



PHOTOS BY SALAMANDER RESORT & SPA

# VENTURING IN *Virginia*

## In search of fine wine and fabulous food

{ WRITTEN BY HEATHER KW BROWN }

**FIVE** hours, one 12-point turn and a few hundred feet of driving backward on a dark highway later, we arrived at the end of a quiet road.

“Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Emanuelson.”

“Welcome to Salamander Resort and Spa. We’ve been expecting you,” said the attentive bellman, as he led us into the property’s beautiful living room.

As moms of similarly aged children, we were easily recognizable, looking every bit in need of fine wine and a good spa. The

only things missing were matching T-shirts that read, “Will drive for wine.” Of course, we’re much classier than that.

When we spotted Robert Duvall in a local coffee shop in Middleburg, for example, we played it cool, snapping a few inconspicuous photos with our smart phones and moseying out, lattes and celebrity sighting in hand. Yes, among the many things our children have taught us thus far, a quick retreat is often best. And so, armed with ample sophistication and a packed itinerary, our whirlwind getaway through Northern Virginia began.



**Top:** Salamander Resort & Spa's cooking studio  
**Bottom:** In 2012, Loudoun County produced 1,342 tons of grapes and had 513 grape-bearing acres, making it number one in the state for both. Bluemont Vineyard and Greenbill Winery and Vineyards are two beautiful stops near Middleburg, Va.

{ VIRGINIA }

**Making the Most of Middleburg**

While Middleburg is known to be Virginia's hunt capital, which besides the incredible charm of this small town, is why many celebrities call it home, Loudoun County is best known as DC's Wine Country. Boasting 41 wineries and tasting rooms, an organic distillery and eight craft breweries, the area appeases many palates, ours among them.

**STAY:**

Rise and shine to the beauty of Salamander Resort and Spa, a luxury destination resort nestled in 340 acres at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Though much of the property has been allocated in a conservation easement, precious space was saved for 168 well-appointed rooms and suites, not to mention several amazing amenities like an impressive full-service equestrian center. Yoga atop a horse, anyone?

We opted to keep both feet on the ground inside the 23,000-square-foot spa ... except when we had them slightly elevated on the heated stone lounge chairs. "Ahhh" never felt so good. Almost like not having to answer the what's-for-dinner question. But, if the urge strikes to channel your inner chef, Salamander has a state-of-the-art Cooking Studio featuring daily culinary classes.

**SIP:**

Located at the top of Foggy Bottom Road, Bluemont Vineyard could be known as the winery with a view, as they have the highest elevation tasting room in the county. On our tasting menu: 2013 Farm Table White, The Peach and a 2012 Cabernet Franc Rose, an off dry 100 percent stainless steel fermented Cabernet Franc Rose with a hint of strawberry freshness. Conversation then turned to the reds, where of the 2012 Farm Table Red, 2011 "The Ram" Merlot and the 2012 Cham-

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bourcin, the latter was most interesting. A newer addition to the offerings, this blend of 77 percent Chambourcin, 21 percent Petit Verdot and 2 percent Merlot is a bigger bodied wine with some chewy tannins.

To make venturing from winery to winery easier, Loudoun wineries are grouped into six driving clusters, each ride providing ample scenics past horse pastures, historic estates and stacked stone fences en route to the next Virginia vintner ready to talk varietals. At Greenhill Winery and Vineyards, go for a glass of wine, stay for possibly the best spot in the area. Opened in August of last year, Greenhill currently features 11 amazing acres of mostly vitis vinifera vineyards, with 5 acres of new vines in the works. The tasting room is open daily from noon until sunset, and I suggest lingering longer - both the wine and the scenery are worth it.

EAT:

Back in Middleburg, don't miss lunch at Market Salamander. Touted to be a "working chefs market," Market Salamander is reminiscent of an Italian village market, complete with cobblestone floors and more gourmet goods than you can imagine.

For dinner, get all dolled up and head downstairs at Salamander Resort and Spa. Craving locally-inspired small plates and an extensive wine list? Find a table to call your own at The Gold Cup Wine Bar. Prefer dishes with a chef's Virginia-Piedmont influence? Harrimans Grill has that plus plenty of panoramic views to appease discerning patrons.

**Top:** The Ritz-Carlton Tysons Corner extends a warm welcome to guests as they enter the lobby.

**Bottom Right:** One delicious example of the flights and flatbreads found at Seasons 52 in Tysons Corner Center.

**Bottom Left:** Award-winning wine from Paradise Springs Winery in nearby Clifton.

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**Left:** Plan to wile the day away at Paradise Springs Winery, where in addition to a handsome tasting room, a back patio beckons.  
**Right:** Alexandria's chefs aren't the only ones smiling in Society Fair's demo kitchens on Friday nights.

