



# Montgomery County Tourism

MEDIA MARKETING  
UPDATE &  
COVERAGE  
REPORT  
JANUARY 2026



PREPARED BY  
*Geiger & Associates*  
*Public Relations*



## *BACKGROUND*

Geiger & Associates Public Relations, Inc. was founded by Debbie Geiger in 1985 after serving as Publicity Bureau Chief for the Florida Division of Tourism. The destination marketing specialists at Geiger & Associates have assisted more than 200 destination marketing organizations and other tourism industry clients in communicating specific messages to various audiences of journalists, opinion influencers, potential visitors and revenue sources for over 40 years. Those 200+ clients include state tourism agencies, smaller community CVBs, large urban CVBs, regional tourism organizations, resort properties, international clients and other organizations with a tourism marketing component.



## *OBJECTIVE*

Montgomery County Tourism began working with Geiger & Associates Public Relations in Fall 2023 to implement a comprehensive media marketing and public relations program. Since then G&A has planned, implemented and conducted five group media tours: November 2023, May 2024, October 2024, April 2025 and October 2025.. Working in collaboration with Montgomery County Tourism, the goal of each media tour is to generate positive editorial coverage of local lodging, dining and attractions.

The success of this joint effort is evident in the outstanding media coverage generated and the effective partnership with local tourism industry sponsors.



# *CUMULATIVE MEDIA TOUR RESULTS*

**43** Number of travel journalists who visited Montgomery County for editorial research

**119** Number of articles generated in print, radio or online media

**158.8 MILLION**

Number of consumers reached by earned editorial coverage

**\$1.40 MILLION**

Total value of this media coverage if purchased as paid advertising

**\$82,313**

This cumulative number represents the sponsored or donated contributions national and regional industry sponsors provided. Sponsored contributions include airfare, meals, lodging and activities that support the CVB's marketing program. This represents money that Montgomery County Tourism did not have to pay to host the visiting journalists.

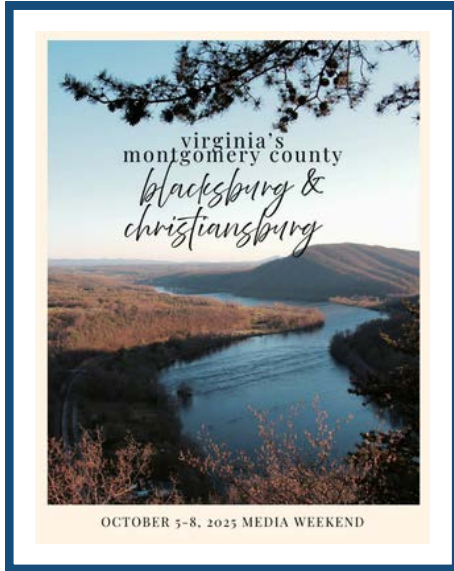
**\$6.78**

The return on investment (ROI) represents the amount Montgomery County Tourism has earned for every dollar invested in the media marketing program.

# 2025 Media Tours

## OVERVIEW

### OCTOBER 5-8, 2025 MEDIA TOUR

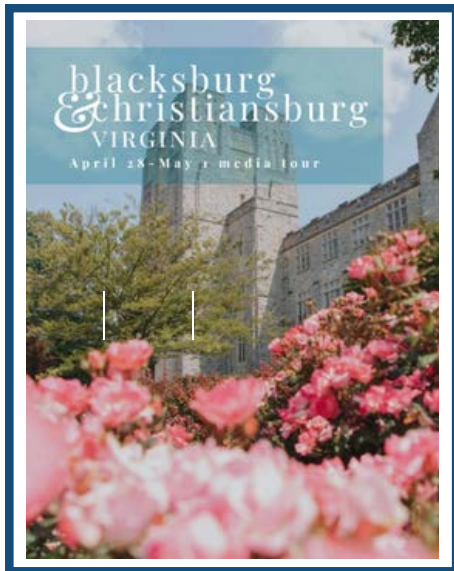


Click here to view the October 5-8, 2025 **itinerary**.

Click here to view the October 5-8, 2025 **media list**.



### APRIL 28-MAY 1, 2025 MEDIA TOUR



Click here to view the April 28-May 1, 2025 **itinerary**.

Click here to view the April 28-May 1, 2025 **media list**.



# Media Coverage

THE FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLE OF COVERAGE RESULTING FROM THE MEDIA MARKETING PROGRAM



COVERAGE THAT HAS APPEARED AS A RESULT OF G&A'S MONTGOMERY COUNTY TOURISM MEDIA MARKETING PROGRAM

[CLICK TO VIEW CUMULATIVE MEDIA TOUR COVERAGE](#)

[CLICK TO VIEW CUMULATIVE MEDIA SUMMARY](#)

[CLICK TO VIEW NEW COVERAGE THAT HAS APPEARED IN Q4 2025](#)

**WINNING NOVEL**  
Sample the story

**PRIDE MARCHES ON**  
History in action

**FAST FOOD**  
Minus the meat

**VA COLLEGE GUIDE**  
Plot your course

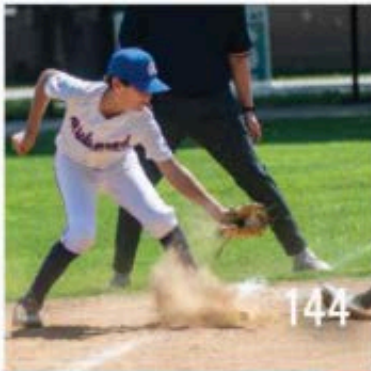
# Richmond

magazine

# CENTER STAGE

YOUR GUIDE TO FALL ENTERTAINMENT





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 Our extended conversation with John Freyer and Ella Floyd of VCU's Recovery Roast project  
[richmondmag.com/recovery](http://richmondmag.com/recovery)

## TRAVEL

# Blacksburg Bound

The college town has Hokies plus a whole lot more

By Karl Smith

**N**estled in the scenic New River Valley, Blacksburg has long been known as a vibrant college town anchored by Virginia Tech. As summer fades and the school year begins, the town's energy shifts into a fresh rhythm fueled by both locals and new arrivals. With a longtime focus on outdoor adventure, recent efforts to elevate local businesses and restaurants, and a forthcoming Amtrak rail extension to the area, Blacksburg is redefining itself as more than just a university hub.

## SLOW DOWN IN TOWN

Blacksburg fits right in among the many charm-loaded small towns in Southwest Virginia; however, thanks to the university, it boasts city-level attractions. Finding a home base within the town's 20 square miles is easy — in addition to a variety of chain hotels, **The Inn at Virginia Tech** blends Southern hospitality with modern amenities. Its prime location near campus and downtown provides easy access to Blacksburg's growing food, drink and cultural scenes.

Strolling retail strips such as College Avenue and Main Street shows off some of the town's best offerings. Blacksburg's cultural heart beats strong at the **Lyric Theatre**, a painstakingly restored venue from the 1930s that hosts indie films, live music and community events. Nearby, the vibrant **Blacksburg Farmers Market** in Market Square Park draws crowds every Saturday year-round, offering fresh produce, artisan cheeses, baked goods, honey, meats and handcrafted wares from over 50 local vendors.

No visit to Blacksburg is complete without exploring the Virginia Tech campus itself. Beyond its Collegiate Gothic architecture and vibrant student life, the campus offers multidisciplinary entertainment and cultural experiences. Catch a performance at **The Center for the Arts**, a modern venue featuring everything from orchestral concerts to contemporary dance and film screenings. For a quieter day, stroll through the **Hahn Horticulture Gardens**, an educational oasis showcasing native plants and seasonal blooms that's perfect for reflection and photography.

## FINE FARE

Though students remain a key portion of Blacksburg's dining population, the growing culinary scene retains a local-first feel as the fall sets in. The influence of local growers and makers is everywhere



Blacksburg Farmers Market

— artisanal coffee roasters, craft breweries and distilleries, refined restaurants, and specialty food shops all offer a taste of Appalachian flavor.

Start your day with seasonal scones and expertly pulled espresso at **Bollo's Bakery & Café**, a popular downtown spot known for its European-style pastries and coffee. For a casual but satisfying treat, **Next Door Bake House** — a locally owned staple adjacent to the north end of campus — specializes in sweet drinks, sandwiches and baked goods.

Venture just outside town to **Rising Silo Farm Brewery**, where a farm-to-table ethos shines. This family-friendly brewery offers craft beers alongside wood-fired pizzas, all featuring ingredients grown on-site or sourced from local farms. Live music adds to the inviting atmosphere, making it a perfect spot for all >



Lyric Theatre

< BLACKSBURG BOUND | CONT'D FROM P. 60

ages to gather.

For wine lovers and foodies, **Blacksburg Wine Lab** delivers a global wine list and cuisine curated by a Virginia Tech professor who is an expert in wines from around the world. Beyond the extensive selection, the Wine Lab also operates as a specialty foods shop, selling local and regional gourmet products that make perfect gifts or take-home treats.

If spirits are more your style, don't miss a tasting at **J.H. Bards Spirits Co.** Owned by Blacksburg natives, this craft distillery produces small-batch bourbon and vodka, offering samples and seasonal specials at their Draper Road facility.

End the night with upscale dining at **Preston's Restaurant** at The Inn at Virginia Tech, with a menu of elevated Appalachian-inspired cuisine paired with seasonal cocktails in a setting that celebrates the town and school's shared history.

## A DOSE OF NATURE

Outdoor enthusiasts will find plenty to enjoy on the **Huckleberry Trail**, a paved greenway ideal for cycling or walking that connects Blacksburg with neighboring Christiansburg. For a more challenging adventure, the much-loved hike to **McAfee Knob** rewards visitors with sweeping Blue Ridge Mountain views and is one of the best ways to see fall colors in Southwest Virginia. As the season deepens, **Sinkland Farms** in Christiansburg draws families with hayrides, a pumpkin patch, corn mazes and live music on weekends.

Ask a student where they'd go for a quick getaway, and you'll probably be advised to walk the tranquil loop of **Pandapas Pond** north of town. Locals also love this popular trail close to Blacksburg for hiking, jogging or dog walking along the pond and for its links to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. **■**



## SAVE THE DATE



The **Sinkland Farms Pumpkin Festival** rings in the autumn season on Sept. 25 and runs Thursday-Sunday through early November, transforming the patch into a packed farm filled with live music, food trucks, vendors and family activities. Admission starts at \$13. [sinklandfarms.com](http://sinklandfarms.com)

NEW ORLEANS MAGAZINE SEPTEMBER 2025 REAL ESTATE GUIDE MOVING TIPS MEN'S FALL FASHION MYNEWORLEANS.COM

# New Orleans

TOP REAL ESTATE

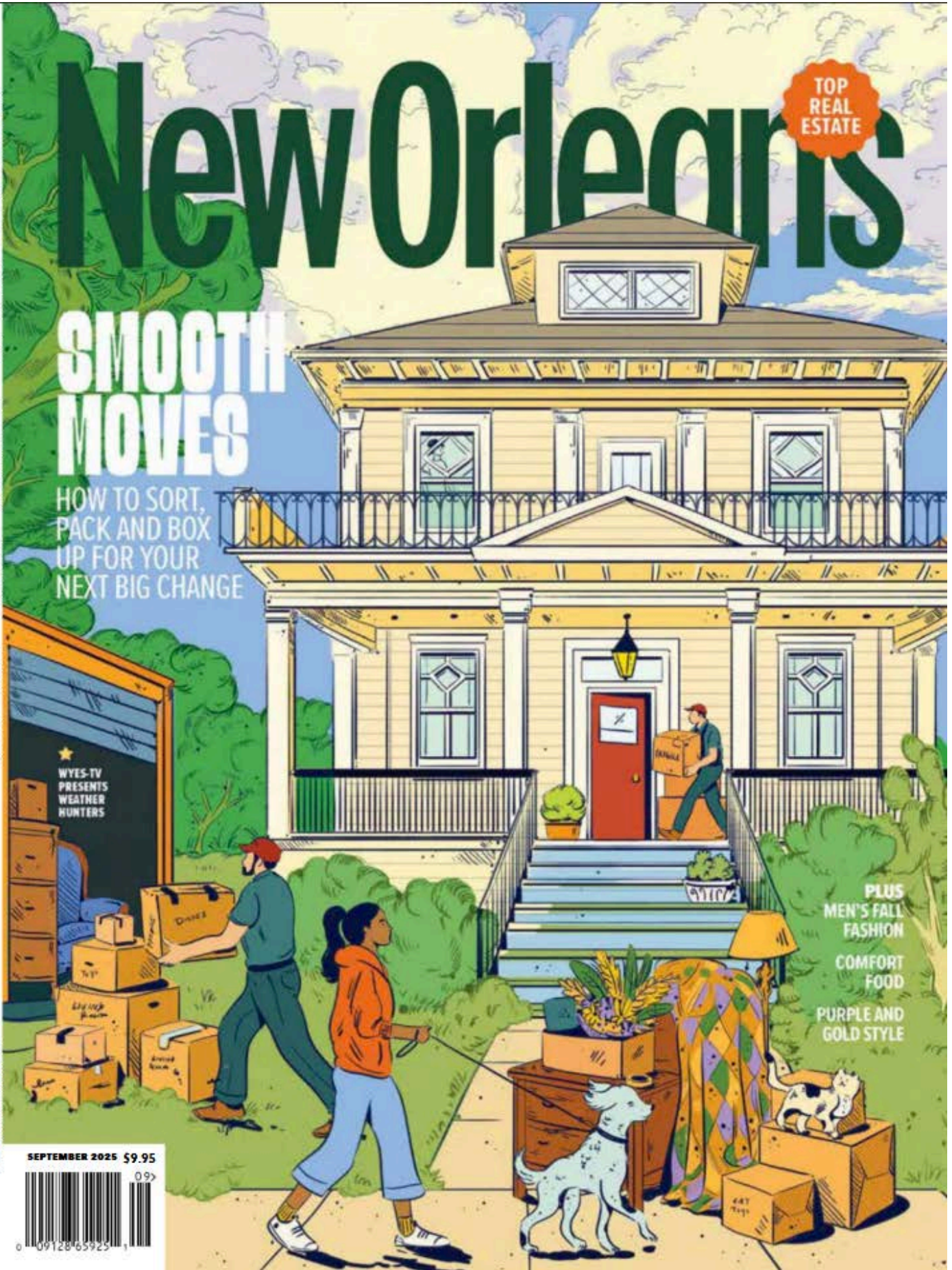
## SMOOTH MOVES

HOW TO SORT, PACK AND BOX UP FOR YOUR NEXT BIG CHANGE

★ WYES-TV PRESENTS WEATHER HUNTERS

PLUS MEN'S FALL FASHION COMFORT FOOD PURPLE AND GOLD STYLE

SEPTEMBER 2025 \$9.95



## Virginia is for Lovers

...of fine dining wine, nature and more

**O**ne of the beauties of living in or visiting a college town is that many of the school's professors retire and start innovative businesses, many times based on their expertise. Such is the case with Blacksburg, Virginia, home to Virginia Tech and some of the brightest minds of the South. There's plenty to do in this quaint town nestled between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains, and much of it can be credited to those creating second careers.

### Stay

The town contains numerous accommodations but a stay at The Inn at Virginia Tech marries comfort with collegiate ambiance. The property includes numerous guest rooms and suites overlooking the campus and its neighboring parks, a restaurant and lounge and the Skelton Conference Center, Blacksburg's largest event venue with almost 24,000 square feet of flexible meeting spaces.

### Dine

Virginia Tech geography professor John Boyer toured the world with his wife, Katie Pritchard, and experienced its viticulture and wine. It was only natural that the couple open the Blacksburg Wine Lab to share that knowledge. Not only may visitors indulge in wines from around the



globe, but they can also sample a curated selection of cheeses and charcuterie plates, pates and spreads, house-made pimento cheeses and unique tinned fish with gourmet crackers. Need help choosing a wine; just ask.

Cabo Fish Taco serves up an incredible array of Mexican specialties (and yes, their tacos are divine) and a wide variety of tequilas housed in one of the Blacksburg's oldest historical properties. For vegetarians, don't miss the popular Gillie's for innovative dishes served with fresh ingredients.

### Drink

When civil engineer Yvan Beliveau retired as a faculty member from the College of Architecture at Virginia Tech, he and his wife, Joyce, opened the Beliveau Farm & Winery outside of town. The winery satisfies Yvan's love of growing grapes and Joyce's admiration of lavender and hospitality. Visitors can enjoy Virginia-grown wine, such as Yvan's "Crazy Professor" series, on the 165-acre land with its 1900's farmhouse, and stay at

the property's bed and breakfast.

Blacksburg natives Jayson Hudson and Jason Hardy started a local whiskey club called the Bourbon and Rye Drinking Society, or BARDS. It morphed into the J.H. BARDS Spirit Co. micro-distillery of craft whiskey and vodka using the region's limestone-filtered mountain water. The taproom serves up craft cocktails as well.

The perfect place to watch the sun set over the region's farmland outside Blacksburg while enjoying craft beers and brick oven pizza is Rising Silo Brewery and Farm. The farm-based brewery uses organic malts and water from the farm's well and sells seasonal produce on the side.

### The Outdoors

One of the best places to enjoy nature is the eight-acre Pandapas Pond that's encircled by a one-mile loop trail that leads through wetlands and over boardwalks and bridges inside a hardwood forest. Be sure to look for wildlife.

For something more adventurous, Brush Mountain Park offers

758 acres of forest multi-use trails popular with hikers and mountain bikers. In the future, the park will expand with two more trail systems, thanks to the New River Land Trust with help from several regional organizations.

### Virginia Tech Campus

The 147,000-square-foot Moss Arts Center on the Virginia Tech campus brings in both local and nationally-known entertainers. The Hahn Horticulture Garden features six acres of teaching and display gardens, including a water garden, herb collection and a landscaped meadow, all adorned with artwork.

A few steps from campus is the Blacksburg Farmers Market, held every Wednesday and Saturday on the corner of Roanoke Street and Draper Road. Farmers within 50 miles and regional makers gather to showcase regional produce, baked goods, meat and eggs, handmade goods and locally produced honey. ♦

# ALPHARETTA

CITY LIFESTYLE™

## *At Home on the Range*

2025 TRAVEL ISSUE

ADVENTURING AT  
MONTAGE BIG SKY

PUERTO VALLARTA  
FOR GROWN-UPS

MAGNETIC SANTA FE

JULY 2025  
CITYLIFESTYLE.COM

# LOVING MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA

WHERE COLLEGE TOWN CHARM MEETS THE MAGIC  
OF NATURE AND HISTORY.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY VALERIE SHEPHERD

As a busy mom looking for a quick getaway from Atlanta, it felt a bit unfair I was going without my college-searching son to Montgomery County, Virginia—home to Virginia Tech. What I was hoping would be a chance to experience a little energy, artistic creativity, history and a hike (or five), turned into experiencing the kind of place students and locals, as well as previous Hokies move back to because of its charm and allure.

