

# Unexpected Getaways

*In Defense of the Detour*

BY KINSEY GIDICK



CHAD WILLIAMS



When you marry a native Virginian who also teaches American history, frequent road trips are a given. Even before we officially moved to Virginia last May, every visit to Virginia from our then-home in Charleston, South Carolina, found us whizzing up to Williamsburg, exploring Appomattox or hustling through Richmond's many museums on summer holidays. Now that we officially live in Central Virginia, our statewide wanderlust hasn't diminished. In fact, if anything, it's only made weekend outings that much more tempting. But rather than head to bold name destinations, we prefer to uncover the quirrier, lesser-known attractions, and what we've found in the last 16 months is that Virginia is a veritable hotbed of off-the-beaten-path surprises.



KIPTOPEKE STATE PARK  
Cape Charles

←  
*The Ghost Ships  
of Kiptopeke*

If coastal oddities are more your thing, consider a visit to Kiptopeke State Park. Located on Virginia's Eastern shore, this Chesapeake Bay spot is an ecological playground ripe for biking, camping, birding, and splashing in the bay. But even better? The same island that Captain John Smith explored first in 1608 is also home to the Ghost Ships of Kiptopeke. The name says it all. Sitting in a U-formation off the coast is a line of abandoned cargo ships. Come to find out, this isn't the result of an epic hurricane or fantastical Pirates of the Caribbean marooning. The boats were actually intentionally placed there after WWII. When the Virginia Ferry Company needed a jetty to protect its new terminal, it bought the obsolete concrete ships that were once used to shuttle commodities during the war. And there they've sat forever more, an eerie, albeit efficient nautical form of recycling. Get an up close and personal look by paddling out to the ships.

*The Charming Hamlet  
of Sperryville*

Located in Rappahannock County, we stumbled upon this boutique village last spring on our way to the more well-known getaway of Middleburg. Tucked along the lovely Thornton River, you'll find a welcoming little downtown with great shops like Happy Camper Equipment Co., where you can stock up on hiking gear before you head into the Blue Ridge. Or, pop into Copper Fox Antiques, a warehouse of old finds. But what you really need to do is schedule this detour when your stomach starts to rumble. Sperryville's Rappahannock Pizza Kitchen makes excellent artisan pies and for dinner there's the 20-seat seasonal fine dining spot, Three Blacksmiths. (Best make a reservation for the latter. It books months in advance.)



KIPTOPEKE STATE PARK  
Cape Charles



## The American Shakespeare Center

Another form of recycling that's worth your time and money? Viewing a reinterpretation of one of the Bard's classics at the American Shakespeare Center. West of Charlottesville, you'll find Staunton, Virginia. This artsy mountain town is home to one of the best theater companies on the East Coast and exclusively produces plays by William Shakespeare. In a theater built to resemble the playwright's Blackfriars Theatre, a 13th-Century monastery

where his company performed, you can see shows including "Henry V" and "All's Well That Ends Well." Much like London's Globe theatre, which draws hundreds of tourists each year to experience a 16th century performance, the same can be said of Blackfriars Playhouse, which truly feels like traveling through time. When the curtain closes you can explore more of Staunton and see sites like the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and the idyllic campus of Mary Baldwin University, or even the Queen City Mischief & Magic festival that celebrates all things Harry Potter each September.

POLLAK VINEYARDS  
Greenwood

## Horseback Rides and Wine Tastings

Indian Summer Guide Service in Charlottesville is an equestrian oenophile's dream come true. Under the guidance of owner/operator Ashton Beebe, saddle up for a private tour of one of five area wineries (Keswick and King Family included) or two local breweries before dismounting for a tasting of the latest varietals. Designed for every range of rider — novice to expert — there's no better way to enjoy the beauty of the state's booming wine scene than atop one of Indian Summer Guide's trusty steeds.

SANJAY SUDHAK



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## Tubing on the New River

On another weekend, swap out the vino for a cooler of brewskies and go for a float along the New River with Tangent Outfitters. Based in the town of Pembroke, east of Roanoke, the New River offers the kind of picturesque scenery Instagram was made for. There are swimming holes and a Class II rapid, not to mention plenty of pull-off sites to enjoy a picnic. Best of all? You don't have to do the work of hauling gear to the boat ramp. Tangent Outfitters does it all for you, so you just need to bring your swimsuit, plenty of sunscreen and a good attitude to the two-mile cruise. Once you've mastered the float, you can consider Tangent's other rentals, including standup paddle boards, canoes and kayaks.



Virginia is truly an embarrassment of riches when it comes to being a tourist. There are more things to do and see than you can imagine. And each season brings with it a fresh batch of events and attractions to uncover. All you have to do is gas up the car, open your GPS and go find them.