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### Falling for Fairfax County

What we learned in Middleburg is that Virginia's wine country is no longer just a weekend getaway for residents of Washington, D.C. and it's no longer a hidden gem. Serving as the gateway to the state's now award-winning pastime is Fairfax County.

### STAY:

The Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner proved a wise decision for us. Here, we were close to wineries; we had a day spa downstairs and we were mere steps away from some of the best shopping in the area, thanks to the adjoined Tysons Galleria and adjacent Tysons Corner Center.

### SIP:

We drove directly to Paradise Springs Winery for lunch and yet another wine tasting. Tucked into the picturesque town of Clifton, Paradise Springs Winery was the first in Fairfax County and about as accommodating as they come. Check out the onsite original log cabin, which in 1955, underwent a major overhaul led by a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright, and then make your way to the tasting room.

The wines here surprised us, so much so that we ended up leaving with several bottles of our own.

Notable notes include the 2013 Nana's Rosé, a dry French-style wine highlighting aromas of rose oil and accent flavors of

guava, strawberry and citrus. Next is the 2012 Norton, a Double Gold Medal Winner. First cultivated in Richmond in 1830, the Norton grape is a popular local pour, but not always the best. An exception to the rule, this one was a decidedly dark-colored wine with blackberry and plum fruit flavors and finishing hints of baking spices.

Besides the handsome barrel room, we also loved the outdoor patio where we wasted no time having a picnic lunch.

### EAT:

In case working up an appetite is a necessity, the high-end shops available at both Tysons Galleria and Tysons Corner Center are indispensable. With wine, food and a little pampering at the top of our priority list in Fairfax, we headed to the Ritz-Carlton Club Level prior to dinner at ENTYSE, Wine Bar & Lounge. Anyone with an affinity for fine wine and a knowledgeable sommelier will want to immediately introduce themselves to Sommelier Vincent Feraud. As sharp as you might expect, but with the humor and grace to accompany his skill, Feraud brings friendliness to the table, instilling confidence and encouragement in wine enthusiasts new and old alike.

For a light taste of home, head to Seasons 52 inside Tysons Corner Center for a round of flatbreads and flights of wine assembled by the restaurant's master sommelier.

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\*The internal quality improvement survey/study, the findings and information on the national standards are available on file at Hudes Endoscopy Center.

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### The Allure of Alexandria

#### EAT:

Well aware of the area's rich history and chic boutiques, we were awed by Alexandria's food scene. The same is true of Chef de Cuisine Harper McLure at BRABO by Robert Wiedmaier. Sitting adjacent to the modern Lorien Hotel & Spa, BRABO boasts an innovative menu that combines the creativity of traditional Belgian fare with McLure's experience in charcuterie, sauce working and farming.

Not too far away, Cathal Armstrong and his wife have been busy changing the culinary landscape of Alexandria with unique concepts like Society Fair, which debuted only two years ago. Inside the fashionable market, dubbed "an epicurean emporium," we found a bakery, a butchery and not surprisingly, a wine bar — all under one roof. Perhaps the coolest part is that the wine bar is also a demo kitchen, where every Friday night, 10 seats are arranged for guests to engage with the chefs as they create three courses for them to enjoy. With more than 150 bottles of wine in every price range — between 25 and 40 by the glass, three on tap and a sommelier on hand for pairings — Society Fair is not just a fair for food lovers, but wine lovers too.



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Wine without cheese? No thanks. Owner and “cheese lady” Jill Erber carved her own niche in the food scene with Cheese-tique, a go-to destination for gourmet cheese, meats, wines and accompaniments from around the world. We arrived early, grabbed a seat at the bar and settled in for a cheese and charcuterie board. A brunch of Green Eggs and Ham – pesto scrambled eggs served on top of a toasted English muffin with Black Forest ham, topped with house made cheese sauce and a side of Manchego grits nearly sent us happily over the edge.

### SHOP:

The best fix for being full? Walk along the scenic Potomac waterfront. Besides fabulous cosmopolitan dining, Old Town Alexandria is renown for its trendy boutiques and independent shops. In the more than 30 unique and locally owned shops of the Old Town Boutique District - said to have the highest concentration of independent shops in the DC region - we found everything from high-end home décor at Decorium to sassy shoes at Bishop Boutique. Elsewhere along the dozens of blocks to shop, we popped into Olio Tasting Room, where we learned that oils and vinegars are, in some ways, comparable to wine with their nuances of flavors, countless varieties and pure pleasure when the time comes to sample. I bought the basil olive oil to use with my homemade pasta and debated between the espresso balsamic and the chocolate - by this, I mean, sampled several times.

Our expeditious exploits accomplished, we headed home sufficiently pampered, slightly more sophisticated and vowing to revisit Northern Virginia's wine country again soon. And next time, we're staying much longer. **PN**

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