Tucked between the Blue Ridge and Alleghany Mountains, this region isn't just stunning - it's full of everything for a revitalizing getaway. The minute you arrive, you can feel the heartbeat of a vibrant college town (think cozy cafes, antique shopping, botanical gardens) surrounded by natural beauty and a rich history.



*The writer in her  
natural habitat - traveling!*

So if you have a weekend (or more!) I highly suggest the following:

#### WHERE TO SHOP

If you're a fan of unique finds, local charm, and Insta-worthy shots in every corner, then Montgomery County shopping has your name written all over it. In Christiansburg, Cambria Station Antiques and Old New River Books is a must-see. There's a giant arch made of vintage books housed in a historical general store - it's a treasure trove of vintage must-haves, rare books and amazing nostalgia.

Over in downtown Blacksburg, Sugar Magnolia is about as cute as they come. It's the kind of place where you can browse stationery and gifts that make your soul sing with an ice cream cone in hand—and yes, they serve that too as well as handmade chocolates!

If there on a Saturday morning, Blacksburg Farmers Market is a visual and sensory treat! It checks all the boxes for buying and shopping local with a producer who comes from no more than 50 miles away.

#### WHERE TO EAT

Foodies, prepare to be wowed. From little cafes to star-worthy dining, Montgomery County knows how to feed you. Start with sushi and ramen at Hefun, in downtown Blacksburg, and for a laid-back lunch, head to Cabo Fish Taco, set in one of the town's historic buildings but has amazing outside seating. Their "Bangin' Baja Tacos" are worth the trip alone.

If you're in for a rustic vibe with bold flavors, The Blacksburg Tavern offers Appalachian comfort food served in one of Main Street's oldest homes (with gorgeous paintings!) Think out-of-this-world fried chicken, brisket, and cornbread served family style.

Round it all off with a short trip to The Blacksburg Wine Lab—co-founded by a Virginia Tech professor, it blends wine education with savory sips and stunning views of farm country.

#### WHERE TO STAY

The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center located right on campus, offers warm Southern hospitality and a bigger-than-big buffet breakfast at Preston's Restaurant. It's the



perfect base for exploring the area and soaking up the college town energy.

#### WHAT TO DO

This region is packed with ways to get moving and be inspired. Start your day with a peaceful walk around Pandapas Pond or explore the miles of hiking and biking trails in Brush Mountain Park, a protected area of the Appalachian. Don't miss the Hahn Horticulture Garden, a six-acre paradise on Virginia Tech's campus, or a visit to the Moss Arts Center for art exhibitions and performances.

History lovers will appreciate Historic Smithfield, which weaves together the stories of early America, and the Montgomery Museum of Art & History.

And for something truly unique, time your visit to coincide with the Sinkland Farms Pumpkin Festival in the fall. With live music, local vendors, cows, games, art and giant pumpkins galore, there's a reason why it's ranked the top in the Southeast!

#### WHEN TO GO

Spring and summer bring vibrant greenery and perfect hiking weather but, in my opinion... fall steals the show! Think bright foliage, perfect weather, Hokie football, pumpkin patches and wine tastings in full swing or enjoying a scenic drive through the mountains.

GoToMontva.com

Facebook: @GoToMontVa

Instagram: @gotomontva



Get lost in Old New River Books in Christiansburg.

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# Richmond magazine

## Blacksburg Bound

The college town has Hokies plus a whole lot more | Photos courtesy Montgomery County Regional Tourism

BY KARI SMITH | SEPTEMBER 26, 2025



*The Lyric Theatre*

Nestled in the scenic New River Valley, Blacksburg has long been known as a vibrant college town anchored by Virginia Tech. As summer fades and the school year begins, the town's energy shifts into a fresh rhythm fueled by both locals and new arrivals. With a longtime focus on outdoor adventure, recent efforts to elevate local businesses and restaurants, and a forthcoming Amtrak rail extension to the area, Blacksburg is redefining itself as more than just a university hub.

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*Huckleberry Trail*

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South Carolina  
**Currents**

A PUBLICATION OF MPD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SEPTEMBER 2025

**Time-Honored  
College Traditions**

Southern schools embrace fun,  
unique campus histories **Page 6**

ADobe STOCK AI PHOTO BY RY/TKO

# Time-Honored College

Southern schools embrace fun, unique campus histories

By Cheré Coen

After two years at a Washington, D.C., private school—where I succeeded more at the school newspaper than my political science major—I knew I needed a change in course. But where to go next? My father attended Tulane University, so Louisiana State University was out of the question. They were avid rivals.

But then a friend from my home state of Louisiana animatedly detailed the pregame show of a Saturday night in Baton Rouge—how the LSU Tiger Band marches silently on the field and, in an instant, dramatically performs “Tiger Rag” while the stadium erupts. Goosebumps ran up my arms. It sounded like the perfect college experience. With the state school price tag, my father agreed.

There are so many similar traditions at colleges across the South, enhancing that collegiate ambiance that makes each university unique and special.

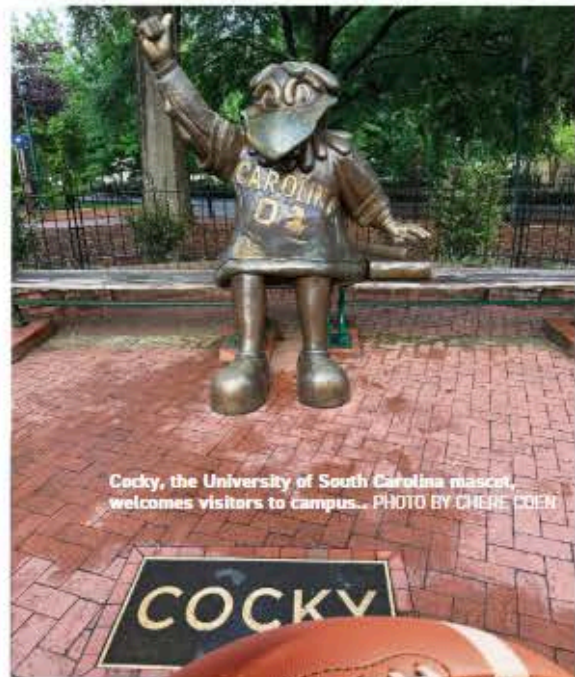
## Clemson and the University of South Carolina

There’s a long-standing rivalry between Clemson and South Carolina, and each college has its own traditions around the annual football matchup. South Carolina burns a massive papier-mâché tiger surrounded by cheering fans, while Clemson holds a funeral for Cocker, South Carolina’s rooster mascot.

Rivalry aside, Clemson’s football team dresses out at Fike Field

House and runs down the hill on to the field at the start of each game, a tradition some call the most exciting 25 seconds in college football.

Players also honor a rock from Death Valley, California, that was brought to the field in 1967. Then-coach Frank Howard told his players that if they gave 110% against Wake Forest, they would receive the privilege of rubbing that rock. The team won, and “Howard’s Rock” became a Clemson football tradition.



Cocker, the University of South Carolina mascot, welcomes visitors to campus. PHOTO BY CHERE COEN



English bulldog Uga proudly represents the University of Georgia. PHOTO COURTESY OF UGA



# Traditions



**ABOVE:** Those who find their “sole” mates while attending Murray State University hang their shoes on a campus tree for continued good luck. PHOTO COURTESY OF MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

**LEFT:** University of Alabama’s famed coach Paul “Bear” Bryant is immortalized in bronze as part of the school’s Walk of Champions. PHOTO BY CHERE COEN

South Carolina Gamecocks fans line up out-of-service train cabooses—called “Cockabooses”—outside Williams-Brice Stadium. Each train car is privately owned and outfitted for tailgating.

## University of Georgia

Georgia has gone to the dogs. The UGA mascot is an adorable English bulldog named Uga. Heading into the country’s 10th largest stadium, students sing for “Calling the Dawgs,” a song that ends with a woof.

There’s even a Dawg Walk, where thousands of fans greet the players and coaches at the main entrance to Sanford Stadium while the Georgia Redcoat Band plays. If the football team wins, fans head to the Chapel Bell on the North Campus and ring it into the night.

On the superstitious side, undergraduates are warned not to walk under the circa-1850s black iron arch on the North Campus for fear of not graduating.

## Murray State University

If you meet your “sole” mate while attending this Kentucky university, hang your shoes on the Shoe Tree for a lifetime of good luck.

Murray students are nicknamed racers, because the original nickname of thoroughbreds—it’s Kentucky, after all—felt too long to the journalists writing about the teams.

## Lander University

Lander University in Greenwood doesn’t have a football team but the college, which dates back to 1872, continues many traditions. On freshmen move-in day, faculty and staff turn out to help the new students move in. Sometimes even the mayor shows up. After students are settled in, they are ushered into the arena where faculty and staff line up like a greeting tunnel and cheer them on. Nursing students participate in an annual pinning ceremony and the Lighting of the Lamps of Knowledge.

The Lander community believes in creating new traditions as well, such as the holiday tree lighting.

“Lander is an old university, and we want to maintain traditions but also move into modern traditions,” says Amanda Darden, vice president for student experience and quality assurance.

## College of Charleston

Students entering the College of Charleston at Porter’s Lodge pass through an arch inscribed with “Know Thyself” in Greek.





Spring-graduating students, wearing white dresses or white dinner jackets instead of caps and gowns, exit the Cistern Yard by passing underneath the same arch. In December, male graduates wear black tuxedos, and women wear black dresses.

#### **Coastal Carolina University**

Carolina's Cocky has competition with Chauncey, a Chanticleer rooster that arrives at football games on a motorized Jet Ski. When the Coastal team recovers a turnover, the player who secured the ball puts on a fur coat, known as the Turnover Cloak, and wields a sword in a sideline celebration.

#### **Francis Marion University**

As the first Friday of fall semester arrives, the school welcomes students to campus in Florence with live music, a DJ, student organizations, food trucks and fun activities to kick off the year. Festivities return in February, when the university celebrates Homecoming with tailgating, a variety of fun activities and several athletic showdowns. A celebratory bonfire lights up the traditional Homecoming pep rally.

When final exams loom and stress levels soar, students are often seen walking past the Stokes Administration building to rub the statue of FMU's founding president, Dr. Doug Smith. The quirky ritual connects today's Patriots with the past.

#### **Auburn and the University of Alabama**

Another hotly contested rivalry among two universities from the same state is Auburn and Alabama. It's so intense that when folks move to Alabama, they're routinely asked to take a side.

At Auburn's Toomer's Corner, a grove of oak trees was planted in 1937 by state Sen. Sheldon Toomer. Fans decorate the trees with toilet paper after winning football games, turning the natural beauty into something akin to a winter wonderland.

The University of Alabama has long been the Crimson Tide, but the original team was known as the Crimson White. At the 1907 Iron Bowl—the teams' annual rivalry matchup—Alabama played in white jerseys that turned red from the state's colorful mud on the field. Birmingham Age-Herald sportswriter Hugh Roberts remarked how the game turned red, and the rest is history.

#### **University of Arkansas**

Arkansas adopted the mean razorback as its mascot, so on game days the human mascot known as Tusk heads to Razorback Stadium in Fayetteville to lead the school's famous Calling of the Hogs cheer. Fans wiggle their fingers and raise their hands over their heads for about six seconds as they shout, "Woool!" They then bring their hands down as they call out "Pig, sooie." Razorback fans perform this chant three times and on the final cheer call out, "Razorbacks!"

#### **Duke University and the University of Virginia**

It's not enough to pay tuition and do the work. Some universities like to make graduates go the extra mile. Not official, naturally, but Duke graduates are asked to drive backward around the traffic circle. At Virginia, some run naked from the rotunda down to the statue of Homer to kiss his bottom before retrieving their clothes.

#### **University of Florida**

George Edmondson didn't like the University of Florida fans booing the team, so he jumped up in 1949 and started a cheer that's become legend at the school's football games.

George was called Mr. Two Bits, and at every Gator home football game you'll hear, "Two bits, four bits, six bits, a dollar. All for the Gators, stand up and holler!"

Between the third and the fourth quarter all fans stand up, lock arms and sing, "We Are the Boys."

#### **University of Kentucky**

Fans in Lexington begin their football games with a "Call to the Post," a cheer akin to the opening of the Kentucky Derby. These Wildcats got their name when a former university official told a group of students that the team had "fought like wildcats." And if you're tailgating in Lexington, you'd better be toting some good ole Kentucky bourbon.

#### **University of Mississippi**

One explanation as to how Ole Miss started the "Hotty Toddy" chant dates to a Nov. 19, 1926, issue of the student newspaper. The article instigated a chant called the "Heighty! Tightly!": "Heighty! Tightly! Gosh a mighty! Who in the hell are we? Rim! Ram! Flim! Flam! Ole Miss, by damn!"

Today, the chant begins when someone asks the question, "Are



**LEFT: Louisiana State University football games feature the talents of the Golden Band from Tigerland. PHOTO BY CHERE COEN**

**FAR LEFT: Mississippi State's tradition of using cowbells celebrates a cow that once wandered onto the football game during a challenging game. PHOTO COURTESY OF MISSISSIPPI STATE**

you ready?" The crowd answers: "Hell, yes! Damn right! Hotty Toddy, gosh almighty! Who the hell are we? Hey! Flim flam, bim bam Ole Miss, by damn!"

#### Mississippi State

In Starkville, fans always want more cowbell. Story has it that a Jersey cow made its way onto the field at Davis Wade Stadium during a victorious game, and the students declared it a good luck charm. Since then, fans have incorporated the cowbell into the school's athletic events. The cow, however, lost out as mascot to Bully the English bulldog.

#### North Carolina State University

The South's most popular donut company originated in North Carolina, so students include Krispy Kreme in their annual philanthropic challenge.

Participants must race 2.5 miles to the closest Krispy Kreme store, devour 12 donuts and return to campus in one hour.

#### University of Tennessee

Tennessee is one of only two U.S. college football stadiums accessible by water. This means Volunteers fans can anchor their boats on the Tennessee River outside the stadium and tailgate on the water, watching the game on TV if they can't nab tickets on dry land.

This Vol Navy can attract around 200 boats per football game.

#### Texas A&M

Texas A&M students say howdy to others they meet, and others say goodbye by spouting out "Gig 'em!"

This tradition hails back to a 1930 football game against Texas Christian University when A&M graduate Pinky Downs wanted to incite a crowd gathered for a midnight yell practice.

"What are we going to do to those Horned Frogs?" he asked. The answer was "Gig 'em," referring to what Southerners do to frogs when hunting them.

#### Vanderbilt

A naval horn was perched on top of the press box of Vanderbilt Stadium in 1993 and used by Vanderbilt's Navy ROTC to call fans to pregame activities and welcome the football team to the field.

Known as "The Admiral" and named by Bob Redd, a fan who

won the naming contest in 2011, the horn is also sounded after every Commodores score.

#### Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech students call themselves Hokies. The tradition dates to 1896 when the school, then Virginia A&M College, changed its name to Virginia Polytechnic Institute. A contest for a new cheer for the new name was held, and senior O.M. Stull won first prize for his "Hokie" yell. When asked what "Hokie" meant, O.M. said he made it up.

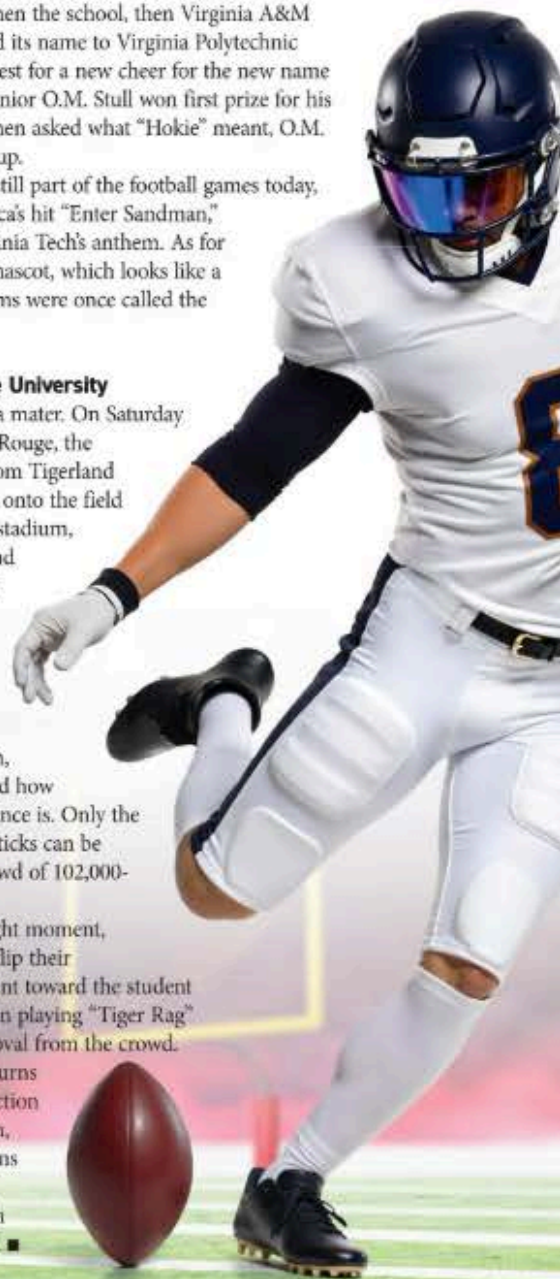
The cheer is still part of the football games today, but so is Metallica's hit "Enter Sandman," considered Virginia Tech's anthem. As for the HokieBird mascot, which looks like a turkey, Tech teams were once called the gobblers.

#### Louisiana State University

Back to my alma mater. On Saturday nights in Baton Rouge, the Golden Band from Tigerland silently marches onto the field at Death Valley stadium, spreading out and pausing in front of the student section while the crowd goes eerily silent.

If you know the LSU stadium, you'll understand how unusual that silence is. Only the sound of drumsticks can be heard as the crowd of 102,000-plus fans stand.

At just the right moment, band members flip their instruments, point toward the student section and begin playing "Tiger Rag" to roars of approval from the crowd. After the band turns toward every section of Tiger Stadium, and those sections respond, the musicians march to spell out LSU. ■



AFC/BE STOCK PHOTO BY: FP-CREATIVE STOCK/ROHNIGCHU

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TRAVEL COLUMN



Photo Provided by City of Christiansburg

A visitor enjoys a slide at the all-inclusive playground in Christiansburg, Va.

