

1

The Best of Virginia

America's first permanent English-speaking colonists had a rough start at Jamestown in 1607, but within a few years the beautiful and bountiful land they called Virginia had greatly rewarded them for their courageous efforts. They first set foot on a sandy Atlantic Ocean beach at Cape Charles, at the mouth of one of the world's great estuaries, the Chesapeake Bay. Beyond them lay a varied, rich, and highly scenic land. They settled beside one of the great tidal rivers whose tributaries led their descendants through the rolling hills of the Piedmont, over the Blue Ridge Mountains, and into the great valleys beyond.

Almost 400 years later, the history-loving Commonwealth of Virginia abounds with historic homes and plantations, buildings that rang with revolutionary oratory, museums that recall the storied past, and small towns that seem little changed since colonial times.

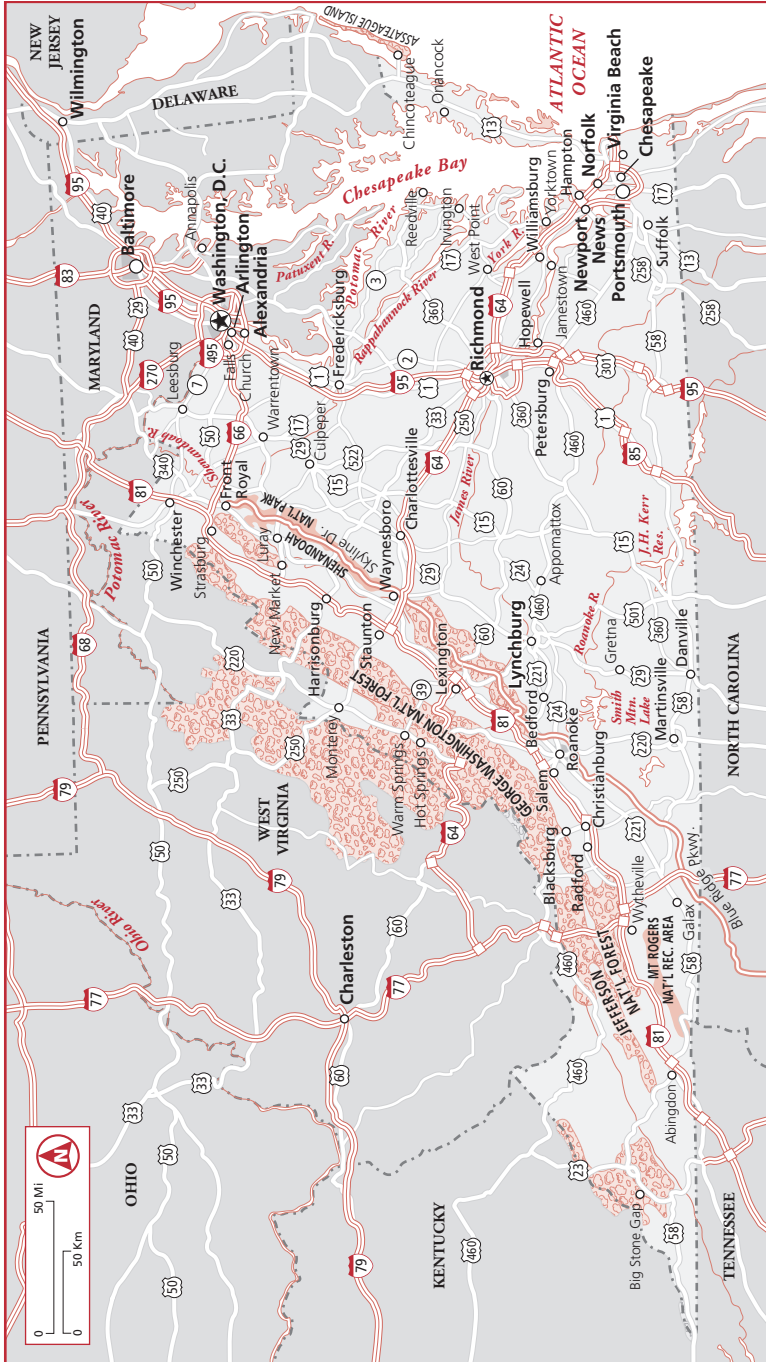
Fortunately, preservation hasn't been limited to historical landmarks. Conservation efforts have kept a great deal of Virginia's wilderness looking much as it did in 1607, making the state a prime destination for lovers of the great outdoors. Whether you like to hike, bike, bird watch, fish, canoe, or boat—or just lie on a sandy beach—Virginia has a place to indulge your passion.

