventure.

Our first evening? Specialty cocktails at the Organics Sky Garden rooftop bar, surrounded by lush greenery and city views, while the soft pulse of lounge music set the mood. Shop, Sip, Repeat, The Milan Way Milanese shopping isn't just retail therapy. It's history, artistry, and everyday glamour stitched into every street. From the iconic glass-domed Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II to hidden ateliers tucked into quiet courtyards, the city tempts at every turn. Pro Tip: Bring your passport for VAT refunds and know that many luxury shops will happily deliver your purchases straight to your hotel. European prices without import markups and tax perks? That's girl math at its finest.



Organics Sky Garden



Langosteria

FLAVORS THAT TELL A STORY

In Milan, even meals feel couture. At Langosteria, recommended by one of Chau's Milanese contacts, we dressed up for an evening of fresh seafood and craft cocktails that danced on the palate. The gothic marvel of the Duomo di Milano stole our breath. Six centuries in the making, this marble masterpiece is pure magic, especially early morning or at sunset. Afterward, we treated ourselves to cocktails and dessert at the chic Armani Café because in Milan, fashion and flavor are never far apart.



LAKESIDE MAGIC AT *Lake Como*

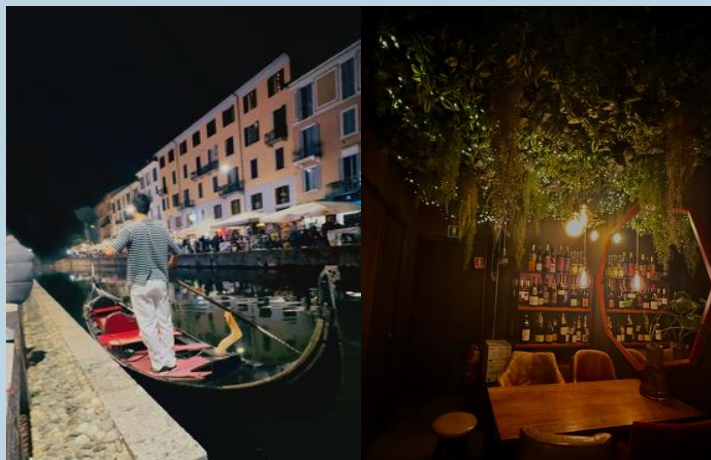
When city energy meets lakeside serenity, you get Lake Como. Just a quick train ride from Milan, yet it feels like stepping into a postcard. Famous for its dramatic alpine backdrop, charming pastel villages, and elegant villas that spill right down to the water's edge, Lake Como has inspired writers, artists, and dreamers for centuries. We booked a private boat with Como Blue Lake, timing it to catch the sunset, a must if you go. As we glided over the deep, mirror-like waters, the shoreline revealed grand estates framed by cypress trees and gardens in full bloom. Among the highlights was spotting George and Amal Clooney's villa, and the breathtaking Villa del Balbianello, known worldwide as a wedding venue and a filming location for movies like *Star Wars* and *Casino Royale*. We stopped to explore the storybook towns of Bellagio, known as the "Pearl of the Lake," and Varenna, with its romantic lakeside promenade and colorful houses climbing the hillside. Between local artisan shops, creamy gelato, and rich espresso, every corner felt like it belonged on a vintage postcard.

As the sun set and the breeze turned cool, our captain passed out rain ponchos, practical yet oddly fun as we sped back across the water, legs a bit numb but hearts completely full. A quick tea stop at Ceccato Garden Bar warmed us up before we nearly boarded the wrong train. Thankfully, we caught the last one to Milan. And honestly, getting "stuck" in Como wouldn't have been the worst thing.



Canals, Cocktails and Moonlit Conversations

Back in Milan, we wandered into Navigli, one of the city's oldest and most romantic neighborhoods. Originally designed with help from Leonardo da Vinci, its remaining canals, Naviglio Grande and Naviglio Pavese were once used to transport goods and even the marble for the Duomo. Today, these historic waterways are lined with lively cafés, art studios, and vintage shops that hum with bohemian charm. We joined friends visiting from the Bay Area for dinner, soaking in the district's buzzing energy and the soft twinkle of lights reflecting off the water. Navigli has a different rhythm, slower and dreamier.



You can visit by day for antique markets, espresso breaks, and people-watching along the canals. By night, the water glows, conversations spill out of wine bars, and every street feels wrapped in magic. If time had allowed, I would have booked a gondola ride to drift along the canal and see the neighborhood from the water's view. Next time for sure. We capped off the evening at Enocentrico, a cozy cocktail and wine bar where the drinks are just as creative as the company. The city hummed gently around us, and with every sip, the night settled into a perfect little memory.



Chausaenz.com

Sunrise Shoots and Outlet Hunts

One morning, Chau planned a sunrise photoshoot for her new handbags and invited me to model with her. With fewer tourists around, the Duomo felt almost ours. In Italy, a duomo refers to the main cathedral of a city, often its most iconic and ornate building and Milan's Duomo is just that. Its soaring marble spires glowed in the early light, a gothic masterpiece that took nearly six centuries to complete and now stand proudly at the heart of the city. The quiet grandeur was breathtaking, and our local photographer led us to hidden corners of Milan we would never have found on our own.

Chau Saenz

Chau's handbags are as captivating as the setting. Handcrafted in small batches with luxe materials sourced from Italy, each piece is designed with thoughtful structure and timeless elegance. They are the kind of bags that turn heads without trying, beautifully blending function with fashion. Every photo we took felt like a celebration of artistry, hers, Milan's, and the magical moments in between. Later, we hopped on a shuttle for a day trip to Milan's luxury outlets about an hour outside the city. The deals were worth the trip, especially with designer labels priced far better than back home. It felt like a fashion lover's treasure hunt. Lunch at Eataly? More pasta and vino, per favore. Grazie!

Florence Bound, But Milan Stays with You

After packing up in Milan, we made a quick stop for dim sum and tea at Ta Hua, a sleek and modern spot known for its authentic bites and elegant Hong Kong-style dishes. The flavors were delicate, the tea soothing, and the vibe effortlessly chic. I'll definitely be back for another round next time I'm in town. Soon it was time to board the fast train to Florence. Even with our luggage, the ride was smooth and surprisingly quick. Milan had left its mark on us in laughter shared over cocktails, quiet moments before the Duomo, and memories sewn between bites of pasta and sips of wine. Milan teaches you this: say yes to indulgence, wander into hidden alleyways, toast under the stars, and always have room for dessert. Arrivederci, Milano. Until next time, you beautiful, stylish and unforgettable city.



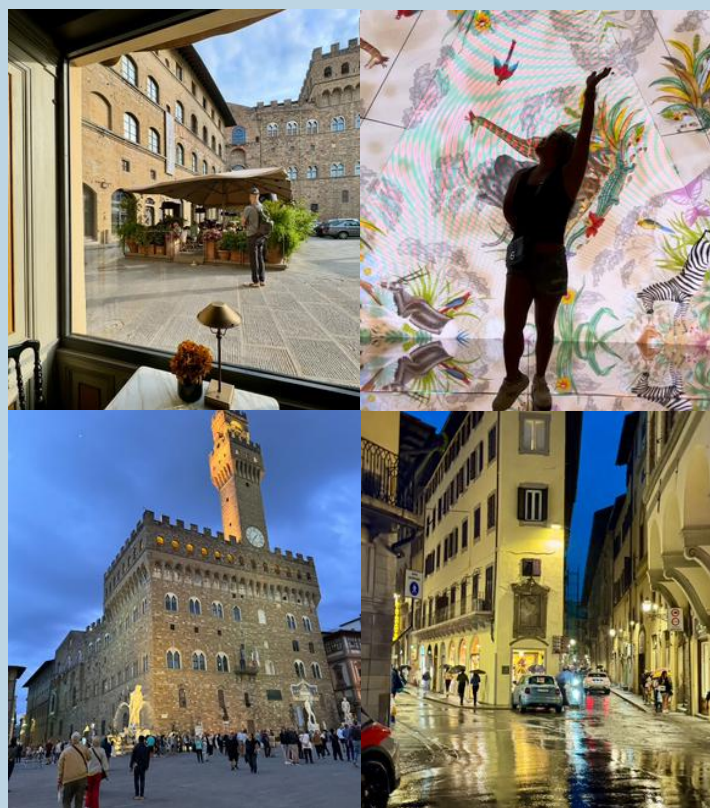
Enoteca Pontevecchio

Florence

Fashion and a Taste of Gucci

A Warm Welcome with Wine and Friends Florence greeted us with open arms and full glasses. Our first stop was Enoteca Pontevecchio, a gem of a wine shop nestled near the heart of the city and owned by my dear friend, Tony Sasa. Walking inside feels like slipping into a secret, cozy, warm, and lined with treasures. Shelves burst with boutique wines from small Italian vineyards, each with a unique story to tell. Tastings here aren't just about sipping; they're moments of connection, laughter, and discovery. From bold reds to velvety limoncello, Tony and his team pour passion into every bottle. The best part? They'll ship your favorites straight to your doorstep, so a little slice of Florence follows you home.

After settling in, Chau and I made our way to the iconic Ponte Vecchio, its glittering rows of jeweler shops sparkling like a fairytale. Just around the corner, we stepped into Jennifer Tattanelli's elegant boutique. Meeting Jennifer was such a treat. Her warmth and artistry instantly put us at ease. She shared stories of her life designing in Florence, balancing her world between Palm Beach, The Hamptons, and here in Italy. In true Italian fashion, she even called ahead to her favorite restaurant to make sure we had a table waiting. That's Florence for you, full of grace, style, and the kind of generous spirit that lingers long after the meal ends.



A Dinner Worth Savoring

That evening, we dined at Garga Trattoria, a lively and whimsical spot where every bite is a celebration. We started with silky Beef Carpaccio and followed with Veal Scaloppina in a luscious avocado cream sauce, each dish paired with the perfect glass of wine. The owner, kind and charming, came in on his day off just to say hello and then surprised us with not one but two of his favorite desserts. Under the glow of the Florentine night, with full bellies and fuller hearts, we knew we were exactly where we were meant to be.



A Journey Through Gucci's Legacy

No trip to Florence is complete without a stop at Gucci Garden. Tucked beside the one and only Giardino 25 Gucci, we paused for a quick cocktail before diving into the rich world of Italian fashion. Housed in the 14th-century Palazzo della Mercanzia, the Gucci Museum is an experience, not just an exhibition. Reimagined by creative director Alessandro Michele, it's a multi-sensory journey through the brand's eccentric, opulent, and ever-evolving identity.

Each room tells its own story. One is filled with Guccification mania, another echoes with the delicate botanicals of De Rerum Natura. There's even a velvet-walled cinema and an art gallery space that blends imagination with couture. The boutique sells exclusive Gucci Garden pieces you won't find anywhere else, and with any purchase, your museum entry is complimentary. How's that for fashion-forward hospitality?

Gelato, Gardens and Greenhouse Charm

For lunch, we shared a classic lasagna and a vibrant seafood pasta at an outdoor café in the Piazza, with the Duomo standing proudly in the background. The marble shimmered under the sun, as if watching over us. For dessert, pistachio gelato, rich, creamy, and honestly, life-changing.

Later, dinner swept us into the storybook world of Moi Je Joue La Menagerie. This hidden gem feels like dining in a lush greenhouse, filled with vintage books, fresh florals, and soft lighting under a glass arboretum. A grand piano sat under a canopy of greenery, adding a romantic soundtrack to the evening. Between the imaginative cocktails and beautifully plated dishes, Florence once again worked its magic, showing us how to dine with heart and style.

Buongiorno!





Piti

Stories Etched in Stone

To walk off dinner, we strolled to the Duomo for a spontaneous photo session under its illuminated facade. Then it was time for a deep dive into Florence's layered history at the magnificent Pitti Palace. Once the home of the Medici family, the palace now houses rooms of breathtaking art and royal opulence. The Palatine Gallery and Imperial Apartments are filled with frescoes, chandeliers, and whispers of the past. But it was upstairs in the Museum of Costume and Fashion where I truly felt transported.

Here, centuries of Italian fashion unfold. Ornate gowns, ceremonial garments, and couture pieces that once graced royalty and runways alike. In one softly lit room, preserved behind glass, were the delicate funeral garments of Cosimo I de' Medici, Eleonora of Toledo, and their son Garzia. Standing before them felt like stepping into a solemn echo of history, one that makes you pause and reflect on the contrast between regal extravagance and the struggles outside those palace walls. It's a tension that still exists in many corners of the world today.

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Dinner that night turned into an unexpected highlight thanks to a last-minute reservation at Carne Diem, tucked inside the lobby of the 25-hour Hotel. We sat family style, passing plates of beef carpaccio, perfectly grilled steaks and rich side dishes as glasses of red wine kept our conversations flowing. At first, sitting at a long table filled with strangers felt almost unfamiliar after years apart, especially in a different country, but once bread was broken and stories shared, it felt beautifully natural. Cheers to shared tables, new friends from around the world, and the simple joy of gathering. As the night wound down and goodbyes were shared, I knew that Florence had more chapters waiting to be written. Chau flew home the next day, but the city stayed with me. Etched in light, layered in memory, and wrapped in the scent of truffles and roses. Florence isn't just a destination. It's a feeling. A sense of wonder, romance, and walking hand in hand with history while still finding space for new beginnings.



A Pasta Performance and a Warm Welcome

Osteria Pastella

My yogis began to arrive in Florence, and the energy shifted in the most beautiful way. We were gathering here before heading into the Tuscan countryside for Audrey Sutton's soul-nourishing yoga retreat in Greve. First to land were Audrey herself, along with Kavita Karode and Shradha Cripe, and we wasted no time in meeting up for a late lunch at Osteria Pastella Cucina Fiorentina.



This cozy spot, just steps from the Duomo, offers more than just a meal. It's a full sensory experience. Their signature dish, the truffle tagliatelle prepared tableside in a bubbling wheel of Grana Padano, is pure pasta theater. The server pours brandy into the hollowed cheese wheel, sets it alight, folds in fresh pasta, drizzles white truffle oil, and finishes with generous shavings of truffle. The aroma alone is intoxicating. You can even catch a glimpse of pasta being handmade each morning through the restaurant's front window. The space itself feels like a well-kept secret, with its antique-chic charm, warm service, fresh bread, and a complimentary welcome drink that immediately makes you feel at home. If you love your pasta with a bit of drama and a whole lot of flavor, this one's a must. Just be sure to book ahead. This gem is no secret to locals or travelers.

That evening, we gathered for dinner on the terrace at Relais Piazza Signoria, joined by Kavita's lovely mother, Anjali Karode, and Yasmina Henning. After our indulgent truffle lunch, I kept it light with a perfectly roasted chicken and a fresh salad. We sipped, we laughed, we shared stories under the Florentine sky. Travel tip: Weekends in Florence can be tricky for taxis and Ubers, especially in the historic center where the narrow streets aren't always car-friendly. Reserving a taxi ahead of time is not just smart. It's essential. Florence might move at a slower pace, but your ride shouldn't.

A Drive Through Tuscany,

A Taste of

Greve

Audrey and I picked up our rental car and made a quick stop for groceries to stock up for the week in Greve. Navigating the aisles and deciphering labels in Italian added a bit of fun (and adventure) to our shopping experience. With two overflowing carts and plenty of laughs along the way, we loaded up the car and hit the scenic road to Greve, ready for our Tuscan retreat.