**WHERE LOCALS  
LIVE THE DREAM**

## A traveler's discovery in Virginia's Blue Ridge

**KIMBERLY BURK**  
GUEST TRAVEL COLUMNIST

I don't travel with the intention of finding people to envy, but it often turns out that way.

In Blacksburg, Va., for instance, her name is Beth Christensen, a U.S. Forest Service district ranger assigned to Pandapas Pond. It's the Walden you might never have heard of, bequeathed to the city by a man who built it in 1948 as a retreat for his employees.

"The community treasures this place," Christensen said as she led a group of travel journalists on a walking tour around the eight-acre pond on a picture-perfect morning in April. "I have a reverence for it."

Pandapas Pond sits on the Eastern Continental Divide in the Jefferson National Forest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Virginia Tech University students routinely join fellow Blacksburg residents in making the five-mile trip to the federal day-use area to walk, run, bike, walk their dogs, nature-watch and sometimes even study. Admission is free, but there is a donation box.

James Pandapas, who brought the first two industries to Blacksburg, developed 500 acres including the pond into a private recreational area for the exclusive use of his Electro-Tec and Poly Scientific employees. He sold it in 1983 to the U.S. Forest Service.

"It's very well-loved," said Christensen, who exudes contentment as she describes her little piece of paradise. "I appreciate that it's open to everybody. I think about the gift to the community that Mr. Pandapas



Kimberly Burk | For The Transcript

**Beth Christensen, a U.S. Forest Service District Ranger,** describes for visiting travel journalists the blissfulness to be experienced at Pandapas Pond near Blacksburg, Va.

gave."

Another Montgomery County resident who can hardly believe his good fortune is Scott Douglas, director of the Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Garden on the Virginia Tech campus. He spends half his time in the six-acre gardens and the rest teaching in Virginia Tech's School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, which includes serving as faculty adviser to the horticulture team.

There's always something to look forward to.

In early May, tulip season has ended but the Japanese and American dogwoods continue to bloom. In the vegetable garden, lettuce, kale, onions and garlic plants have poked through.

Adorning the sides of the mean-

dering pathways are lilacs, bleeding hearts, azaleas, violas and hostas. There's a conifer collection, and an edible garden with crabapples, grapes and Asian pears. All that vegetation attracts rabbits, birds and butterflies, and water features are stocked with koi fish. Carnivorous plants are a favorite stop when elementary students come for guided tours.

"We are open to the public every day. There are no gates or fences," Douglas says. "A lot of photos are taken here. Art classes paint here. A dance class will perform in the gardens next week."

A scenic eight-mile drive from Blacksburg is Christiansburg,

See **TRAVEL** on [B6](#)

## TRAVEL

CONTINUED FROM B5

another Montgomery County city where residents are eager to showcase to visitors their pleasant quality of life. Here we met another man who is all smiles when he talks about his work.

Brad Epperley is director of Huckleberry Park, and his pride and joy is the all-inclusive playground.

Much of the colorful, inviting equipment was designed in Sweden, which Epperley said has outpaced the United States when it comes to playgrounds for kids of all abilities.

The Roller Slide, for example, is designed to provide a calming experience for children with sensory processing issues. And it's made from steel and aluminum, which works best for kids with cochlear implants. The Zero-G Swing Chair has a harness for children with limited upper-body strength. The Wave Rock N Raft accommodates mobility devices. Near the playground is an outdoor fitness area for adults who use wheelchairs.

Travelers can find the park because it's on a national registry of inclusive playgrounds, Epperley said.

A nighttime adult Easter egg hunt, held on the gigantic turf field, featured a division for adults with disabilities, Epperley said. About 1,500 people raced to find 15,000 eggs, some of which held the keys to prizes such as televisions and barbecue grills.

Belivean Farm Winery near Blacksburg showcases the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains and a couple who care deeply for one another.



Photo provided by City of Christiansburg

**A boy plays in the spraygrounds of the all-inclusive playground at Huckleberry Park in Christiansburg, Va.**

Yvan Belivean, who taught in the College of Architecture at Virginia Tech, had traveled the world to speak at academic conferences, sampling his fair share of wine along the way. When he began to consider turning his hobby into an agribusiness, he received nothing but support from his wife, Joyce, who holds a master's degree in counseling from Virginia Tech and said her husband always encouraged her singing career.

"We have tried to honor each other's passions," she said of their 56-year marriage.

They purchased a 165-acre slice of heaven, planted grapes, and produced their first bottles in 2011. The secret to their delicious wine, Joyce

Belivean said, is that they are committed to creating a Virginia product and not trying to be California.

The winery features a bed and breakfast, event center, gift shop and a tasting room with a mountain-top view. And Belivean, by the way, means "beautiful valley."

If you go:

The full-service Inn at Virginia Tech offers a breakfast buffet that's worth getting up for.

The Twisted Liquid restaurant lives up to its name, blending fine cuisine with what it bills as "an innovative cocktail bar experience."

Dine al fresco at Cabo Fish Taco. And don't skip the appetizers.

Locally-owned shopping options include the Fringe Benefit boutique and Blacksburg Books. In Christiansburg, learn about the candle pouring process at The Chandlerie and revel in three floors of treasures at Cambria Station Antiques and Old New River Books.

The New River Valley recreation area offers fishing, camping, hiking, kayaking, boat rentals and bicycling, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains and featuring a scenic stretch of the New River.

**Editor's note:** Kimberly Burk was a guest of the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Office.

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

DESTINATIONS > USA

## This 122-mile Mountain Road Trip Through Virginia and West Virginia Has Charming Small Towns, Beautiful Hiking Trails, and Outdoor Adventures

Enjoy hiking, biking, whitewater rafting, and beautiful views along the way.

By [Rebecca Deurlein](#) | Published on July 7, 2024



PHOTO: REBECCA DEURLEIN

Between the Blue Ridge Mountains of Roanoke and the Gorge of West Virginia lies a scenic, 122-mile journey or weekend getaway. Here's what to see and

### Hike, tube, and sip your way through Christiansburg and Blacksburg, Virginia.

Drive less than two hours on U.S. 219 S and U.S. 460 E to the home of Virginia Tech, Jefferson National Forest, world-class tubing, and a bevy of breweries. Stretch your legs on the [Huckleberry Trail](#), which connects Christiansburg and Blacksburg. Its many branches provide 15 miles of options, and one of the best is the ADA-accessible, 1.5-mile loop at Coal Mining Heritage Park. Or, visit [Jefferson National Forest](#) and hike the one-mile loop from Pandapas Pond, choosing your adventure among varying Poverty Creek trails.

For a family experience and a chance to view the scenic mountain ranges from the water, try [tubing at New River Junction](#). It's a lazy float over gentle, shallow waters, so everyone from the kids to grandpa can participate. Order a cooler tube so you can sip cold beverages on the ride.

Further quench your thirst with the six craft beers brewed at Southwest Virginia's oldest brewery, [Bull & Bones Brewhaus & Grill](#). If vino is your vibe, [Beliveau Farm Winery](#) pours award-winning wines like Crazy Professor Vidal Blanc. And if you enjoy both beer and wine, you're in luck as Beliveau operates the only gluten-free brewery in Virginia.

If you're having so much fun that you don't want to leave, stay at [The Inn at Virginia Tech](#). Soak up campus life, peruse the galleries at Moss Arts Center, and stroll the floral walkways at Hahn Horticulture Garden.

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The Hahn Horticulture Garden offers a nature sanctuary for the public and Virginia Tech students with six acres to discover.

# Fall in love with small-town Virginia

Neighbouring communities nestled among Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains will draw you in with natural beauty, southern charm

NADYA PANKIW

**B**LACKSBURG, Va. — It's on licence plates, highway signs and even on stickers for sale at local shops: Virginia is for Lovers.

In two neighbouring towns, Blacksburg and Christiansburg, nestled between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains the saying couldn't be more true. But it also takes on new meaning — this part of the state is for lovers of nature, the arts and most importantly, community.

If you want to get away from the hustle and bustle of big America, mall shopping and crazy crowds, these two towns offer Hallmark-movie-worthy scenery, quintessential southern hospitality and local wares like no other.

Blacksburg, which was established Jan. 13, 1798, is home to Virginia Tech, a buzzing campus that provides a youthful, vibrant energy to the town. Since the horrific on-campus shooting 17 years ago which resulted in the deaths of 32 students and faculty members, the school has erected a memorial for the victims and honours them annually during remembrance walks. The school, which is highly regarded for its engineering program is also home to the Moss Arts Center and Gallery, a partially-converted cafeteria with a stunningly spacious theatre that hosts professional artists and student groups throughout its season.

On the south side of campus the Hahn Horticulture Garden offers natural solace for the public and students with six acres to discover. Visitors are welcome to recharge and explore the unique annual and perennial plants offer, such as a banana tree and Zig Zag Redbud.

Established in 1984, the garden also boasts a koi pond, educational workshops for plant and bug identification, and various art sculptures including the *Maid in the Mud* garden spritz by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Blacksburg's highly walkable Main Street is located a stone's throw off Virginia Tech's campus. Along the cobblestone sidewalks, its charming storefronts promote locally-made art, art supplies and Virginia Tech gear, and host an array of restaurants.

If you're searching for southern comfort food, look no further than the

## HOW TO GET THERE

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport is the closest flight-hub to Blacksburg and Christiansburg.

Non-stop service is offered to eight cities in the United States. Travellers from Winnipeg would have the option of flying through Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport or Chicago O'Hare International Airport before continuing on to Roanoke.

## WHERE TO STAY

The Inn at Virginia Tech provides a comfortable stay on the Virginia Tech campus, which is close to the action on Blacksburg's Main Street.



Blacksburg Farmers Market features vendors year-round selling goods produced or grown within an 80-kilometre radius of the town.



Cambria Station Antiques features three floors filled with reasonably priced vintage wares.

Blacksburg Tavern. The town's oldest home, originally constructed in 1892, was purchased by Daniel Riley in 2007 and converted into a restaurant. It's now serving up hand-battered buttermilk fried chicken, beef brisket and of course you can't forget the buttermilk biscuits and cornbread.

If you're dining on the patio or porch, be sure to head inside the tavern to examine its interior — each wall features murals hand-painted by the owner's great-aunt depicting local history and landscapes.



A massive archway made out of books connects the Old New River Books shop to the neighbouring Cambria Station Antiques.

• CONTINUED ON 12

SMALL-TOWN VIRGINIA • FROM 11

Located next door to the tavern, Cabo Fish Taco is a chain with locations in Virginia and North Carolina that serves up specialty tacos, burritos and quesadillas as well as an ooey-gooey queso dip that you simply must not skip.

Once you are satisfyingly stuffed, cool off from Virginia's humid climate and head over one block to Sugar Magnolia.

The shop, which specializes in spectacular ice cream and delectable chocolates and stocks an adorable selection of stationery and giftware, was established in 2015 by husband-and-wife duo Michelle and Tom Raub.

After starting up in a 632-sq.-ft. shop down the road, the Raubs opened their current location in 2018 and even blew out the wall of the neighbouring building, a former bank, to expand their business.

"We have an awesome local base that really has a strong affinity to us," said Michelle. "We're the space where on a Friday, Saturday night, the middle schoolers are allowed to stay until 1 a.m."

"That was really our whole mission, was building community one gift at a time."

Community also is the cornerstone of Blacksburg Farmers' Market, an event that has brought vendors together since its inception in 1985.

The year-round producer-only market gathers downtown in a converted parking lot to host vendors selling items produced or grown within an 80-kilometre radius of Blacksburg.

During a Saturday-morning visit in early October, the market featured about 30 vendors selling blossoming floral arrangements, organic produce, dog treats, watercolour paintings, alpaca yarn, soaps, jams, honey, eggs, and various baked pastries and breads.

Debbie Edwards, manager of Blacksburg Farmers' Market, says the event really comes alive around mid-morning as families often gather on the lawn space to listen to live music performed by local artists.

"There's a vibe and an energy here that is very special to the community," said Edwards.

An autumn visit wouldn't be complete without a trip to the nearby Jefferson National Forest, which puts the state's mountain landscape, tree foliage and wildlife on a platter for nature lovers. Surrounded by pine, oak and poplar trees, the eight-acre Pandapas Pond features a 1.6-km packed-gravel loop perfect for hikers, bikers, dog walkers, birdwatchers and baby strollers.

Families with younger children, however, may prefer the outdoor recreational offerings of Christiansburg's 50-acre, award-winning Huckleberry Park.

The former cattle farm turned public facility opened in September 2023 and features a splash pad, state-of-the-art playground equipment from Sweden, turf field, trails and two dog parks.

Brad Epperley, director of parks and recreation for the town of Christiansburg says the park was designed intentionally to provide recreational opportunities for everyone, especially those with disabilities.

The family fun continues over at Sinkland Farms' Pumpkin Festival. Over six weeks in the fall, owner Susan Sink, 71, says approximately 40,000 visitors come to enjoy the corn maze,



Pandapas Pond at Jefferson National Forest features a packed-gravel loop perfect for hikers, bikers, dog walkers, birdwatchers and baby strollers.



A Sinkland Farms employee cosplays as a scarecrow.

food and craft vendors, live music, pig races and hay rides, and of course, to pick out a perfect pumpkin for the season.

Set on 125 acres, the festival is a highly Instagrammable affair if not for the breathtaking scenery then for the hay bales painted to look like farm animals and staff cosplaying in creepily convincing scarecrow attire.

Christiansburg's history comes alive at the Montgomery Museum of Art and History. The museum moved into a former bank about two years ago, and the space has been creatively used to display regional history and art.

Sometimes, learning more about

an area can go beyond the walls of a museum. Visitors with a knack for treasure hunting are best to head to Cambria Station Antiques.

The three-storey warehouse is situated beside active train tracks, so you won't be sifting through the reasonably-priced vintage goods for long until the store's hardwood floor begins to vibrate from the force of a passing train. Whether you're searching for jewelry, dishes, clothing, records or furniture, shoppers are bound to come across a unique oddity.

Attached via a massive archway made of books, Old New River Books features used reads priced around US\$3-4. By



Children play at Christiansburg's Huckleberry Park.



Sinkland Farms' annual Pumpkin Festival features more than just pumpkins.

visiting this local gem, you'll be sure to get a good story out of it.

Speaking of affordable, if you're looking for a delicious meal that won't break the bank in Christiansburg, head over to Gardner's Grill. Head chef Matthew Tolbert trained at the Culinary Institute of the Carolinas and now works at the Grill with his mother, Cindy (also known as Mama C).

"In order to be a better place for Christiansburg, we needed to lower our prices," said Cindy.

With Matthew's culinary expertise, he revised the restaurant's menu which serves up grab-and-go favourites like Mama's Grilled Cheese, smash burgers

and hot dogs. Matthew even cooks up specials like the Kickin' Chicken and Waffles, to offer flavours locals usually couldn't find around town.

"If I don't like it, then I don't sell it," said Matthew.

As many of these destinations are within walking distance, renting a car at the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport will allow visitors to get the most out of these two towns.

*Nadya Pankiw was provided a promotional trip to Blacksburg and Christiansburg.*

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# The surprises offered in western Virginia

By Elaine Warner

One of the best-known tourism slogans ever – Virginia is for Lovers – could read Virginia is for Everybody. Perhaps most people think of spots like Williamsburg, Mount Vernon and Monticello in eastern Virginia. These are important places, but I'm finding surprises in the far western part of the state – cool little towns like Blacksburg and Christiansburg with beautiful mountain scenery, swift-flowing rivers, and great food and, yes, wine.



Elaine

These two communities are tucked in a valley between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains. The heart of the valley is the New River. The name is oxymoronic as geologists believe this is one of the oldest rivers in the world, the result of the collision of the African tectonic plate with the North American plate some 300 million years ago.

Members of the press trip were staying at the Inn at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Pardon my ignorance, but it's not in the Big Twelve or even the SEC. So I wasn't prepared for the massive and magnificent campus and I quickly understood that Virginia Tech and its mascot, the HokieBird, were a very big deal in the area.

Opened in 1872 as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, the school changed names several times, finally settling on Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. That's a mouthful, so people just call it Virginia Tech. The mascot, the HokieBird dates back to the last century when a football fan would bring trained turkeys to the games to entertain the crowd. The Tech teams adopted the name The Gobblers, which morphed somehow into the turkey-like HokieBird.

Most of the buildings on campus are constructed from Hokie Stone, dolomite from the university's own quarry, which produces approximately 50 tons of stone per week. The campus covers 2,600 acres with more than 213 buildings. The Inn entrance features stone column topped with glass triangles – striking architecture. And my room and the restaurant were wonderful.

The town is delightfully diverse with great historical elements plus an exciting young vibe. In a quick tour of the downtown area, I found a great independent book store – not only a place to buy books, but a gathering place with cool activities. My favorite section was labeled "Non-boring Non-fiction." And they have a comfy kiddy corner and a community poetry project that changes weekly. Blacksburg Books is definitely not boring.

Close by was Sugar Magnolia, an ice cream parlor and gift store with a real family feel and super-friendly employees. The ice cream was good, too. My blackberry pomegranate sorbet really hit the spot.

Food is always an interesting element to me and our selections in Blacksburg were diverse. Contemporary met traditional at Preston's in the Inn. A definite college vibe and outdoor dining accompanied super selections at Cabo Fish Tacos. A romantic Italian meal was a hit at Zeppoli's and historic offerings, including fried chicken, baked ham, biscuits and cornbread, rounded out the tour at the 1892 Blacksburg Tavern.

Drinks were also on the itinerary. A drive through the beautiful countryside brought us to the 165-acre Beliveau Farm Winery featuring Virginia wines and a million-dollar view. The farm also has a brewery, the only gluten-free brewery in the state, and a charming bed and breakfast facility.



Books are big business at Cambria Station Antique and Old New River Books in Christiansburg. (All photographs by Elaine Warner.)

Other breweries we visited included lunch at Eastern Divide Brewing. Hot Honey Fried Chicken Sandwich and the Crab Cake Sandwich were tempting, but, feeling a need to go light, I ordered the Summer Salad with chicken. Turned out, I could have split it with two friends! Beers here are brewed with Virginia grains supporting local agriculture. Some are fermented in oak barrels previously used for wine, bourbon or maple syrup, adding new notes to familiar flavor profiles.

In Christiansburg, we stopped at Iron Tree Brewing, a smaller facility with a real neighborhood feel. And it was pet friendly. The company was started by three Virginia Tech friends who began home brewing. Their brews became so popular at tailgates and among other friends that in 2018, they opened their own brewery. Situated in downtown, it's a center for members of the community – all ages welcome.