This chapter describes some of the best experiences Virginia has to offer. Bear in mind that it's just an overview, and you'll surely come up with your own “bests” as you travel through the state. Be sure to see the destination chapters later in this book for full details on the places mentioned below.

1 The Best of Colonial Virginia

- **Old Town Alexandria:** Although Alexandria is very much part of metropolitan Washington, D.C., the historic district known as “Old Town” evokes the time when the nation's early leaders strolled its streets and partook of grog at Gadsby's Tavern. See “Alexandria,” in chapter 4.
- **Mount Vernon:** When he wasn't off surveying, fighting in the French and Indian Wars, leading the American Revolution, or serving as our first president, George Washington made his home at a plantation 8 miles south of Alexandria. Restored to look as it was in Washington's day, Mount Vernon is America's second most visited historic home. See “Mount Vernon & the Potomac Plantations,” in chapter 4.
- **Fredericksburg & the Northern Neck:** Not only did the Fredericksburg area play a role in the birth of a nation, it was the birthplace of George Washington, father of the new nation. Also born here was James Monroe, who as president kept European powers out of the Americas by promulgating the Monroe Doctrine. The great Confederate leader Robert E. Lee was born here a generation later. Fredericksburg still retains much of the charm it possessed in those early

Virginia



8 CHAPTER 1 · THE BEST OF VIRGINIA

days, and the birthplaces of Washington and Lee stand not far from town on the Northern Neck. See chapter 5.

- **Charlottesville:** If Washington was the father of the United States, then Thomas Jefferson was its intellectual genius. This scholar, lawyer, writer, and architect built two monuments—his lovely hilltop home, Monticello, and the University of Virginia that still evoke memories of this great thinker and patriot. See chapter 6.
- **Williamsburg, Jamestown & Yorktown:** Known as the Historic Triangle, these three towns are the finest examples of colonial America to be found. Thanks to the Rockefeller family, Colonial Williamsburg has been restored

and rebuilt as it appeared when it was the capital of Virginia in the 18th century. The site of the original Jamestown settlement is now a national historical park, as is Yorktown, where George Washington bottled up Lord Cornwallis and won the American Revolution. See chapter 10.

- **James River Plantations:** Colonists fanning out from Jamestown hacked huge tobacco plantations out of Virginia's forests creating America's first great wealth. Today, you can visit some of their great manses on the James River between Williamsburg and Richmond. Descendants of the colonial planters still occupy some of these mansions. See "James River Plantations" in chapter 10.

2 The Best of Civil War Virginia

When the Civil War broke out in 1861 and the Confederacy moved its capital to Richmond, the state became the prime target of the Union armies. Virginia saw more battles than any other state, as Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia turned back one assault after another. Today's visitor can visit the sites of many key battles, all of them national historical parks.

- **Manassas:** The first battle of the war occurred along Bull Run near Manassas in northern Virginia, and it was a shock to the Union (and thousands of spectators who came from Washington to watch), when the rebels engineered a victory over a disorganized Union force. They won again at the Second Battle of Manassas. See "The Hunt Country," in chapter 4.
- **Fredericksburg:** No other town in Virginia has as many significant battlefields as Fredericksburg. Lee used the Rappahannock River as a natural line of defense, and he fought several battles against Union

armies trying to cross it and advance on Richmond. Today, you can visit the battlefields in town, at Chancellorsville, and the Wilderness in a day. See chapter 5.