The drive from Florence to Greve in Chianti along the SS222, fondly known as the "Chiantigiana," is a dreamy journey through the heart of Tuscany. Winding through sun-drenched vineyards, silver-green olive groves, and postcard-perfect hilltop villages, this 30 to 45-minute drive feels like a warm welcome into wine country. Greve itself is considered the gateway to Chianti Classico, with its charming triangular Piazza Matteotti lined with porticos, artisan shops, and local wine merchants. It's home to historic treasures like the Antica Macelleria Falorni, a butcher shop dating back to 1729, and serves as a perfect base for tasting world-renowned Chianti wines. Whether you're here for the views, the vino, or the vibe, Greve offers the kind of rustic elegance and heartwarming hospitality that defines the Tuscan dream.





A Toast in *Chianti*

While winding through the golden hills of Chianti, Audrey and I made a charming stop at Tenuta di Nozzole, the historic estate of Ambrogio e Giovanni Folonari, to collect her pre-ordered case of wine. What began as a simple pickup turned into a spontaneous and unforgettable tasting experience. The estate, with its centuries-old cellars and sweeping vineyard vistas, welcomed us like old friends. We couldn't resist settling in for a tasting among the vines. Each glass rich Chianti Classico, hearty Super Tuscan blends felt like a love letter to the land, poured from a bottle of history and passion. As the Tuscan sun cast a warm glow over rolling rows of grapes, laughter came easily, and time slipped away. Audrey's wines were carefully packed up, but what we carried with us were richer memories: shared stories, sunlit toasts, and the unmistakable taste of Tuscan hospitality.

Villa Benedetta

Where Stillness Meets the Soul

We arrived at the beautiful Villa Benedetta in the heart of Chianti, a stunning property owned by the Folonari family, the same name behind some of Tuscany's most celebrated wines. This would be home for the next seven days, the perfect setting for a deeply nourishing yoga retreat that Audrey has so thoughtfully curated. Audrey's retreats are never just about yoga. They're about connection, transformation, and creating space to return to yourself. She's led many heart-opening experiences around the world, and this one feels especially magical. Here, surrounded by rolling vineyards and centuries-old stone walls, the journey inward begins.



Piazza Greve



Yoga retreats like this offer something for everyone whether you're just beginning your practice or have been on the mat for years. They remind us that the path to our truest self doesn't lie outside of us, but within. With a little stillness, a little movement, and a lot of grace, we begin to release what no longer serves and remember who we really are. Our itinerary is a perfect blend of intention and ease. We'll start each morning with yoga in the fresh Tuscan air, followed by two immersive Soul School workshops "Release and Receive" centered on quieting the inner critic and reconnecting to the soul's dream. There's something powerful about sharing this kind of work with like-minded souls, all here seeking mindfulness, connection, and expansion. The days ahead promise laughter, learning, and a kind of beauty that stays with you long after you leave.

Tasting Tradition

Monte Bernardi

The next day began with a wine tour at Monte Bernardi, a boutique, family-run estate nestled in the heart of Panzano in Chianti, one of the most prized wine-producing villages in Tuscany. After a warm and welcoming evening of meet-and-greets with fellow yogis from across the United States, this experience felt like the perfect way to settle into the rhythm of the retreat. Monte Bernardi is renowned for its elegant and organic Chianti Classico wines, crafted with deep respect for the land and tradition. Our tasting began in their charming wine room, where each pour told a story of terroir, time, and craftsmanship. We sipped their signature wines, bold, yet balanced and then ventured deeper into the estate. Touring the cellar, we saw firsthand how their wines are produced, aged, and bottled with incredible care. The experience culminated with a peaceful walk through the sun-drenched vineyards, where Sangiovese vines stretched across rolling hills under the Tuscan sky. It was the kind of day that lingers on the palate and in the soul a perfect blend of connection, culture, and Chianti magic.





Monte Bernardi

Garden Lunches and Golden Moments in Panzano
After our beautiful tour and tasting at Monte Bernardi, we made our way to Oltre Il Giardino for a long, leisurely lunch under the Tuscan sun. Tucked into a charming garden setting in the heart of Panzano, the restaurant offered the kind of warmth and flavor that lingers long after the last bite. More pasta, more wine, and more laughter filled the table as new friendships blossomed, and stories flowed freely. It was one of those simple, perfect afternoons where time slows down and everything tastes like joy.



Serpent Symbols & Sips *Montecalvi*

Next stop on our vino adventure: the magical Montecalvi estate, tucked like a secret treasure in the sun-drenched hills of Chianti near Greve. This charming centuries-old winery is all about small batch sustainable wines that honor the deep roots of the land and oh, did they deliver. The standout? Their San Piero Toscana. Not just for its delicious depth, but for the label, two intertwined snakes, bold and beautiful. I gasped. Was this bottle flirting with me? Because it sure felt like a cosmic wink. As someone with Chinese (Yao Mien) and Mongolian heritage, the snake holds a sacred symbolism, wisdom, quiet strength, transformation. In Chinese astrology, the snake is the seeker, the intuitive, the silent powerhouse. Sipping that wine felt like sipping on a little destiny. The reds were lush and elegant, the whites crisp and alive, each glass a love letter to the earth. Wine tasting under the Tuscan sun, soaking up the gold-tinged views and losing all track of time. One moment you're savoring a pour, the next you're blinking at the horizon wondering how it's already dinner o'clock. It was a tasting, a toasting, and a tiny transformation all wrapped into one unforgettable stop.



From Scratch with Love at the Villa

One magical evening at the Villa, we rolled up our sleeves and dove into a hands-on pasta making class led by the delightful Chef Davide Naldoni. He arrived with everything we needed to craft fresh spinach ravioli and tagliatelle from scratch. Laughter echoed through the kitchen as we took turns feeding dough through the pasta machine, cutting sheets, and pressing delicate ravioli pockets with care. The chef transformed the tagliatelle into a rich savory meat dish while keeping the ravioli vegetarian, letting the vibrant ingredients shine. There is something truly different about cooking in Italy. The ingredients feel purer, the flavors fuller, and somehow even those usually sensitive to gluten felt just fine. We ended the night gathered around the Villa's elegant dining table, savoring the fruits of our labor, bellies full and hearts fuller. It wasn't just a meal, it was a memory made in flour, laughter, and good Chianti.



Final Toasts and Vineyard Wanders

Montefioralle

As our retreat gently came to a close, we savored every lingering bit of Tuscan magic. In between our morning yoga sessions and soul nourishing Soul School gatherings, we wandered through the vineyards to the enchanting hilltop village of Montefioralle. With its ivy draped stone walls and winding alleys, it felt like we had slipped into another world entirely. We indulged in a leisurely lunch at La Castellana, highly recommended if you're ever in the area, it's an absolute treasure. We also explored the nearby town of Greve, strolling through the vibrant piazza, popping into quaint shops, and taking in those final tastes of Tuscany. Our closing dinner at La Terrazza, set right in the heart of the square, was the perfect farewell. Under the warm evening sky, we shared toasts, hugs, and reflections. Naturally, I couldn't leave without a few souvenirs. Wine from each winery found its way into a shipment back home, along with bottles of rich, peppery olive oil. Less check in luggage? That's what I call a travel win.

Whispers from Tuscany

As I zipped up my suitcase, I felt the presence of something intangible yet undeniable. This week in Greve was more than a retreat. It was a sacred unfolding, a quiet alchemy of movement, breath, and being. In the hush of early morning yoga, in the laughter shared over hand rolled pasta, in the stillness between the vines, something ancient stirred within us. We arrived as individuals and departed as a circle, men and women alike, each carrying a spark lit by presence, connection, and place. Tuscany has a way of whispering to the soul, of softening the armor we did not know we were wearing. What I carry home is not just memory, but a gentle awakening. A reminder that the most meaningful journeys are the ones that lead us back to ourselves.



Montefalco

As if Tuscany hadn't already filled my cup, life had one more gift in store. On a whim, I made my way to Montefalco in the heart of Umbria for an impromptu visit that felt divinely timed. My lovely stepdaughter Iris had seen I was in Italy and happened to be visiting family nearby. Soon, I found myself wrapped in the warmth of familiar faces and generations of love, her beautiful mother Katia, her equally beautiful aunt Elena and Elena's partner Raffaele, along with their sweet daughter Maya. And of course, Nona Laura and Nonno Otello welcomed me with open arms, as if no time had passed at all. Montefalco's charm is undeniable, but it was the soul of this reunion that made it truly unforgettable.

Learning the Language of Dinner

On my first evening in Montefalco, I found myself at dinner with just Laura and Otello, both of whom speak little to no English. And let's just say, my Italian is far from fluent. Iris already had plans that night, which I insisted she keep, assuring her I would be just fine with the grandparents. With a little patience and a lot of help from Google Translate, we managed beautifully. Even the local pizzeria we went to was full immersion, no English, just kind smiles and curious glances.



Otello and Laura Broccetelli

It was a wonderfully humbling experience to be surrounded by the language, to fumble through conversation, and to be gently pushed to use what little Italian I knew. Somehow, it all worked. And in that quiet, simple evening, I felt deeply connected to the place, the people, and the beauty of not always having the right words.

Harvests of the Heart

Broccatelli

Just outside Montefalco's historic center lies the Broccatelli family estate, where Iris's roots run deep and hospitality seems to bloom from the very soil. The property includes four charming guest units, nestled beside the family home and surrounded by olive groves, sunflower fields waiting to awaken, and the timeless hum of country life. Right next door, rows of Sagrantino vines grown by the neighboring winemaker Giorgio Iannoni Sebastianini roll across the hills like quiet poetry. One afternoon, Iris and I wandered over for a closer look, drawn by the beauty of the vineyard and the promise of something special. Giorgio, warm and welcoming, introduced himself right there among the vines and invited us to taste his wines. Each glass felt like a love letter to Umbria, earthy, bold, and brimming with story.

That night at the estate, Laura welcomed us into the kitchen with the warmth of someone who has been feeding souls her whole life. Dinner was a beautiful expression of the land itself, fresh black truffle pasta rolled by hand, tender parmesan crusted pork, and smoky slices of grilled eggplant, each dish a quiet triumph. The truffles, unearthed earlier by the family's clever hunting dogs, added a touch of wild earthiness that made the meal unforgettable. As the sky deepened into indigo and conversation flowed as easily as the wine, the evening took on its own rhythm. It was not just a meal, but a moment, one of those rare, lingering nights where time feels soft around the edges and belonging finds you effortlessly.



Montefalco is often called the Balcony of Umbria, and while its sweeping views stretch across valleys and vineyards, the town's true magic is something you feel rather than see. Just beyond the edge of town stands the Church of Santa Chiara, where history, devotion, and mystery seem to breathe through the stone walls. It is here that Saint Clare of Montefalco, a 13th century mystic, continues to move hearts with her presence. Clare was known for her visions and unwavering spiritual depth, eventually becoming abbess of the Convent of the Holy Cross. When she passed in 1308, the nuns claimed to find symbols of Christ's Passion etched into her heart, a crucifix, scourge, and crown of thorns, as though her body had become a vessel for divine experience. Today, her heart rests in a silver reliquary behind glass, and nearby, her incorrupt body, dressed in her Augustinian habit, lies in a glass enclosed tomb within the chapel. Visitors step softly through the space, visibly touched by the reverence and quiet power that fills the room. The moment you enter, a hush settles over you like soft velvet. The scent of aged wood, incense, and centuries of candle smoke lingers in the air, wrapping around you like a whispered prayer. Light streams through stained glass in warm hues of gold and rose, painting the silence with a kind of holiness that feels just beyond reach. Whether or not one believes in miracles, the energy in this space feels undeniably otherworldly. They say the church holds more than relics. It holds the soul of Montefalco. Though Saint Clare is not the only nun whose incorrupt body is displayed to the world, the presence of both her preserved form and her heart marked with the Passion makes this shrine unlike any other. Few places in the world offer such a potent convergence of mysticism, history, and faith in one sacred space.



A Taste of Home, Italian Style

On our final evening together, Iris suggested we cook, just like we used to whenever she visited her dad, my former partner, and me in the United States. Her favorite meal has always been my steak wraps with sticky rice and a spicy cilantro lime herb dipping sauce. So, there we were, in a tiny town in the heart of Italy, on a mission to recreate a dish that depended on ingredients we knew would be hard to find. Sticky rice and fish sauce are not exactly staples in rural Umbria. We took a little trip to Perugia, where the markets are slightly bigger, though still small by American standards. No fish sauce in sight, but I managed to find a bottle of Kikkoman soy sauce and a tube of anchovy paste. It became my makeshift version, and honestly, it did the trick. For heat, we picked up some local Italian peppers. They were surprisingly spicy, not quite Thai chili level, but enough to make it work. Iris and I had the best time cooking together again, falling into that familiar rhythm, laughing at our improvisations and celebrating small wins with every sizzling pan. We could possibly make it on the show *Survivor* with these smart hacks.



That night, the entire family gathered at the table, including Katia's dear friend who joined us for the meal. We toasted with wine, shared stories across generations, and passed around plates until they were clean. We used plain white rice in the end, but no one noticed. They loved the flavors so much they all asked for the recipe. I still need to send them real fish sauce, or maybe I will just bring it with me next time and stay a little longer, just like they asked.

After dinner, Katia, her friend, Iris, and I drove into the town center, parked near the piazza, and set out for a stroll to walk off our meal. Montefalco at night is something special. The streets glow softly under old lanterns, and everything feels suspended in a kind of hush. We wandered slowly, letting the rhythm of the evening guide us, and eventually met up with some American friends who were staying in town. One round of cocktails later, and the night had folded into a perfect memory. What stayed with me most though was not the wine or the walk, but the presence of this blended family around me. So often, families fractured by time or circumstance carry tension and disconnection. I am endlessly grateful that has never been the case between Katia and me. I have always loved Iris as my own daughter, since she was just six years old. Now at twenty five, she remains one of the brightest parts of my life. I am incredibly proud of the woman she has become. From barely speaking any English as a little girl to graduating from the University of Washington, she has grown into someone strong, brilliant, and full of grace.

While we were in Montefalco, Iris was also my translator and guide, helping bridge conversations with ease and laughter. She made everything feel effortless. Though I did get to practice my Italian each morning on my solo café runs, ordering coffee and pastries from the bar with a smile and my best accent. Those quiet mornings and shared evenings reminded me that family is not defined by blood or borders. It is built in love, choice, and showing up again and again for each other.

A Farewell Etched in Olive Leaves and Laughter

As my time in Montefalco came to a close, I found myself lingering in the stillness between moments, trying to hold onto the feeling that had quietly taken root during my stay. There is something timeless about this place, yes, but even more unforgettable was the love and generosity of the Broccatelli family. Their warmth wrapped around me like a well-worn quilt familiar, comforting, and deeply sincere. I am so grateful for every moment shared with them. For the meals prepared with heart, the laughter over wine, the long conversations that needed no perfect translation. For little Maya, who spoke to me with such sweet conviction in Italian, completely unbothered by the fact that I didn't understand her. In her world, there was no language barrier, only connection. And in her way, she nudged me to try a little harder, speak a little more, and listen with more than just words.

