

Sand softer than silk, great fishes in the surf, dramatic sunrises over the ocean, acres upon acres of secluded wetlands, bright, colorful shops and warm, friendly people: this is Virginia Beach, the largest city in Virginia, a resort community for families and corporations alike.

Uniquely positioned at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay where it connects with the Atlantic Ocean, Virginia Beach offers its guests access to some of the finest saltwater fishing in the world. The marshes to the west and south provide outstanding waterfowl habitat, and the brackish rivers leading to the Bay give up good numbers of largemouth bass.

The home of the elegant Cavalier Hotel, frequented by presidents and movie

stars, Virginia Beach is an epicurean Mecca, receiving fresh seafood daily from the bounty of the Bay and the ocean. Great restaurants abound. Lush golf courses, sprawling wildlife refuges, pristine state parks, stately yachts and sleek sailboats, Virginia Beach has it all. When the Virginia Sportsman says “the beach,” he means Virginia Beach, a jewel in the royal crown of Virginia’s outdoor resources.

The History

In December 1606, three ships set sail from England, heading for the New Country, hoping to find fame and riches. In April 1607, the contingency spotted land. The first Virginia Beach tourists were about to arrive. The commander of the party, Captain Christopher Newport,

brought thirty men ashore only to find that the Virginia Beach welcoming committee was not nearly so hospitable as it is today. Hostile Indians, in fact, wounded two of Newport’s men, who retreated quickly, back to the ships. On April 29, the early explorers crafted a wooden cross, most likely from a native oak tree, and sunk it at a place they called Cape Henry. Later the colonists would move up the James River and establish a settlement at Jamestown, but it was at Virginia Beach where American history, as Virginia knows it, would begin. In 1935 the Daughters of the American Colonists erected the Memorial Cross, which stands today as a reminder of the first *Crosse at Chesupioc Bay* planted by their forefathers nearly four centuries prior.



The Cavalier Hotel on Atlantic Avenue and 42nd Street



Destination Virginia Beach

By
Jim Brewer

In 1781 during the American Revolution, a major naval battle took place off Virginia Beach as 24 French warships trapped the British fleet of 9 ships and delivered enough damage to send the Brits heading north for repairs. Without adequate naval support, Lord Cornwallis would later cede victory to the Americans at Yorktown.

Entering the 20th century, Virginia Beach was a quiet coastal village, a resort for the well-heeled. The

population in Virginia Beach at the turn of the century was probably no more than a thousand. For many years, Virginia Beach was a two-street town, Atlantic and Pacific avenues. It was in the early 60's, when Virginia Beach politicians out-flanked their rivals to the south and north and annexed huge chunks of land, that the town exploded into the cosmopolitan city it has become. With a population today of a half-million, Virginia Beach has arrived.



The Cavalier Hotel

Much of the modern history of Virginia Beach is intertwined with the construction and subsequent success of the Cavalier Hotel. When the Princess Anne Hotel burned in 1907, there were no luxury hotels remaining at Virginia Beach. In 1924, a group of Norfolk businessmen issued public stock in what was called the Virginia Beach Resort and Hotel Corporation. Soon after, sixty acres centered on what is now Atlantic Avenue and 42nd Street was purchased. Three years and \$1.5 million later, the Cavalier Hotel was completed. As the season opened in the spring of 1927, a grand ceremony marked the birth of the hotel, which at the time was considered to be the “finest hotel in existence on the entire East Coast.” After 77 years, it still is.

The Cavalier is actually two hotels in one. The Historic Cavalier on the Hill sits a long block off the beach, at its original location built on one of the far dunes. The Cavalier on the Ocean, with 300 rooms, is an 11-story beachfront structure with the best views in town. Tourists seem to prefer the beach location in the summer, but flock to the Historic Cavalier with 100 rooms each fall. Over the years, many famous people have enjoyed the extraordinary service and amenities of the Virginia Beach landmark. Presidents Coolidge, Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon all spent at least a night or two at the Cavalier along with notable stars and celebrities to include Nelson Eddy, Rosemary Clooney, Rudy Vallee, Johnny Weismuller, Fatty Arbuckle, Judy Garland, Betty Davis, Bob Hope, George Jessel, Arthur Murray, Elizabeth Taylor and many, many more.