NEW RIVER  
Pembroke

## Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest

And when all else fails, do what we do in our household: go old-timey. History is the lens through which we base nearly all of our travels, so it's no surprise that visiting Thomas Jefferson's Monticello was never going to be enough for us. Rather than head to one of the most well-known presidential homes in America (which I highly encourage everyone to do), make sure you visit his often-overlooked second home, Poplar Forest, as well.

The National Historic Landmark is located in Bedford County, not far from the city of Lynchburg. The minute you pull up to the property you'll note Jefferson's signature look: the octagonal shape, porticos on the north and south facades, Palladian details and Tuscan columns. Off the beaten trail, you'll be rewarded with a calm and quiet stroll through a work of art by one of this country's most fascinating self-taught architects. In addition, Poplar Forest interprets the life of the enslaved who lived and worked on the property and without whose labor the President's fortune would never have been.

SAM O'BRIEN



VISITSWVA.ORG | One Heartwood Circle, Abingdon, VA 24210



# BROWN FACES IN GREEN SPACES

Creating a diverse and welcoming space for all explorers.

By Nicole Boyd and Narshara Tucker



## A City Girl in a Green World: Nicole's Story

Growing up in New York City in the 1980s, I was surrounded by side-walks, skyscrapers and the symphonic echoes of horns, chatter and trains. My fondest memories of growing up in the city all have one thing in common: being outside. There was something about the outdoors that made me feel free. I could explore and have my own adventure. I did not have to read about someone else's adventure in my school-issued textbook or see someone exploring the outdoors on television. The outdoors was my canvas. Much of those adventures included family outings to local and regional parks where my dad would take my brother and me to "explore the park." He didn't call it hiking, and back then I'm not even sure there were actual trails in the park. Still, we somehow made our way through the woods. Little did I know, those adventures would be the footprints to the group Black Girls Hike RVA that I would later co-found with Narshara Tucker.



## Country Girl in a Not-So-Country World: Narshara's Story

Born in 1987 to parents who were already close to retirement age, I was the youngest of four with a 20-year gap between my next youngest sibling. Still, I had a very supportive village growing up in North Carolina that included my school, soccer team, cheerleading squad and church family. While I was active, there weren't many opportunities for me to enjoy the outdoors. My neighborhood did not have a park to play in, so I often took walks around the block with my mom or neighborhood friends. As I think back to my adolescence and young adult life, I wish I could have explored the outdoors more. But at age 32, I completed my first hike thanks to my best friend and co-founder of Black Girls Hike RVA, Nicole Boyd.

COURTESY OF BLACK GIRLS HIKE RVA

JOEL MULEBAH AND ALYSA GILBERT

LITTLE STONY MAN TRAIL  
Luray



# Our Top Five Favorite Hikes

- 1. *Humpback Rocks*
- 2. *Sharp Top*
- 3. *Crabtree Falls*
- 4. *Dragon’s Tooth*
- 5. *Buttermilk/North Bank Trail*




## Being Black on the Trails

Almost 30 years later, we met and quickly became friends. In 2019, Nicole wanted to celebrate her birthday with a waterfall hike and visit to wineries. Luckily, Virginia is full of both. So, she gathered our friends with the intention of having a full day of adventure. We thought that all we needed for this adventure were a comfortable pair of shoes and a great attitude. But shortly after we arrived at Crabtree Falls with our friends, two things were evident: the group was not fully prepared for the inclines and switchbacks, and we were the only group of Black hikers on the trail. Other people on the trail must have noticed, too. We were even asked if our one white friend in the group was our trail guide. But, Black people do hike, we thought. Why was seeing Black folks on the trail an exception and not the norm? We know that African Americans have a painful past with nature and outdoor space that is rooted in slavery and lynching. The outdoors was, historically, not a safe place for many Black folks. But we would soon be working to heal and rebuild from a painful past. First, though, Nicole had to convince us that hiking was possible with better preparation – so we started small and local.

## The Birth of Black Girls Hike RVA and Beyond

We began hiking local trails and state parks and posting our adventures on social media. Friends and family took notice and wanted to join. When COVID-19 shut down so much, folks really craved getting outdoors. Thus, Black Girls Hike RVA was created in May 2020 as a space for women of color to hike safely, build a sisterhood and support one another. Over a year later, we have 30 official members. Hiking with our group is always free and our group hikes have ranged from five to 75 people, encompassing Black women and their families, friends and allies. We’ve collaborated with other Virginia outdoor groups, enthusiasts, foundations and state park leaders. And we’ve even connected with outdoor groups nationally through social media.

Our lives were forever changed by stepping out into green spaces and becoming one with nature. We’ve seen the incredible impact it’s had on others, as well. We’re excited to continue doing our part to ensure the outdoors is diverse and welcoming – and to show the world that Black girls do, in fact, hike!

