

The limestone Tinker Cliffs look out past McAfee Knob and beyond, where we'd hiked just the day before.

Burgers, Brews, & Blue Ridge Hikes

A West Coaster's Guide to Eats & Adventure Along the Appalachian Trail

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Plan your trip
to Roanoke



MY FIRST TIME IN VIRGINIA

This past summer, my friends and I touched down in Washington Dulles airport for the first time. We were surprised to learn that Dulles — one of the busiest international airports in the world — was not only in Virginia, but also on the doorstep of the Appalachian Trail. The A.T., as it's known amongst thru-hikers, is over 2,000 miles long and stretches from Georgia through Virginia, and all the way up to Maine. We set out to explore the city of Roanoke and a short section of the trail known as "Virginia's Triple Crown" — three challenging hikes that lead to iconic vistas.

As a West Coaster, I'll be the first to admit that the extent of my knowledge of the Blue Ridge Mountains came solely from singing John Denver at karaoke nights or on road trips. It took me many years to venture out towards the eastern side of the U.S., and it was easy to see

how this region got its name; ripples of ridges fanned out in every direction with pockets of population nestled in between. Homesteads, farms, and churches peppered the valleys below, whilst a blue-hued mist gave a magical touch to our surroundings.

What immediately stood out to me was just how accessible these trails are. Despite the A.T. running through 14 different states, some of the most scenic overlooks on the whole trail are found just 20 minutes outside of downtown Roanoke. We spent five days exploring the tranquil forests, enjoying the lively city, and getting acquainted with friendly locals who made this place unforgettable.

THE TRIPLE CROWN

The "Virginia Triple Crown" is comprised of McAfee Knob, Tinker Cliffs, and Dragon's Tooth — some of the most

rewarding sections of the A.T., all within a stone's throw of Roanoke. Overhanging rock ledges, otherworldly boulder features, and limestone cliffs make this area geologically fascinating.

McAfee Knob, our first hike to conquer, has a graciously gentle, four-mile ascent leading to an outcrop that affords a 270-degree view of the Catawba Valley below. This is one of the most popular overlooks on the Appalachian Trail, and those brave enough to sit on the edge of the overlook dangle their feet over the 100-foot drop. If this includes you, don't forget to snap a photo, because it's a feat you'll want to show friends and family.

Just a day's walk north on the A.T. is Tinker Cliffs, another prominent outcropping of rock that offers a view of the mountains from the other side of the Catawba Valley. The hike leads you over a creek and through Scorched Earth Gap. From the summit, you'll even spot the

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legendary Murder Hole Cave (look up how these features received their names — there are definitely some interesting backstories!).

And in a more southwesterly direction, back in the Catawba Valley, is Dragon's Tooth — a short but very steep ascent complete with a rock scramble to a truly unique rock feature. Standing on the precipice of Cove Mountain is a 35-foot rock spire that should only be attempted by an experienced climber. The trail connecting these epic viewpoints is well maintained, posted with visible signage, and doable for all hikers with a basic

level of fitness.

During this journey along Virginia's Appalachian Trail, there were a few things that surprised us about the Blue Ridge Mountains. First, the humidity; we packed as much water as we could carry and were extremely grateful that we did! Whilst water is available on the trail, strategic planning is crucial. Secondly, the summer heat; thankfully, most of Virginia's trails save their open-air views for the final stretch, which meant we were protected by shade in the forest for the most arduous sections of the hikes.

To combat the humidity and sum-

mer heat, we started our hikes early in the mornings and hiked mostly in the shade. This also allowed us to explore the underworld of the tree canopy, revealing the tiny worlds of plant and animal life along the trails. Birdsong was a constant and welcome companion as we trekked, and deer wandered across the trails frequently, stopping to watch us pass. Virginia's black bears eluded us, but stories circulated of these beautiful mountain animals as we met new friends at each shelter.

Some of the hikers we crossed paths with were traversing the entire



post-hike burger, the neon signs of Campbell Avenue offered up plentiful food and cold beer options. For coffee, Mill Mountain Coffee became a daily morning necessity. Texas Tavern was our go-to after late-night hikes, offering 24-hour service, affordable food (you have to order the Cheesy Western), friendly faces, and guaranteed interesting conversation with your diner chair neighbor. For a selection of cold local beers, we loved Big Lick Brewing Company.