These memories are now part of me. This family, this home, this hillside soaked in sun and stories. I carry them with me, not just as cherished moments, but as familia. And I know this is not goodbye, only arrivederci, until we meet again. With my heart full and my Italian slightly improved, I packed my bags and turned toward my next destination on the list. Rome was calling, with its ancient stones, espresso-soaked mornings, and endless treasures waiting to be discovered. A new chapter was about to begin, but Montefalco would remain nestled in my soul, a quiet reminder of the beauty of connection and the magic of being welcomed as family.



ROME

in Motion and Light

After the sacred stillness of the Holy Door, I was ready to soak in the vibrancy of Rome in full color. The city greeted me like an old friend, grandeur and grit wrapped together in centuries of stone and soul. I wandered through St. Peter's Square, letting the open arms of the colonnades embrace me. The fountains danced in the light, and the energy buzzed with reverence and wonder. Even among the crowds, there was something deeply grounding about standing there, in a space where millions have passed through with hopes and prayers of their own.

From there, I dove into all the quintessential Roman experiences. I made my wish at the Trevi Fountain, where the marble shimmered under the sun like something out of myth. I climbed the Spanish Steps, pausing midway to take in the hum of the city below and the laughter of travelers spilling gelato on their fingers. Every street corner revealed another treasure whether it was the rich scent of espresso wafting from a tucked-away café, the glint of gold leaf on an aging church ceiling, or the sudden burst of live music echoing through the cobblestones.



St Peters Square, Vatican City



One of my favorite memories was an evening golf cart tour around the city. There were seven of us and our wonderful guide, Daniel, who was equal parts historian, comedian, and storyteller. Sandi Harris and her husband from Alabama were celebrating their fortieth wedding anniversary. Brooke Dannenfeldt and her father Steve had come from Iowa to honor her graduation from Drake University. Rachel Bozek and her mother Judy Hanzas from Pennsylvania were on a mother-daughter adventure through Italy. As we zipped through the streets together, past the Colosseum glowing against the night sky and the Pantheon standing quiet in its ancient grace, I felt that beautiful thing that happens when strangers become companions, even just for an evening.

The food, of course, was its own love story. Cacio e pepe that melted on the tongue. Suppli that cracked open to reveal molten mozzarella. Flaky pastries filled with pistachio cream and espresso that tasted like fuel for the gods. And the people, gracious, expressive, effortlessly stylish, and always ready to share a smile or a story.

Rome is a city that does not rush. It invites you to linger, to look up, to get lost and find yourself again. In every echoing piazza and candlelit trattoria, there was a sense of timelessness that reminded me to be fully present. I came to walk through the Holy Door during Jubilee (*The Holy Doors at opens every 25 years during a Jubilee, or Holy Year*), but Rome opened many more doors than I expected. And each one led me deeper into a city that continues to unfold like poetry under the moonlight.



Trevi Fountain



St Peter's Basilica and the Tiber River



Colosseo

Tastes of Rome

With the Roman sun lingering in the mid-eighties during my stay, I found myself leaning into lighter meals and late-night dinners. My first meal was sushi, yes, sushi in the heart of Rome. Nakai was just around the corner from my hotel, a sleek and modern spot with garden vibes and beautifully crafted dishes. The miso soup was comforting, the sushi fresh and balanced, but it was the wagyu dumplings and a chilled glass of nigori sake that stole the show. Light, flavorful, and just right for a summer day in the city.

Another evening took me to Cresci, also nearby. I love discovering neighborhood gems, and this one delivered. I started with their beef tartare salad, which was both elegant and satisfying, followed by a pasta with baby octopus and asparagus that still lingers in my thoughts. I find myself craving it even as I write this.

One of my favorite moments was sitting just outside the Piazza del Popolo at Angolo degli Artisti. I ordered a limoncello spritz, perfectly bright and refreshing for the warm evening air, and paired it with a delicate clam pasta that made me close my eyes for just a moment in pure contentment.

My mornings were simple. When I travel solo, I usually start the day with a strong coffee and maybe a pastry, enjoyed quietly while the city wakes around me. In the summer heat, I often skip lunch and save my appetite for dinner, letting the day carry me lightly from one experience to the next.

Rome fed me in every sense, body, soul, and curiosity. From the unexpected to the traditional, every bite was a reminder that joy can be found in the simplest pleasures.

Reflections Under Roman Skies

Rome left its mark on me, not with grand gestures, but with quiet power. It is a city of contrasts, ancient and modern, chaotic and graceful, overflowing with history yet always unfolding in the now. My days moved slowly and intentionally, guided not by a strict itinerary but by intuition. One moment I was walking through Vatican courtyards steeped in centuries of devotion, and the next I was laughing with strangers on a golf cart, weaving through cobblestone alleys under the soft glow of evening lights. But Rome was just one chapter in a story much larger.

This journey began in Milan, where I stepped into the pulse of Italian fashion and elegance. I found there during Fashion Week, surrounded by creativity and couture. Milan was sleek and energizing, filled with refined beauty and bold ideas. Then came Firenze, where every street felt like a living gallery. I wandered through Renaissance wonder, sipped espresso beside the Duomo, and visited the only Gucci Garden boutique in the world. It was in Florence that the pace began to soften and my senses started to fully open. From there, Tuscany wrapped me in warmth. Yoga mornings in Greve, soulful sips of wine in Chianti, and the slow unfolding of time among olive trees and family tables in Montefalco. These were moments of reconnection and stillness, of stories shared across languages and generations. Each place carved a space in my heart. Each encounter added another layer to the tapestry of this journey.

As I packed my suitcase for the final time, I felt full in the best way. Full of memories, flavors, laughter, and light. From the runways of Milan to the cathedrals of Rome, this Italian adventure reminded me of who I am when I am most alive. A daughter of refugees. A woman rooted in spirit and curiosity. A traveler who finds home not just in places, but in people.

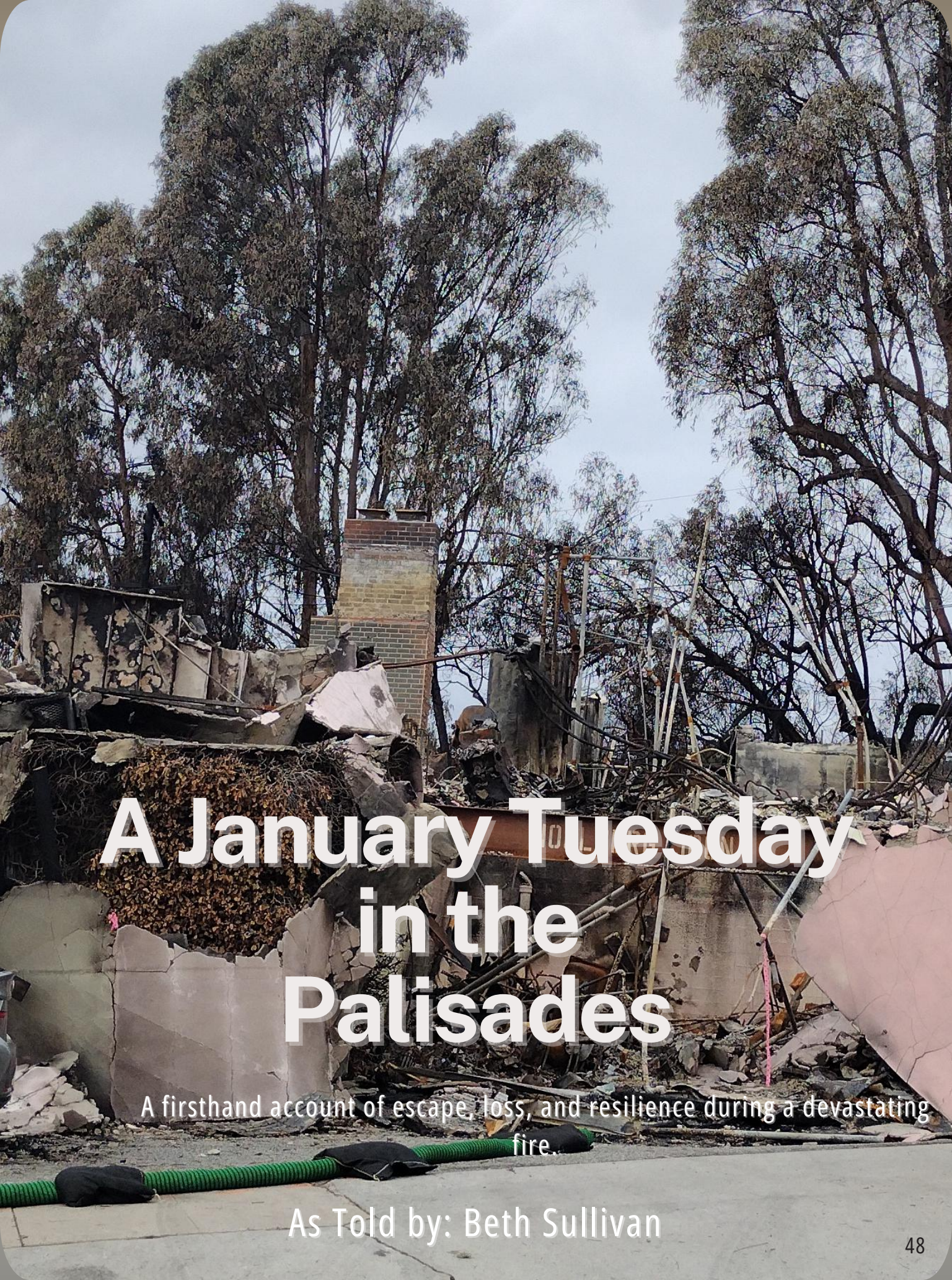


The Takeaway

Italy reminded me that the journey is not just about where you go, but how you arrive. With openness. With presence. With love for the details that others might miss. This trip was a homecoming of sorts, not to a place I was from, but to a version of myself that feels most whole. And that is the real souvenir. Rediscovering yourself in a country that speaks to your soul without needing to say a word. Until next time, Italia. Con tutto il mio amore, a presto!

A Few Intuitive Travel Tips from the Heart

- Let your mornings breathe. Do not rush out the door.
- Sit with your coffee. Watch the city wake.
You will notice more magic in five minutes of quiet than in an hour of chasing monuments.
- Learn just a few meaningful phrases in the local language.
Not just hello and thank you, but things like: this is beautiful or I understand a little. It opens hearts and doors in unexpected ways.
- Travel light, emotionally as well. Leave space in your days. Let detours happen.
- Say yes to unplanned invitations. Some of my favorite memories were never on the itinerary. Ask locals what they eat, not just where they eat. It is “the what” that tells you how they live, celebrate, and take care of themselves.
- Bring a small offering for hosts, even if it is just a heartfelt note. Kindness lingers longer than souvenirs.
- Put a tracking device in every checked bag. I used an AirTag and it gave me complete peace of mind. If your luggage goes on a solo adventure, you will know exactly where it is, and that kind of calm is priceless when you are halfway across the world.



A January Tuesday in the Palisades

A firsthand account of escape, loss, and resilience during a devastating fire.

As Told by: Beth Sullivan

On Tuesday Jan 7th I drove over to work in No Ho -**North Hollywood**- to do a pick up and drop off and then started driving back home to the Pali- Pacific Palisades
This was about **10:30 am**.

The sky was ominous that morning and driving up the 405 and the 101 was insane - dust storms, flying debris, wind literally moving your car as you drove. I thought for myself I shouldn't have gone out on the roads today. I'm getting out of here as soon as possible. So I took Ventura Blvd to get to the Sepulveda Pass As I'm driving across the Valley most traffic lights are out swinging back and forth. It was a 4 way stop calamity.

At 10:30 I got the first Watch Duty App alert there was a fire .8 miles from my place on Lachman . 10 Acres burned. Within 3-5 minutes I got the next alert - 200 Acres burned I started to race back home.



Early signs of devastation near the Palisades.



My pet sitter, and friend, Sandra - my Hero- called me and said she was coming from her client on Lachman and to get back as fast as I can and she on her way to my place to grab Shillelagh. As I'm driving up the pass I see a huge plume of fire but as I get to the top its coming from WeHo - West Hollywood. I get up to Sunset Blvd to turn on to it and then I see the much larger plumes of smoke coming from the Palisades.

Now I start to panic and then I start to cry because I have to get home! As we are all driving on Sunset we pulled over numerous times for all the Fire trucks and LAFD related vehicles.

As I get to town Sandra calls to let me know she has Shillelagh, his backpack, and heart medication and got out of there. It took 1/2 hr to go a mile just to get him.





SANDRA SAVES SHILLELAGH

We meet in the Gelsons parking lot to do the Pet exchange because she has to get to PCH to get out and get to Mothers home as the fire is the fastest we have ever seen .

I get Shillelagh situated in a grocery cart and start to go into Gelson to get Pet food and they are locking the doors to evacuate. I see a group of people standing across the parking lot on the Sunset side and go over to see whats up. Its then that I see the fire already burning the hillside across the street. This nice woman next to me and points over there and turns to me and says that's my house.

It was then I knew I couldn't risk our lives to try to make it back to my place. We left Gelsons, stopped the empty car wash to get gas as they were evacuating Ralphs and started trying to get out the back way on Entrada but had to cut back around and to get to Sunset. It took 3 hours to go a few miles but we made it out .

All throughout this process getting fired Alerts non stop. My neighbors and other friends texting each other to make sure we were getting out safe.



GOODBYE, SUNSET GARDENS

**Sunset Gardens — your walls may be gone, but the
memories still stand.**

So goodbye Sunset Gardens. A cool vintage California Bldg where all my nice neighbors became good friends.

A place where people lived 10,20,30+ years and raised their kids up through College.

You could run down to the beach, hike into the foothills and Santa Monica Mtns, and walk into Town.

The photos below are whats left of you now.

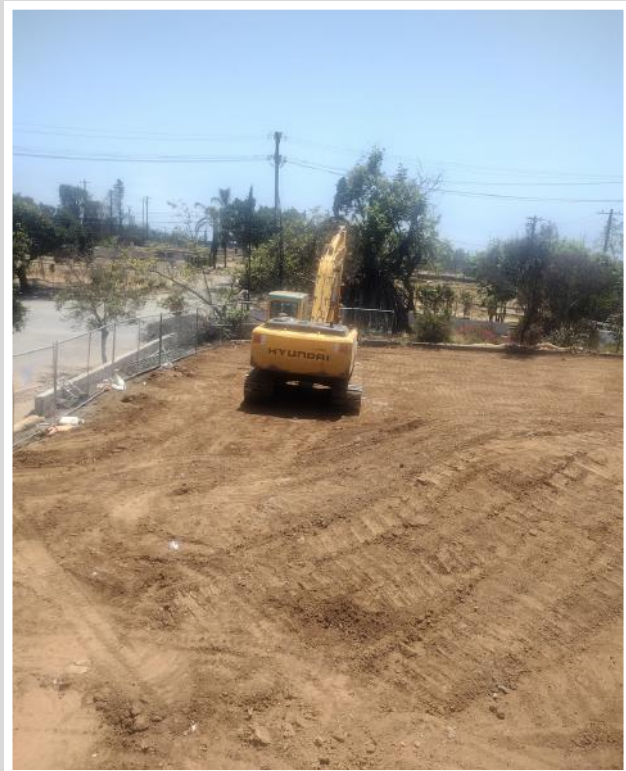


THEN & NOW

I moved to the here is Palisade Sept 94 and lived in some cool places - including a wel.known mobile home park on PCH across from the beach , like in the old show the Rockford Files, but I lived here the longest.