I have to admit – I don't like beer! So my favorite stop was Moon Hollow Brewing Company back in Blacksburg. Woman owned, LGBTQ+ friendly, their brews reflected lots of personality with selections like Mountain Mist Hibiscus Grapefruit Hard Seltzer and E&F Prickly Pear (pale sour ale with prickly pear puree) along with more traditional Moon Hollow Hefewiesen and Lunatic (an American-style IPA). They won my heart with their non-alcoholic choices and I thoroughly enjoyed Smoked Mint Julep, a craft soda.

Lest you think all we did was eat and drink – there were lots of other activities. We enjoyed a peaceful walk around Pandapas Pond in the Jefferson National Forest. The towering trees, trilling birds, geese padding on the pond past water lily pads and the fresh air made a refreshing break from our busy schedule.

A stop along the New River gave us history on the area. At New River Junction we toured a family-owned and operated campground and recreational park – the ideal place for tubing in the river.

A good Saturday morning stop at the Blacksburg Farmers Market provided a look at produce and crafts – and a chance to pick up breakfast before

heading to the Hahn Horticulture Garden at Tech. The six acres here include a Trident Maple allée leading into a shade garden, a meadow and stream area and a garden with plantings arranged on the color spectrum. The Hahn Garden is the largest botanical garden in western Virginia and is free to the public.

In Christiansburg, Huckleberry Park was an eye-opener. While the park includes expected areas like playing fields, a dog park, picnic facilities and trails, the thing I found most amazing was the playground area. The playground incorporates activities for all abilities including special equipment for guests with social, emotional, cognitive, physical, hearing or visibility issues. There's also an adult fitness zone and challenge area.

While in the area, we also stopped at Cambria Station Antiques and Old New River Books – three floors of vintage, antique and hand-made items and books – lots of books. So many books, there's a wall of them with an arched door – of books.

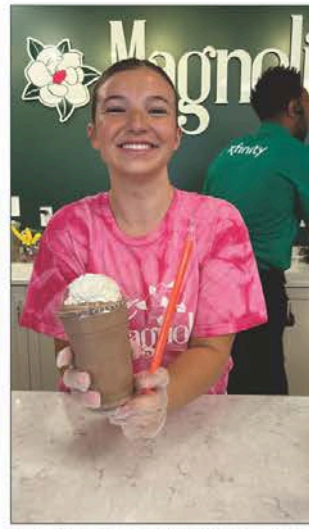
We did all these things – and more – in two-and-a-half days. I always say "Travel writers get one lick off the lollipop but we get lots of lollipops." Sweet stops are more than available to travelers who take the time to explore the New River Valley in Virginia.



Eastern Divide Brewing headlines their beer options, but their food offerings shine, too.



The scenic Virginia countryside is cuddled by the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains.



Sweet treats are served with a big smiles at Sugar Magnolia in Blacksburg.

## Virginia Tech and the great outdoors

DONALD DUENCH

I don't normally do this, but please turn away from this story, find a recording of Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, and listen to it. Loud. Finished? Thank you.

Now you're in the mood to take a trip in your mind to Blacksburg, a small community in southwestern Virginia that is intertwined with a big U.S. college, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, commonly known as Virginia Tech.

*Enter Sandman* is played as Virginia Tech's football team enters the playing field during home games.

The home fans jump as the music plays — sometimes enough to trigger a reading on a seismograph.

That football team? The team, and the other athletes representing Virginia Tech, are known as the Hokies. What are Hokies?

According to VT's athletics website, "Hokie" was a made-up word by a 19th-century student to win a cheer contest.

What's in Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and the surrounding area to experience if you go there in person? That made-up word, letter by letter, here's what I learned during a recent visit:

### HIS FOR ...

Hahn Horticulture Garden is a 6-acre teaching and display garden adjacent to VT's baseball park.

"Hahn" is Marshall Hahn, a former president of VT.

Throughout the year, the pleasant outdoor areas are enjoyed by students, visitors and dog-walkers. Volunteers who tend to the plants are "paid" by the produce that grows in their vegetable garden.

A highlight of Hahn Horticulture Garden is the Trident Maple Allee, a walkway underneath the branches of tall maple trees, which provide a canopy above.

A serenity pond is popular for marriage proposals — and when the big day arrives, there are both indoor and outdoor areas suitable for a ceremony.

H is also for HokieBird and Hokie

HokieBird is VT's sports mascot. HokieBirds are fierce turkey-like creatures in maroon and orange, the school colours. Statues of HokieBirds can be found around Blacksburg and the VT campus.



The Torgersen Bridge on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va.

DONALD DUENCH/TORONTO SUN PHOTOS

# Enter TRAVEL Blacksburg

Hokie Stone is the distinctive limestone used in the exterior of many buildings on the VT campus.

Hokie Stone is mined from a university-owned quarry.

### O IS FOR ...

Outdoor areas near Blacksburg, which provide an opportunity for recreation and relaxation, include New River Junction and Pandapas Pond.

Since Blacksburg is a small urban area, its surroundings are mainly untouched by city life, leaving plenty of natural roundings to enjoy.



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Hikers can use the parking lot to access the 27-km Poverty Creek trail system, which goes through the Blue Ridge mountains.

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Kids' paradise: Huckleberry Park, in nearby Christiansburg, Va., is a playground so impressive that parents from neighbouring states bring

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The park opened in 2023.

It's inclusive, with many of the playground activities wheelchair-accessible.

"It's been a great asset to our community so far," said Brad Epperley, the town's director of parks and recreation.

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A 40-yard dash area, with automatic timer, allows prospective football players to test their speed. There's also a splash pad, and a dog park — with separate areas for small and large dogs.

Another area of Huckleberry Park has four full-sized rectangular fields for football, soccer and lacrosse tournaments.

### I IS FOR ...

Ice cream. Yes, you can get ice cream almost anywhere, but enjoying a cool treat on a warm day at



The interior of the Torgersen Bridge serves as a large study hall.



The interior of the Lyric Theatre, which opened in 1930. Below, a 40-yard dash area at Huckleberry Park in Christiansburg, Va.



Sugar Magnolia in downtown Blacksburg is a special delight. I sampled a milkshake made from Michigan Pot Hole ice cream (think chocolate ice cream, chocolate chunks and chocolate fudge) while learning about Sugar Magnolia from Tom Raub, who along with his wife own the business. Over the years, they realized that there was a demand in Blacksburg for not only an ice-cream parlour with an area to sit and chat but also high-end chocolates, a souvenir shop (for non-VT items), and stationery. The ice cream comes from a wholesaler that doesn't sell to stores — and yes, it was tasty! The stationery cards sold at Sugar Magnolia are blank. Raub wants you to put your heart into the message you send, instead of having someone else write it for you. "Everything we do is built around

nurturing human connections," he said. I is also for the innovation on display in and around the VT campus. One example is the Torgersen Bridge, which connects the Newman Library and Torgersen Hall buildings. It could have been just a walkway between the buildings, but instead the interior of this wide bridge is a vast quiet study area, bathed in maroon and orange, that wouldn't look out of place at the fictional Hogwarts. "Torgersen" is Paul Ernest Torgersen, another former VT president. Entertainment at the Moss Arts Center and Lyric Theatre. The Moss Arts Center is a VT building that opened in 2013. It houses a performance hall, art galleries and other studios. The performance hall is a 1,274-

seat theatre, big enough and modern enough to welcome touring artists, as well as Broadway-style shows. *Dear Evan Hansen* and *The Book of Mormon* are the Broadway in Blacksburg presentations as part of the 2024-25 season, which runs from Sept. 13 to May 10. Acoustics were top of mind during the design of the hall. There are adjustable speakers and curtains, curvilinear walls, and seats designed to mimic a human body so that sound checks in the empty hall before a show are as close as possible to matching the effect of a full house. "We hear from artists all the time how much they love the sound here," said Susan Bland, associate director of communication for the centre. The Lyric Theatre opened downtown in 1930 and was the first air-conditioned building in Blacks-

burg, as well as the third building in Virginia built specifically for "the talkies." After some hard times, the 477-seat theatre was renovated to its 1930s look, and reopened in 1999, run by a local non-profit organization. The Lyric Theatre presents first-run movies, and also hosts theatre classes for youngsters and live music. As a non-profit, admission tickets and popcorn are less expensive than at regular movie theatres. **SIS FOR ...** Solemn settings on the VT campus where the dreadful activities of the past aren't forgotten, including the April 16 Memorial, War Memorial Chapel and the Solitude building. The April 16 Memorial, at the northwest part of the Drillfield, serves as a means to remember the 32 people killed on campus by an undergraduate student on April 16, 2007. There are 32 engraved small Hokie Stones, one for each person who died, in a semicircle. War Memorial Chapel is a 260-seat place of worship and contemplation at the northeast end of the Drillfield.

Above it is Memorial Court, where eight pylons salute Brotherhood, Honor, Leadership and Sacrifice (on the left side) and Service, Loyalty, Duty and "Ut Prosim" ("That I may serve," which is VT's motto). The names of alumni who died in military service are carved on the pylons. Solitude is the oldest building on the VT campus, dating to before the U.S. Civil War, and the enslaved people who served the family of Solitude's owner lived in a nearby structure. An artwork of wood figurines and benches, "Think on these things," invites visitors "to contemplate Virginia Tech's layered histories." **GETTING THERE** Using commercial airlines, the nearest airport is in Roanoke, Va., a 40-minute drive from Blacksburg. Toronto to Blacksburg would take a minimum of 10 hours, passing through Buffalo, Erie, Pa., Pittsburgh and Morgantown, W. Va. **MORE ONLINE** For options on accommodations, food and beverages in the Blacksburg area, check out the rest of this story at [torontosun.com](http://torontosun.com).

Stone.

# CANADA'S POST MEDIA SYNDICATION:



# Enter Blacksburg, Va., and Virginia Tech

*After listening to Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, you will be in the mood to take a trip in your mind to Blacksburg, a small community in southwestern Virginia which is intertwined with a big U.S. college, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, commonly known as Virginia Tech.*

Donald Duench • Toronto Sun\*

Published Aug 09, 2024 • Last updated Aug 10, 2024 • 10 minute read

Join the conversation



The Torgersen Bridge on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

I don't normally do this, but please turn away from this story, find a recording of Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, and listen to it. Loud.

Now you're in the mood to take a trip in your mind to Blacksburg, a small community in southwestern Virginia which is intertwined with a big U.S. college, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, commonly known as Virginia Tech.

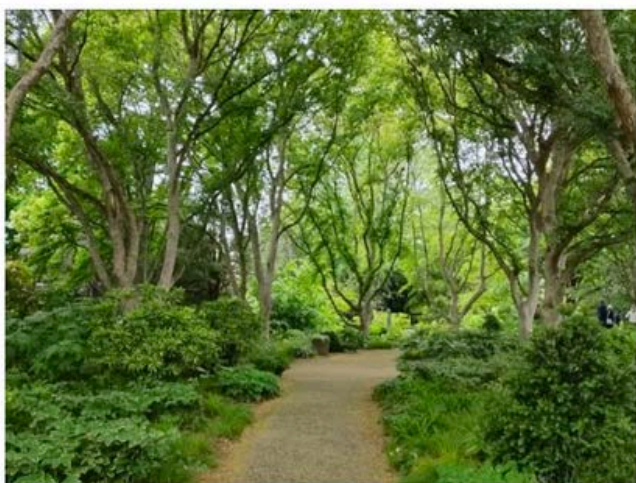
*Enter Sandman* is played as Virginia Tech's football team enters the playing field during home games. The home fans jump as the music plays — sometimes enough to trigger a reading on a seismograph.

That Virginia Tech football team? That team, and the other athletes representing Virginia Tech, are known as the Hokies.

What are Hokies? According to VT's athletics website, "Hokie" was a made-up word by a 19th-century student to win a cheer contest.

What's in Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and the surrounding area to experience if you go there in person?

Using that made-up word, letter by letter, here's what I learned during a recent visit:



Part of the Trident Maple Allee inside the Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

## H IS FOR ...

Hahn Horticulture Garden is a six-acre teaching and display garden adjacent to VT's baseball park. "Hahn" is Marshall Hahn, a former president of VT.

Throughout the year, the pleasant outdoor areas are enjoyed by students, visitors, and dog-walkers. Volunteers who tend to the plants are "paid" by the produce which grows in their vegetable garden.

A highlight of Hahn Horticulture Garden is the Trident Maple Allee, a walkway underneath the branches of tall maple trees, which provide a canopy above.

A serenity pond is popular for marriage proposals — and when the big day arrives, there are both indoor and outdoor areas suitable for a ceremony.



One of the many statues of a HokieBird, a Virginia Tech mascot, which can be found in Blacksburg, Va. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

H is also for HokieBird and Hokie Stone.

HokieBird is VT's sports mascot. HokieBirds are fierce turkey-like creatures in maroon and orange, the school colours. Statues of HokieBirds can be found around Blacksburg and the VT campus.

Hokie Stone is the distinctive limestone used in the exterior of many buildings on the VT campus. Hokie Stone is mined from a university-owned quarry.



The New River, surrounded by greenery, is the setting for fun warm-weather activities at the New River Junction campground. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

## O IS FOR ...

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If visitors want to have a barbecue after tubing, NRJ provides complimentary charcoal and lighter fluid.

NRJ was opened in 1982 by Bernadette Mundy and her husband (who died in 2010). Their sons now run the business. "My kids grew up right here," Mundy said. "We have people who have been camping with us



Pandapas Pond, near Blacksburg, Va., is surrounded by a 1.6-km trail. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

Pandapas Pond is about 10 kilometres north of Blacksburg, inside the George Washington & Jefferson National Forests. The pond itself is surrounded by a 1.6-kilometre trail, which provides a relaxing area to walk or run, especially early in the day. The area around the pond is a lovely spot for a picnic as well.

Hikers can use the parking lot to access the 27-kilometre Poverty Creek trail system, which goes through the Blue Ridge mountains.

Blacksburg businessman James Pandapas wanted a recreational area for his employees, so in 1948 he purchased the land, and eventually had the pond dug and the walking path created. In 1987, he sold the land to the U.S. Forest Service for the same amount of money he originally paid to buy the property.

Like NRJ, Pandapas Pond sits on the Eastern Continental Divide — water to the east drains to the Atlantic Ocean, water to the west drains to the Gulf of Mexico.

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A milkshake is served at Sugar Magnolia in Blacksburg, Va. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

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Entertainment at the Moss Arts Center and Lyric Theatre.

The [Moss Arts Center](#) is a VT building which opened in 2013. It houses a performance hall, art galleries, and other studios.

The performance hall is a 1,274-seat theatre, big enough and modern enough to welcome touring artists as well as Broadway-style shows. *Dear Evan Hansen* and *The Book of Mormon* are the Broadway in Blacksburg presentations as part of the 2024-25 season, which runs from Sept. 13, 2024 to May 10, 2025.

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Interior of the Lyric Theatre in Blacksburg, Va., which opened in 1930. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

The [Lyric Theatre](#) opened in 1930 in downtown Blacksburg. It was the first air-conditioned building in Blacksburg, as well as the third building in Virginia built specifically for "the talkies."

The Lyric Theatre presents first-run movies, and also hosts theatre classes for youngsters and live music.

As a non-profit, admission tickets and popcorn are less expensive than at regular movie theatres.



The April 16 Memorial on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., serves as a means to remember the 32 people who were killed on campus by an undergraduate student on April 16, 2007. There are 32 engraved small Hokie Stones, one for each person who died, in a semicircle. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

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Solemn settings on the VT campus where the dreadful activities of the past are not forgotten, including the April 16 Memorial, War Memorial Chapel, and the Solitude building.

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Four of the eight pylons at Memorial Court at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The names of alumni who died in military service are carved on the pylons. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

The [War Memorial Chapel](#) is a 260-seat place of worship and contemplation at the northeast end of the Drillfield. Above it is Memorial Court, where eight pylons salute Brotherhood, Honor, Leadership and Sacrifice (on the left side) and Service, Loyalty, Duty, and "Ut Prosim" ("That I may serve," which is VT's motto). The names of alumni who died in military service are carved on the pylons.

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Nearby is an artwork of wood figurines and benches, "Think on these things," where visitors are invited "to contemplate Virginia Tech's layered histories."

## GETTING THERE

Using commercial airlines, the nearest airport is in Roanoke, Va., a 40-minute drive from Blacksburg. Driving from Toronto to Blacksburg would take a minimum of 10 hours, passing through Buffalo, Erie, Pa., Pittsburgh, and Morgantown, W. Va.

## STAYING THERE

The [Inn at Virginia Tech](#) is the only hotel on the VT campus. Connected to the hotel are the Shelton Conference Center and the Holtzman Alumni Center.

**TIP:** Look for Virginia's Bicentennial Tapestry in the Shelton Conference Center area.

The hotel's restaurant, Preston's, offers a breakfast buffet (including smoothies in shot glasses), lunch, dinner (try the Fig Balsamic Skirt Steak), and Sunday brunch.

An option outside of Blacksburg, with a Canadian connection, is the bed and breakfast at [Beliveau Farm Winery](#). Yvan Beliveau, originally from Quebec, is a former VT faculty member (College of Architecture), and his wife Joyce is a VT alumna.

Their B&B building is known as the Manor House, with five bedrooms available to book and a common area with a pool table (the felt is a maroon colour) and plenty of other VT touches.

Visitors to Beliveau Farm Winery can enjoy beverages in the winery's tasting room or the brewery, where gluten-free beer is produced.

Beliveau Farm Winery is also a wedding venue, with indoor and outdoor facilities.



The Blacksburg Tavern is situated inside the oldest house on Main St. in downtown Blacksburg, Va. PHOTO BY DONALD DUENCH /Toronto Sun

## FOOD AND DRINK

[The Blacksburg Tavern](#) is a restaurant, bar, and “historical preservation project” inside the oldest house on Main St. in downtown Blacksburg (circa 1892). The menu is similar to what would have been available a century ago, such as fried chicken, brisket, and cornbread. Meals can be ordered a la carte, or “family style.” Murals on the walls were painted by the current owner’s great-aunt.

[Zeppoli’s](#) is an Italian restaurant very close to The Inn at Virginia Tech, with a subdued atmosphere, great food, and lots of it. My lasagna (featuring homemade pasta) and Greek salad were a great way to end a busy day.

A lunch option is [Cabo Fish Taco](#), a Mexican-California restaurant at which I was encouraged to order the “Banging Baja tacos” — containing beer-battered shrimp. I was not disappointed. It was very good!

The craft beer scene in the Blacksburg area is ... hopping! I got to experience three different craft beer locations, all of which opened in the past six years.

[Eastern Divide Brewery](#) is a place to get away from the world and enjoy good food and an adult beverage with friends and family. No TVs, no cellphone service, but plenty of tables in a large room filled with houseplants.

“I think it contributes to the social atmosphere,” head brewer Brandon Roberson said.

Roberson uses all Virginia grains to produce his beers, which are canned in-house, one at a time.