- **Appomattox Court House:** After the fall of Petersburg in 1865, Lee fled for little more than a week until realizing that continuing the war was fruitless. On April 9, he met Grant at Wilbur McLean's farmhouse and surrendered his sword. America's bloodiest conflict was over. The farmhouse is preserved as part of Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. See "What to See & Do," in Charlottesville, chapter 6.
- **New Market:** While Lee was fending off the Union near Fredericksburg, the war flowed up and down the Shenandoah Valley, the Confederacy's breadbasket. The town of Winchester changed hands 72 times. Perhaps the war's most poignant battlefield is at New Market, where the corps of cadets from Virginia Military Institute helped

stop a larger Union force. Ten of the teenagers were killed, and 47 wounded. See “New Market: A Civil War Battlefield,” in chapter 7.

- **Richmond:** The capital of the Confederacy, Richmond is loaded with reminders of the conflict, including the magnificent Museum of the Confederacy and its adjacent White House of the Confederacy, home of Pres. Jefferson Davis. The city’s Monument Avenue is lined with statues of the rebel leaders. Now suburbs, the city’s eastern outskirts are ringed with battle sites,

part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. See chapter 9.

- **Petersburg:** After nearly 4 years of frustration trying to capture Richmond, Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant bypassed the southern capital in 1864 and headed for the railroad junction of Petersburg, the lifeline of the Confederate capital. Even there he was forced into a siege situation, but finally, in April of 1865, Grant broke through and forced Lee into retreat westward. See “An Easy Excursion to Petersburg,” in chapter 9.

3 The Best of the Great Outdoors

Virginia has hundreds of thousands of acres of natural beauty preserved in national and state parks, national forests, and recreation areas. Especially in the mountains, you can find more than 1,000 miles of trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. The Chesapeake Bay offers boating and fishing, and the Atlantic beaches are among the best on the East Coast.

- **Shenandoah National Park:** Nearly two million visitors a year venture into the Shenandoah National Park, which straddles the Blue Ridge Mountains from Front Royal to Rockfish Gap between Charlottesville and Waynesboro. Many visitors merely drive along the 105-mile Skyline Drive, one of America’s most scenic routes. Others come to walk some of the more than 500 miles of hiking trails, including 101 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Many trails start at the Skyline Drive and drop down into hollows and canyons, some of them with waterfalls. Even on the Skyline Drive, you are likely to encounter deer, and you might even see bear, bobcat, and wild turkey. See “Shenandoah National Park & the Skyline Drive,” in chapter 7.

- **Running the Rivers** (Front Royal, Luray, Lexington, Richmond): The South Fork of the Shenandoah River twists and turns its way between the valley towns of Front Royal and Luray, making it a perfect place for river rafting, canoeing, and kayaking—or just floating along in an inner tube. The James River can be swift and turbulent as it crosses the Shenandoah Valley, cuts through the Blue Ridge Mountains, and courses its way across the Piedmont to Hampton Roads. Depending on the amount of rain, you can even raft down the James through metropolitan Richmond. See chapters 7 and 8.

- **Mount Rogers National Recreation Area:** While you won’t be alone in Shenandoah National Park, you could have a hiking, biking, horseback-riding, or cross-country skiing trail all to yourself in Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. This wild land in the Southwest Highlands occupies some 117,000 acres of forest, and includes its namesake, Virginia’s highest peak. Two of Virginia’s finest rails-to-trails hiking, biking, and riding paths serve as bookends to the 60-mile-long recreation area: the New River Trail

10 CHAPTER 1 · THE BEST OF VIRGINIA

near Wytheville, and the Virginia Creeper Trail, from Abingdon to White Top Mountain. See “Mount Rogers National Recreation Area,” in chapter 8.

- **Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge/False Cape State Park** (Virginia Beach): You can’t sunbathe or swim on the beach of Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, but you can hike through the dunes or take a canoe into the marshes, which are on the Atlantic Flyway for migrating birds. You can sunbathe and swim at the adjoining False Cape State Park, but it’s so out of the way that you’ll have to bring your own drinking water.

See “Parks & Wildlife Refuges” in chapter 11.

- **Assateague Island:** Of all the natural areas in Virginia, none surpasses Assateague, which keeps the Atlantic Ocean from the back bays of Chincoteague. Here you will find the famous wild ponies in Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, and relatively tame humans strolling along some 37 miles of pristine beach. Assateague Island is also situated directly on the Atlantic Flyway, making it one of the best bird-watching sites in the country. See “Chincoteague & Assateague Islands,” in chapter 11.