From the 1930’s through the 1950’s, Virginia Beach was noted for dancing, parties and big bands, and the Cavalier Hotel brought in the best of the best. Some recognizable names include

Sammy Kaye, Les Brown, Benny Goodman, Vaughn Monroe, Xavier Cugat, Glen Miller, the Dorseys, Guy Lombardo, a fellow named Sinatra and a scat singer named Ella. The Cavalier came to symbolize affluence and the finest in service, food and entertainment.

The Dixon family of Buckingham County has owned the Cavalier for the past 40 years. Director of Sales and Marketing, Cliff Myers, confirms that not many hotels like the Cavalier exist today. “It is rare to find a privately held hotel these days,” Cliff remarked of the Virginia Beach landmark, which was recently selected as one of the “Historic Hotels of America” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The historic Hunt Room Grill, where President Nixon and others cozied up to the huge fireplace, and the Pocahontas Dining Room are both filled with history and nostalgia.

“The Cavalier is a hidden secret,” Myers added. “It represents a tremendous value: a beach resort and a step back to yesterday. It’s the hotel that made Virginia Beach famous.”

The Fish

There is no finer saltwater fishing available than that found at Virginia Beach. Whether in the Bay, back in the creeks, inshore or offshore, saltwater buffs have more opportunities at a wider variety of fish than at any other location, certainly on the East Coast, if not worldwide. Claude Bain of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission notes that the location of Virginia Beach is truly unique.

“The strength of Virginia Beach is all related to geography,” Claude remarked. “Located as it is at the confluence of the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic, and just north of where the Gulf Stream and Labrador Currents meet,



Chelsea Burch and her catch of the day



Tuna

Claude Bain with Striped Bass





Rudee Inlet

Virginia Beach becomes an ideal fishing grounds.”

Virginia Beach is also the southernmost point where many fish from the north will migrate and the northernmost point for numerous species traveling from the south. Tautog, sea bass and rockfish, all northern species, seldom go much farther south, though rockfish will winter off the North Carolina coast. Cobia and Spanish mackerel are southern species that rarely venture north of the Virginia coast. As a result, one of the broadest mixes of fish anywhere exists within an easy boat ride off the Virginia Beach marinas.

Bain went on to say that the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay at Virginia Beach has the widest range of water temperatures on the East Coast. “In the winter, the temperatures drop as low as 36 or 38 degrees,” Claude noted, “while in the summer they climb into the 80’s. This brings numerous species of fish into the Bay, yet very few species live here year round.”

One species that makes Virginia Beach its home throughout the year is the rockfish, or striped bass. Unless water temperatures become exceedingly cold, the *rocks* hang off the Bay Bridge Tunnel year round, and when they do leave, it’s generally only to go a few miles out into the ocean where anglers have access to trophy-sized fish all year. Sea bassin’ off the wrecks in cold weather is a Virginia Beach specialty, and tautogs also bite well when the thermometer drops. Bluefish make an appearance at the mouth of the Bay and off the Virginia Coast around April, sometimes earlier. Voracious feeders, blues give a good account of themselves no matter their size, but when one of those ‘gator sized bluefish grabs a big Clarke spoon, it’s every man for himself.

Flatfish, the flounders, show up each spring when water temperatures approach 50 degrees. In recent years, Virginia Beach flounder have reached huge proportions. “We had to raise the citation size to 7 pounds,” Claude stated. “Even so, we have issued over 500 cita-

tions for flounders over 7 pounds through the first half of 2004.” After the flounder arrive, the bottom fish move in. The whiting, spot, croakers, pigfish, silver perch, blow fish, pompano and sheepshead combine to provide steady action from spring until late fall. A Virginia Beach angler caught a 19-pound sheepshead, a new Virginia record, in July of this year. Other game fish available to anglers out of Virginia Beach include spadefish, speckled trout, gray trout, cobia, red drum and black drum. The latter three species can reach weights of 100 pounds or more. A variety of sharks ply the coastal waters of Virginia offering sporting opportunities and good eating too.