McAfee Knob is the most photographed spot on the Appalachian Trail, and it's easy to see why.

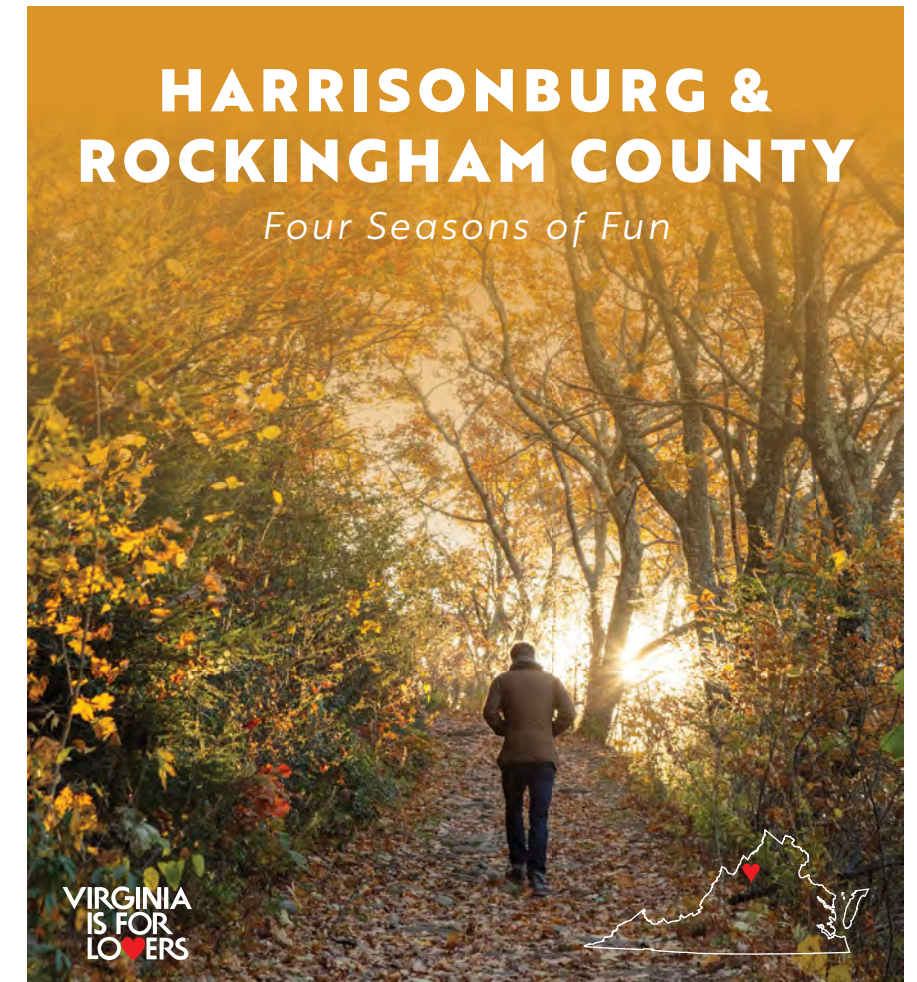


Appalachian Trail, while others were traveling smaller sections — like us. We envied those who passed us with no overnight packs, leaving a scent of detergent and shampoo in their wake, but we comforted ourselves with the thought that they wouldn't get to see the multiple sunrises and sunsets that we experienced.

ROANOKE AND THE FOOD

When we weren't hiking the trails, we spent our time exploring Roanoke, an urban city center tucked into the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains that's home to some of the most delicious food, both for the gourmet self-proclaimed "foodies" and the hungry hikers looking for large quantities on a budget.

The "Star City's" (named for the large illuminated star that overlooks the city from Mill Mountain) proximity to these stunning trails made it an unforgettable urban experience for us. Whether it was a pre-hike coffee or



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The instantly recognisable Dragon's Tooth is a 35-foot quartzite spire jutting out from atop Cove Mountain.