4 The Best Scenic Drives

One of the best ways to see Virginia is by car: the Old Dominion has some of America’s most beautiful scenic drives.

- **George Washington Memorial Parkway** (Northern Virginia): Stay away during rush hour, when it becomes a major commuter artery into and out of Washington, D.C.,. But any other time, the “G.W. Parkway” is a great drive along the Potomac River from I-495 at the Maryland line to Mount Vernon. The river views of Washington’s monuments are unparalleled. See “A Scenic Drive Along the Potomac River,” in chapter 4.
- **Skyline Drive** (Shenandoah National Park): Few roads anywhere can top the Skyline Drive, which twists and turns 105 miles along the Blue Ridge crest in Shenandoah National Park. The views over the rolling Piedmont to the east and Shenandoah Valley to the west are spectacular, especially during spring, when the wildflowers are in bloom, and in fall, when the leaves change from green to brilliant hues of rust, orange, and yellow. See “Shenandoah National

Park & the Skyline Drive,” in chapter 7.

- **Lexington to Hot Springs:** While I-81 runs down the floor of Virginia’s great valleys, other roads offer a different scenic treat by cutting across the mountains. One of these is Va. 39, which runs from Lexington to Hot Springs via the Goshen Pass, a picturesque gorge cut by the Maury River. You can make a loop by continuing north from Hot Springs via U.S. 220 to the beautiful village of Monterey in “Virginia’s Switzerland.” From Monterey, you can cross the mountains via U.S. 250 to Staunton and I-81. See chapter 7.
- **Blue Ridge Parkway:** A continuation of the Skyline Drive, this road continues along the Blue Ridge crest south to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. Of the 218 miles in Virginia, the most scenic are north of Roanoke. You’ll find it difficult to keep your eyes on the road, as the parkway often runs right along the ridgeline, with views down both sides of the

mountain at once. See “The Blue Ridge Parkway,” in chapter 8.

- **Colonial Parkway:** It’s not long, but the Colonial Parkway between Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown has its scenic merits, especially the views of the James River near Jamestown and of the York River near Yorktown. The parkway goes through a tunnel

under the heart of Colonial Williamsburg. See chapter 10.

- **Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel:** A man-made wonder, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel runs for 17 miles over—and under—the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay between Norfolk and the Eastern Shore. You can barely see land when you’re in the middle. See chapter 11.

5 The Best Small Towns

Virginia’s many lovely small towns capture and nurture the state’s history and culture. This is especially true in the Shenandoah Valley, where the Valley Pike, then U.S. 11, and now I-81 string together Winchester, Strasburg, Staunton, and Lexington, all possessed of 18th- and 19th-century brick and stone buildings.

- **Middleburg:** The self-proclaimed capital of Virginia’s Hunt Country, Middleburg takes up barely 6 blocks along U.S. 50, small enough to be digested in an afternoon. Some of the world’s wealthiest individuals keep their horses near Middleburg, and the town has a host of upscale shops in buildings dating from the 1700s. See “The Hunt Country,” in chapter 4.
- **Monterey:** Over Shenandoah and Bull Pasture Mountains from Staunton, the village of Monterey appears more like New England than Virginia, with its white churches and clapboard homes in a picturesque valley. Thousands of visitors make the trek over the mountains to the annual Highland Maple Festival in March. See “Over the Mountains to Monterey,” in chapter 7.
- **Staunton:** There’s Shakespeare to be seen at the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, an old railroad town that was formerly most

famous as President Woodrow Wilson’s birthplace. The replica of The Bard’s 17th-century indoor theater has spurred a downtown renaissance, with new restaurants and shops opening all the time. A don’t-miss for kids, the Frontier Culture Museum is here, too. See “Staunton: A Presidential Birthplace with The Bard’s Playhouse,” in chapter 7.