In the ocean, amberjack are plentiful off the Virginia Beach coast. A powerful opponent at the end of a rod, amberjack can exceed 100 pounds but are generally caught in the 30 to 60 pound range. Big king mackerel also come close to the Virginia Beach shore when the Gulf Stream eases west.

Blue water boats enjoy some of the finest tuna fishing anywhere with big-eye, yellowfin and bluefin all available. The bigeye tuna often exceed 100 pounds, and bluefins can weigh 1,000 pounds or more. Other tuna-related species available to Virginia anglers include albacore, bonito, and the little tunny. Dolphin, or mahi-mahi, to 80 pounds are found offshore near floating weedlines or most any surface cover. The dolphin feed heavily on flying fish in the surface and can be caught readily with fly rods. These iridescent beauties are unequaled leapers and are excellent table fare. Wahoo to 100 pounds and more also make formidable opponents and are good to eat as well.

Billfishing off Virginia Beach is



Dimitri and wife Josée are owners of Bubba's Restaurant and Bubba's Marina on Shore Drive at Lynnhaven Inlet.

first rate with sailfish to 100 pounds, white marlin to 150, and blue marlin to 1,000 pounds or greater. Other species encountered by Virginia Beach anglers include blue runners, jack crevalle and even tarpon off the Eastern Shore.

But Virginia Beach anglers do not need to venture 50 miles offshore to catch fish. Many are available in the surf and especially in the inlets. Surf casters are likely to catch most anything – from a 60-pound cobia to a tasty 12-ounce pompano. The most common species caught include flounder, croaker, whiting, spot, trout, rockfish, puppy drum, bluefish, pompano and Spanish mackerel. Back in the inlets,

both Rudee and Lynnhaven, anglers catch speckled trout, flounder, puppy drum and a wide variety of bottom fish. Though most are unaware, the brackish rivers leading to Virginia Beach provide excellent largemouth action and unparalleled scenery. The Northwest River, the North River and North Landing River are all superior bass waters.

Virginia Beach. Whether freshwater, offshore, inshore, in the surf or in the Bay, as Claude Bain says, "It's ideal fishing grounds."

The People Dimitri Hionis

Dimitri Hionis is a restaurateur, and a fisherman. The owner of Bubba's

Originally from Greece, Dimitri has been fishing and cooking "all his life." His specialty is crab cakes, made with backfin crabmeat and very little filler. Just enough to hold the cakes together. Throughout the day, hungry fishermen and recreational boaters tie up to the docks at Bubba's and come in for a hot fish sandwich, a thick burger or any number of sandwiches, steaks or seafood entrees.

When the water temperature gets hot at the mouth of the Bay, Dimitri goes fishing. "At 90 degrees, the spadefish and sheepshead come to the surface," he says. Bubba's is one of a very few restaurants where guests can dine on fresh sheepshead, a true saltwater delicacy. But that's only if the sheepshead are biting,

Larry Blum of Atkinson Realty shows how much property value has risen since he has been in Virginia Beach.



Restaurant and Bubba's Marina, located on Shore Drive at Lynnhaven Inlet, Dimitri came to Virginia Beach in 1988. "I love it here," he said. "It has been a great place for a restaurant, to start a family and raise my three daughters."

Dimitri comes to work by boat every day along the Western Branch of Lynnhaven Inlet and often works in his boat, catching fresh fish for his guests at Bubba's Restaurant. A 200-seat restaurant with indoor and outdoor tables, Bubba's also hosts many private parties in their upstairs room. It's a rehearsal dinner favorite for many residents of Virginia Beach.

since Dimitri catches his own. On the 4th of July, Dimitri had a truly unusual catch, a 42-pound male rockfish. That size is not unusual for females, but it is almost unheard of to catch a male that large, particularly in the middle of summer.

Dimitri and his wife Josée have adapted easily to the lifestyle at Virginia Beach. "We came here to be near the water," he said. "It's a beautiful place. My three daughters all work here, and the fishing is wonderful."