Every interaction we had in Roanoke was a glimpse into the culture of Southern hospitality. Once the shock of being called “ma’am” wore off, I found it endearing. We had so many slow, meaningful conversations that made me forget what it meant to be rushed. Our absolute favorite hangout — for friendly locals, general rock’n’roll vibe, experimental taxidermy (look for the infamous ‘assquatch’), and excellent

burgers was Jack Brown’s Beer & Burger Joint, a local gastropub with cool vibes and delicious eats. On that note, I can honestly say I had some of the best burgers in my life in Roanoke, and would like to mention the following standouts; the Honey Butter Chicken Sandwich from Food Hut RKE (served in Big Lick Brewing Co.) was the best chicken sandwich I’ve ever had — and I’ve had a lot; second, the Dry-Aged

Brisket Sandwich from Mama Jean’s BBQ near Salem was the best melt-in-your-mouth brisket sandwich you could ask for. I’ll be raving about these burgers for years to come, and they really hit the spot after several days spent conquering the strenuous trails of the Triple Crown. After grabbing brunch at Scratch Biscuit Company on our final morning in Roanoke — one last mind-melting meal — we headed to Black Dog Salvage,

a vintage warehouse of antiques and goods that starred in its own TV show called “Salvage Dawgs.” It was a treasure trove of repurposed materials, charming trinkets, and reclaimed pieces. We could have spent all day wandering this gigantic emporium, but alas, the drive back to Dulles was calling, so we regretfully packed up our car and said farewell to Roanoke and Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains.



FAREWELL BUT NOT GOODBYE

All in all, my first trip to Virginia was an absolute treat, mixing jaw-dropping natural scenery with that famous Southern hospitality I’d always heard about. Whether we were hiking the Triple Crown on the Appalachian Trail or diving into Roanoke’s foodie scene, there was never a dull moment or empty stomach.

The Blue Ridge Mountains totally lived up to the hype, showcasing challenging-but-fun hiking trails and killer views, while Roanoke surprised us with its laid-back vibe, great eats, and welcoming locals who made us feel right at home. As we cruised back towards Dulles to catch our flight home and cranked up the country tunes on the radio, we were already thinking about our next visit to Virginia — we can’t wait to come back for more.



Discover the best spots for birding and wildlife viewing on the Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail, a guide to 600 parks, trails, waterways, and more where you can experience Virginia’s natural world as you walk, hike, paddle, bike, or camp.

VirginiaWildlife.gov/BirdTrail

VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

NATURAL WONDERS

- Natural Bridge
- Natural Tunnel
- First Landing
- Fairy Stone

GREAT FOR CAMPING

- Kiptopeke
- Staunton River
- Westmoreland
- Douthat

ACTIVITIES GALORE

- Hungry Mother
- Smith Mountain Lake
- Pocahontas
- Sky Meadows

HIDDEN GEMS

- Occoneechee
- High Bridge Trail
- Machicomoco
- Sweet Run

With 43 Virginia State Parks its easy to find your favorite, see pages 8-9.
Plan your next adventure at virginiastateparks.gov

SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE STATE PARK is located on the second-largest freshwater lake in Virginia, creating picturesque views. With a 500-foot sandy beach, waterfront picnic areas, 13 miles of hiking trails, boat rentals, and a fishing pier, there's something for everyone at this 1,000-acre park.



HUNGRY MOTHER STATE PARK'S beautiful woodlands and placid 108-acre lake make it a favorite in the heart of the mountains. Hike or bike more than 17 miles of trails. Introduce your family to geocaching with a park "treasure hunt." There are self-guided programs for all ages and interests, including the .6-mile paved Kids in Parks Track Trail that helps children and adults learn about various plants and animals in the park.



POCAHONTAS STATE PARK: More than 90 miles of trails make this park particularly popular among bicyclists, but there's something for everyone just 20 miles from Richmond. Get wet at its Aquatic Center, with a toddler pool, fountain wet deck, leisure pools, and more. Three lakes offer plenty of fishing, and you can rent a boat seasonally at the 225-acre Swift Creek Lake. And on summer evenings, you might catch a Pocahontas Premieres concert in the 2,000-seat amphitheater.



DOUTHAT STATE PARK: Find this park on the National Register of Historic Places thanks to its original Civilian Conservation Corps-built cabins, a model for parks nationwide. Enjoy interpretive programs, four miles of stream fishing, a 50-acre lake stocked with trout, a sandy swimming beach, boat rentals, cabins, and more than 43 miles of hiking, mountain biking, and bridle trails.