- **Lexington:** One of America’s best small towns, Lexington has a lively college atmosphere in addition to a host of historical sights. It’s home to Virginia Military Institute (VMI), where Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson taught; its students went off to the Civil War at New Market. Afterwards, Robert E. Lee came here as president of Washington College, now Washington and Lee University. VMI was also the alma mater of Gen. George C. Marshall, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. Jackson, Lee, and Marshall are buried here, and the town has three museums dedicated to these leaders. Lexington’s downtown looks so much like it did when Jackson and Lee were here that only dirt had to be added to Main Street’s pavement for the film *Sommersby*. See “Lexington: A College Town

12 CHAPTER 1 · THE BEST OF VIRGINIA

with a Slice of American History,” in chapter 7.

- **Abingdon:** Daniel Boone opened Virginia’s Southwest Highlands to settlement in the 1770s, and a thriving town grew up at Abingdon. Homes and buildings dating to 1779 line Main Street, making

it a wonderful place to stroll. The town’s beauty has attracted artists, craftspeople, and actors, who perform at the Barter Theatre, where you can still barter for a ticket. See “Abingdon: A Town with Beauty & Charm,” in chapter 8.

6 The Best Family Vacations

A vast majority of Virginia’s visitors arrive by car, and most of them are families. Accordingly, the state’s major attractions and resorts are well equipped to entertain and care for children. It’s a great place for kids to learn about American history, while enjoying a good time at the beach or one of three major amusement parks.

- **Shenandoah National Park:** Two lodges in the most popular part of Shenandoah National Park make this a great place for family vacations. The kids can participate in ranger programs, hike to waterfalls, or go for a pony ride in the mountain forests. See “Shenandoah National Park & the Skyline Drive,” in chapter 7.
- **Richmond:** The state capital has several attractions of interest to children, including the hands-on Science Museum of Virginia. The big draws, however, are the wild rides and movie and TV characters at the huge Paramount’s Kings Dominion amusement park north of the city. See chapter 9.
- **Colonial Williamsburg:** The historic area of Colonial Williamsburg is the best place of all for children to get a quick lesson in American history. On the streets, they might run into Thomas Jefferson (actually, an

actor) and have a conversation about the Declaration of Independence, or practice marching and drilling with the 18th-century militia. As soon as they get bored, head for Busch Gardens Williamsburg or Water Country USA, two nearby theme parks. See chapter 10.

- **Virginia Beach:** First there’s the beach, 4 miles or so, with lifeguards during summer—but that’s not all. Rainy days can be spent at the local Virginia Marine Science Museum—the state’s most popular museum. Norfolk’s NAUTICUS, Hampton’s Virginia Air and Space Center, and Colonial Williamsburg are all just short drives away. See chapter 11.
- **Chincoteague & Assateague Islands:** The fishing village was the setting for Marguerite Henry’s classic children’s book *Misty of Chincoteague*, and there are plenty of wild horses (called “ponies”) in Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on Assateague Island, which also has a lifeguarded beach for swimming during the summer. The best time to see the horses is during the annual pony swim the last week in July, but the kids can ride one in a small equestrian center. See “Chincoteague & Assateague Islands,” in chapter 11.

7 The Most Unusual Virginia Travel Experiences

A museum devoted to hounds, a stalactite organ, an 18th-century version of today’s Jacuzzi, a stuffed horse, and

a cruise to Elizabethan times all make for unusual travel in Virginia.