[Moon Hollow Brewing Company](#) is located in the former kindergarten of a school building which has been repurposed. Owner and head brewer Hannah Lester is a member of the Pink Boots Society, whose mission is to support women and non-binary individuals in the fermentation and alcoholic beverage business. At the time of my visit, all of her employees were female.

A special feature at Moon Hollow is the “Beer Buddies” blackboard: Patrons who want to “pint it forward” can leave money with the staff to cover expenses for someone else, whose name goes on the board.

Anyone who wants to stay away from alcohol — such as the guest of honour at a baby shower there during my visit — can enjoy a non-alcoholic slushie or a Nitro Cold Brew coffee.

[Iron Tree Brewing Company](#) is located in a former furniture store in downtown Christiansburg. Co-founder Seth Locklear is a former student of Yvan Beliveau at VT. Locklear and two friends experimented with home brewing, and eventually started Iron Tree. In addition to beer, Locklear also produces his own hard seltzer.

Their tasting room is far enough away from Blacksburg that it’s more of a dog-friendly community bar than a VT student hangout.

## FINAL FUN FACT

One Hokies alumnus well known to Toronto sports fans is Dell Curry.

Curry was a standout basketball player for Virginia Tech, and entered the university’s Sports Hall of Fame in 1996. He had a long career in the NBA, the final three seasons of which were with the Raptors.

While playing in Toronto, one of his sons received part of his basketball training at a local school.

You may have heard of Dell’s son: [Stephen Curry](#).

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# The Delight of Visiting a Used Bookstore

David and Kay Scott | America's Historic Road Trip Nov 30, 2024



Ken Vaughan, co-owner of Old New River Books with his wife Heather, stands in front of a case holding a few of their rare books.  
David and Kay Scott

During an October journey to the New River Valley, a scenic four-county region of southwest Virginia, we stopped at Old New River Books in Christiansburg. Visiting libraries and bookstores has long been an enjoyable part of our travels. It is always fun to browse the aisles of a bookstore brimming with volumes of stories, illustrations, history and ideas. While all bookstores offer enjoyment, used bookstores add the mystery of never knowing what you might discover. A used bookstore is the rare commercial enterprise where a few dollars can buy many hours of pleasure. We especially enjoy small town bookstores where strangers are generally welcomed by a knowledgeable and friendly owner who enjoys discussing books and telling out-of-towners about the community. Old New River Books is one of these special places.

Christiansburg enjoys an interesting history. With a population of 23,000, it is located 8 miles south of Blacksburg, a town twice its size and home of Virginia Tech University. In addition to driving on public roads, a paved trail allows residents to hike or bike between the two towns. Christiansburg was named for Colonel William Christian, an early settler and brother-in-law to Patrick Henry. Established in 1792, the town once served as home to Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone and, later, Booker T Washington. Christiansburg still has an operating drive-in theater, one of six remaining in the state. It is host to a fall pumpkin festival and can boast having one of the most impressive public parks we have visited in a town of its size. Interestingly, the town's Main Street follows the Eastern Continental Divide with rainfall on one side flowing to the Gulf of Mexico and the other side flowing to the Atlantic Ocean.

The Old New River Bookstore consumes the rear portion of the first floor of an early 1900s warehouse. The three-story building is primarily devoted to antiques with the bookstore occupying space that was formerly an apartment for the previous owner. The building sits across the street from the town's historic 1868 railway depot that served as a passenger and, later, freight depot until 1960. An earlier depot was burned by Union forces during the Civil War. For train buffs, the station alone is reason enough to visit Christiansburg, a town with a lot of early American history.

Walking into Old New River Books through a unique portal constructed of nearly 3,000 books, we met Ken Vaughan who, along with wife Heather, are the store's owners. The couple love the New River area and chose to remain following graduation from local universities, Radford and Virginia Tech, respectively. Offering a greeting, Ken reached into the book-lined portal and opened a fake book filled with candy. Becoming burned out from years working in the software industry, he and Heather spent six years building an online book business prior to branching into retail by renting a booth in the Christiansburg antique store. Their retail business had grown to three booths when the store owner mentioned her intention to retire and offered the business to the Vaughans who, along with a business partner, took the plunge and bought the building.

Ken estimates the store typically has about 4,000 volumes on its shelves, with another 10,000 books in the couple's home that are available online ([oldnewriverbooks.com](http://oldnewriverbooks.com)). Most of their inventory is acquired from estates and book-rich families who have decided to downsize or move from the area. Major estate purchases typically offer the owners a yield of about 20% keepers for resale with the remainder being donated to nonprofits. Both the sales and acquisition sides of their business benefits from being near a large university like Virginia Tech.

Although you might expect this of a bookstore owner, it was obvious during our conversation that Ken is in love with books. He commented that one of his greatest pleasures of being in the business is experiencing the enormous variety of what authors have written. When asked about the problems of operating a bookstore, he mentioned not having sufficient funds to buy all the books he wanted. He realizes not everyone has the same interests as himself. In the Vaughan's case, they make a point to stock a wide variety of books so any customer entering the store will find something he or she would enjoy reading.

Following an enjoyable visit, we departed Old New River Books with a used copy of "The Shortwave Mystery," a Hardy Boys adventure story in a series written for young boys who dreamed of a life as exciting as that experienced by teenage sleuths Frank and Joe Hardy. After reading the book once again, I realized that after 70 years, Frank and Joe were still smarter than me.

*David and Kay Scott are authors of "Exploring the Oregon Trail" America's Historic Road Trip" (Globe Pequot). The authors live in Valdosta, Georgia. Visit them at [blog.valdosta.edu/dlscott](http://blog.valdosta.edu/dlscott).*

# Valdosta Scene

South Georgia  
Life & Style

Holiday 2024

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*Holiday traditions bring joy at Christmas*



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THE CHRISTMAS SPREAD  
SCB'S THE NUTCRACKER  
TO WOW AUDIENCES

# The Delight of Visiting a Used Bookstore



*words & photography by David & Kay Scott*

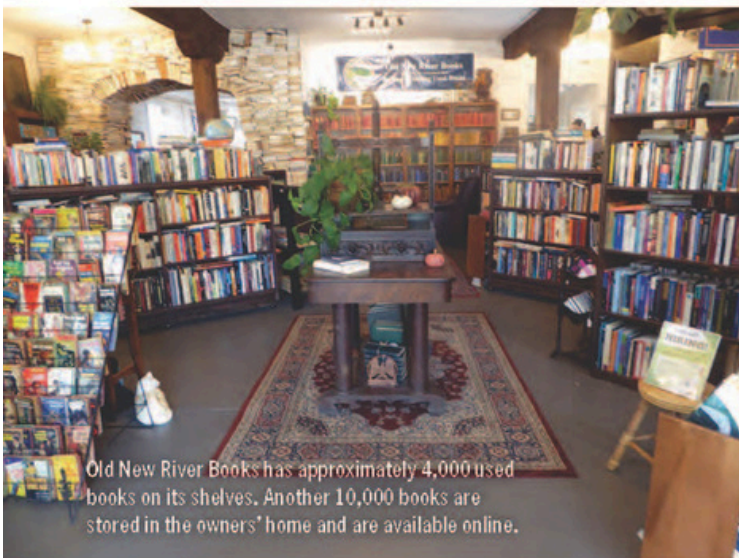
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Ken Vaughan, co-owner of Old New River Books with his wife Heather, stands in front of a case holding a few of their rare books.





Ken Vaughan used nearly 3,000 books to constructed an arch that separates the bookstore from a floor filled with antiques.



Old New River Books has approximately 4,000 used books on its shelves. Another 10,000 books are stored in the owners' home and are available online.

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Cambria Station Antiques is in a 3-story building that once served as a storage facility for goods that arrived by train.

impressive public parks we have visited in a town of its size. Interestingly, the town's Main Street follows the Eastern Continental Divide with rainfall on one side flowing to the Gulf of Mexico and the other side flowing to the Atlantic Ocean.

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The 1868 train station across the road from Old New River Books served as a passenger, and later, freight depot until 1960.



The new 50-acre Christiansburg Huckleberry Park has an all-inclusive playground, an ADA accessible adult fitness zone, a large dog park and multi-purpose playing fields.





LEFT: Sinkland Farms outside Christiansburg holds an annual pumpkin festival on six weekends each fall. The festival includes multiple activities including a corn field maze.



LEFT BELOW: One of 26 booths used by antique sellers to display their goods in Cambria Station Antiques.

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Major estate purchases typically offer the owners a yield of about 20% keepers for resale with the remainder being donated to nonprofits. Both the sales and acquisition sides of their business benefits from being near a large university like Virginia Tech.

Although you might expect this of a bookstore owner, it was

obvious during our conversation that Ken is in love with books. He commented that one of his greatest pleasures of being in the business is experiencing the enormous variety of what authors have written. When asked about the problems of operating a bookstore, he mentioned not having sufficient funds to buy all the books he wanted. He realizes not everyone has the same interests as himself. In the Vaughan's case, they make a point to stock a wide variety of books so any customer entering the store will find something he or she would enjoy reading.

Following an enjoyable visit, we departed Old New River Books with a used copy of "The Shortwave Mystery," a Hardy Boys adventure story in a series written for young boys who dreamed of a life as exciting as that experienced by teenage sleuths Frank and Joe Hardy. After reading the book once again, I realized that after 70 years, Frank and Joe were still smarter than me.

*David and Kay Scott are authors of "Exploring the Oregon Trail" America's Historic Road Trip" (Globe Pequot). The authors live in Valdosta, Georgia. Visit them at [blog.valdosta.edu/dlscott](http://blog.valdosta.edu/dlscott). **TS***

## Exploring interesting airports: BCB, Blacksburg, Virginia

BY FRANCIS ZERA



An aerial view of Virginia Tech/Montgomery Executive Airport in Blacksburg, VA. Photo courtesy of BCB Airport

We usually cover specific events at airports, often relating to aircraft or airline events, but sometimes about milestones at the airport itself.

We're going to try something new – profiling airports you may not know about, ones that have an interesting history or attribute.

First up will be Virginia Tech/Montgomery Executive Airport in Blacksburg, Virginia (BCB).

Why choose an airport that most avgeeks haven't heard of, that's well off the beaten path, and that doesn't even have commercial service? Because of all those things. We love to learn, and places like these are often filled with fascinating tidbits of info and history.

Last month we had the opportunity to visit and tour BCB with the airport's Executive Director, Keith Holt.

The heavy use from training aircraft was ruining the grass runway, so in 1941 a 2,850-foot paved runway was installed, designated 08-26. Over time, it became apparent that the runway was not optimally aligned with prevailing winds, so in 1966 what was then the 4,200-foot runway 12-30 was constructed; runway lighting was installed the following year. The original runway (08-26) was closed in 1985 and converted to aircraft parking.



A row of parked bizjets and private aircraft parked at the airport for a Virginia Tech football game

Since then, the airport has expanded even further, lengthening the runway, adding a localizer, DME, and GPS instrument approach and landing equipment, an automated AWOS weather system, and updated lighting.



Virginia Tech operates a turbomachinery and propulsion lab at the airport



Looking down the 5,501-foot runway 13 at BCB airport

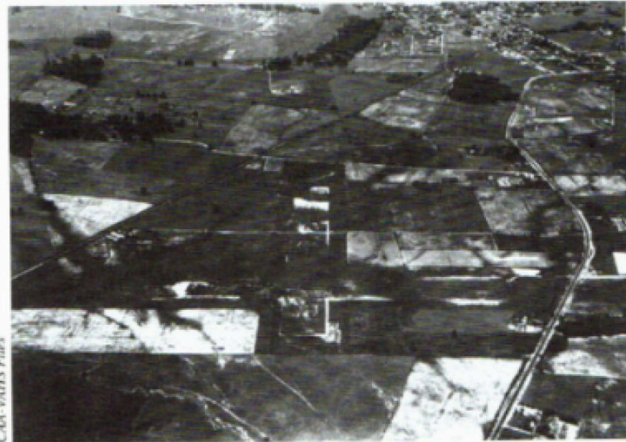
The airport currently boasts a jet-capable 5,501-foot runway, but that wasn't always the case.

Virginia Tech has been around since 1872. The airport was founded in 1929 on land that was owned by the university, located about 1.5 miles from campus. Before that, aviators made use of either a nearby farmer's field and an athletic field on campus (those old biplanes didn't need a very long runway).

The airport officially opened in 1931. As World War II approached, the airport was designated a Civilian Pilot Training Program facility and an aircraft mechanic training facility, all to help the war effort.



Blacksburg Airport, Virginia Tech. Blacksburg, VA 7/26/39



Blacksburg Airport, Virginia Tech. Blacksburg, VA 7/26/39

Aerial photos of the airport from 1939. Photos courtesy of the Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society

We asked the airport's Executive Director Keith Holt to describe what makes the airport unique and useful for the region: "BCB is an in-town destination. We are incorporated inside town limits and our property line directly borders the campus of Virginia Tech. Our location is central and convenient not just for visitors to the University, but also businesses and corporations doing business in Blacksburg, Christiansburg and the greater Montgomery County."



An interesting and forward-thinking amenity at the airport is a charger for BETA Technologies electric aircraft, which Holt says have visited the airport

Holt said the airport has 42 aircraft based on site and 21,900 operations a year. "The most common aircraft are corporate jets, charters and light general aviation," he said. "As an airport so close to a major university – sporting events and college graduations become a large event for the airport. For a recent football game, we had 59 arrivals just for the game," he said.



**FRANCIS ZERA**

**EDITOR-AT-LARGE / DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY - SEATTLE, WA** Francis Zera is a Seattle-based architectural, aerial, aviation, and commercial photographer, a freelance photojournalist, and a confirmed AvGeek.

<https://www.zeraphoto.com>

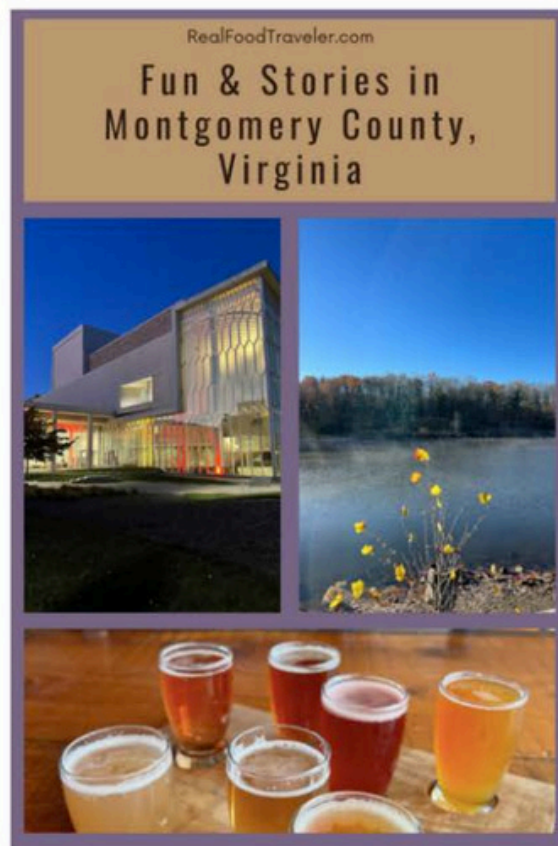




# Fun & Stories in Montgomery County, Virginia

Courtney Drake-McDonough, Publisher and Managing Editor

*Between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains is Montgomery County, in Virginia. It's a pastoral region that celebrates its agricultural roots and the long history of Virginia Tech University. Two of its most unique towns, Blacksburg and Christiansburg, have many stories to tell and many things for visitors to experience. A late-fall visit left me with so much to share with [Real Food Traveler](#) readers, from time spent on the peaceful land to the energetic vibe that comes with a "college town," to some great backstories of area businesses. Here are my Editor's Picks for where to eat, stay and play in Montgomery County, Virginia.*



## Discovering Fun & Stories in Montgomery County, Virginia

### Where to Eat and Drink in Montgomery County

**Bull & Bones Brew Haus & Grill** is the oldest brewery in southwest Virginia and serves wood-fired BBQ including ribs, seafood, steak and chicken. Specialties include the "Smoke Alarm Burger" with jalapenos, pepper jack cheese and spicy ranch. "Game Day Mac & Cheese" has pulled pork and melted cheddar jack. Their ten-barrel brewhaus generates six craft beers they are very proud of. The owner, Jon, was a medical device rep selling pacemakers and defibrillators even through the first three years of his business. There are college bars a-plenty but no breweries nearby. Jon saw microbreweries and pubs in other states and knew it was only a matter of time before the trend reached Virginia. He saw the market need and went for it.



*A BBQ platter from Bull and Bones Brew Haus & Grill shows off some of the best of the best.*

**Beliveau Farm Winery** is owned and operated by a husband-and-wife team (Joyce and Yvan) with other members of their family. She's more the self-described "desk person" and he's the winemaker. Some 25 years ago, the couple started contemplating what to do after retirement. Formerly a professor at Virginia Tech, Yvan had always wanted to make wine, seeing it as "art versus science," because it's the art of manipulating yeast and other elements that create the wine. The winery officially opened in 2012 and, seven years later, they added a brewery that produces the state's only gluten-free beers. They pride themselves on only using Virginia grapes to make their wine.

Up the hill, next to one of the expanses of vines, is the Sugar Shack where they do food and wine pairings and multi-course dinners. Cozy inside, there's a huge patio outside, affording sprawling views of rolling hills. Just stunning.



*Beliveau Farm Winery offers wine and food tastings, lodging, an events venue and beautiful scenery.*

**Blacksburg Wine Lab** specializes in cheese and charcuterie plates, fresh-baked, local breads, crackers and pastries from around the world. They are known for their tinned fish and the house-made pimento cheese and spicy Tasso ham grilled cheese. Owners John Boyer and Katie Pritchard incorporate education in wine tasting that draws on John's years teaching a wine geography class at Virginia Tech. Reflecting on the cultures from which the grapes are grown and harvested before becoming wine, there's much to learn and pass on to eager diners.

Hungry for more? [Read about the Blacksburg Wine Lab experience.](#)

**Iron Tree Brewing** in Christiansburg was started by three friends who met at Virginia Tech and were all homebrewers. After a decade of lots of home brewing practice and growing their brand, they opened the tasting room. The name comes from one of the owners, Seth's, brewing with water from his home well which had a lot of iron and lent a flavor they all loved.



*Enjoy a flight of beer or a pint at Iron Tree Brewing in Montgomery County's Christiansburg.*

**Rising Silo Brewery** is a delightful surprise just about a mile out of town. The farm-based brewery is in a large wood building with walls decorated with old doors. It's rustic, casual and super-charming. The beers are brewed using their own well water. They take advantage of a ready supply of local ingredients to brew some core beers but also seasonal beers with tongue-in-cheek names like Udder Chaos Milkshake IPA with pawpaws (described as mountain mangos), a Sasquash beer made from squash and their popular Apple 'Atacha Pale Ale with Red Delicious apples. They use only organic grain and grow their own barley hops. Because the operation is small, they can get creative in having different grains and yeast which wouldn't be successful on a large scale.