FIRST LANDING STATE PARK is one of Virginia's most visited parks and guests love the secluded beach front access for fishing, boating, and swimming. Guests can hike or bike to explore the park's numerous unusual habitats including a bald cypress swamp, lagoons, and maritime forest, as well as rare plants and wildlife.

Virginia's Greatest Golf Courses



THE OMNI HOMESTEAD RESORT
Hot Springs

Above the banks of the Shenandoah River, these 6,499 yards of rolling fairways at **Caverns Country Club Resort** seem to touch the mountain foothills. Amid vistas of farmlands, large tees and lush greens complement this 18-hole, par 72 course, creating one of the most scenic golf opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic region. Golf, scenery, an internationally-famous natural wonder, and a national park — a grand slam location adjacent to Luray Caverns in the land of Shenandoah.



CAVERNS COUNTRY CLUB RESORT
Luray

The Golden Horseshoe Golf Club is rated a top-5 golf course in Virginia and currently ranked #43 on Golf Digest's list of "America's Greatest Public Courses." Designed by father-and-son team Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Rees Jones, players experience 36 championship holes over three courses.

Toast to a day spent on the course at one of Colonial Williamsburg Resorts' 10 on-site restaurants. Stay at the award-winning accommodations or relax at the world-class spa and fitness center. This golf getaway is an incredible vacation that keeps you coming back year after year.



GOLDEN HORSESHOE GOLF CLUB
Williamsburg

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KINGSMILL RESORT
Williamsburg

A renowned golf destination for more than a century, **The Omni Homestead Resort** was named as one of the top 100 golf resorts in the world for 2024-2025 by GOLF magazine. Annually ranked among the top 100 courses in the country, The Cascades at The Omni Homestead Resort is regarded as one of William S. Flynn's finest works.

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America's 100 Greatest Public Courses: Gold Course #60, Golf Digest	Best Courses in Virginia: Gold Course #7 Golf Digest
Top 100 Best Courses You Can Play: #66 Golfweek Magazine	Best Public Golf Courses, State by State: Gold Course #3, Golfweek Magazine

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Give Me Liberty!

Virginia Commemorates 250 Years of American Independence

BY RICHARD LEWIS

In 2025, Virginia will observe the 250th anniversaries of four key events of the American Revolution, all of which grew from the oppressive regime of the British governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore. Dunmore substituted heavy-handed rule for diplomatic skill, which fanned the flames of growing revolutionary passions in the Commonwealth. One man was particularly moved to action, the famous American patriot and noted rabble-rouser Patrick Henry. On March 23rd, 1775, Henry lit the powder keg of revolution with his incendiary "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech at St. John's Church in Richmond while addressing the Second Virginia Convention.

Henry's speech was followed by the arming of the Virginia Militia. Dunmore responded by ordering gunpowder removed from the militia's magazine at Williamsburg. In what became known as the Gunpowder Incident, 15 barrels of gunpowder were taken by British troops on April 20th and transported to a gunship on the James River. This action led to further unrest and the organization of more militia companies throughout

Virginia. Dunmore, who had taken refuge aboard a ship, was confronted by militia under Patrick Henry. Dunmore paid Henry 330 pounds for the powder. The stage was now set for armed conflict in Virginia.

By late 1775, fighting had already broken out in the American Colonies. Concerned by the volatile situation in Virginia, Dunmore issued a proclamation on November 7th instituting martial law and offering freedom to slaves willing to join the British. Between 800 and 2,000 enslaved men responded. While many were placed in non-combatant roles, others were formed into what was called the "Ethiopian Regiment." Predictably, Dunmore's Proclamation raised a furor among slaveholders. The Virginia Convention issued its own proclamation stating that any escaped slave returning within 10 days would be pardoned, and those who did not would be executed when caught.

Aboard a British warship anchored at loyalist-dominated Norfolk, Dunmore continued to recruit and organize local loyalists who, along with his Ethiopian Regiment and a regular British infantry

regiment, comprised a force Dunmore deemed sufficient to operate against "rebel" colonists. Heated incidents in and around Norfolk came to a head on December 9th, when Dunmore's force was soundly thrashed by Virginia militia at the Battle of Great Bridge. It spelled the end for Dunmore, who soon retreated to New York and eventually returned to England. The victory secured Virginia's place as a vitally important player in the struggle for American independence.