This was not the Hollywood ending I would have ever written for this story. 💔😭😭😭🎬



" I make you laugh. I make me laugh. I make strangers laugh"
Beth Sullivan is a Virginia Tech graduate, a Producer/Writer/Lead Singer/Former First Chair French horn/Military Brat/Super Jock, Story Teller/ Manager

FROM REGIONAL TRIUMPH TO GLOBAL STAGE



Startup World Cup Returns to Virginia Beach This August

INNOVATION DOESN'T SLEEP—AND NEITHER DOES VIRGINIA.

BY: ZACK MILLER

A MOVEMENT ON THE RISE

In August 2024, a powerful signal was sent from the shores of Virginia Beach: the Commonwealth is not just a player in the innovation economy—it's a contender on the global stage. The Startup World Cup Virginia Regional Finals, hosted by Innovate Hampton Roads, brought together the brightest minds, boldest startups, and most forward-thinking investors for a night that felt less like a pitch competition and more like a movement.

Held at the Zeiders American Dream Theater, the energy was palpable. Guests lined up early. Founders fine-tuned their slides. Judges whispered predictions. With every pitch, the room surged with anticipation—because everyone knew: one team would walk away with a shot at \$1 million and a place on the world stage in San Francisco.

That team? ivWatch, a Hampton Roads-based company reinventing how the world monitors IVs in hospitals.



2024'S TRIUMPH: IVWATCH MAKES WAVES ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Founded in Newport News, ivWatch has long been known in medtech circles for its commitment to patient safety. Their flagship technology—a sensor that detects IV infiltration in real-time—had already earned FDA clearance. But their win at the Startup World Cup launched them into a new league.

They didn't just attend the Grand Finale in San Francisco—they placed third in the world.

It was a jaw-dropping achievement for a company that got its start right here in Virginia, and a moment of pride for everyone in the state's startup ecosystem.

This isn't ivWatch's first rodeo. Since its founding in 2010, the company has racked up 69 patents, earned FDA clearance for its SmartTouch Sensor in 2024, and even pivoted to produce NIOSH-approved N95 respirators during the pandemic. Recognized by Fast Company, Inc., and Modern Healthcare in 2024, ivWatch also clinched Virginia's "Coolest Thing Made" award.



Backed by 757 Angels, ivWatch employs hundreds locally, fueling our region's economy. In June 2025, the company announced market authorization under the EU MDR CE Mark for their SmartTouch Sensor, unlocking access to hospitals across the UK, Ireland, and the European Union.

BUT IVWATCH WASN'T ALONE

The 2024 finals featured a diverse lineup of startups across sectors like AI, AgriTech, CleanTech, and EdTech. From early-stage founders to well-funded startups, the stage was packed with visionaries ready to scale.

Agricision

Led by Ken and Diana Warren, has evolved significantly since last year's Startup World Cup. While maintaining its focus on pest detection for row crops, the team recently pivoted to better meet customer needs and will debut the BUBBA-70L—a 70-liter agricultural spray drone—at Penn State's Ag Progress Days this August. This next-generation drone is purpose-built for modern farming, offering real-time, targeted solutions to support a more sustainable agricultural future.



Agricision's scout and sprayer drones will be manufactured in Virginia, fully NDAA-compliant, and engineered with secure data handling as a core feature. The company recently won the BullPen Challenge at the Virginia Farm Bureau and is now raising \$500,000 to scale manufacturing and meet increasing demand.

ops, the team recently pivoted to better meet customer needs and will debut the BUBBA-70L—a 70-liter agricultural spray drone—at Penn State's Ag Progress Days this August. This next-generation drone is purpose-built for modern farming, offering real-time, targeted solutions to support a more sustainable agricultural future.

As farmers themselves, the Warrens as well as the entire Agricision team understand that timing is everything in agriculture, and they've built a tool designed to deliver with that urgency in mind.





CXperks

Founder Scott Janney took the pain out of hospital waiting rooms with CXperks, a no-app-needed platform that turns idle time into interactive time. By scanning a QR code, visitors get access to games, trivia, and entertainment. Now active in 13 Sentara hospitals and with \$3.1 million in funding, CXperks is proving that a better customer experience is good medicine.

Gabb VR

Founder Malcom Lee is changing how students learn languages. Gabb VR uses virtual reality to immerse learners in lifelike environments—engaging their brains more deeply than flashcards or classroom drills ever could. Now in 73 schools, the platform has increased student engagement by 25% and is raising \$1.1 million to expand.

M-Con Innovations

Tech meets user-first design with MCON's sleek, adaptable phone game controller. After raising \$1.7 million, they're bringing to market a device that's compatible with almost any phone and case—designed with precision to adapt to all camera bumps and sizes. And that's just scratching the surface.

Other standouts included:

- DroneUp, a logistics disruptor delivering goods via autonomous drones.
- Psionic, develops next generation GPS-denied navigation systems for land, air, space
- Amruta, delivers secure, explainable AI that empowers organizations to make better decisions without exposing data—keeping it safely within your own systems while meeting the demands of today's fast, complex environments.
- Complify, simplifying compliance for scaling businesses.
- VerbaAI, Stay informed with real-time, by-the-minute global reporting—delivering critical insights and analysis in seconds, all from one centralized platform.

Each company brought something unique. Each pitch added fuel to the fire that is Virginia's growing innovation economy.





2025: A NEW STAGE, A BIGGER VISION

On Thursday, August 21, 2025, from 5–8 PM, the Startup World Cup returns—this time to the iconic Sandler Center for the Performing Arts in Virginia Beach.

A MORE EXPANSIVE VENUE. A BROADER NETWORK. A BIGGER SPOTLIGHT.

If 2024 proved Virginia's potential, 2025 aims to prove its staying power.

If Attendees can expect:

- Ten top-tier startups pitching live for a chance to advance to San Francisco
- A room full of investors, mentors, professional, creatives, the top talent of Virginia, and innovation leaders
- Networking opportunities that could lead to capital, customers, friendships, or co-founders

- From Artificial Intelligence and FinTech to AgriTech, EdTech, CleanTech, and DefenseTech, the 2025 finalists are sure to span the sectors shaping our future.

From Artificial Intelligence and FinTech to AgriTech, EdTech, CleanTech, and DefenseTech, the 2025 finalists are sure to span the sectors shaping our future.





WHY THIS EVENT MATTERS

Virginia has long been rich in talent. From the research centers in Charlottesville to the entrepreneurial engines of Richmond and the tech corridors of Northern Virginia, the state is full of potential. But too often, that potential goes unseen—especially in regions like Hampton Roads, where a growing wave of innovators, founders, and technologists are quietly shaping the future from the coast.

The Startup World Cup changes that.

Backed by Pegasus Tech Ventures, this international competition connects local founders to global investors—and puts Virginia on the map in a big way.

According to Zack Miller, co-host of the 2024 event and longtime innovation advocate in the region:

“Events like this don’t just create visibility—they create velocity. Founders who pitch here walk away with more than exposure. They walk away with momentum.”

That momentum is visible in ivWatch’s global growth, Agricision’s expansion, and the rapid adoption of CXperks across hospital systems.



A PLATFORM FOR GROWTH, A MISSION FOR THE REGION

The Virginia Regional Finals are more than a competition. They're a cornerstone of a larger mission led by Innovate Hampton Roads: to grow, guide, and connect the state's innovation ecosystem.



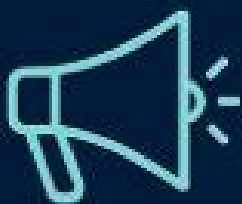
Educating
entrepreneurs



Providing access
to funding and
resources



Creating synergistic
partnerships



Amplifying the region's
collective innovation
voice

Through initiatives like 757 Collab, REaKTOR, and the This Week in 757 newsletter, the region is doubling down on entrepreneurship, workforce development, and inclusive growth.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Last year, Virginia Beach showed the world what the Commonwealth is capable of. This year, it's time to show we can do it again—and better.

Join us at the Sandler Center on August 21 for an evening that celebrates ambition, community, and the relentless pursuit of bold ideas. You'll walk away inspired, informed, and maybe even with a new favorite founder to root for.

And who knows? Maybe next year, it'll be your company taking the stage.

The future is calling --- are you ready to take the stage?



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Innovate Hampton Roads

A Beacon of Regional Transformation



Nestled along one of the world's richest harbors, Innovate Hampton Roads (IHR) stands as a remarkable testament to the power of collective vision. From its humble origins to its status as the unifying voice of innovation in southeastern Virginia, Innovate Hampton Roads' journey mirrors the region's evolution—resilient, collaborative, and forward-thinking.

THE ORIGINS – UNITING DISPARATE FORCES

While Hampton Roads has long been renowned for its deep-water ports, military installations, and shipbuilding prowess, its entrepreneurial ecosystem only started to take shape in earnest in the 1990s. Several parallel efforts emerged:

- Hampton Roads Technology Council (HRTC) was formed in the late '90s as a non-profit 501(c)(6), dedicating itself to elevating tech businesses through startup incubators and member networking.
- In 2016, HRTC rebranded as the Hampton Roads Innovation Collaborative (HRIC), expanding its programming to include a concept-to-commercialization track, mentoring schemes, and export acceleration.
- Separately, StartWheel, a startup support initiative, and the Norfolk State University Innovation Center fostered social entrepreneurship and support for underrepresented innovators.

There was momentum, but these efforts—while impactful—remained siloed.

The year 2023 marked a significant turning point. In December, HRIC and StartWheel officially merged under a single umbrella—Innovate Hampton Roads—aligning their strengths in storytelling, programming, and ecosystem coordination. The merger aimed to expand their reach and influence. By the end of that year, Innovate Hampton Roads had reached major milestones:

- Published over 200 news stories (a 20% increase from the previous year)
- Promoted nearly 800 events, representing a 54% growth in community engagement

A DEFINED MISSION: WEAVING THE INNOVATION FABRIC

At its core, IHR is driven by three foundational pillars:

1

A central hub – Acting as a “one-stop conduit” connecting entrepreneurs with resources, funding, mentorship, programs, and community networks.

2

Narrative leadership – Capturing and amplifying stories that highlight Hampton Roads as an innovation destination and advocate for ecosystem investment.

3

Programmatic breadth – Powering initiatives like the Fervent Four Show podcast, REaKTOR innovation center, Start Peninsula pitch challenges, and the Virginia Beach-hosted regional Startup World Cup finals.



Under the leadership of Executive Director Tim Ryan and Associate Director James Doe, and guided by a board of entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, academics, and civic leaders, IHR leverages collective expertise and energy.

A SURGE OF SUPPORT: VIPC GRANT, 2025

In mid-2025, Innovate Hampton Roads received a critical boost. The Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC) awarded a prestigious Regional Innovation Fund grant to fuel ecosystem growth. This grant will enhance program delivery, storytelling capacity, equity-focused support, and capital attraction to early-stage enterprises.

As Tim Ryan noted, the investment will:

"Help us enhance our slate of programs that provide support and encouragement beginning at the earliest ideation stages and that tell the story of innovation and entrepreneurship in Hampton Roads and across Virginia."



Executive Director Tim Ryan



Associate Director James Doe,

PARTNERSHIPS, HUBS, & INFRASTRUCTURE

- REaKTOR in Hampton and Assembly in Norfolk provide co-working hubs that connect innovators across the region. The expansion to Norfolk in 2024 signals IHR's regional ambition.
- The IDEA Lab at the World Trade Center (through Hampton Roads Alliance) specializes in Defense, Energy, and Aerospace ventures—especially offshore wind and AUKUS-aligned technologies.
- The region's established infrastructure—encompassing shipbuilding apprenticeships at Newport News, NASA Langley, Jefferson Lab, VMASC, and the Port of Hampton Roads—provides a formidable foundation for advanced manufacturing and defense innovation.



IHR functions like a neural network, connecting these nodes to help startups find mentors, capital, testing facilities, and market access—all while broadcasting their stories across Virginia and beyond.

WHAT MAKES HAMPTON ROADS UNIQUE



Military & Defense Dominance: The region hosts the world's largest concentration of military assets, complemented by defense innovation in autonomous systems and maritime robotics.



Research Intensity: NASA Langley, Jefferson Lab, and ODU's modeling centers generate cutting-edge breakthroughs.



Strategic Infrastructure: The third-largest port in the U.S., dual international airports, rail access, and the pioneering Tide light-rail system support mobility, logistics, and connectivity.



Manufacturing Legacy: With apprenticeships dating back to 1919 and 1,600 annual technical graduates, the talent pipeline is robust.

IHR taps into these strengths, charting pathways for startups in BlueTech, energy, defense, autonomy, and advanced manufacturing—areas where Hampton Roads can lead globally.

CATALYSTS ON THE HORIZON

The momentum continues:



Study tours to innovation hubs like Kendall Square inspire regional playbooks for public-private partnerships, infrastructure investment, and ecosystem storytelling.



New programs will cultivate export-ready startups, engage corporate leaders, and connect students with entrepreneurial ventures.



The region's push into offshore wind, unmanned systems (e.g., HII's Orca XLUVs), and federal partnerships under AUKUS open new opportunities for tech-driven entrepreneurship.

With continued VIPC support, IHR plans to broaden programming, deepen equity outreach, and accelerate capital attraction.

YOUR ROLE IN THIS STORY

Look around—the region’s textbooks, highways, and waterfronts whisper history: bridge tunnels, aerospace breakthroughs, contraband camps, and civic resilience. Now, a new chapter is being written—one of entrepreneurial grit, BlueTech ingenuity, and collaborative transformation.

If you're an aspiring founder, curious citizen, nonprofit leader, student, or investor, Innovate Hampton Roads extends an open invitation:

- Attend an event – Startup World Cup, 757 TechNite, Fervent Four Show tapings, or REaKTOR pitch nights.

- Join the hubs – Co-working in Assembly Norfolk or REaKTOR Hampton, gain mentorship and workspace.
- Share your story – Spotlight your innovation journey through IHR’s news and podcast platforms.

Whether you’ve built drones, renewable energy systems, defense technology, or maritime intelligence, your narrative fuels regional momentum. Innovate Hampton Roads believes your idea matters—and this is where it gets wings.



EMBRACING THE FUTURE

As the grant reignites coiled ambitions and future-forward institutions continue to link together, Innovate Hampton Roads stands ready to write new chapters.

- Entrepreneurs will launch faster.
- Corporations will scout locally.
- Students will discover meaningful careers at home.

In the coming pages of this story—of equity, economic resilience, and technological leadership—the region will not just keep pace but set standards. The next unicorn might emerge from Norfolk. An underrepresented founder could change global climate trajectories from Hampton.

And when the world asks, “Who are the unsung innovation heroes of 2025?”—the answer will echo from bridges, labs, hubs, and harbor frontages: Hampton Roads.

From anchor points of naval power to hubs of energy innovation, from incubators to assembly spaces, Innovate Hampton Roads knits the region’s past into its future. With strategic vision, robust partnerships, state support, and community determination, IHR is more than an organization—it’s a movement.

And like every great movement, it thrives on participation.

So here's to the next thousand founder moments, the next expansion plan, and the next entrepreneur whose breakthrough begins at IHR. After all, every bridge and tunnel connecting our cities speaks to our capacity to bridge gaps—between sectors, people, and ideas.

Innovate Hampton Roads invites you to cross into tomorrow.