- **Tally Ho!** (Leesburg): The Hunt Country gets its name from the hounds, horses, and very wealthy people who hunt foxes for sport here. You can learn all about the history of this aristocratic pastime at Leesburg's Morven Park, home to the Museum of Hounds and Hunting. See p. 93.
- **Chimes Down Under** (Luray): There are several caverns under the Shenandoah Valley, but one of the most fascinating is at Luray. Through subterranean rooms more than 140 feet high comes beautiful music—in the form of hammers striking million-year-old stalactites. See “Luray: An Underground Organ,” in chapter 7.
- **Ancient Hot Tubs** (Warm Springs): Eighteenth-century travelers couldn't climb into the Jacuzzi after a rough day on the road—unless, that is, they pulled into Warm Springs. Since 1761, travelers have slipped their weary bodies into these natural rock pools whose waters range from 94°F to 104°F (34°C–40°C). You can, too. See “Warm Springs & Hot Springs: Taking the Waters,” in chapter 7.
- **Mounting Little Sorrel** (Lexington): After he died of wounds accidentally inflicted by his own men at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Gen. Stonewall Jackson was buried in Lexington, where he had taught at Virginia Military Institute. One of the exhibits at VMI's museum is the bullet-pierced raincoat Jackson was wearing that disastrous night. And thanks to taxidermy, there stands the hide of his warhorse, Little Sorrel. Nearby, Robert E. Lee's horse, Traveller, is buried just outside Lee Chapel, his master's resting place. See p. 181.
- **Hoi Toide Tonoit** (Tangier Island): Out in the Chesapeake Bay sits remote Tangier Island, whose residents have been so isolated that they still speak with the Elizabethan brogue of their forebears. Out here, “high tide tonight” is pronounced *hoi toide tonoit*—as in “hoity-toity”—and narrow 17th-century lanes barely can accommodate modern automobiles. Cruises leave from the Northern Neck and the Eastern Shore. See chapters 5 and 11.

8 The Best Country Inns

With all of its old homes and gorgeous countryside, it's no wonder that Virginia is a hotbed of country inns and bed-and-breakfasts. Some have been in business since colonial times, and a few are among the best around. Our picks barely touch the surface.

- **Red Fox Inn** (Middleburg): In the center of tiny Middleburg, this rambling inn maintains the romantic charm of early Virginia in its original 1728 stone structure. There's a cozy dining room downstairs and a lively sports bar across the street. See p. 100.
- **Hope and Glory Inn** (Irvington): The state's most fascinating country inn occupies a converted 1890s school house, and it has charming cottages in the garden, but what really sets it apart is an outdoor bathroom complete with clawfoot tub. That's right: It's outdoors, albeit surrounded by a stockade fence. See p. 120.
- **Inn at Little Washington** (Washington): For the best, you need look no further than the Blue Ridge foothill village of Washington, which everyone in Virginia calls “Little Washington.” An English decorator designed the rooms here, but it's the romantic restaurant that draws the most raves, as co-owner

14 CHAPTER 1 • THE BEST OF VIRGINIA

and chef Patrick O'Connell relies on regional products to produce wonderful French cuisine. See p. 160.

- **Fort Lewis Lodge** (Millboro): One of Virginia's most unusual inns, the Fort Lewis Lodge occupies an old mill and rebuilt barn on a farm beside the Cowpasture River, just over the mountain from Warm Springs. A spiral staircase ascends to three rooms inside the old silo, and there are two log cabins with their own fireplaces. It's a great place to show urban

kids a bit of farm life in beautiful surroundings. See p. 176.

- **Martha Washington Inn** (Abingdon): Gracing Abingdon's historic district, the center portion of this Greek Revival inn was built as a private home in 1832—and as if to prove it, the plank floors creak loudly as you enter the gracious lobby. You can sit in white-wicker rocking chairs on the front porch and watch the traffic on Main Street—or imagine Daniel Boone's dogs being attacked by wolves nearby. See p. 210.

9 The Best Luxury Accommodations

With deep enough pockets, you can enjoy some of the Mid-Atlantic's best luxury accommodations in Virginia.