Larry Blum

In the late 60's, Larry Blum moved to Virginia Beach and started build-

ing houses in Sandbridge. After completing over 300 homes, Larry began working for ERA Atkinson Realty at 54th and Atlantic Avenue. "I came in the late 60's," he said. "I wish I had come earlier. Virginia Beach is a wonderful place to live, not just in the summer, but throughout the year."

Atkinson Realty specializes in the sales and rental management of properties at the North End of the beach, the old, established neighborhoods, well above the shops and bright lights of the Boardwalk. "We deal in properties from 42nd Street up through 89th Street," Larry stated. "Some of these places we have been renting for over 60 years. We've rented many properties to entire families - the parents, their children and their children's children. It's truly a family beach."

It is said in the Virginia Beach real estate community that Larry Blum *sells the North End*. He sells it so well, in fact, that he is a member of ERA's exclusive Multi-Million Dollar Club. Through the years, Larry has seen properties skyrocket in price at Virginia Beach. "The land here is too expensive for a return on investment with a normal down payment," he said frankly. "But when you factor in personal pleasure and the appreciation potential, it's an excellent investment."

Oceanfront lots, according to Larry, now start at \$1.5 million. "An oceanfront lot in the early 70's ran from \$20,000 to \$25,000," he recalls. "Oceanside condos that were \$475,000 only three or four years ago are now selling for \$750,000. My advice to buyers is that if you can make the mortgage payment, you'll likely make money with any North Beach property."

Atkinson Realty manages over 200 North Beach properties for weekly rentals. As Larry Blum observes, Virginia Beach is a wonderful place to visit year round, but fall is especially nice.

Hoyt Duff

Hurricane Isabelle was not kind to Lynnhaven Inlet Fishing Pier. The crippling storm removed several hundred feet from the end of the pier, now being rebuilt. But that's life at the beach, states Hoyt Duff, the pier's general manager.

Built in 1956, Lynnhaven Inlet Fishing Pier extends 1,400 feet into the Atlantic Ocean making it the longest sport fishing pier on the East Coast. The pier has been in the Cashman family from its inception. Barbara Cashman Duff, in fact, was raised on the pier from the time she was three years old, and brings a lifetime of experience and advice to serve her customers. According to Hoyt, a wide variety

of people catch a huge variety of fish from the lengthy pier.

"One of the biggest fish to have been caught here was a 42-pound red drum," he remarked. "Lots of people come to not only fish, but to catch blue crabs as well."

According to the Duffs, there are almost endless numbers of fish available to the pier's patrons including spot, croaker, speckled trout, gray trout, drum, flounder, pompano, spadefish, sheepshead, cobia, sharks, rockfish, bluefish, whiting, lizardfish, blowfish and Spanish mackerel.

The pier is lighted for evening fishing and has a complete tackle shop plus snacks, sandwiches, hot dogs, ice cream and cold beer for hungry and thirsty visitors. There is plenty of free parking available, and guests can rent all the equipment necessary to fish or crab.

"The best fishing here is in September and October," Hoyt said. "An incoming tide with a northeast wind in the evenings makes for the best conditions. When that happens, it's time to call in sick at work and come fishing at Lynnhaven Inlet Pier.

Let's Go To The Beach

Virginia Beach is many things to many people. For the young at heart, there is the Boardwalk, the main thoroughfare





Lynnhaven Inlet
Fishing Pier

along Atlantic Avenue with shops, hotels, bars, restaurants, and entertainment of all descriptions. For those seeking a quiet vacation, there is the North Beach and family cottages. For nature lovers there is False Cape State Park to explore, the Barrier Islands to the south, and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. And for saltwater fisherman, there is simply no better spot to be.

Fall is an ideal time to visit Virginia Beach. The weather is mild, crowds are dispersed, and rates are reduced. From the prestigious Cavalier Hotel to a cottage rental at North Beach, or even a stay at an oceanside motel along the Boardwalk, the beach is calling, the fish are biting, and a grand getaway is within a few hours' drive for most Virginians.

Virginia Beach: a home away from home for the Virginia Sportsman.

Lynnhaven Fishing Pier

2350 Starfish Road
Virginia Beach, VA

757-481-3832

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