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VIRGINIA BEACH'S ViBE DISTRICT CELEBRATES 10 YEARS IN 2025

Written by Kate Pittman, Executive Director for the ViBe Creative District

This year, the ViBe Creative District celebrates 10 years of as the creative heartbeat of Virginia Beach, a place where hundreds of local artists are showcased, and dozens of diverse events take place each year. Since 2015, the ViBe Creative District has been adding hundreds of works of public art to Virginia Beach's bustling resort. Additionally, ViBe has fostered a growing neighborhood of small, locally owned creative businesses that make a notable mark in Virginia Beach's economy.



Astronaut in the ocean street mural by Sydney Comisky painted for ViBe Creative District in 2024. Image courtesy of ViBe Creative District.

Created in partnership with the City of Virginia Beach, the ViBe Creative District intended to spur economic development, attract residents and visitors to the once dormant neighborhood and to create a unique sense of place at the resort. This central beach corridor provides an important cultural connection from the oceanfront beach on the east to the VB Convention Center and Sport Center to the west. The future continues to look bright as Atlantic Park, neighboring the ViBe Creative District, will also open in 2025. This landmark development, featuring an entertainment venue and world-class surf lagoon, will further grow the economic impact of the arts and culture in Virginia Beach.

In the words of Laura Wood,
co-founder of ViBe and current chair of the nonprofit – "VIVA LA VIBE!"



City Council Formal Session and Resolution honoring ViBe Creative District's 10 Year Anniversary. Image courtesy of the City of Virginia Beach.

Creative Capital has a strong return on investment

After a decade of impact, the metrics are clear. The arts mean business in the ViBe Creative District. More than 68 small businesses have moved into the arts district in the last ten years, generating an increase of \$33.9 Million gross sales annually and a net increase of over \$916,000 in yearly taxes in 2024 over 2015 baseline figures from the Commissioner of the Revenue. Outdoor markets and private redevelopment have spurred 203 new businesses licenses located in the district. Additionally, the 15-block area has seen real estate values increase by \$56 Million in the last decade, providing a significant return on investment to the City of Virginia Beach.

Creative Capital has a strong return on investment

Two of the greatest small business incubators are the Old Beach Farmers Market and Old Beach Art and Eco Market which have operated in the neighborhood for 16 years and 12 years respectively. The markets generate large crowds and interest in shopping local throughout the ViBe Creative District while fostering growth for the vendors. Old Beach Farmers Market vendors Three Ships Coffee and The Stockpot both started to grow their customer base at the Old Beach Farmers Market, opened flagship store fronts in the ViBe District and now have grown to 3 bricks and mortars stores each. Crafters like Jars of Dust and North End Bag Co each grew out of the Old Beach Art & Eco Market to retail spaces at WRV's The Alley on 19th Street and have a broad national customer base. Additionally, The VB Flea and the annual Small Business Saturday market, both 9 years old, round out opportunities for non-food or art-based businesses to participate.

Growth of these small businesses and others blossomed from a small business matching grant program piloted in the ViBe Creative District in 2017. After researching similar programs in 15 other cities through the country, the ViBe nonprofit requested that \$75,000 of their City grant allocation be transferred to the City of Virginia Beach Economic Development for grant disbursements of up to \$10,000 each to small businesses operating in ViBe. The program ran two years and assisted 12 small businesses in the district, boasting a return on investment to the City of Virginia Beach at nearly 5 to 1. The program was so successful it was modified only slightly to become a City-wide endeavor in 2021, helping more than 50 local businesses to date via the Virginia Beach Development Authority which continues to see private investment matching the City's at a 5 to 1 return on investment.



2025 ViBe Park activated during the Old Beach Art & Eco Market, operating in the ViBe Creative District for 12 years. Image courtesy of ViBe Creative District.

Creative Capital uncovered with CreativeMornings VB and arts programming

Locally, the ViBe nonprofit contracts an average of 100 artists a year and has dedicated over \$600,000 to artists stipends in recent years. Artists are an integral part of the creative economy in Virginia Beach, so much so that the City of Virginia Beach adopted dedicated funding sources to offer individual artists grants for the first time in 2025. This landmark funding speaks to a growing culture in VB.

Internationally, ViBe has partnered with the global creative speakers' network, CreativeMornings to feature individuals working here in Coastal Virginia. Hosted monthly in The Garage VB, CreativeMornings Virginia Beach highlights diverse, creative entrepreneurs' stories as a means to formally document the creative capital found here. But CreativeMornings speakers participate for free in exchange for the professional development opportunity to be photographed and filmed for global sharing. These creatives often find additional work with ViBe's small business community and larger programming partners, from Something in the Water to Busch Gardens. But CreativeMornings speakers participate for free in exchange for the professional development opportunity to be photographed and filmed for global sharing.

The program began in November 2023 and has featured entrepreneurs, dancers, painters, photographers, bakers, arts advocates, creative professionals, sculptures, an aura reader, writers, tastemakers, and community-builders from the region. The monthly events nurture an growing audience of 50-80 individuals who gather for hugs, high-fives and valuable networking time with other creatives every Third Friday morning in ViBe. ViBe draws speakers for CreativeMornings Virginia Beach from their network of community partners and collaborators that has developed over the last decade.





Anita Patel and Stephanie Walters of YELLOW shared their entrepreneurial stories at CreativeMornings Virginia Beach in February 2025. Image courtesy of Misty Saves the Day.

Community partnerships are a key component to ViBe's success. Partnering with more than 30 nonprofit organizations, the ViBe Creative District's impact extends beyond the beach to schools, libraries, recreation centers, parks and more. From in-school murals at 18 Title I schools, to hundreds of Season for Nonviolence poetry and poster submissions by students City-wide, or student painted skate decks and murals the boardwalk for Jackalope, ViBe partners closely with VB Schools on multiple projects each year. In 2025, VBSchools students and teachers will help repaint 35 parking space murals for Paint the Parking Lot, a project first implemented in 2020.

Cultural entities like Virginia Beach Art Center, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art and the Virginia African American Cultural Center are natural collaborative partners. Working with VAACC and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, ViBe has added large outdoor murals through a statewide effort to Franklin and Williamsburg, with additional murals planned for Chesapeake and Suffolk in the next two years.



Signature Events Catch National Attention

ViBe's largest signature events – ViBe Mural Festival started in 2018 and the VB Street Art Festival started in 2024 – generate the largest support from corporate sponsors. Companies like The Runnymede Corporation, LISC Hampton Roads, Norfolk Southern, TowneBank and Dominion Energy have supported the district in recent years. Likewise, dozens of individual donors contribute annually to support the ViBe Creative District. "The ViBe has been an amazing, transformational organization for this entire neighborhood, and we are so proud to be a part of it," said Garrett Berger of The Runnymede Corporation, a corporate sponsor of ViBe.

ViBe Mural Festival evolved from a goal to connect local artists with business owners to create unique site-specific mural art as a reflection of the community and people who live here. The ViBe board came up with the idea of "10 Murals in 10 Days" which seemed like a sweet spot between novice artists and professionals and also allowed the public to visit one weekend to see it all start and come back the following weekend to see the finished work. Over 70 murals have been created since then, with no loss of momentum or public interest. ViBe Mural Festival is one of the few notable mural festivals which accepts and encourages first time mural artists to participate. In 2023, Virginia Beach artist Tessa Hall Duquette painted her first mural along 17th Street with the help of neighbors and friends.

By the end of the festival, she had offers to paint 3 additional murals at local businesses outside of ViBe. A year later, she opened her own creative business called The Garage VB and has over two dozen murals completed to date. The Garage VB is welcoming artist studio for all people and routinely attracts hundreds of attendees for events like the "Mighty Minis" exhibition.

Unconventionally, road construction projects outlined in a ViBe Connectively Plan for 19th Street, 18th Street and 17th Street, designed and funded by the City of Virginia Beach, provided a new platform for VB Street Art Festival. Custom V-shaped triangular sculptures – called Neighborhood Identifiers by urban designers—are located at street corners on every street and are an aluminum surface intended 100% as an artist painting canvas. First installed in 2020 on 19th St, the Neighborhood Identifiers grew from 8 sculptures to 15 with the completion of 18th Street road project in 2025. Construction on 17th Street begins in Fall 2025 and will bring the collective total up to 24 paintable neighborhood identifiers. For this year's VB Street Art Festival, 95 artists applied from 11 different states and 3 countries and were reviewed by the City of Virginia Beach Public Art Committee which narrowed it down to the top 15 designs. The roads themselves created a canvas for artist-designed brick intersection art and thermos-plastic artworks in the crosswalks. Four new artist crosswalks will be unveiling in late 2025.

Artist Lizzie Brown from Richmond celebrates her first public artwork for ViBe in VB Street Art Festival 2025. Image courtesy of Lori Golding Photography.



People outside of Virginia Beach who are unable to travel to see the street art, murals and district can enjoy online photo albums via Facebook, artist feature videos via YouTube for each mural and an online ViBe Google Mural Map that has reached more than 730,000+ views globally since it was created in 2017. ViBe's significant online content drew attention from national and international professional conference planners – the ViBe nonprofit presented nationally at the ASLA Conference in Nashville and virtually via the International Conference on Creative Territories for Sustainable Development in Brazil –both in 2021. Within the Commonwealth of Virginia, ViBe has presented multiple times for the Virginia Commission for the Arts and other professional and alumna associations. Virginia Beach's creative community has created waves.



Positive Press for Virginia Beach lets locals feel the LOVE

ViBe is a destination that stands for Virginia Beach—named by Friends of the Creative District business association founder Charles Powell. ViBe is also an authentic reflection of our creative community. Last year, AAA's national Traveler Magazine named Virginia Beach's ViBe District as one of the "7 US Cities with the Best Street Art and Murals." The streets, sidewalks, roads, fences and exterior walls are adorned with vibrant works of public art. Residents and visitors alike are welcome to enjoy the open-air museum for free, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. In recognition of this revitalization effort, ViBe has been featured in over 1,000 earned media articles, TV segments, videos interviews, blogs and conferences.

Back in 2019, a surprise appearance on a Jeopardy clue generated positive vibes locally and nationally. When the \$1600 clue "Adjacent to Norfolk, this city boasts about 30-miles of oceanfront and a creative district called ViBe" popped up on prime-time, contestant Becky responded "What is Virginia Beach!" Back in Virginia Beach, locals cheered at the TV screens.



Artist Chesley DeLeon posed with friends and family at the dedication of her LOVEwork for Virginia is for Loves, City of Virginia Beach and ViBe Creative District tourism efforts in 2018. Photograph courtesy of ViBe Creative District.

And yet, one of the simplest words—LOVE— which was turned into graphic art representation of Virginia Beach and greater Virginia, then a large sculpture, then a sticker, may have the most impact in the ViBe Creative District. ViBe's LOVEwork is the most-sought selfie in the arts district and LOVE stickers have been one of the most requested items from ViBe in the last ten years. Nearly 100,000 LOVE stickers have been printed to date and shared City-wide with residents and tourists alike. It is not unusual for the nonprofit to receive requests from out-of-towners even to mail a love sticker out of state. The City of Virginia Beach convention and visitor's bureau has customized hats for conventions and promotional gigs and fostered interest in the creative community of our coastal city. Joint tourism efforts in recent years spawned two forward-thinking tourism campaigns in 2024— "Virginia Beach VIBE" and "Virginia Beach Artisans" both of which include artists, creative entrepreneurs and small businesses who are the authentic representation of our community and Virginia Beach locals. It seems, Virginia is for ART Lovers.

What started as means to improve a blighted neighborhood has grown into a city-wide anthem – Virginia Beach, it's a VIBE!



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A man with a full grey beard and sunglasses is holding a large, dark-colored fish vertically. He is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and a light blue baseball cap with "Bass Cat" written on it. The background is a clear blue sky with some greenery visible at the bottom.

what's biting?

This fishing season has been absolutely amazing on all fronts! Action has been on fire for just about every species in the Hampton Roads area in both salt and freshwater. Many anglers have reported catching their personal best catch of their lifetime, regardless of what species they were targeting. Look for action to continue heating up!!!

what's biting?

Offshore Deep Dropping

Offshore deep dropping action has been outstanding with so many anglers scoring huge on giant black seabass, flounder, triggerfish, tautog, black belly rose fish, blue line, and golden tilefish, bluefish, amberjack along with snowy grouper on the edge of the continental shelf as well as wrecks 30–50 miles out.

Finding wreckage that has not been fished out is the key to loading your fish box. Once you have located the fish, a variety of bait offerings should get you bit. Multi-hook rigs with cut bait—including squid, shrimp, clam, cut blue crab, fiddler crabs, or small, freshly caught menhaden—all should serve you well. If you prefer artificials, large bucktails and jigs topped with long Gulp tails have been the ticket for success.

The wreck fishing “flounder pounders” have been spanking big flatties and this will continue into the winter. Swordfish are also on the radar for heavy gear deep droppers, and this will only improve as the waters begin to cool as fall approaches. Spadefish, sheepshead, cobia, king and Spanish mackerel, flounder and seabass are available on towers and wrecks inside 20 miles of the beach as well as along the CBBT inside the bay.



Yellowfin tuna caught by the crew of Playin Hookey Charters.



Beautiful Spanish Mackerel caught by Playin Hookey Charters crew.

Anchor your boat up to the current of the wreck or structure. Use a chum bag of clam to bring the spadefish up to your boat so you can drift your baits back to the fish. Use small red hooks for best results. Chart numbers for popular fishing locations are available to the public on several free websites online. Explore the internet for information and then go treasure hunting for trophy fish!!!

what's biting?



Offshore success! A gorgeous yellowfin tuna caught on a charter trip out of Virginia Beach.

Offshore Sportfishing Action

Offshore sportfishing action has been phenomenal with both private vessels and charter boats reporting lots of tuna and billfish action with mahi, bonita and Spanish mackerel readily available. Blue marlin, white marlin, yellowfin, bluefin, blackfin and big eye tuna, along with false albacore, and wahoo numbers have been incredible, with mahi as close inshore as the nearest windmills off the coast of Virginia Beach. Trolling baits such as ballyhoo, Spanish mackerel, mullet or whole squid rigged natural or on

multicolored sea witches on wire or mono leaders can be just what the doctor ordered for incredible offshore sport fishing during this time of year. Ballyhoo come in various size options with large "horse ballyhoo" typically being the preferred size for blue marlin and big eye, and the smaller ones appealing to most other pelagic species. Don't be afraid to pull straight artificial lures as well. The beauty of offshore trolling is that you don't have to be perfect in your lure selection to be successful and it's okay to experiment. But I will say, "meat" is hard to beat. I once heard about some guys who caught a carp in a freshwater pond and they rigged it for trolling. The next day they caught a blue marlin on it out of Rudee Inlet.



Tuna tales start young. Moments like these are what fishing's all about.

what's biting?

Inshore and Bay Action

Bull red drum and cobia are available right now and can be caught by sight casting live eels, spot and croaker or bucktails to surface fish or by anchoring on shoals or near channel edges, or around the rocks of the CBBT islands. Use cut bait or live bait near the bottom on fish finder rigs to hook up with fish feeding in the area. Soaking a chum bucket can greatly increase your chances of drawing cobia to your location, but it also attracts sharks, skates and stingrays so keep that in mind.

Be sure to know your shark regulations if you decide to keep one for dinner. Black drum are also available and can be caught sight casting jigs or bucktails, or by anchoring using clam on the bottom. Anchoring and soaking bait works for tarpon on Virginia's Eastern Shore as well, but make sure you know where the channels are and that you have enough water under your boat to avoid underwater obstacles.