- **Relais & Chateau Morrison House** (Alexandria): More like a country inn in the middle of Old Town Alexandria, this small, luxurious hotel isn't that old, but it looks exactly like the Federal period homes surrounding it. The dining is marvelous. See p. 74.
- **The Tides Inn** (Irvington): After a multi-million dollar renovation, The Tides Inn once again stands among Virginia's elite resorts. The style is now more British raj than Old Virginny, but the facilities are first-rate, including a spa with treatment rooms overlooking Carter's Creek. The golf course has been improved, too. See p. 121.
- **The Boar's Head Inn** (Charlottesville): A 19th-century gristmill serves as the centerpiece of this lakeside resort, on the outskirts of Charlottesville, and lends ancient charm to the Old Mill dining room, one of the best places to sample Virginia wines without trekking to the vineyards. Modern amenities include a full-service spa and access to Charlottesville's best-equipped sports club. See p. 126.
- **The Homestead** (Hot Springs): Outstanding service, fine cuisine, and a myriad of activities denote this grand old establishment, in business since Thomas Jefferson's day. In fact, Jefferson was the first of seven presidents to stay here. The Homestead offers accommodations ranging from standard rooms to plush suites. PGA pro Lanny Wadkins presides over its golf course, one of Virginia's finest. See p. 174.
- **Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center** (Roanoke): The grand, Tudor-style Hotel Roanoke stood in a wheat field when the Norfolk & Western Railroad built it in 1882. It was closed in 1989, but a \$45-million renovation completely restored its grand public areas to their original appearance and rebuilt all its rooms to modern standards. See p. 197.
- **Jefferson Hotel** (Richmond): A stunning beaux arts landmark with Renaissance-style balconies and an Italian clock tower, the Jefferson was opened in 1895 by a wealthy Richmonder who wanted his city to have one of America's finest hotels. A complete 1980s restoration renewed its original splendor. See p. 220.

- **Williamsburg Inn:** An establishment with three fine golf courses, the Williamsburg Inn was built as part of the Colonial Williamsburg restoration, but looks like it might have been here in 1750. If staying

in the main inn with its superb service and cuisine won't do, you can opt for one of the restored houses and taverns that have been converted into accommodations. See p. 261.

10 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

Virginia has too many fine, affordable lodgings to mention them all here. The following are some we like best:

- **Holiday Inn Select Old Town** (Alexandria): One of the finest Holiday Inns, this colonial-style brick building occupies an entire block in the heart of Alexandria's historic Old Town. It looks like it's been there forever. See p. 74.
- **Norris House Inn** (Leesburg): Built in 1806, this charming house offers comfortable lodging right in the middle of Leesburg's historic district. See p. 97.
- **Richard Johnston Inn** (Fredericksburg): Elegantly appointed rooms await in these two 18th-century homes across from historic Fredericksburg's visitors center. See p. 111.
- **Belle Grae Inn** (Staunton): Michael Organ gave up teaching at Mary Baldwin College in the

1980s to convert an 1873 hilltop Victorian house into an inn. Today his establishment includes houses ringing an entire block, all of them beautifully restored and furnished with period pieces. The cuisine is the best in town. See p. 169.

- **Hampton Inn Col Alto** (Lexington): No ordinary Hampton Inn, Col Alto is an 1827 manor house converted into a comfortable B&B-type hotel. Even if you stay in the modern motel buildings next door, you'll eat your continental breakfast in the period dining room. See p. 183.
- **Linden Row Inn** (Richmond): This row of Victorian-era town houses in downtown Richmond has been renovated but not restored, which has left the rooms with 12-foot ceilings, a mix of late Empire and Victorian pieces, and marble-top dressers. See p. 221.

11 The Best Inexpensive Accommodations

Virginia has many clean, comfortable motels of the budget chain variety. But for something a little more special, check out the following choices:

- **Big Meadows & Skyland Lodges** (Shenandoah National Park): With stunning views from perches atop the Blue Ridge Mountains, these two rustic but charming inns are surprisingly affordable. Just be sure to reserve as early as possible. See p. 150.
- **Fredericksburg Colonial Inn** (Fredericksburg): Don't be surprised to see Blues and Grays toting

Civil War rifles in the lobby; this place is very popular with reenactors. An avid collector, the owner has laden the rooms with antiques. See p. 110.

- **Roseloe Motel** (Hot Springs): You don't have to pay a fortune to stay at the Homestead—head 3 miles north to the Roseloe, a clean family operation across U.S. 220 from the Garth Newel Chamber Music Center. Warm Springs is a short drive, and you can pay much less than the cost of a room to use the Homestead's recreational facilities. See p. 175.

Fun Fact Virginia's Gourmet Contributions

Author William Styron, a native of Newport News, once said that the French consider salt-cured Virginia hams to be America's only gourmet contribution to the world's cuisine. Virginians love their ham (especially stuffed into hot biscuits), and they are also crazy about rockfish (sea bass) and crabs from the Chesapeake Bay and shad and trout from the rivers. Virginia's farms produce a plethora of vegetables, and its orchards are famous for apples. And let's not forget the peanut, one of Virginia's major crops, which has been used in soup since colonial times!