On the food side, their **Farm & Forage Kitchen** operation, they have a seasonal menu that rotates weekly, using local ingredients. They are best known for their pizzas made in the oven built right in the dining room.



*Rising Silo makes creative beers and great food like the Silo Burger with Silo Sauce, in their casual and funky setting.*

**The Blacksburg Tavern** is a standout dining experience in Montgomery County, which is saying a lot. Located in the oldest house on Main Street (circa 1892), it is owned by Daniel Riley who purchased the property in 2007, converting the former home into the restaurant. Guests cross the grand porch into the foyer where the host, likely Daniel, welcomes and seats them in one of several rooms of the home. The menu is a hearty, regional farmer's menu like was undoubtedly served by the family who originally lived in the house. Chicken, beef, ham, veggies, biscuits with apple butter, pie and ice cream fill up the table like a holiday feast. While there, enjoy Appalachian bluegrass music and wall murals hand-painted by Virginia McLaughlin, the owner's great aunt when she was 91!



*The setting and food are really special at Blacksburg Tavern.*

**Zeppoli's Italian Restaurant & Wine Shop** opened in 1996 by Cody Thompson and Chris Mullens, specializes in made-from-scratch cuisine and recipes handed down from their Italian mothers. Spinning from that with their own creations, favorites include Smoked Salmon Bruschetta, Bacon Florentine Aglio and Vodka Crab Rigatoni. The pasta and bread are all made from scratch and fresh pasta can be purchased by the pound. Shop bottles of wine off the shelf to take away or to have opened to accompany dining in.

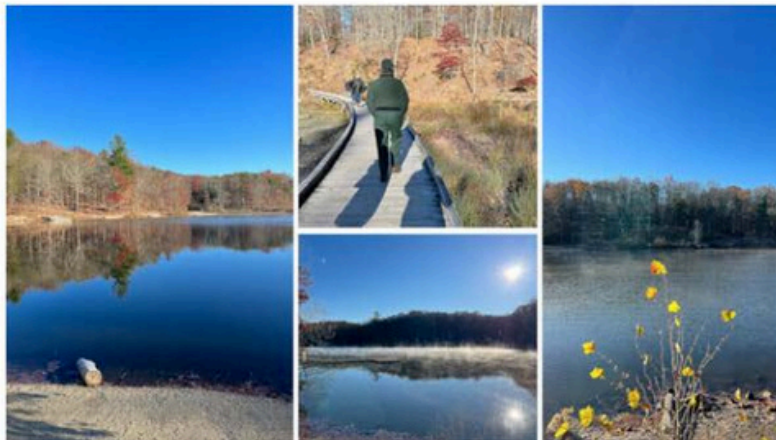


*Scratch-made Italian food and a world of wines make Zeppoli's a great place to dine.*

### Where to Play in Montgomery County:

**Hahn Horticulture Garden**, which celebrated 40 years in 2024, is on Virginia Tech property but is supported by fundraisers and volunteer helpers. The six-acre gardens' goals are 1. To be a place of teaching and learning (art, plants, insects and poetry); 2. To provide community outreach with schools, garden clubs and community in general with opportunities to learn wreath making and flower arranging; 3. To offer a place to relax especially for students and staff. There are hammock stands so students can bring their own hammocks, string them up and relax. Teachers come to grade papers there. One joked he gives better grades when he's grading from the garden. Get a glimpse of one of the waterfall features in our video below.

**Jefferson & George Washington National Forest** offers a network of trails spanning 17 miles that local volunteers have designed and maintained. Within the area is the eight-acre **Pandapas Pond** that has a one-mile loop trail around it, going around wetlands, over boardwalks and bridges and among a wide variety of plant life. A trio of people, bundled up and looking through binoculars on the early November morning we were there, said it's a great area for bird-watching. We certainly enjoyed seeing the reflection of fall colors in the glassy water, a thin layer of frost around the edges, and evaporation fog rising as sun warmed it up. It was a very serene place.



*Pandapas Pond is a great place to stroll to enjoy one of many of the area's nature trails. See the morning fog rising in our video below.*

**Montgomery Museum of Art & History** in Christiansburg is housed in an old bank building that dates back to the 1800s. Many structural elements remain and are celebrated like the giant safe and safe deposit boxes. As a museum celebrating the towns, communities, industries, long history and agriculture, it's the cultural and community hub, offering something for everyone in exhibits and programming. The museum is viewed as an excellent example of reuse and is an anchor for the improving downtown area.

**Moss Arts Center**, on the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg, was created to provide programming bringing an arts presence to the university's science-technology-engineering focus for which it is known. The dramatic building opened in 2013 and hosts 28-30 performances each year. Artists typically spend several days there holding master classes, free mid-day concerts and outreach to schools. Community engagement is very important to the Moss Center and to the artists who visit. For visual arts, exhibitions are swapped out every semester but are planned 2-3 years in advance. Art talks and exhibits are free to the students and public. Check out their schedule and plan ahead to see performances and exhibits.



*The Moss Center on the Virginia Tech campus benefits students, residents and visitors alike with arts and culture happenings.*

**Sinkland Farms**, on 125 acres of rolling hills, gardens, meadows and farm fields in Christiansburg, is home to the popular Pumpkin Festival which runs six weeks in the fall, celebrating the region's agriculture. Once a dairy farm, Susan Sink and her husband bought it in 1989 right out of college. They tried to keep it a dairy farm but it wasn't doing that well because there was already so much supply out there. So they turned it into a pumpkin farm. Tragically, Susan's husband was killed in a motorcycle accident leaving her with three kids and a large business to run. She decided to expand the pumpkin farm, began offering school field trips and added an events venue. In a happy turn of events, Susan remarried her husband's best friend around six years ago. She said he came around to check on her and never left! Together, and with the help of the kids and grandkids, they've made Sinkland Farms a successful community venue in Christiansburg. In addition to the pumpkin festival, they host a wine festival, an art in the barn event, a Sunflower Festival in July and have local live music and other activities throughout the year.

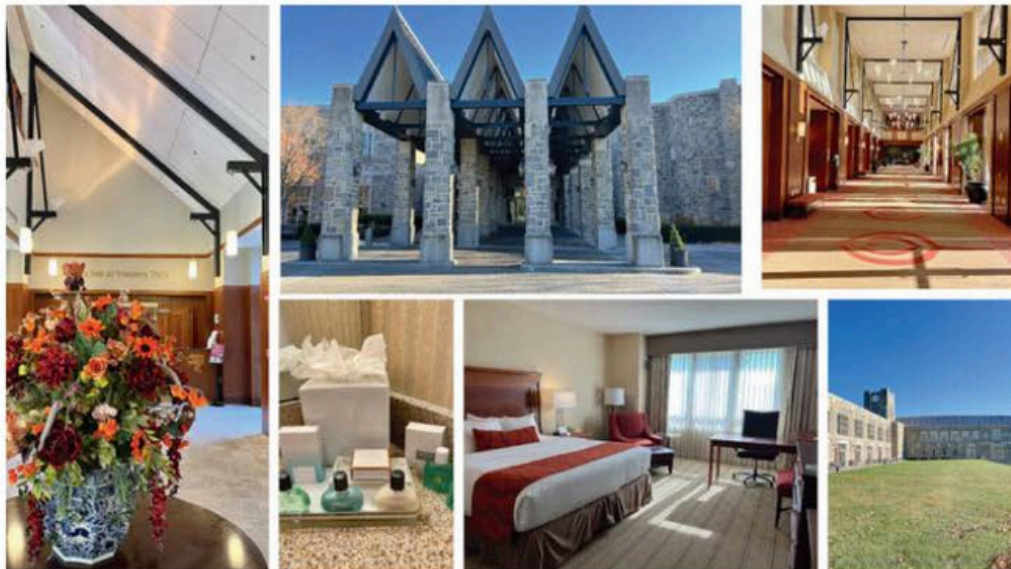


*The pond area at Sinkland Farms is the site of many weddings and other gatherings. The resident geese might join in.*

### **Where to stay in Montgomery County, Virginia:**

**The Inn at Virginia Tech** is an ideal home-away-from-home when visiting Blacksburg and Christiansburg. It's certainly a favorite of parents in town for Virginia Tech events and to visit their kids. And its where performers for the Moss Center are likely to be staying – I met several musicians who were in town for concerts.

The Inn is the only hotel on the Virginia Tech campus and offers spacious rooms, nice in-room amenities, flexible meeting spaces, Blacksburg's largest event venue and Preston's restaurant with delicious food (their plentiful breakfast buffet was one of the most varied I've experienced).



*The Inn at Virginia Tech offers comfortable lodging and a convenient location for enjoying Montgomery County.*

**For more information about Blacksburg & Christiansburg in Montgomery County, Virginia, visit [gotomontva.com](http://gotomontva.com).**

*-Story and photos by Courtney Drake-McDonough, Publisher & Managing Editor of Real Food Traveler*

## Explore Virginia's New River Valley: What To Do Near Virginia Tech

Robin Raven Contributor 

May 11, 2024

The New River Valley in Southwest Virginia is a scenic vacation spot and the home to [Virginia Tech](#), a large public university in Blacksburg, Virginia. It's located in Montgomery County which touches three river drainages – New River, James River, and Roanoke River – so there's an abundance of outdoor activities available. You'll also find a classic cinema, a charming bookstore, an innovative arts center, and lots more. Here are the things you shouldn't miss when you visit the valley.



Looking out over the New River in Blacksburg, Virginia with the blue ridge Mountains in the background. [-] GETTY

## Go Tubing At The New River Junction



Views of the winding New River at New River Junction. GETTY

What's a visit to the New River Valley without experiencing the New River? To experience some of the natural beauty of the area in a fun and relaxing way, visit the [New River Junction](#), a campground and recreational park that's only 13 miles from Blacksburg. It has been owned and operated by the same family for decades.

When you visit this park, you can go tubing down the mile-long stretch of the New River. This part of the river is almost 300 yards wide, and it's popular among families. It's safe and fun for kids who can go tubing alongside their parents to float down a mile of calm water. Adventuresome tubers can enjoy the optional 200 years of rapids at the end of the mile-long stretch of calm waters.

## Explore Downtown Blacksburg



Blacksburg is an incorporated town in Montgomery County, Virginia. GETTY

Affectionately known by residents as the “heart of the Blacksburg”, [The Lyric Theatre](#) is more than a cinema. Yes, it plays new releases, but it also serves the community in many ways. Originally opened in 1930, it was one of the first theaters in Virginia to show sound pictures. This movie theater, located in downtown Blacksburg, is a sight to behold with its 1930s tapestries and replica lanterns. The fully restored lobby gives one the feeling of stepping back into Hollywood’s golden age.

While you’re in downtown Blacksburg, it will be hard to resist the charming [Blacksburg Books](#). It offers a wonderfully curated selection of books, and you can find fun stuff like journals, stickers, patches, and more for sale. Then you can learn more about local history and culture at the [Alexander Black House & Cultural Center Gift Shop](#).

## Take A Hike In And Near The New River Valley



Overlook of a McAfee Knob and Blue Ridge mountains in Virginia. GETTY

There are a wide variety of hiking opportunities in and near Blacksburg. If you're looking to get out in nature and savor a leisurely stroll, walk along a one-mile loop trail that encircles Pandapas Pond, a serene, eight-acre pond that lies just outside of Blacksburg. The trail is wheelchair accessible. Cross a wooden boardwalk to enter a wetland area where you might get glimpses of local wildlife.

If you are hoping for a more challenging hike, you can access the 17-mile Poverty Creek Trail system from the upper parking lot at Pandapas Pond. There's also the Huckleberry Trail which connects Blacksburg to Christiansburg with more than 13 miles of paved trails. You can go rock climbing as part of your hike of Dragon's Tooth, which is a 5.7-mile round trip, and also enjoy lovely views of Southwest Virginia.

Have you always dreamed of hiking part of the Appalachian Trail? One of the most popular spots along the famous trail is McAfee Knob, which is only about a 40-minute drive from Blacksburg. You'll be treated to breathtaking panoramic views if you are up to hiking 4.4 miles to the top of McAfee Knob.

## Celebrate The Arts In Southwest Virginia

You can see many types of arts performances at Virginia Tech's [Moss Arts Center](#). In addition to plays and concerts, they host innovative art exhibitions and artist talks throughout the year. There's also the nearby [New River Stage](#) where you can see classic and modern plays. Some of their upcoming productions include *Steel Magnolias*, *The Story of Lewis & McHenry*, and *Three Sisters in Black*.

## When To Visit The New River Valley

A lot of visitors come to Blacksburg around school-centered events. With over 30,000 Virginia Tech students descending upon the city during the schoolyear, the city is far more crowded when school is in session, but there is something to do all year long. If you love fall foliage, you'll find the New River Valley to be a wonderland throughout the autumn months. If you come in the summer months, you can enjoy warm summer days and nights with fewer crowds because many students go home for the summer.

## Where To Stay In Blacksburg, Virginia

With so many local happenings centered around the university, [The Inn at Virginia Tech](#) is a popular place to stay in Blacksburg. The comfortable hotel is located on the gorgeous campus, and guests can choose from modern rooms and suites. Complimentary parking is available to all guests, and electric vehicle charging stations are onsite. Also, it has an onsite restaurant with options for vegans and others with special dietary needs.

## Fresh Discoveries Await In Southwest Virginia

Travelers Who Venture To Blacksburg, Christiansburg Find Plenty To See, Do In This Corner Of Appalachia

By **RANDY MINK**

Special to the Journal & Topics

The combination of school colors -- maroon and orange -- seems a bit jarring at first, but they kind of grow on you after a few days of exploring the Virginia Tech campus and pleasant college town of Blacksburg. And you soon become comfortable with other places in Montgomery County and the New River Valley, an inviting blend of pretty scenery and small-town life in the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains of southwestern Virginia.

The 147-room Inn at Virginia Tech, on the edge of campus, provides the perfect base for first-time visitors to this neck of the woods. From my spacious fourth-floor guest room I had views of the grassy backyard and stately clock tower of the limestone-block hotel and conference center.

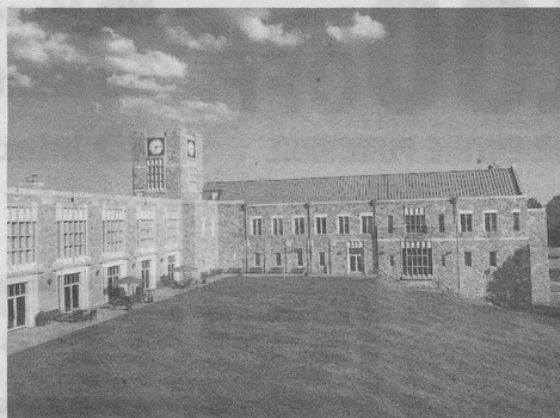
Like almost every other building on campus, the inn is constructed of dark-gray dolomite stones quarried locally. In fact, the school (formally the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) owns two quarries and employs its own stone masons. All new central campus buildings must bear the distinctive limestone, an architectural element that lends the beautiful, tree-shaded grounds a pleasing uniformity.

Chefs at the inn's farm-to-table restaurant, Preston's, prepare their regionally-inspired dishes with seasonal ingredients and Southern flair. At our group's first dinner there, I savored the Fish and Grits, a delicious entree featuring rainbow trout with cheddar grits and pickled forest mushrooms. Others raved about the Fig Balsamic Skirt Steak.

Starters were crab hushpuppies with red pepper aioli and the Hokie Board, a charcuterie ensemble of Virginia shaved country ham, pimento cheese, house chow chow and lavosh, a crunchy cracker bread. For des-



During college football season, thousands of passionate fans throng Lane Stadium to cheer on the Virginia Tech Hokies. (Photo courtesy Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism)



The Inn at Virginia Tech, built of the dolomite limestone known locally as Hokie Stone, offers 147 hotel rooms, a conference center and gracious dining at Preston's Restaurant. (Randy Mink Photo)

sert we shared Preston's Signature Bread Pudding and Molten Chocolate Lava Cake.

**Exploring Virginia Tech**  
As followers of college sports

know, the nickname "Hokie" refers to Virginia Tech students, athletic teams and fans. It comes from the word "hoki" in a school spirit cheer that rang out in the 1890s. The HokieBird mascot,

a turkey-like character, rouses up crowds at 66,000-seat Lane Stadium, one of the loudest stadiums in college football. Teams once were known as the Fighting Gobblers.

Maroon-and-orange Hokie gear, from plush HokieBirds to caps, T-shirts and sweatshirts, makes the perfect souvenir and is sold at the inn's gift nook and other shops in Blacksburg. Artist-painted HokieBird statues around town provide great photo ops. The limestone blocks that face campus buildings are called, you guessed it, Hokie Stones.

Blacksburg's 15,000 permanent residents are outnumbered by the 30,000 students who attend Virginia Tech. The campus counts 221 buildings across 2,600 acres. Best known as a center for cutting-edge technological research and programs in

engineering and natural sciences, VT also offers liberal arts studies. Its students pursue more than 250 degrees.

The university's impressive Moss Arts Center, a hot spot for the performing and visual arts, welcomes the general public as well as students. For the 2024-2025 season, its Anne and Ellen Fife Theatre will showcase entertainment as diverse as the Czech National Symphony Orchestra and Bela Fleck, considered the world's premier banjo player. Touring Broadway shows include "The Book of Mormon" and "Dear Evan Hansen." The stage hosts School of Performing Arts productions, too.

Perhaps the most peaceful spot on campus is Hahn Horticulture Garden, where students bring hammocks to chill out. Favor-  
**(Continued on next page)**

# Southwest Virginia

(Continued from previous page) its features of the teaching and display gardens include a pond with koi and goldfish, an open meadow with native plants and Trident Maple Allee with its cathedral-like canopy for shade-loving perennials and shrubs.

Among other points of interest at the home of the Hokies are The Pylons, a war memorial saluting every VT student or graduate who has made the ultimate sacrifice since WWI, and the April 16 Memorial, whose 32 engraved Hokie Stones honor each victim murdered in the 2007 mass shooting at a VT residence hall and classroom building.