-  [blackgirlshikerva.com](http://blackgirlshikerva.com)
-  [blackgirlshike\\_rva](https://www.instagram.com/blackgirlshike_rva)
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SHENANDOAH  
NATIONAL PARK



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# CHOOSE YOUR OWN *outdoor* ADVENTURE

5 Tips for State Park Trips



BREAKS INTERSTATE PARK  
Breaks

SAM DEAN



FIRST LANDING STATE PARK  
Virginia Beach

Virginia's 41 diverse state parks offer adventure from its coastal shores to its stunning mountains, luscious forests and more. No matter which park you visit, these tips will help you make the most of your experience.

**1 Choose a park for your favorite kind of adventure.** Love exploring waterways? Consider one of 25 state parks with paddle-craft access, many of which offer guided kayaking tours with park interpreters. If you're looking for hiking trails, you'll be happy to find more than 397 miles of multi-use trails. For biking enthusiasts, try New River Trail State Park with 56 miles of scenic beauty along the New River.

**2 Prepare to play.** Stay hydrated and dress adequately to fully enjoy your explorations. Bring your own filled, reusable water bottles, and always check the weather and park conditions. Each park website includes additional tips on what to bring and how to prepare, to help you make the most of your visit.

ALI ZAMAN



Whether you're walking, hiking, paddling, or camping, there's plenty of wildlife and birds to see in Virginia!

Find a spot to enjoy nature on the **Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail**, a guide to more than 600 sites with excellent birding and wildlife viewing opportunities.

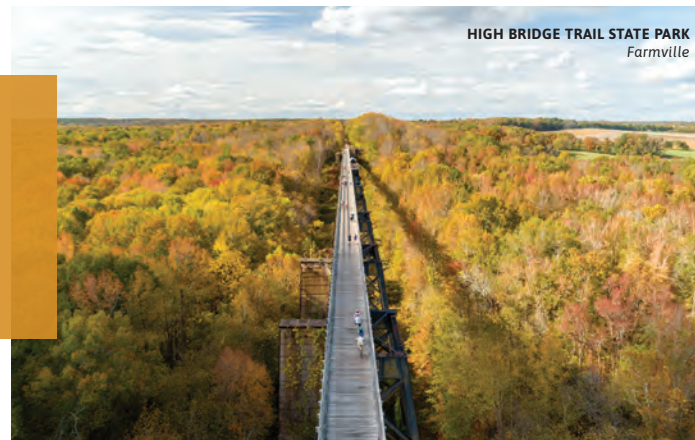


[VirginiaWildlife.gov/BirdTrail](https://VirginiaWildlife.gov/BirdTrail)





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HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK  
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**3 Enhance your experience by learning from experts and interpretive displays.** Many of our parks offer intriguing tours led by park rangers or naturalists where you can learn more about the history, plants and animals at the park. Head to Sky Meadows State Park for special learning opportunities on their Sensory Explorers' Trail, where you can experience the park through all of your senses.

**4 Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife.** Our preserved parks are havens for wildlife. At York River State Park, you can discover all kinds of creatures and critters in the marsh. If looking up is more exciting to you, then try bird watching at Caledon State Park.

**5 Practice the Leave No Trace Principles.** Just like the name suggests, leave no trace of your visit. Take nothing but memories, photos and gift shop souvenirs. Respect the park and wildlife during your visit so that you can return to your favorites year after year. Go the extra mile by volunteering; each park has unique opportunities to get involved.

## Virginia's Greatest Golf Courses

All ages and skill levels can enjoy a beautiful day on these local courses.



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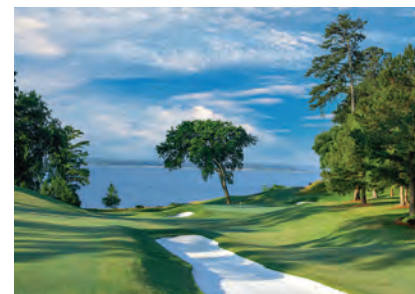
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Sam Snead once remarked that if he could play only one course, it would be The Cascades at **The Omni Homestead Resort** in Hot Springs. Recently ranked #31 on Golf Digest's list of America's 100 Greatest Public Courses, The Cascades is regarded as one of William S. Flynn's finest works. Flynn's deft architectural skills created a course which fit perfectly within the scenic Allegheny Mountains. A variety of tee shots lead to sloping, treelined fairways and the Cascades stream comes into play on several holes. The Old Course is distinguished as home of the nation's oldest first tee in continuous use. Updates by Flynn and Donald Ross are showcased in the abundant fairway contouring and smallish greens, making approach shots interesting.

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