Angler Glen Grandstaff Sr. with a quality Kingfish caught in the surf.



A good haul of Kingfish by the Grandstaff Gang!!!



An average sized Kingfish caught by the author.

Many kayakers and fly fishermen have unlocked the code for tarpon and are seeing success along the barrier islands on the seaside of Eastern Shore. Tarpon will be here until near October when they will make the trip southward to Florida. Bad September storms can send them away even sooner.

what's biting?

Sheepshead and black drum can be found around bridge pilings throughout the bay using blue or fiddler crabs, shrimp or clams on tog head jigs fished close to the structure. Fish the down-current side to keep your bait in the strike zone longer.

Inshore fishing for bottom fish such as spot, croaker, pan trout, flounder, pufferfish, porgy, pompano, sea bass and sea mullet or roundhead is in full swing. Use high/low bottom rigs with strips of squid, bloodworm, fish bites, chunks of shrimp or mussels to catch a wide variety of these species.

As fall approaches, migratory species of bottom fish will head out and large schools of speckled trout, puppy drum, bluefish and striped bass will move down, joining resident fish already here. Gloucester has produced several "gator-sized" speckled trout in the 25" to 30" range on topwater lures and wake baits.



Topwater Whopper Plopper type lure.

Freshwater Frenzy

Freshwater action has been amazing for anglers pursuing shell crackers, bluegill and other members of the sunfish family using worms, cut bait, wax worms, bread or crickets under bobbers. Beetle spins or small jigs with curly tails are excellent search baits.

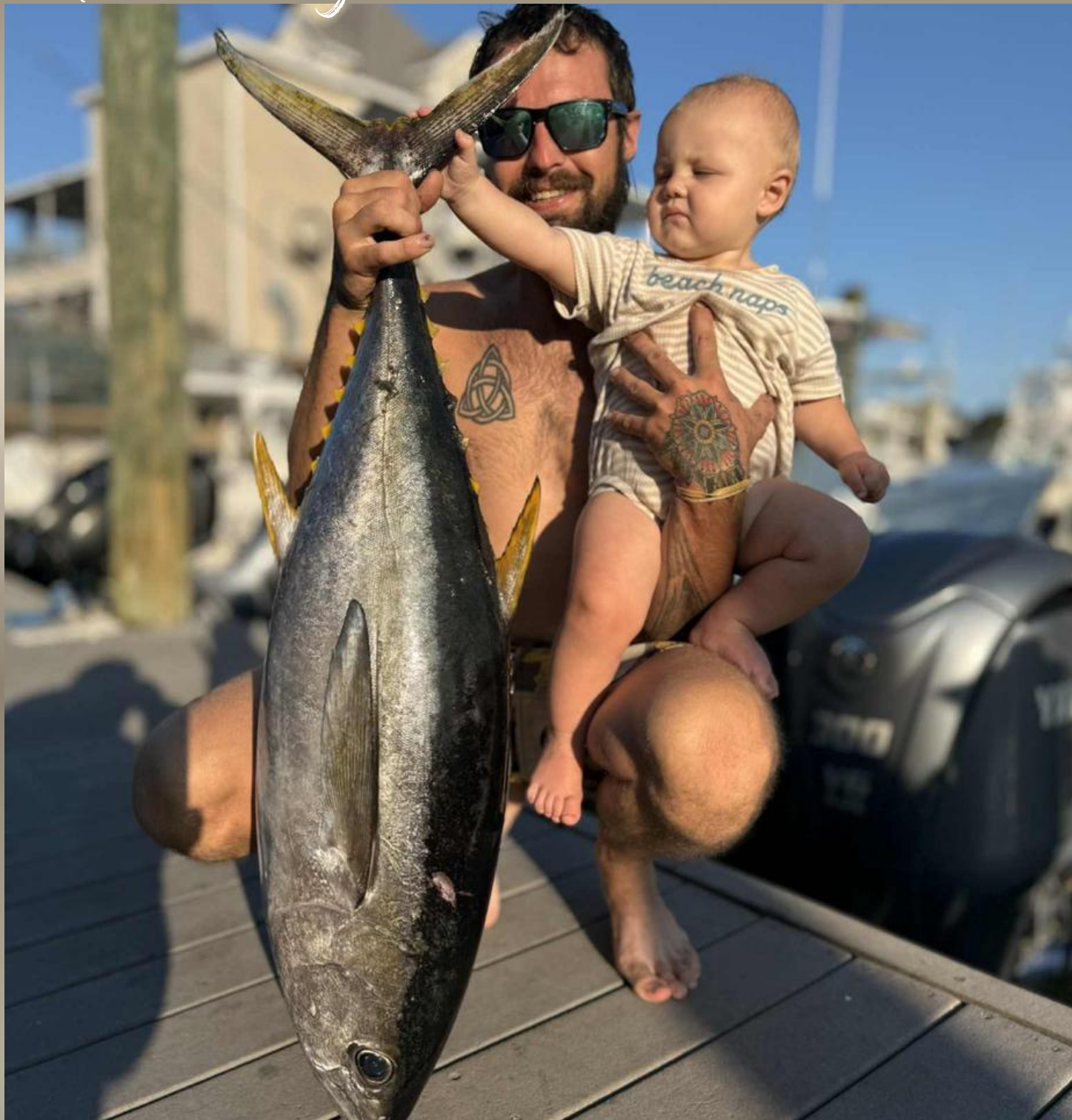
Crappie, largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass have been biting in low light. Topwater bites have been red-hot with Pop-R's, Devils Horses, Zara Spooks, and Whopper Ploppers. Try frogs or mouse baits in thick grass. Rainy, overcast days = bonus bites! Tree tops and deep structure with plastic worms are key midday. The upper James and Chickahominy Rivers, Lake Smith and Lake Whitehurst are top destinations.

Striped bass, musky, gar, big catfish and pike hang around channels with shad. Carp can be targeted in spillways and shaded coves with corn, red wigglers or dough baits. For light gear, small streams offer great action on trout and smallmouth—try spinnerbaits, marshmallows or salmon egg powerbait.



Nice Blue Gill caught by the author.

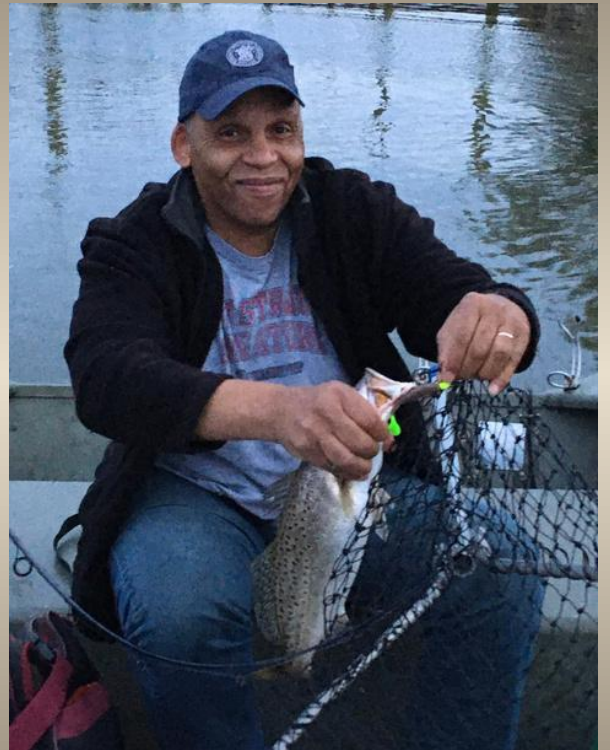
what's biting?



Pass It On

Regardless of what species you're chasing, introducing someone new to fishing matters. The future of the sport depends on it. Fishing teaches kids discipline, patience, nature appreciation and so much more. It's not just a hobby—it's a life skill.

what's biting?



Angler Llewelyn Williams with a quality speckled trout caught trolling jigs



Anglers Joshua Turner and Daulton Manning show off their limit of slot sized Redfish



Angler Joshua Turner with a beautiful slot sized Redfish



Featured Fish: Kingfish

Known by many names—roundhead, sea mullet, whiting, king whiting, king croaker—kingfish are a summer staple in Virginia and Carolina waters. Found from Florida to Maine, they spawn April–October and prefer shallow, sandy bottoms with current.

Use high/low rigs with squid, shrimp, fish bites or sand fleas. Surf anglers: let your bait drift until you locate fish, then switch to sinkers. Most kingfish are under 2 lbs but can reach 3 lbs and 23 inches.

Try this recipe:

Soak cleaned fish in saltwater (iodized) for 2 hours. In peanut oil heated to 375°F, fry until golden. Flip, repeat, and serve with your favorite sides. You can eat it like a croaker—right off the bone!

Let's see your kingfish pics in the comments. Tight lines, friends!



Born and raised in Portsmouth, Virginia, son of Judy and legendary local fisherman and avid hunter, Captain Billy Sugg Sr., Bill Jr. was taught from an early age to love the great outdoors. He began working on his parent's boat at a very young age and began mating professionally when he was approximately 12, catching most saltwater and freshwater species along the East coast and teaching fishing classes with his father. As a young adult he worked in the marine industry selling boating equipment until 1995 when he joined the Portsmouth Sheriff's Office, serving for over 28 years in law enforcement, retiring in January 2024 as a Major. Bill now continues to serve part time as a school resource officer, while sharing his knowledge and love for fishing with anglers of all ages. He is married to his high school crush, Christine, residing in Suffolk, Va. and they have 4 children together.

what's biting?

During August, September and October you'll typically reel in these catches:

August

Offshore

Swordfish, tilefish, big eye tuna, yellowfin tuna, bluefin tuna, mako shark, sea bass, mahi/dolphin, Spanish mackerel, ribbonfish, bluefish, white marlin, blue marlin, wahoo, cobia

Chesapeake Bay

Red drum, black drum, flounder, croaker, spot, striper, Spanish mackerel, spadefish, ribbonfish, cobia, sheepshead, speckled trout

Tidal Rivers

Spot, croaker, puppy drum, trout, flounder, striper

SEPTEMBER

Offshore

Swordfish, tilefish, big eye tuna, yellowfin tuna, bluefin tuna, mako shark, sea bass, mahi/dolphin, black sea bass, trigger fish, spadefish, amberjacks, flounder, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, white marlin, blue marlin

Chesapeake Bay

Red drum, black drum, flounder, croaker, spot, striper, Spanish mackerel, spadefish, cobia

Tidal Rivers

Spot, croaker, puppy drum, trout, flounder, striper, speckled trout

OCTOBER

Offshore

White marlin, bigeye tuna, mahi/dolphin, yellowfin tuna, wahoo, tuna, sea bass, flounder, trigger fish, black drum, red drum, bluefish, blue marlin, tilefish (blue & gold), king mackerel, swordfish

Chesapeake Bay

Bluefish, red drum, flounder, Spanish mackerel, spadefish, cobia, sheepshead, ribbon fish, striper, tautog, speckled trout, puppy drum, striper

Tidal Rivers

Bluefish, flounder, speckled trout, spot, croaker, puppy drum, ribbonfish, striper



What have you reeled in?

We would like to publish your photos, information, prize catches and catches of note in our What's Biting segment. Send us your favorite amateur photos with a description and the photographer's name.



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A Spartan Legacy Born on the Gridiron

Photo Credit: <https://nsuspartans.com/sports/football>

The Norfolk State Spartans football program was established in 1938, although it did not consistently field a team until the mid-1950s. Initially an independent team, NSU joined its first conference, the Eastern Intercollegiate Conference, in 1953. Under the early coaching of Joe Echols, they won conference titles in 1957 and 1959.

The program's golden era occurred in the mid-1970s under the leadership of head coach Dick Price. A Norfolk native and NSU's track coach turned football expert, Price led the Spartans to an impressive three consecutive CIAA championships from 1974 to 1976. During his tenure, the team achieved a record of 62 wins, 41 losses, and 4 ties, earning him back-to-back CIAA Coach of the Year honors. Price's contributions to the program are commemorated by having the football stadium at NSU named in his honor.

From Division II to Division I: A Steady Ascent

After the CIAA years, Norfolk State's football program began to undergo significant evolution. From 1974 to 1996, they were a strong contender in NCAA Division II. In 1997, NSU moved up to Division I-AA (now known as FCS), starting as an independent team before joining the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) in 1999. This transition to the MEAC was a significant milestone but also presented challenges. Although there were moments of success, such as winning the MEAC championship in 2011 and making their first (and only) FCS playoff appearance that same year, the program struggled with consistency. Notably, NCAA sanctions resulted in the stripping of NSU's victories from 2009 to 2011, including the 2011 MEAC title.

Rivalries, Records, and Rebuilding

One of Norfolk State University's longest-standing rivalries is the "Battle of the Bay" against Hampton University. Since their first matchup in 1963, the series has been closely contested, with Norfolk State leading the series 30–28–1 as of 2024.

On the field, the late 2000s saw sporadic success, highlighted by an impressive 8–3 season in 2007. However, this was followed by years of inconsistency. From 2009 to 2019, the Spartans cycled through several coaches, struggled in the MEAC, and experienced more losing seasons than winning ones. The period from 2014 to 2022 under head coach



Dawson Odums brought some hope, but it was marked by middling performances, culminating in a disappointing 4–8 finish in 2024, which ultimately led to a change in leadership.





A New Era: Michael Vick Takes the Helm

A Homecoming for Hampton Roads

On December 20, 2024, Norfolk State made headlines in the collegiate football world by naming NFL legend Michael Vick as its 19th head coach. The NSU Board's unanimous approval, followed by an official press conference on December 23, marked a significant turning point for the program.

A native of Newport News, Vick is returning to his roots as a Hampton Roads standout, now ready to revitalize his hometown team's fortunes. His hiring reflects a growing trend of elite NFL players taking on leadership roles in HBCU football, following in the footsteps of figures like Deion Sanders and Eddie George. At the press conference, Athletic Director Melody Webb highlighted Vick's ability to combine his star power with mentorship, describing him as an inspiration to student-athletes. Vick, visibly emotional, shared how "football has always been that safe place" for him and expressed his commitment to restoring Spartan pride.

While Vick has no previous experience as a collegiate head coach, he brings a wealth of life experiences as a Hall of Fame-bound Virginia Tech star, the No. 1 pick in the 2001 NFL draft, and a four-time Pro Bowl quarterback. His career has seen both incredible highs and serious lows, including a public legal battle and a stint in prison. He emerged from those challenges, later earning the title of NFL Comeback Player of the Year and returning to elite form on the field.