- **Colony House Motor Lodge** (Roanoke): This older, but clean and very well maintained motel, is convenient to both downtown Roanoke and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Doors to the rooms have louvers to let in fresh air but not light—an unusual touch for any inexpensive hotel. See p. 197.
- **Angie's Guest Cottage and HI-USA Hostel** (Virginia Beach): You won't find any luxuries but you will have an interesting mix of guests at one of Virginia's few youth hostels. Those who don't care for dorm-style accommodations can stay in one of the comfortable, spotlessly clean private rooms. See p. 308.

12 The Best Culinary Experiences

You can dine on all types of cuisine in Virginia, but the highlights are produced from recipes handed down since colonial times—dishes such as peanut soup and Sally Lunn bread—or that put a modern spin on fresh local ingredients. Here are some of the best places to sample Virginia's unique and very historic cuisine.

- **Gadsby's Tavern** (Alexandria): George Washington said good-bye to his troops from the door of Gadsby's Tavern in Alexandria's Old Town. This former rooming house and the tavern next door look much as they did then, and a waitstaff in colonial garb still serve chicken roasted on an open fire, buttermilk pie, and other dishes from that period. See p. 76.
- **Inn at Little Washington** (Washington): Chef Patrick O'Connell constantly changes his menu to take advantage of trout, Chesapeake Bay seafood, Virginia hams, and other local delicacies in his romantic dining room. The service at Virginia's finest restaurant is wonderfully attentive and unobtrusive. See p. 160.
- **Mrs. Rowe's Restaurant and Bakery** (Staunton): Every town has its favorite "local" restaurant, where you can clog your arteries with old Southern favorites like pan-fried chicken, sausage gravy over biscuits, and fresh vegetables seasoned with smoked pork and cooked to smithereens. In business since 1947, Mrs. Rowe's somehow manages to cook the golden oldies without all the lard you'll ingest elsewhere. See p. 171.
- **Roanoker Restaurant** (Roanoke): Another favorite "local," the Roanoker regularly changes its menu to take advantage of the freshest vegetables available, but every day it serves the best biscuits in Virginia, hot from the oven. See p. 200.
- **The Log House 1776 Restaurant** (Wytheville): The name is appropriate at this restaurant, part

of which is contained in a log house built in 1776. Here you can order Thomas Jefferson's favorite, chicken marengo, or a very sweet Confederate beef-and-apple stew like the one Robert E. Lee fed his troops. See p. 204.

- **King's Barbecue** (Petersburg): Like all Southerners, Virginians love their smoked pork barbecue, and it doesn't get any better than at the two branches of King's. Pork, beef, ribs, and chicken roast constantly over an open pit right in the dining rooms, and the sauce is served on the side, not soaking the succulent meat and overpowering its smoked flavor. See p. 242.
- **Trellis Cafe, Restaurant & Grill** (Williamsburg): Chef Marcel Desaulniers has been nationally recognized for his outstanding regional cuisine, all of which emphasizes fresh local produce. Desaulniers has written three cookbooks, including *Death by Chocolate*. They don't raise cocoa in Virginia, but you can definitely die by it here. See p. 268.
- **Old Chickahominy House** (Williamsburg): Named for a nearby river, this reconstructed, antiques-filled 18th-century house is one of the best places to sample traditional Virginia fare, such as Brunswick stew and Virginia ham on hot biscuits. See p. 269.
- **Todd Jurich's Bistro** (Norfolk): Actor Donald Sutherland and other famous folk frequent this bistro, where chef Todd Jurich uses produce from local farms that practice "ecologically sound agriculture." See p. 295.
- **Cora** (Norfolk): Chef Nancy Cobb blends grits, okra, and other local products with more fancy items in her "creative Southern" cuisine. She even offers a version of her father's hearty "fishmuddle" seafood stew. See p. 295.
- **Lynnhaven Fish House** (Virginia Beach): Wonderful water views accompany some of the state's finest seafood at this restaurant built on a fishing pier over the Chesapeake Bay. See p. 311.