## Shopping in Downtown Blacksburg

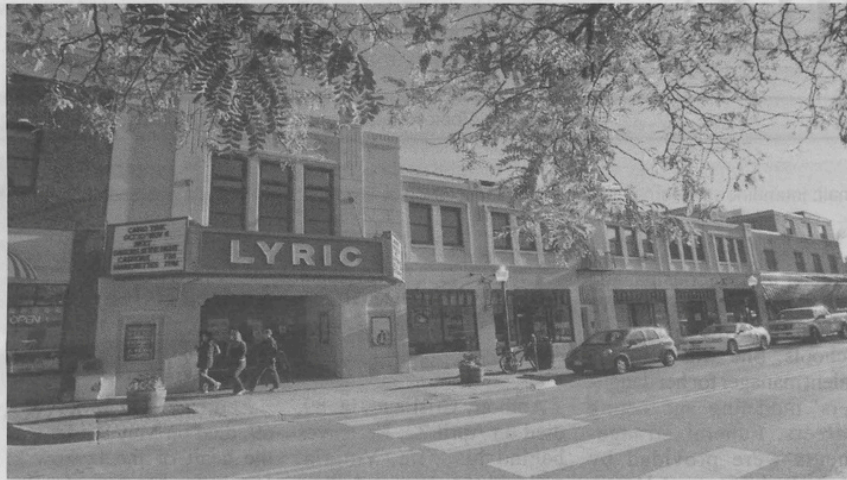
Adjoining the campus, downtown Blacksburg abounds with fun shops and eateries. On Main Street, bookworms flock to Blacksburg Books, a quirky independent bookstore that promotes local authors and sells locally made goods like soaps, chocolates and honey. Of special note is the Appalachian Appreciation section, where you'll find titles like "Talking Appalachian," "The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Cooking" and "What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia."

The store's "Blind Date with A Book" rack displays bargain-priced books wrapped in plain brown paper with a hand-written description of the subject matter but no clue to the title or author. On the first Saturday of the month, Typewriter Poetry sessions involve an instructor from the VT Fine Arts Department who will type out a custom-composed poem after ascertaining your interests.

Down the street, I connected with Sugar Magnolia, a shop that specializes in paper goods, gifts, chocolates and ice cream. I had a sundae made with Hokie Tracks, a flavor that consists of salted caramel ice cream with dark chocolate-covered pretzel chunks. The large gift shop had some artistically designed wall plaques in maroon and orange, plus some other Hokie-influenced pieces.

## A Theater and Farmers Market Worth a Visit

Another downtown magnet is the Lyric Theatre, just steps from the VT campus. Built in 1930, it was the third theater in Virginia designed for sound movies and the first air-conditioned building in Blacksburg. Renovated in 1998-1999 after a period of sitting empty and then serving as VT classroom space, the 477-seat



Dating from 1930, the historic Lyric Theatre in downtown Blacksburg, VA shows first-run movies. (Photo courtesy Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism)



A one-mile trail circles Pandapas Pond in Jefferson National Forest, a recreation focal point in southwestern Virginia. (Randy Mink Photo)

auditorium shines with the original 1930s tapestries and replica hanging lanterns fashioned after the originals.

The Lyric shows first-run movies 364 days a year, plus art, international and children's films. It also hosts concerts and speakers. Movie tickets are \$6-\$8, a large popcorn only \$3.50.

Downtown's Market Square Park stages the Blacksburg Farmers Market year-round on Saturdays and on Wednesday afternoons from April to November. Nearly 40 vendors purvey everything from produce and baked goods to flowers, jewelry and alpaca socks.

## Bring Your Appetite to Downtown Blacksburg

Southern comfort food is one of my favorite ways to indulge, and Blacksburg Tavern didn't disappoint. Occupying an 1892 house on Main Street, the restaurant pays tribute to southwestern Virginia with a menu of hearty dishes and soundtrack playing old-time and bluegrass music in the Appalachian tradition.

Our group's family-style meal

featured platters of fried chicken and sliced beef brisket accompanied by combread, buttermilk biscuits, and bowls of mashed potatoes and succotash (a medley of lima beans and corn). The finishing touch was a slice of scrumptious blueberry pie with vanilla bean ice cream.

Baked ham and meatloaf are the other two meats served at Blacksburg Tavern. Next time I might try The Huge Hokie, a bowl of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, chicken gravy, green beans and pimento mac 'n' cheese.

Blacksburg Tavern is decorated with framed historical photos of Virginia Tech and Blacksburg along with murals depicting local history and landscapes. The wall art was done by Virginia McLaughlin, the great aunt of tavern owner Daniel Riley, when she was 91 years old, and her son. She painted similar murals for the Mount Vernon Inn Restaurant at George Washington's Mount Vernon estate in northern Virginia.

For Mexican food on Main Street, head to Cabo Fish Taco, where our group ate on the large

outdoor patio. I rated the blackened mahi mahi taco a 10-plus, while others raved about the Epic Tuna Burrito and Banging Baja Taco loaded with beer-battered shrimp. Cabo Fish Taco offers one of the largest tequila menus in Virginia, with 13 specialty margaritas to choose from.

## Craft Beer Fans Flock to Innovative Breweries

Montgomery County boasts a robust beer culture. We sampled three brewpubs, including the largest, Eastern Divide Brewing Company in Blacksburg. In the cavernous, steel-frame building with a friendly beer hall atmosphere and lots of plants lending a refreshing touch of greenery, I washed down a grilled pimento cheese sandwich with a flight of beers that included Los Mas Mexican Amber Lager, infused with lime puree; Blackbear Sour Ale, flavored with blueberries and blackberries; and Coconut Migration Porter, with strong hints of coconut and vanilla (my favorite).

In a male-dominated industry, Moon Hollow Brewing stands

out. The Blacksburg brewery, in the kindergarten room of a former elementary school, is female-run and -staffed. Moon Hollow is best known for its fruited sours, like Lavender Fields, a Belgian-style saison made with black currants and lavender blossoms. The patio faces a barn and pasture with grazing cows.

At Iron Hollow Brewery in Christiansburg, owner and brewhouse manager Seth Locklear says the James Blonde, an easy-drinking blonde ale, is the most popular beer. Adventurous patrons try the Duck Pond Water, a smoked Scottish ale that Locklear says "smells like a campfire when I'm making it." Fun seasonal flavors have included gingerbread, fruitcake, peppermint and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

## Shop, Play in Christiansburg

A highlight of my visit to Christiansburg was rummaging around a place called Cambria Station Antiques and Old New River Books. Located in a former general store in a historic district that once was the town of Cambria, it abounds with special finds, from used books and records to vintage clothing, furniture and advertising memorabilia.

I also got a look at brand new Christiansburg Huckleberry Park, an innovative facility with an all-inclusive playground featuring equipment designed for children with social, emotional, cognitive, physical, hearing or visual disabilities.

## Communing with Countryside

On the edge of Montgomery County, 12 miles from downtown Blacksburg, resides Beliveau Farm, a destination winery with vineyards overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. The tasting room and patio at the hillside Sugar Shack afford views of the rolling green hills that once were part of a cattle farm.

The estate's brewery produces gluten-free beers, including the Tree Tapper Maple Ale flavored with syrup from the farm's 250 tappable maple trees. Also made on-site are grape-based jams, including clove, pineapple jalapeno and lemon lavender.

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For more information, visit the website of Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism, [www.gotomontva.com](http://www.gotomontva.com).

(Continued on next page)

local research and program in

1890s. The Hokiebird mascot.

A follows of college sports

crunchy cracker bread. For des-

# LEISURE

GROUP TRAVEL

## Fresh Discoveries Await in Southwest Virginia

History & Heritage, Online Exclusives



### TRAVELERS WHO VENTURE TO BLACKSBURG, CHRISTIANSBURG AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE FIND PLENTY TO SEE AND DO. THIS CORNER OF APPALACHIA IS FULL OF SURPRISES.

The combination of school colors—maroon and orange—seems a bit jarring at first, but they kind of grow on you after a few days of exploring the Virginia Tech campus and pleasant college town of Blacksburg. And you soon become comfortable with other places in Montgomery County and the New River Valley, an inviting blend of pretty scenery and small-town life in the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains of southwestern Virginia.

The 147-room **Inn at Virginia Tech**, on the edge of campus, provides the perfect base for first-time visitors to this neck of the woods. From my spacious fourth-floor guest room I had views of the grassy backyard and stately clock tower of the limestone-block hotel and conference center.



The Inn at Virginia Tech. (Photo credit: The Inn at Virginia Tech)

Like almost every other building on campus, the Inn is constructed of gray dolomite stones quarried locally. In fact, the school (formally the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) owns two quarries and employs its own stone masons. All new central campus buildings must bear the distinctive limestone, an architectural element that lends the beautiful, tree-shaded grounds a pleasing uniformity.

Chefs at the inn's farm-to-table restaurant, Preston's, prepare their regionally inspired dishes with seasonal ingredients and Southern flair. At our group's first dinner there, I savored the Fish and Grits, a delicious entree featuring rainbow trout with cheddar grits and pickled forest mushrooms. Others raved about the Fig Balsamic Skirt Steak. Starters were crab hushpuppies with red pepper aioli and the Hokie Board, a charcuterie ensemble of Virginia shaved country ham, pimento cheese, house chow chow and lavosh, a crunchy cracker bread. For dessert we shared Preston's Signature Bread Pudding and Molten Chocolate Lava Cake.

## EXPLORING THE VIRGINIA TECH CAMPUS

As followers of college sports know, the nickname "Hokie" refers to Virginia Tech students, athletic teams and fans. It comes from the word "hoki" in a school spirit cheer that rang out in the 1890s. The HokieBird mascot, a turkey-like character, rouses up crowds at 66,000-seat Lane Stadium, one of the loudest stadiums in college football. Teams once were known as the Fighting Gobblers. Maroon-and-orange Hokie gear, from plush HokieBirds to caps, T-shirts and sweatshirts, makes the perfect souvenir and is sold at the inn's gift nook and other shops in Blacksburg. Artist-painted HokieBird statues around town provide great photo ops. The limestone blocks that face campus buildings are called, you guessed it, Hokie Stones.

Blacksburg's 15,000 permanent residents are outnumbered by the 30,000 students who attend Virginia Tech. The campus counts 221 buildings across 2,600 acres. Best known as a center for cutting-edge technological research and programs in engineering and natural sciences, VT also offers liberal arts studies. Its students pursue more than 250 degrees.

The university's impressive **Moss Arts Center**, a hot spot for the performing and visual arts, welcomes the general public as well as students. For the 2024-2025 season, its Anne and Ellen Fife Theatre will showcase entertainment as diverse as the Czech National Symphony Orchestra and Bela Fleck, considered the world's premier banjo player. Touring Broadway shows include *The Book of Mormon* and *Dear Evan Hansen*. The stage hosts School of Performing Arts productions, too.

Perhaps the most peaceful spot on campus is **Hahn Horticulture Garden**, where students bring hammocks to chill out. Favorite features of the teaching and display gardens include:

- A pond with koi and goldfish
- A vegetable garden
- An open meadow with native plants
- Trident Maple Allee with its cathedral-like canopy for shade-loving perennials and shrubs



Virginia Tech's iconic Burruss Hall and the April 16 Memorial. (Photo credit: Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism)

Among other points of interest at the home of the Hokies are **The Pylons**, a war memorial saluting every VT student or graduate who has made the ultimate sacrifice since WWII, and the **April 16 Memorial**, whose 32 engraved Hokie Stones honor each victim murdered in the 2007 mass shooting at a VT residence hall and classroom building.

## SHOPPING IN DOWNTOWN BLACKSBURG

Adjoining the campus, downtown Blacksburg abounds with fun shops and eateries. On Main Street, bookworms flock to **Blacksburg Books**, a quirky independent bookstore that promotes local authors and sells locally made goods like soaps, chocolates and honey. Of special note is the Appalachian Appreciation section, where you'll find titles like:

- *Talking Appalachian*
- *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Cooking*
- *Birds of Appalachia and the Southeast*
- *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*

For my brother, an avid birder, I was tempted to buy *The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of the Whole Stupid World*. The store's "Blind Date with A Book" rack displays bargain-priced books wrapped in plain brown paper with a hand-written description of the subject matter but no clue to the title or author. On the first Saturday of the month, Typewriter Poetry sessions involve an instructor from the VT Fine Arts Department who will type out a custom-composed poem after ascertaining your interests.



Sugar Magnolia's gift shop. (Randy Mink Photo)

Down the street, I connected with **Sugar Magnolia**, a shop that specializes in paper goods, gifts, chocolates and ice cream. I had a sundae made with Hokie Tracks, a flavor that consists of salted caramel ice cream with dark chocolate-covered pretzel chunks. I forgot to ask for a sample of Michigan Pothole, a chocolate ice cream with ribbons of "thick, black-tar fudge" and chunks of "chocolate asphalt." The large gift shop had some artistically designed wall plaques in maroon and orange, plus some other Hokie-influenced pieces.

#### A HISTORIC THEATER AND FARMERS MARKET WORTH A VISIT

Another downtown magnet is the **Lyric Theatre**, just steps from the VT campus. Built in 1930, it was the third theater in Virginia designed for sound movies and the first air-conditioned building in Blacksburg. Renovated in 1998-1999 after a period of sitting empty and then serving as VT classroom space, the 477-seat auditorium shines with the original 1930s tapestries and replica hanging lanterns fashioned after the originals.

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The Lyric shows first-run movies 364 days a year, plus art, international and children's films. It also hosts concerts, speakers and community events. Movie tickets are \$6-\$8, a large popcorn only \$3.50. Group tours are available.

Downtown's Market Square Park stages the Blacksburg Farmers Market year-round on Saturdays and on Wednesday afternoons from April to November. Nearly 40 vendors purvey everything from baked goods and produce to flowers, jewelry and alpaca socks. All food items are grown within a 50-mile radius.

#### BRING YOUR APPETITE TO DOWNTOWN BLACKSBURG

Southern comfort food is one of my favorite ways to indulge, and **Blacksburg Tavern** didn't disappoint. Occupying an 1892 house on Main Street, the restaurant pays tribute to southwestern Virginia with a menu of hearty dishes and soundtrack playing old-time and bluegrass music in the Appalachian tradition.

Our group's family-style meal featured platters of fried chicken and sliced, slow-roasted beef brisket accompanied by cornbread, buttermilk biscuits, and bowls of mashed potatoes and succotash (a medley of lima beans and corn). The finishing touch was a slice of scrumptious blueberry pie with vanilla bean ice cream.

Baked ham and meatloaf are the other two meats served at Blacksburg Tavern. Next time I might try The Huge Hokie, a bowl of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, chicken gravy, green beans and pimento mac 'n' cheese.

Blacksburg Tavern is decorated with framed historical photos of Virginia Tech and Blacksburg along with murals depicting local history and landscapes. The wall art was done by Virginia McLaughlin, the great aunt of tavern owner Daniel Riley, when she was 91 years old, and her son. She painted similar murals for the Mount Vernon Inn Restaurant at George Washington's Mount Vernon estate in northern Virginia.

For Mexican food on Main Street, head to **Cabo Fish Taco**, where our group ate on the large outdoor patio. I rated the blackened mahi mahi taco a 10-plus, while others raved about the Epic Tuna Burrito and Banging Baja Taco loaded with beer-battered shrimp. Cabo Fish Taco offers one of the largest tequila menus in Virginia, with 13 specialty margaritas to choose from.



Beer flight at Eastern Divide Brewing. (Randy Mink Photo)

### CRAFT BEER FANS MAKE A BEELINE TO INNOVATIVE BREWERIES

Montgomery County boasts a robust beer culture. We sampled three brewpubs, including the largest, **Eastern Divide Brewing Company** in Blacksburg. In the cavernous, steel-frame building with a friendly beer hall atmosphere and lots of plants lending a refreshing touch of greenery, I washed down a grilled pimento cheese sandwich with a flight of six beers that included:

- Los Mas Mexican Amber Lager, infused with lime puree
- Blackbear Sour Ale, flavored with blueberries and blackberries
- Coconut Migration Porter, with strong hints of coconut and vanilla (my favorite)
- Hive-mind Honey Wheat, sweetened with Virginia honey
- Righteous Chardonnay Aged Belgian Tripel, aged one year in French chardonnay barrels
- Commerce Street Kölsch, a light-bodied German ale

Others enjoyed the non-alcoholic cherry limeade and ginger beer.

In a male-dominated industry, **Moon Hollow Brewing** stands out. The Blacksburg brewery, in the kindergarten room of a former elementary school, is female-run and -staffed. Moon Hollow is best known for its fruited sours, like Lavender Fields, a Belgian-style saison made with black currants and lavender blossoms. Craft sodas include the ginger beer and strawberry pink peppercorn.

The patio at Moon Hollow faces a barn and pasture with grazing cows. The beasts are friendly and, through the fence, seem to like interacting with brewery guests.

At **Iron Tree Brewing Company** in Christiansburg, owner and brewhouse manager Seth Locklear says the James Blonde, an easy-drinking blonde ale, is the most popular beer, followed by Hazy River, a New England-style IPA. Adventurous patrons try the Duck Pond Water, a smoked Scottish ale that Locklear says "smells like a campfire when I'm making it." Fun seasonal flavors have included gingerbread, fruitcake, peppermint and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

Iron Hollow also makes root beer and a margarita-flavored hard seltzer. Guests can bring their own food, and some days a food truck is stationed outside.

### SHOP AND PLAY IN CHRISTIANSBURG

A highlight of my visit to Christiansburg was rummaging around a place called **Cambria Station Antiques and Old New River Books**. Located in a former general store in a historic district that once was the town of Cambria, it abounds with special finds, from used books and records to vintage clothing, furniture and advertising memorabilia.

Our group got a look at brand new **Christiansburg Huckleberry Park**, an innovative facility with an all-inclusive playground featuring equipment designed for children with social, emotional, cognitive, physical, hearing or visual disabilities. The park also has tournament-ready playing fields, a dog park and paved trails.



Beliveau Farm, set among the rolling hills of Montgomery County, Virginia, offers both wine and beer tastings. (Randy Mink Photo)

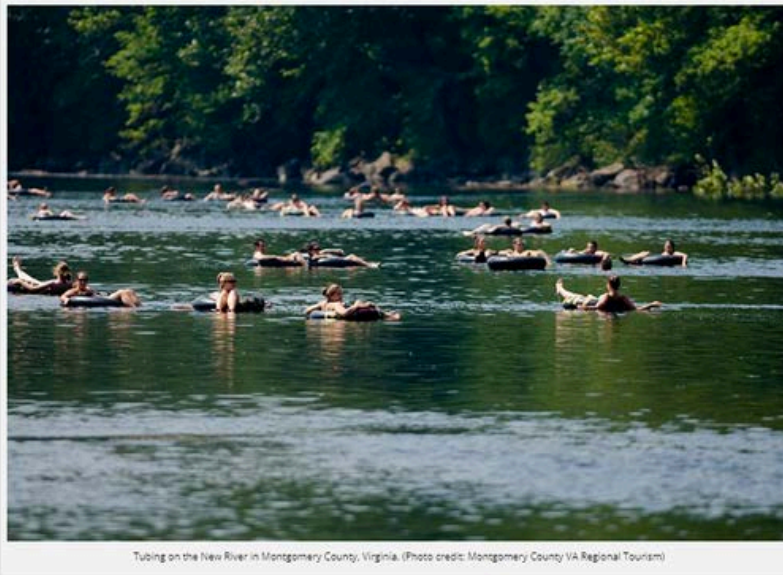
## COMMUNING WITH THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY

On the edge of Montgomery County, 12 miles from downtown Blacksburg, resides **Beliveau Farm**, a destination winery with vineyards overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. At 2,300 feet, it's one of the highest vineyards in Virginia. The tasting room and patio at the hillside Sugar Shack afford views of the rolling green hills that once were part of a cattle farm.