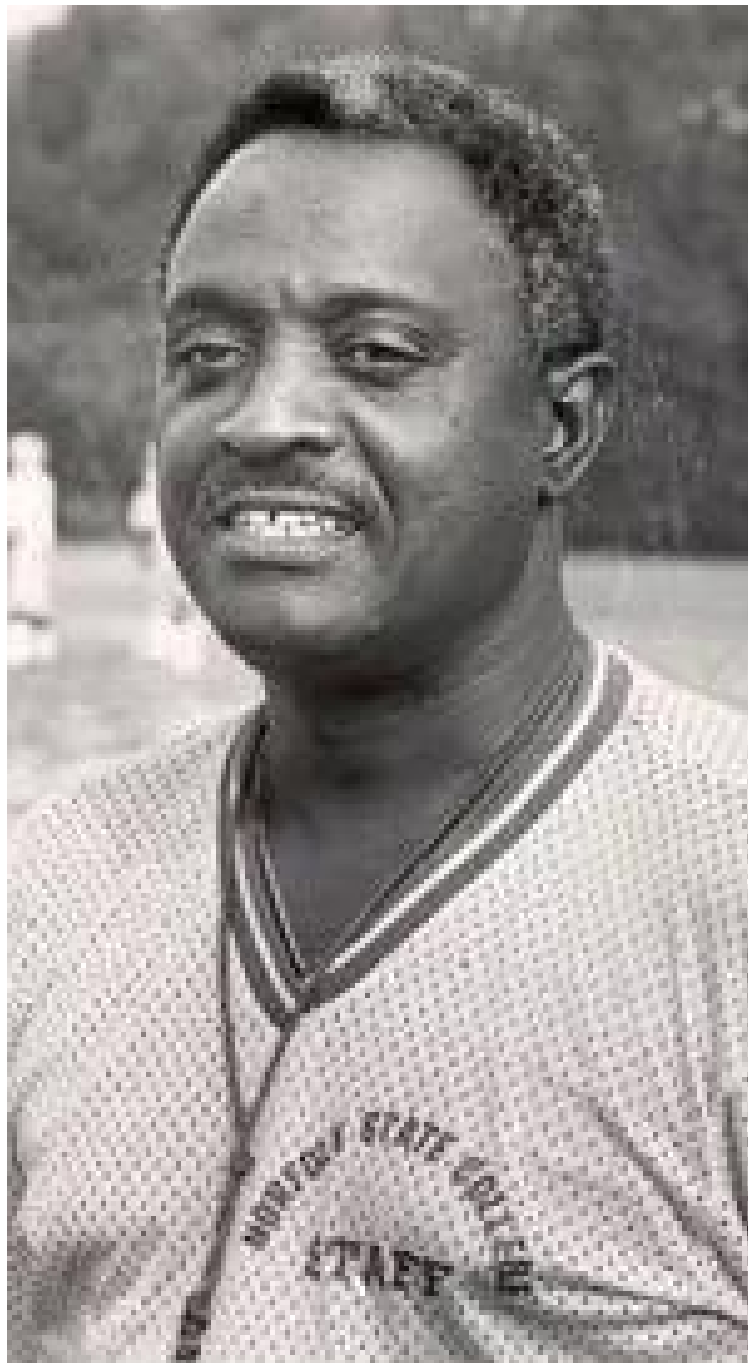


As Vick prepares to lead the Spartans into the 2025 season, expectations are high. The 2025 roster is undergoing changes, with a large class of incoming transfers and impressive recruits from National Signing Day. The MEAC schedule promises exciting matchups, including a high-profile game on October 30, 2025, against HBCU counterpart Delaware State, featuring DeSean Jackson, at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia.



Shaping the Future at William "Dick" Price Stadium

All roads lead to William "Dick" Price Stadium, a 30,000-seat venue named after NSU's legendary coach, Dick Price. Opened in 1997, the stadium has witnessed numerous highs and lows, and now a new beginning under Michael Vick. The Spartans provide fertile ground for Vick's approach to mentoring and rebranding. With his speed and visibility, he has the potential to reshape recruiting pipelines across Virginia and nationwide, just as Webb emphasized. This "homecoming story" should resonate deeply with our audience — a narrative rich in local pride, generational change, and the enduring magic of football. Vick's commitment to his community and his journey of redemption reflect the persistent spirit of NSU itself. It's a modern-day tale of a hero returning, grounded in real consequences, genuine impact, and hope.



Norfolk State football has always embodied perseverance, whether in the CIAA, during the transition to Division I, or in overcoming NCAA challenges. Now, with Michael Vick's arrival, the Spartans stand at a pivotal moment: old wounds meet fresh opportunities, and tradition blends with transformation. As Vick often reminds us, "Behold!" — it's time to speak that word with authority once more. This is more than just a sports story; it's a story of homecoming, healing, and hope — a season of rebirth for Nor-town.

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It's Been 25 Years Since Norfolk Adopted Mermaids,

and One of the Original Local Artists is Still Cranking Them Out

By Joel Rubin

Norfolk native Georgia Mason didn't construct the city's first official mermaid.

"That was sculptor Kevin Gallup, hired by Norfolk in 2000 to fashion a female creature with a fin to represent itself to the world," says Mason, whose late sister bought one of the first Gallup mermaids. "She knew the Deckers."

Oh, the Deckers—Hampton Roads's first family of flair. Attorney Pete and wife Bess had visited Chicago and saw Cows on Parade, returning home with a plan to encourage home and business owners to place Gallup mermaids on their front lawns or sidewalks for all the world to see.

In November 1999, the Deckers staged a huge breakfast meeting at Nauticus, attended by 300 business and civic leaders, to announce the campaign. Using Gallup's and the city's design, Georgia, who had dabbled in ceramics, became one of the initial artists and has never stopped.

"Back then Norfolk wanted the mermaids to have a blank face and flat chest," she says. "But the public wanted more features, so if you go around town today, you see newer mermaids that look like women."

In fact, Georgia—whose studio is the one-car garage of her home on the Lafayette River in Norfolk's Roland Park neighborhood—has her mermaids all over the world.

"There are hundreds in Norfolk as well as Virginia Beach and other localities here, but also in Europe and the Far East." Every Norfolk Sister City, for instance, has one.

Georgia's signature design, which she makes today, has a Pocahontas-type face with long hair.

"One of my mermaids is actually in Kent, England, where Pocahontas is buried."

Why Mermaids?

According to *Mermaids on Parade*, a 2000 book on the project, they reflected “nautical and Norfolk themes, civic pride, and the diversity of the region.” Indeed, no two are alike.

There's:

- Bay Mechanical's Maid of Lobster
- Nancy Chandler's Flower Garden
- Willcox and Savage's Gliding Through the Bay

“I talk to the buyer, and we decide on themes and colors,” says Georgia, who has epoxied suns, moons, butterflies, and other attachments to her ladies. Now in her 70s, Mason long ago stopped the messy work of casting the plexiglass molds.

“I have a boat builder friend in Norfolk who does that.” And she doesn't deliver either.

The three in the garage this day awaited pickup by a tour boat operator in Florida.

“I take orders through my website, georgiamasonstudio.com.”





A New Campaign?

What she would love to do, though, is repair ones she sees around Norfolk.

"Some are damaged or could use some fresh paint. The owners should call me."

Georgia recalls a few years ago, Norfolk considered moving on from mermaids to another symbol, but the marketing company they consulted wisely, she heard, said no.

"That would have been a terrible idea."

Now a quarter-century since Pete (who passed away in 2012) and Bess (still with us) convinced the city fathers and mothers to make mermaids Norfolk's calling card, a better idea might be to rev up a new campaign with a fresh look to represent a more modern time.

"Some people call Norfolk the Mermaid City," says Georgia, who says she still has the stamina to keep cranking out the 4-, 6-, or 10-foot-long fishy females from her cluttered but productive space.

"The public loves them."

Just as Uncle Pete predicted.



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Cocktail menu

01. Gordon's Cup

The Gordon's Cup is the nested Russian dolls of sour-style drinks. It's like if you put a Gimlet through the movie Inception. It takes the primary tension of its family of cocktails, and cubes it. Layered. Deeper. More.

02. Red Raider

Meet the Red Raider. The Red Raider cocktail is bourbon, lemon, pomegranate, and orange liqueur, and comes to us from an old printing of the Mr. Boston Official Bartender's Guide, where it's reportedly been since at least 1974.

03. Gold Rush

The Gold Rush is a classic, but its standard form can feel flat. A grapefruit peel—known as a “regal shake”—adds brightness and depth. It's an easy upgrade that transforms the drink.

04. Benton's Old Fashioned

Bacon-infused bourbon, this modern classic kicked off the fat-washed cocktail trend—rich, smoky, bold, and unforgettable.

05. Boulevardier

The Negroni's bolder cousin—bourbon, Campari, and sweet vermouth. Rich, bittersweet, and smooth. Hints of vanilla and citrus. A classic for any season.

Gordon's Cup



2 oz. gin
0.75 oz. lime juice
0.75 oz. simple syrup
3-4 cucumber slices
1-2 coin of lime skin, sliced thinly off the fruit
Salt
Pepper

Combine gin, lime, simple syrup, and cucumber slices, and lime coins in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake hard for six to eight seconds and fine strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice. Add lime wedges and/or cucumber slices to the glass, sprinkle a pinch or two of salt and pepper on top, stir briefly to combine, and enjoy.

Notable Potables

Red Raider

1.75 oz. bourbon
0.75 oz. lemon juice
0.5 oz. Cointreau
0.5 oz grenadine

Add all ingredients to a cocktail shaker and shake good and hard for six to eight seconds. Strain over ice into a rocks glass and garnish with an orange peel if you've got one, a lemon peel or wheel if you don't, or maybe just nothing at all.



Gold Rush

2 oz. bourbon
0.75 oz. lemon juice
0.75 oz. honey syrup
1 grapefruit peel, maybe 1" x 2",
taking care to get as little of the
white pith as possible

Add all ingredients, including grapefruit peel, to a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake hard over ice for 8 to 10 seconds, and strain into rocks glass over fresh ice.



Benton's Old Fashioned

- 2 oz. bacon-infused bourbon*
- 0.25 oz. maple syrup
- 2-3 dashes Angostura Bitters

Add a large piece of ice to a rocks glass, add liquids, and stir for about 10 seconds. Express the oils of an orange peel over the top and place the peel in the drink as a garnish.

e sec, cranberry, and lime



Boulevardier

- 1.5 oz. bourbon or rye whiskey
- 1 oz. Campari
- 1 oz. sweet vermouth

Add ingredients to a rocks glass with ice. Stir for 10 seconds if the ice is small, 30 seconds if one big cube and somewhere between if ice is somewhere between. Garnish with an orange peel.





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DESTINATION: ONANCOCK, VIRGINIA

BY: RICK POLSTON



ONANCOCK

LITTLE SLICE OF NOWHERE ELSE

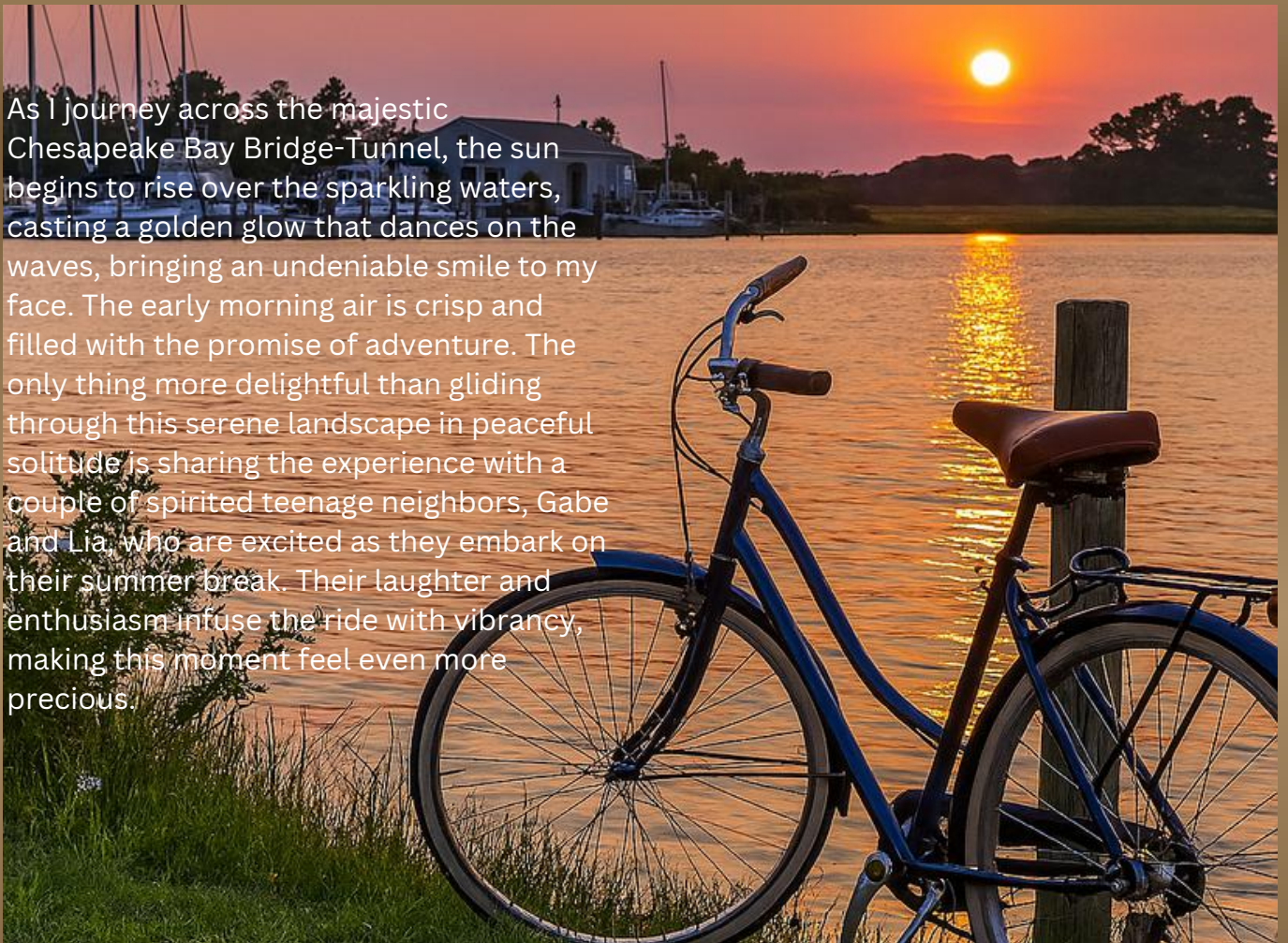
Chasing Charm on the Eastern Shore

Once again, the enchanting charm of Virginia's Eastern Shore beckons me onto the open road.

On the Road to Onancock

As we approached our destination along the scenic stretch of U.S. Route 13N, the GPS led us through the winding roads of Onancock, a hidden gem waiting to be discovered. Long ago, the leaders of this quaint town chose a fitting motto: Onancock is a “little slice of nowhere else.” If you haven’t taken a day trip to explore a new place, I wholeheartedly encourage you to do so; the allure of small-town charm must be experienced in person.

As I journey across the majestic Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, the sun begins to rise over the sparkling waters, casting a golden glow that dances on the waves, bringing an undeniable smile to my face. The early morning air is crisp and filled with the promise of adventure. The only thing more delightful than gliding through this serene landscape in peaceful solitude is sharing the experience with a couple of spirited teenage neighbors, Gabe and Lia, who are excited as they embark on their summer break. Their laughter and enthusiasm infuse the ride with vibrancy, making this moment feel even more precious.





History and Heritage

Established in 1680, Onancock, which translates to “Foggy Place,” carries a rich history that whispers through its streets. Contrary to popular belief, the town's name does not stem from an Indian tribe but pays homage to a significant group in early Virginia history – the Occohannock Indians. Nestled gracefully between the meandering Onancock Creek and the vast expanse of the Chesapeake Bay, this charming town was also a canvas for the exploratory strokes of Captain John Smith, securing its place as one of twelve royal ports appointed by King James in the Colonies. Much like Cape Charles, highlighted in the May–July issue of covablvd.com, Onancock has deep roots in maritime commerce. It once thrived as a bustling ferry stop, facilitating the transport of passengers and freight across the enchanting waters of the Chesapeake Bay, linking vibrant cities from Baltimore to Norfolk. The legacy of this town is richly woven into its history, waiting to captivate those who venture to explore its streets.