Today, visitors to Virginia can immerse themselves in multi-sensory experiences that bring revolutionary history into the fourth dimension. The outstanding American Revolution Museum at Yorktown enables you to see, hear, and feel the dramatic events of the 1770s. At Richmond's St. John's Church, visitors can sit among the actors at engaging re-enactments of Patrick Henry's famous speech in the exact spot where it took place. The reconstructed powder magazine stands guard at Colonial Williamsburg, for generations one of America's favorite living history attractions. The site of the Battle of Great Bridge is marked by a monument and museum in Chesapeake.

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semiquincentennial
movement



HISTORIC ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
Richmond



GREAT BRIDGE BATTLEFIELD &
WATERWAYS HISTORY FOUNDATION
Chesapeake

HANNAH ARMSTRONG / ELIZABETH GOODWIN

On the Map

FloydFest Turns a Music Town Into an Annual Festival Mecca

BY PATRICIA KEPPEL ANDERSON

Since 2002, FloydFest has brought thousands of people to the small town of Floyd, a mountain community off the Blue Ridge Parkway, but this Southwest Virginia destination has long been known as a "music town."

Floyd Country Store, a circa-1909 general store, began hosting Bluegrass bands from the area in the early 1980s, and as the crowds grew over the following decades, so did Floyd's reputation as a beacon for music lovers. Locals

and visitors gather every Friday night for the store's Jamboree, a lively event where music lovers of every age dance, sing, and share their appreciation for Old-Time music. Afterward, they empty onto the town's Main Street to peruse the cute locally-owned shops or dine at downtown restaurants, keeping the town buzzing well into the evening hours.

FloydFest has embraced the musical heritage of Floyd and surrounding Southwest Virginia, bridging the gap

between the past and present. Hear everything from Rock and Reggae to Bluegrass and Folk at FloydFest, and in between performances, you can wander the village to engage in arts and crafts, tag along for a guided hike through the Blue Ridge Mountains, attend yoga lessons, or grab a bite from local vendors.

FloydFest has helped draw a fresh crowd to the music scene of Floyd, shining a spotlight on one of Virginia's best hidden gem communities and bringing visitors from all over the world to discover the magic of this mountain town.



Read the full story



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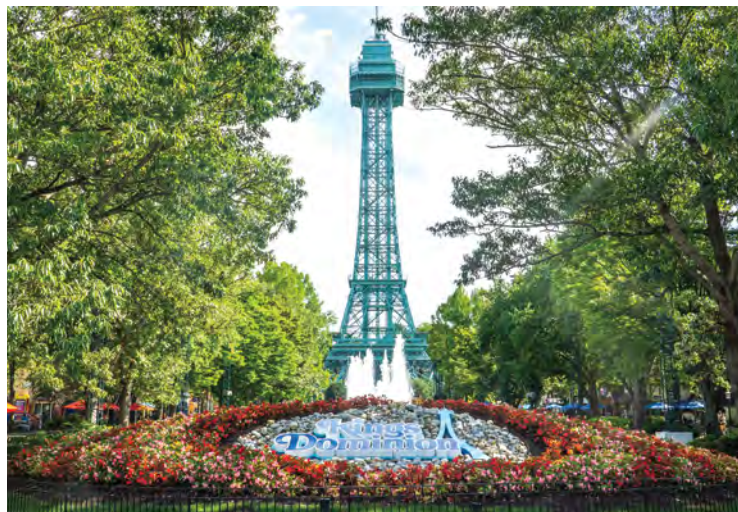

Quick Hits

What's happening in 2025



APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Guardians of the Appalachian Trail have preserved the Trail's rugged beauty and untamed spirit for the last century. In 2025, we recognize their unwavering dedication, honoring a legacy that keeps this legendary path open for discovery, adventure, and connection to nature.



CHINCOTEAGUE PONY SWIM

For 100 years, the Chincoteague Pony Swim has captivated spectators with its stunning display of wild ponies crossing from Assateague to Chincoteague. Celebrate this incredible milestone in 2025 and witness a beloved tradition that's been treasured for generations.

KINGS DOMINION

In 2025, the beloved amusement park will mark its 50th anniversary alongside the debut of Rapterra, the world's tallest and longest launched wing coaster. Riders will conquer the skies with intense launches and sweeping turns, channeling the spirit of the legendary Jungle Hawk! This exciting new ride promises to combine adrenaline and fun for the whole family.