The estate's brewery produces gluten-free beers, including the Tree Tapper Maple Ale flavored with syrup from the farm's 250 tappable maple trees. Also made on-site are grape-based jams, including clove, pineapple jalapeno and lemon lavender.

Our group got another taste of Montgomery County's scenic countryside at a location in **Jefferson National Forest** just 10 minutes from Blacksburg. We took the one-mile loop trail that traverses wetlands over bridges and boardwalks at **Pandapas Pond**. A 26-mile network of trails branches off from the eight-acre pond, which is stocked with walleye and trout.

On a hot summer day, there's nothing better than a lazy downstream float on the New River. At **New River Junction**, a family-run campground and tubing center now in its 43rd year, you can rent an inner tube for as little as \$14 day for unlimited one-mile rides to the rapids. A shuttle bus takes you back to the starting point.



Tubing on the New River in Montgomery County, Virginia. (Photo credit: Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism)

Most of the forest-lined river is less than three feet deep. The water temperature in August reaches into the 80s. At the end of the run, Big Falls Park has grills, tables, plates and plastic utensils for tubers who pack a picnic lunch. Offering cabins along with tent and RV sites, New River Junction is 13 miles west of Blacksburg.

For more Virginia travel ideas, you can [subscribe to Leisure Group Travel for FREE](#)

Trending Destinations, Expert Advice & Industry News - May 17, 2024



Exploring the New River Valley in southwestern [Virginia](#) last week, I discovered a couple of friendly Montgomery County towns worth putting on your next Appalachian itinerary. Blacksburg and Christiansburg, both conveniently located off Interstate 81, abound with top-notch attractions, restaurants, breweries and recreation options.

You may know Blacksburg as the home of Virginia Tech, whose students, fans and athletic team members are called Hokies. The beautiful, tree-shaded campus features stately limestone buildings made from a distinctive, locally quarried material called Hokie Stone. One of those buildings is the 147-room Inn at Virginia Tech, renowned for gracious dining in its restaurant, Preston's.

Downtown Blacksburg offers an array of specialty shops, like quirky independent bookstore Blacksburg Books and Sugar Magnolia ice cream parlor/gift shop. Down-home Southern cooking awaits at Blacksburg Tavern, which occupies an 1892 house on Main Street.

Groups also will feel at home at one of Montgomery County's brewpubs. I sampled the beers at Eastern Divide Brewing Company and Moon Hollow Brewing, both in Blacksburg, and Iron Hollow Brewery in Christiansburg.

You can try gluten-free beers as well as wines at Beliveau Farm, a destination winery overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. A trip into the countryside also takes you to Jefferson National Forest, a hiker's paradise, and New River Junction, a campground that offers tubing on the New River.

We have plenty more unique trip offerings in our [Virginia Group Tour Guide](#) that include heritage, cultural and performing arts, outdoor adventures and scenic vistas, music and artesian trails, and an exciting culinary scene.

Happy traveling,

Randy Mink, Senior Editor



podcasts › society & culture

## Journeys of Discovery with Tom Wilmer

From KCBX

Tom Wilmer's award-winning shows travel from the Arctic to African safaris, in the wheelhouse of the Rainbow Warrior II, flying in WWII bombers, navigating a micro light above Victoria Falls, sailing around Grenada, hiking through the wilds of Malaysian jungles and exploring remote atolls and isles throughout the South Pacific.



APPLE PODCASTS

RSS LINK

JUNE 19, 2024

### Christiansburg, Virginia's iconic Starlite Drive-In celebrates 72nd anniversary

Brenda Flora shares tales of Christiansburg, Virginia's historic Starlite Drive In

LISTEN · 13:00

PLAYLIST



JUNE 4, 2024

### A visit with Master Gardener Beth Umberger at Montgomery Museum of Art & History

Join correspondent Tom Wilmer for a visit with Master Gardener, Beth Umberger in Christiansburg at the Montgomery Museum of Art & History's legendary gardens.

LISTEN · 13:19

PLAYLIST



JUNE 3, 2024

### Christiansburg, Virginia's Huckleberry Park – redefining a community asset

Correspondent Tom Wilmer explores Christiansburg, VA's state of the art Huckleberry Park and how it became a trendsetter.

LISTEN · 13:28

PLAYLIST



MAY 31, 2024

### Reimagining the future of aviation at Virginia Tech's trendsetting regional airport

Correspondent Tom Wilmer visits with Keith Holt, Executive Director at the innovative Virginia Tech/Montgomery Executive Airport in Blacksburg, VA.

LISTEN · 22:00

PLAYLIST



MAY 29, 2024

### Blacksburg Books--more than a store it's Blacksburg, Virginia's community center of sorts

Ellen Woodall, manager at Blacksburg Books in downtown Blacksburg, shares the inside story of why the indie bookstore is thriving

LISTEN · 11:42

PLAYLIST



MAY 27, 2024

### Exploring Christiansburg VA's Huckleberry Park and visiting with Master Gardener, Beth Umberger

Join the conversation with Brad Epperley, Christiansburg VA's Director of Parks & Recreation and Master Gardener Beth Umberger at nearby Montgomery Museum of Art & History

LISTEN · 25:00

PLAYLIST





podcasts › society & culture

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From KCBX

Tom Wilmer's award-winning shows travel from the Arctic to African safaris, in the wheelhouse of the Rainbow Warrior II, flying in WWII bombers, navigating a micro light above Victoria Falls, sailing around Grenada, hiking through the wilds of Malaysian jungles and exploring remote atolls and isles throughout the South Pacific.

APPLE PODCASTS

RSS LINK

MAY 23, 2024

### Engaging with community at Blacksburg, Virginia's weekly Farmers Market

Correspondent Tom Wilmer reports from Blacksburg, Virginia's Farmers Market. Come along for a visit with Director, Deborah Edwards.

LISTEN · 13:00

PLAYLIST



MAY 21, 2024

### Blacksburg, VA's classic circa-1930 Lyric Theatre

Join Correspondent Tom Wilmer at the historic Lyric Theatre in downtown Blacksburg, Virginia for a conversation with Executive Director, Seth Davis.

LISTEN · 15:34

PLAYLIST



### Hannah Lester, owner and brewer at Blacksburg Virginia's Moon Hollow Brewing

Join correspondent Tom Wilmer at Moon Hollow Brewing in Blacksburg, Montgomery County Virginia for a visit with owner and brewmaster, Hannah Lester.

LISTEN · 14:00

PLAYLIST



MAY 17, 2024

### Engaging with Virginia Tech and the community at Eastern Divide Brewing Company

Correspondent Tom Wilmer visits with head brewer, Brandon Roberson and tap room manager Samantha Sol at Eastern Divide Brewing in Blacksburg, Virginia.

LISTEN · 27:00

PLAYLIST



MAY 14, 2024

### Time travel back to 1774 at Smithfield Plantation on Virginia Tech's campus

A conversation with historians at historic Smithfield Plantation at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg Virginia.

LISTEN · 20:11

PLAYLIST



MAY 12, 2024

### Exploring Christiansburg, Virginia's Old New River Books, antiques and art

Exploring Christiansburg, Virginia's Old New River Books, antiques and art.

LISTEN · 16:25

PLAYLIST



MAY 9, 2024

### The future is present at Virginia Tech

A conversation with John Provo, Executive Director of Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement in Blacksburg, Virginia.

LISTEN · 25:03

PLAYLIST



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## DISCOVER MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VA

Pumpkin festivals, hiking and antiquing are some of the fun

Story and Photos by Grady McGill



Get fresh fruits and vegetables from Sinkland Farms.



Shop for antiques at Cambria Station Antiques.



Nature at its best at George Washington & Jefferson National Forest.

If adventures, festivals, nature, fresh food and a relaxed atmosphere are calling your name, then escape to Blacksburg and Christiansburg in Montgomery County, Virginia. Located just an hour from Roanoke and two hours from Richmond, Blacksburg is known for being home to Virginia Tech, which was founded in 1872. It has a college town feel with boutiques, funky coffee shops and a youthful vibe.

### What to see

Upon coming to Virginia, we all got in the fall spirit and went for a Pumpkin Festival adventure and hayride at Sinkland Farms. Sinkland Farms opened in 1980 while their annual Pumpkin Festival was started in 1991. The farm's Pumpkin Festival was voted best pumpkin festival by the Commonwealth by Virginia Tourism and we can see why. It was massive with everything from pumpkins to food trucks to live music and family-fun activities.

Taking a hayride was a laugh-filled and relaxing adventure especially with the breeze flowing. After the hayride we tasted some fair favorites such as the funnel cake and fried Oreos. When the Oreos arrived, everyone was eager to go for them and they were amazing! In addition to the Pumpkin Festival, Sinkland Farms hosts a variety of offerings from weddings to the Sunflower Festival and Wine Festival.

Fall is the perfect time to enjoy nature with a hike at George Washington & Jefferson National Forest. Jefferson was combined with the George Washington National Forest in Blacksburg in 1995. The trails stretch as far as 330 miles and offer more than 1.8 million acres of lush woodlands, unique mountain balds, peaceful waters and lots of outdoor adventures. Mountain biking is a big activity here. We were fortunate enough to come in the fall where there were gorgeous views of the Appalachian Mountains and their colorful foliage. Any time is perfect for a visit, but the fall is extra special.

Our first morning in Montgomery County began at the Center for the Arts, which is a performing arts venue within the Virginia Tech campus. The center was one of the first theaters in Virginia to show talkies. Besides being a performance venue, it boasts the Ruth C. Horton Gallery that features paintings by artists Clare Grill and Margaux Ogden.

Later, we toured Lyric Theater, which is one of Virginia's oldest movie theaters. Since its opening in 1930, it has gone through renovations but it still maintains the old charm with tapestries and replica lanterns. The lobby and auditorium looked just like they did when Clark Gable and Greta Garbo movies were on the screen.

We went antique shopping at Christiansburg Cambria Station Antiques, a three-floor store with a variety of antiques, furniture, primitiveness and oddities. We were in retro heaven! Every floor had something different. On the third floor, for example, there were vinyl records (Nirvana and Def Leppard) and VHS movies and shows (*Seinfeld*, and early Disney) that brought me back to my childhood.



*It's a beautiful day at George Washington & Jefferson National Forest.*

**Virginia Tech Inn**

We stayed at The Inn at Virginia Tech, which is near the campus and three miles from the Jefferson National Forest. Opened 20 years ago, the hotel has 24,000 square feet with 147 rooms, a 700-seat ballroom and 10 conference rooms. It also features two restaurants: Preston's for full-service dining and the Continental Divide Lounge. There are also two private dining rooms: the 1872 Salon and the Old Guard.

The Montgomery Museum of Art & History offered a fascinating look into the everyday lives of those living in the region as well as works by local and national artists. Among our favorite exhibits were the Appalachian Instruments and a retrospective of America's service stations where they not only filled your tank but washed your windshields — those were the good old days. Coming soon is an exhibit on Girl Scout cookies.

**Local fare**

After a morning hike and visit to the Center for the Arts, it was time for lunch at Cabo Fish Taco, which serves up fresh coastal Mexican fare. While waiting on the tacos we enjoyed some chips and salsa but the highlight of the evening was the Banging Baja Shrimp Tacos. Also on the menu are such delicious entrees such as BBQ Mahi-Mahi tacos, and Epic Tuna Burrito. The food was outstanding and, if you're hankering for a margarita, they have more than 15 specialty ones along with one of the largest tequila menus in the state.

Another place for a refreshing cocktail is JH Bards Spirit Co. Founded by Jayson Hudson and Jason Hardy in 2017, the owners gave a tour and talked about their distillery and its extensive offerings



*There's plenty of books at Christiansburg Community College.*



*A display of old violins at the Montgomery Museum of Art & History.*



*Fall foliage is at its best in Montgomery County.*



*A map of downtown Blacksburg.*




*11 Birds Spirit Co. is the place for a local whiskey.*

of spirits, cocktails, whiskeys and bourbons. I opted for a vodka tonic with a local vodka called "Singing Creek".

There is no better way to start the day than with beignets and coffee and we enjoyed this taste of New Orleans at Brew Da Bean. The Brew Da Bean owners consider their shop more than just a coffee place. They love sharing their passions for NOLA culinary traditions and, of course, coffee with the community. With the beignets, I ordered a Golden Honey Latte, which had a delightful cinnamon taste to it.

We had dinner at family-owned eatery Buffalo and More, located in Riner, which sits on the Montgomery County Artisan Trail. The menu focuses on bison dishes and for starters, I had the white bean chili, which was hearty and perfect for a chilly evening. I then opted for a bison burger, which to my surprise, had a very subtle taste. Collard greens were the perfect side dish. It's homemade cooking at its best. For dessert, it was vanilla cheesecake all the way.

Before heading to the airport, we had lunch at Gillie's, a hipster family-owned restaurant that is perfect for vegans, vegetarians and those with dietary restrictions. Located in downtown Blacksburg, they are well known for their chili and creative salads such as its smoked trout salad. I chose the Seitan "Steak" Sandy with house grilled seitan, onions, potatoes and horseradish aioli. Seitan, I learned, is made from gluten and is an alternative to soybean-based foods. Cut into strips, the seitan has a chewy texture that resembles beef and was soft, subtle and very delicious.

Come to Blacksburg, Christiansburg and, in fact, all of Montgomery County and be immersed in history, take part in its festivals, test your adventurous side and enjoy nature. There is something for every visitor, so come discover this beautiful part of Virginia. [gotomontva.com](http://gotomontva.com); [geigerpr.com](http://geigerpr.com) 



*Vintage vinyl records are available at Christiansburg Cambria Station.*



*Cuba En Tu Toca is the place to go for coastal Mexican fare.*

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## Finding the Heart of America in Montgomery County, Virginia

by Olivia Liveng

**W**hen you live overseas, you start to forget what small-town America sounds like — screen doors closing, gravel under tires, a low radio hum from the diner counter. Montgomery County, Virginia, brought all of that back the moment I arrived.

Set between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, the county centers around the neighboring towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, where mountain air, farmland, and university energy all mix together. It's a part of Virginia that feels genuinely lived in — local farms still operating, students cycling past brick buildings, families heading to Friday night games. Nothing about it is put on.

The drive from Roanoke took less than an hour, winding through quiet fields and forest. At the Inn at Virginia Tech, I could see the limestone campus stretching out behind me and the hills just beginning to turn amber in the fall light. The air was clean and still, the kind of air that makes you slow down without trying.

My first stop was Sinkland Farms, a long-standing family property that turns into a patchwork of orange each autumn during its Pumpkin Festival. The fields were full of families taking wagon rides and musicians playing under tents. I walked past rows of sunflowers and stalls selling apple butter, cider, and fresh bread. The owner, Susan Sink, waved from her golf cart and said she's been running the fes-



World Traveler Winter 2025-26

tival for decades. It shows — the place feels worn in the best way.

Dinner that night was at Buffalo and More, a small restaurant that serves bison raised on the owners' own farm. The chili came with cornbread and a side of conversation from the following table. The food was rich and honest, and it tasted like it belonged here.

The next morning I drove out to Pandapas Pond, tucked inside the Jefferson National Forest. A trail circles the water through stands of oak and maple. The only sound was the shuffle of leaves and the occasional dog collar jingling down the path. The calm of it lingers with you.

Back in Blacksburg, the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech was showing a textile-inspired exhibit — modern, bright, and a reminder of how much the university adds to the town's creative pulse. Downtown, I wandered through Blacksburg Books and Sugar Magnolia, a cheerful mix of stationery, sweets, and gifts. It's an easy place to spend an afternoon: a scoop of ice cream, a coffee, a stroll.

That evening, I found myself at Beliveau Farm & Winery, reached by a two-lane road that twists through farmland and open sky. The tasting room was small, the wine dry and crisp, and from the porch you could see the last light fade over the hills.

Later, back in town, I stopped into J.H. BARDS Spirit Co., a local distillery started by two friends who came home to make whiskey. The space is small — just a bar, a few stools, and rows of bottles with handwritten labels. It felt personal, and the pour was smooth.

The next day, I spent time in Christiansburg, the quieter counterpart to Blacksburg. Brew Da Bean served chicory coffee and beignets to a steady stream of regulars who all seemed to know each other. I stopped at Cambria

Station Antiques, a maze of creaky floors and good finds, and left with a vintage postcard of the New River Valley. Lunch was at Last in Taste, a playful, space-themed restaurant that takes its food more seriously than its décor. The burger and fries were perfect, and the staff made sure you didn't leave hungry.

Down the road, the Montgomery Museum of Art & History was preparing for the county's 250th anniversary. One of the curators showed me a 1700s courthouse bell that's being restored so it can ring again — a small thing that somehow felt like the whole story of this place.

On my last evening, I found myself back in Blacksburg at the Blacksburg Wine Lab, a relaxed spot opened by a couple who used to teach wine and geography. The room was dim, the shelves lined with bottles, and the tables full of easy conversation. I ordered a cheese plate, watched the rain start outside, and felt completely content doing nothing.

Before leaving town the next morning, I walked through the Hahn Horticulture Garden on the Virginia Tech campus. It's six acres of meadows, ponds, and shaded paths where students read or nap between classes. The smell of damp leaves mixed with coffee drifted from somewhere nearby.

My last stop was Gillies, a local institution that has been around since the 1970s. I sat at the counter with a black bean burger and thought about how rare it is to find a town that still feels this open. Down the street, Rustic Roots Olive Oil offered samples of lemon and basil-infused oils. I tried a few, bought one, and realized that was as close to a souvenir as I needed.

Driving back toward Roanoke, I kept thinking about the sound of the place — not just the obvious noises, but the quieter ones: the clatter of dishes, the call of birds in the pond, a door closing softly behind someone who probably knows everyone in town.

Montgomery County doesn't announce itself. It doesn't need to. It's the kind of place that lets you rediscover the simple, familiar parts of travel — the ones that remind you what home can feel like, even when you're far away from it. ■

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