A Waterfront Welcome

When exploring the charming cities and quaint towns of the Eastern Shore, it's common to begin your adventure at the serene edges of each locale, gradually making your way toward the bustling main highways. At the end of Market Street, you'll find a picturesque spot where maritime travelers gather, captivated by the view and the gentle lapping of the water. The Onancock Wharf and Marina beckon with the promise of relaxation, offering twelve inviting floating dock slips for rent. Spend a night or indulge in a leisurely stay, soaking in the unique charm and offerings of the town. Amenities abound, all at wonderfully reasonable prices, ensuring your comfort without breaking the bank. A public ramp sits nearby, accompanied by ample parking for just a daily fee of \$7.00, making it easy to access the water. Adjacent to the marina, a lovely dock awaits those keen to launch their kayaks, paddleboards, and canoes, inviting you to set forth into the tranquil waters and explore the stunning coastal scenery.



The Town's Heartbeat

As you move into the heart of the town, you will be able to experience just how quaint Onancock is. The North Street Playhouse is a live year-round theatre, the only one on the Eastern Shore.

Town Treasures

When embarking on a day trip, one must not miss the opportunity to explore the rich tapestry of historic landmarks that await. In the heart of the historic district lies the Roseland Theatre, a captivating venue that echoes the performances of a bygone era. Nearby, the magnificent Ker Place stands as a testament to Georgian architecture, its stately presence a nod to the elegance of the Federal period. Don't miss a visit to the Hopkins & Bro. Store, an intriguing relic of 1842, was once bustling with the energy of commercial trade at the wharf.



Venture on to The Watermen's Heritage Museum, where fascinating tales unfold about the brave watermen who have shaped the culture of the Eastern Shore. For those with a passion for the arts, a treasure trove awaits. Throughout the seasons, locals and visitors alike can revel in the offerings of the Eastern Shore Art League and the Artisans Guild. The harmonious strains of the Orchestra of the Eastern Shore and the spirited performances of the Accomack Community Band resonate through the air. At the same time, local musicians bring life to various restaurants and the lively Onancock Farmers Market, creating an enchanting atmosphere filled with creativity and community spirit.





While it may go without saying, take a delightful moment to wander along the charming downtown sidewalks and indulge in some retail therapy. At Onancock 1680, you'll uncover a treasure trove of unique clothing, eye-catching accessories, exquisite home goods, vibrant galleries, timeless antiques, fine wines, delectable delicacies, and so much more waiting to be discovered. If your visit happens to fall on the weekend, don't miss the chance to explore the Onancock Market, a lively open-air market bursting with energy.



*2025 Summer Market (Outdoor) at the corner of Market & Ames Streets
Saturdays 9 am - 12 pm: May through October*

Eateries and Spirits



It's the perfect spot to fill your bags with fresh, locally sourced produce, succulent meats, freshly caught seafood, mouthwatering baked goods, and handcrafted arts and crafts that showcase the incredible talent of local artisans.

Why settle for McDonald's, Chick-fil-A, or Cracker Barrel when you can indulge in the authentic flavors that a vibrant town offers? This question can be pretty challenging to navigate, especially since a day trip barely allows enough time to sample each of the delightful restaurants or specialty shops. However, having options is indeed an incredible privilege. Let's explore a few and then dive into personal reviews of two standout choices.

Day Trip

The OT – Onancock Taphouse
info@theonancocktaphouse.com; The
Blarney Stone Pub – a charming slice of
Ireland; Foggy Place Café
[foggyplacecafe.com]; Mallards at the Wharf
mallardsllc@verizon.net; and Kuchisabishii
[kuchisabishii.va] all beckon for your
attention.



They offer everything from fluffy donuts to impeccably crafted petit fours, creamy cakes, and soft sweet potato biscuits. Lia and Gabe couldn't resist the allure of cookies and cream donuts, while I opted for a rich, cream-filled delicacy that melted in my mouth.

While on our warm mid-morning stroll through the quaint streets of this new town, my young companions, Gabe and Lia, enjoyed a well-deserved snack. After leaving one of the inspiring local galleries, their eyes lit up at the sight of Corner Bakery. As is common across America, this treasured bakery is family-owned and has been serving up delights for generations. The tantalizing aroma of freshly baked pastries wafted through the air, promising a sweet experience.



Day Trip

Just under two hours later, Gabe and Lia were ready for some hearty “real food.” What are donuts if not a snack? After a brief debate, we decided on Bizzotto’s Gallery Caffè, the oldest family-owned restaurant in Onancock with its inviting Mediterranean flair. The menu sparkled with enticing options: succulent steaks, fresh seafood, and classic Italian dishes. On a sweltering day, after gulping down their ice-cold Sprites, Lia’s eyes widened



with excitement as her massive meatball sub, generously topped with gooey cheese, was placed before her. (Somehow, she could not be tempted with a platter featuring baby clams) Gabe sifted through the menu, finally settling on my recommendation of a hearty veal parmigiana paired with a vibrant side of linguine. Our table was soon filled with takeout boxes, a testament to the generous portions.

The restaurant itself radiated charm, with a bright and airy atmosphere that felt welcoming. The chefs and wait staff, warm and engaging, made our dining experience even more delightful. A second visit is not just a possibility; it’s an absolute must, definitely in our future.





The Coolest Side of the Pillow

When venturing through the charming towns of America that lie off the beaten path, there's an unspoken guideline: indulge in a memorable stay at quaint hotels, inviting motels, cozy bed-and-breakfast inns, or delightful local Airbnbs. In the picturesque town of Onancock, you'll discover four enchanting accommodations that promise to enhance your visit.

The Charlotte Hotel & Restaurant.

Dating back to 1907, this boutique hotel is a hidden gem that exceeds expectations. Its restaurant showcases the best of the region's bounty, featuring dishes crafted from locally sourced meats, succulent fish, fowl, and vibrant vegetables harvested from nearby farms. Don't miss the opportunity to unwind at their sophisticated full-service bar, where you can savor a crafted cocktail or a fine wine.



Day Trip

The Inn at Onancock. This charming inn offers a selection of five uniquely themed rooms: the tranquil Maine Room, the exotic Far East Room, the romantic Provence Room, the rustic Tuscany Room, and the elegant Williamsburg Room. Each abode is thoughtfully appointed with distinct amenities, ensuring a personalized experience. There's no minimum night stay requirement, making it an accessible option for any traveler.



Maurice. Experience the vibrant hospitality of this lively boutique inn, where warmth and friendliness greet you at every turn. Their on-site restaurant tantalizes your taste buds with an eclectic menu that seamlessly blends classic American favorites with innovative sushi and fresh seafood delights.



1890 Spinning Wheel B&B. As the cherished original bed and breakfast in Onancock, this family-owned treasure feels like a true "home away from home." Guests rave about the beautifully restored house, complemented by exceptional service and a warm welcome that lingers in memory long after your stay. The heartfelt reviews reflect the unforgettable experiences and cherished moments created within its walls. In Onancock, every stay is an invitation to create lasting memories in captivating settings.



In The Vicinity

Embark on your day trips at your own leisurely pace, allowing for a personal exploration of the charming towns around you. Whether you're eager to uncover hidden gems or soak in the vibrant culture, many visitors find joy in discovering two or more cities in a single day, tailored to their unique interests. If you're newly arrived in our picturesque area and yearning for an unforgettable adventure, let us guide you to a selection of delightful nearby towns and enticing attractions waiting to be explored.

Parksley

In the charming town of Parksley, you can step back in time at the historic train station, which once connected bustling cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk. Don't miss the fascinating Eastern Shore Railway Museum, where you can explore vintage locomotives and learn about the rich history of rail travel in the region, as well as the picturesque Accomack Courthouse Green, ideal for a stroll.



Wallops Flight Facility

As you venture further north along U.S. 13, make a stop at the Wallops Flight Facility. On this exhilarating site, you can witness absolute rocket launches propelling into the vast, open sky. It's an awe-inspiring experience that captivates visitors of all ages.



Chincoteague Island & Assateague Island

If you're longing for a coastal retreat, head east to Chincoteague Island. On sun-drenched summer days, indulge in the delightfully creamy homemade ice cream at the Island Creamery, where an array of delightful flavors will surely satisfy your sweet tooth.

For beach enthusiasts, Assateague Island beckons with its soft sands and sparkling waters, perfect for a day of relaxation or a thrilling adventure under the sun. And when you find yourself in Melfa, be sure to stop by the Blue Crab Bay Company. Here, you can savor mouthwatering seafood or browse through unique gifts that capture the essence of the Eastern Shore.

Tangier Island

Lastly, if you're seeking a memorable day trip, consider planning a visit to Tangier Island. This quaint destination is a treasure, offering stunning views, rich cultural experiences, and the chance to connect with nature. Whether it's the tranquil waters or the vibrant local culture, Tangier Island promises an incredible adventure that you won't soon forget.

Nestled in the heart of the Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Island is a charming, secluded gem accessible only by boat or plane. From spring to fall, you can embark on a delightful ferry ride from Onancock, where the gentle winds and shimmering waters will whisk you away on a scenic hour-long journey.

Once you arrive, let the serene beauty of Tangier Island Beach envelop you—its soft, sandy shores beckon you to relax and soak up the sun. For those eager to explore, renting bikes or golf carts offers the perfect way to traverse the island's quaint paths and hidden corners. Don't miss the local history museum, where you can delve into the rich heritage of this unique community.

If you're considering an overnight stay, make sure to secure your accommodations well in advance, as the island's lodging options tend to fill up rapidly, especially during peak season.

Once you've settled in and the hunger pangs set in, prepare yourself for an unforgettable culinary journey! Indulge in the island's gastronomic delights at renowned locations such as Four Brothers Crabhouse and Ice Cream, where you can savor delectable crab dishes paired with their famous homemade ice cream.

Don't miss Lorraine's, celebrated for its cozy atmosphere and mouthwatering crab cakes that are a local favorite. If you're in the mood for something laid-back, visit Fisherman's Corner, where the seafood is plucked straight from the ocean, promising freshness in every bite. For a delightful treat afterward, swing by Spanky's, known not only for its savory bites but also for its irresistible desserts.

Finally, make time for Hilda Crockett's Chesapeake House, a charming eatery that embodies the essence of home-cooked meals, serving up the finest local dishes with a touch of southern hospitality. Each restaurant provides a unique taste of the island's fresh seafood and local flavors that will surely leave you craving more!



Whether you're embarking on a leisurely day trip or an adventurous road trip, Virginia beckons with a rich tapestry of history and natural beauty, as this is the cradle of America. The state unfolds into five distinct geographical regions, each offering unique experiences that will leave lasting memories.

Tidewater Region

The Tidewater Region, which encompasses the enchanting Coastal Plain, is home to Virginia Beach, our crown jewel. Here, the inviting waves of the Atlantic Ocean call out for you to dive in or cast your line for a day of fishing. The soft, golden sands and the rhythmic lull of the ocean create a serene escape, perfect for relaxation or adventure.



Blue Ridge Mountains

Next, we ascend to the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains, renowned for their stunning panoramas. Rising sharply into the sky, with an average elevation of nearly 4,000 feet, the area boasts Mount Rogers, the state's tallest peak, standing proud at 5,729 feet. Here, you'll find trails that weave through the rugged landscape, inviting exploration and offering views that leave you breathless.

Piedmont Region

As you move inland, the Piedmont Region reveals itself—a true paradise where nature wears its finest attire. This area is a verdant canvas painted with foothills that cradle a series of picturesque rivers, cascading waterfalls, shimmering lakes, and lively streams. Each turn reveals the beauty of the land, especially during the vibrant hues of fall when the leaves transform into a breathtaking spectacle.



Appalachian Plateau

Finally, rounding out our state is the Appalachian Plateau, the smallest but no less remarkable of Virginia's regions. Comprising only three counties, this area is a hidden gem where deep, ancient forests thrive, rich in deposits of coal, natural gas, and petroleum. The earth is alive here, whispering stories of its geological past while offering a glimpse into a vibrant ecosystem that flourishes in its embrace.

Valley & Ridge Region

The Valley & Ridge Region presents a stunning view of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the breathtaking Shenandoah Valley. The undulating hills and lush valleys create a dramatic backdrop. The landscape is a tapestry of green, with rolling hills that cradle the vibrant wildlife and rich agricultural lands.

Virginia is for Lovers! See for Yourself!

Virginia truly is a land of wonder, where each region invites discovery and adventure at every turn.
Are you ready for an adventure?

Coming Soon: Eastern Shore of Virginia Rail Trail

Exciting developments are on the horizon! The Eastern Shore of Virginia Rail Trail (ESVA Rail Trail) is set to unveil a remarkable 49-mile pathway designed for walkers, runners, bikers, and hikers alike. This breathtaking trail promises to captivate health enthusiasts while offering seamless access to a diverse range of recreational and community activities.

As the trail weaves its way from the serene National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, just north of the iconic Bridge-Tunnel, it stretches to the charming city of Hallwood, located due west of the picturesque Chincoteague and Assateague Islands. This scenic route not only invites outdoor exploration but also aims to invigorate tourism and stimulate economic growth across the enchanting Eastern Shore.

Stay tuned for your chance to experience this stunning addition to our community!

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boulevard's last call

Photo Contest: Enter to Win



DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN?

"LAST CALL" Highlights a location or an artifact in the Tidewater region every issue. Send us your guess via email or on the website as to where you think the photo was taken and identify what it is. Those who send correct guesses will have their names placed into a hat with the winner randomly chosen.

Please provide your email address / contact information with your submission incase you're the lucky one

We will award a prize each issue. for this contest we will provide a \$150 gift certificate at one of The Boulevard Team's favorite restaurants. Of course, we'll name the winner in the next issue and on social media so you can take advantage of all the appropriate bragging rights with your friends and family. Good Luck Everyone!

Last issue's winner:

Ramona Bond
Portsmouth, VA

The photo of the lady in the swimsuit was taken on Shore Drive. It's on the side of the van parked in front of Bikini Hut. Ramona Bond from Portsmouth, VA is the lucky winner!



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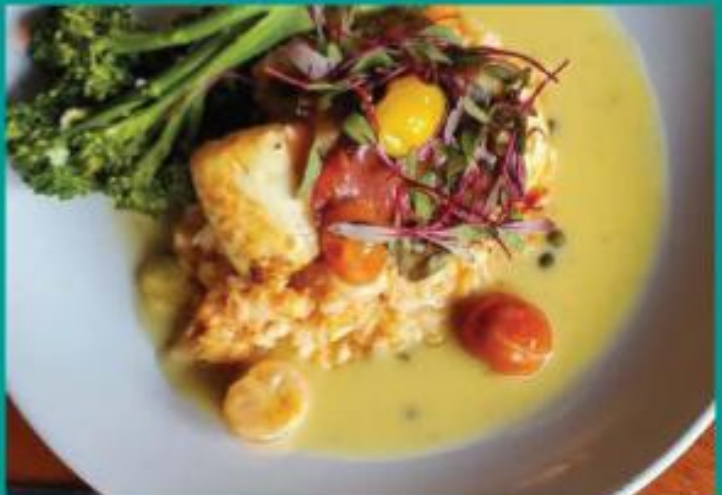
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