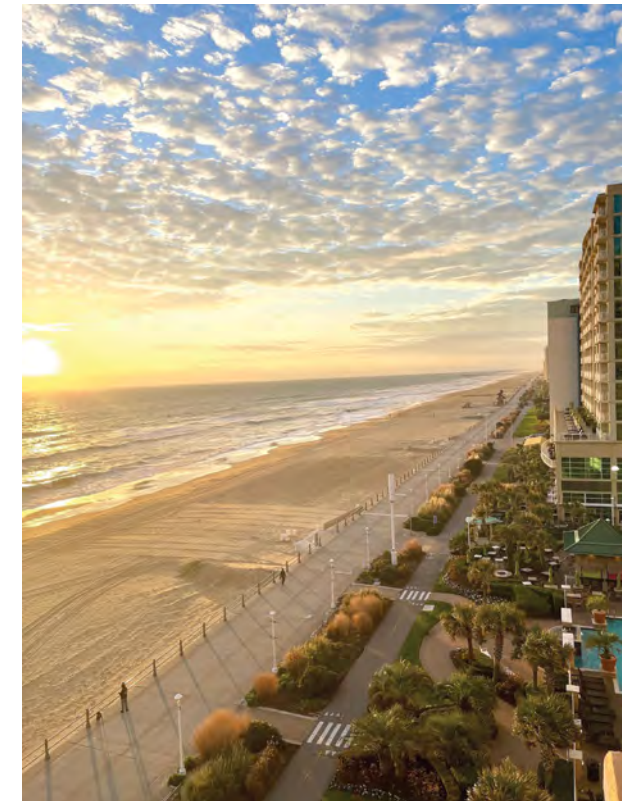
BUSCH GARDENS WILLIAMSBURG

In 2025, the world's most beautiful theme park celebrates 50 years with an all-new thrill, The Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge. Riders will experience over 2,500 feet of track while bolting through the streets of a Bavarian village, as the sound of screams and the echo of a howling wolf creates chaos in a familiar town. Traveling up to 40 miles per hour, riders become the beast on Busch Gardens' all-new family-friendly inverted roller coaster.



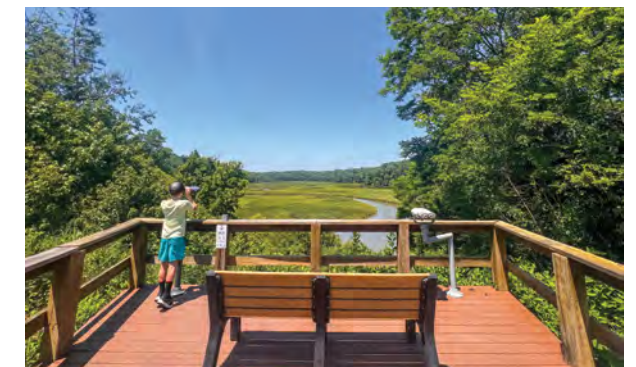
POCAHONTAS REFRAMED FILM FESTIVAL

The Pocahontas Reframed Film Festival, coming into its 9th year this fall, celebrates and raises awareness of Native American language, cultures, and societies through films that share Native American perspectives. The only festival of its kind on the East Coast, this event brings storytellers, screenings, and an artisan market to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Virginia Museum of History and Culture in Richmond, Virginia.



FILMED IN VIRGINIA: ATLANTIS

Grammy-winning icon and two-time Oscar® nominee Pharrell Williams (*Hidden Figures*, *Piece by Piece*) joins forces with Oscar® winner Michel Gondry, the visionary filmmaker of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Science of Sleep* for an extraordinary musical expedition into the summer of 1977 and the Virginia Beach neighborhood inspired by the Atlantis Apartments of Williams' childhood. See the magic of Virginia on the big screen when *Atlantis* comes to theaters in May 2025.



ENCHROMA VIEWFINDERS

Virginia State Parks are the first in the nation to feature EnChroma Viewfinders in every park! These special viewfinders allow colorblind visitors to experience the full spectrum of natural beauty, bringing vibrant landscapes to life in a whole new way. Discover the colors waiting for you!

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