

GREAT NEWS

On the shore of the James River, where watermen still harvest fish and oysters, Newport News has a small-town feel coupled with metropolitan amenities. The commonwealth's fifth-largest city offers tree-lined roads, outdoor art, scenic parks, dynamic museums, and places to relive American history. BY SUSAN SMIGIELSKI ACKER



The miniature ships are a popular part of the Mariners' Museum and Park in Newport News. This model of RMS Britannia captures the beauty of Samuel Cunard's steam-powered ship that sailed across the Atlantic in 1840.

THE MARINERS' MUSEUM AND PARK

It is easy to find the top attraction in Newport News. Just look for the huge propeller atop a fountain of cascading water off Warwick Boulevard near Christopher Newport University. Designated by Congress in 1998 as America's National Maritime Museum, it showcases sea exploration's history with models, artifacts, photographs, and replicas.

The USS Monitor Center's "Ironclad Revolution" exhibit chronicles the March 9, 1862, Civil War battle between the ironclad vessels USS Monitor and CSS Virginia with a full-size Monitor replica and a Virginia gun deck replica. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recovered the actual USS Monitor off the North Carolina coast, and visitors can view the ongoing restoration of its gun turret, gun carriage, and engine. They can also see recovered uniform remnants found in the Monitor's turret and pieced together by conservators.

The Miniature Ships of August and Winnifred Crabtree Gallery is a family favorite, with 16 miniature vessels created by famous model maker August Crabtree.

New this year, "Speed and Innovation in the America's Cup" features the yacht AC72, Oracle Team USA's 72-foot-long and 46-foot-wide catamaran. AC72's 2013 victory marked a major comeback for Team USA, which trailed Emirates Team New Zealand 8-1 until AC72 won eight consecutive races, flying across the water at 50 mph to score a 9-8 victory. "This is the museum's largest and most technologically advanced vessel," says the museum's Jenna Dill.

The park offers the 5-mile, tree-lined Noland Trail, which follows the Lake Maury shoreline to Lions Bridge.

Admission: \$1 through Labor Day. Regular rates: \$13.95; ages 4-12, \$8.95; ages 3 and younger, free. 100 Museum Drive. (757) 596-2222; marinersmuseum.org.

ERIC VAN EYKE (4)

VIRGINIA LIVING MUSEUM

Indoor and outdoor settings show mammals, reptiles, sea life, and amphibians in natural environments. Many of the animals couldn't survive in the wild because of previous injuries; others have been rescued from illegal captivity.

A highlight are the 21 aquariums with fish, sea-horses, crabs, sea stars, lobsters, jellies, and turtles. The 30,000-gallon Noland Chesapeake Bay Aquarium houses sharks and a loggerhead sea turtle. Among the museum's most popular animals are a red wolf and a river otter.

The new Dinosaur Discovery Trail features 16 dinosaur models, four fossil-digging areas, two huts with real fossils, and actual-size fossil replicas. "This will get kids of all ages thinking about dinosaurs," says the museum's Fred Farris, who designed and implemented the trail.

Admission \$20; ages 3–12, \$15. 524 J. Clyde Morris Boulevard. (757) 595-1900; thevlm.org.

The Virginia Living Museum features a cast of colorful critters.

EASTERN SCREECH OWL



HORSESHOE CRAB AT THE CHESAPEAKE BAY TOUCH TANK



RATTLESNAKE



VIRGINIA WAR MUSEUM

On the grounds of Huntington Park, the museum displays weapons, vehicles, and artifacts, including Harry Truman's World War I helmet, a Berlin Wall section, and a collection of propaganda posters that trace U.S. military history from World War I to the present.

Admission \$8; ages 7–18, \$6. 9285 Warwick Boulevard. (757) 247-8523; warmuseum.org.



ARMORED TANK

FROM BOTTOM: COURTESY VIRGINIA WAR MUSEUM; ERIC VAN EYKE (4)

HISTORIC HOMES

Newport News has an abundance of significant structures to visit.

Lee Hall Mansion, the lower Peninsula's only Italianate antebellum plantation house, was built by Richard D. Lee in 1859 and served as Confederate headquarters for Gen. Joseph Johnston and Gen. John Magruder during the Civil War's 1862 Peninsula Campaign. 163 Yorktown Road. (757) 888-3371; leehall.org.

The Harwood family built **Endview Plantation** prior to the Civil War. During the war, it served as a Confederate hospital, and medical tools are on display. 362 Yorktown Road. (757) 887-1862; endview.org.

The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center is the restored home of J. Thomas Newsome (1869–1942). This African-American attorney, journalist, churchman, and civic leader prospered after the Civil War in the region's urban black middle class. The 1899 Queen Anne–style landmark was the hub for the local community to lead the social justice fight. Suggested donation \$2. 2803 Oak Avenue. (757) 247-2360; newsomehouse.org.

More than a century old, the **James A. Fields House** (pictured) displays artifacts from several eras, including the Civil War, and is listed on the Virginia Civil War Trail and the Underground Railroad Trail. Fields (1844–1903) was an African-American teacher, lawyer, and Virginia House of Delegates member. In 1908, the building became the first Newport News hospital for African Americans. Open by appointment. Suggested donation: adults, \$3; ages 13–17, \$2; ages 12 and under, free. 617 27th Street. (757) 813-6014; tinyurl.com/jafhouse.

MEDICAL ARTIFACTS



CIVIL WAR MEMORABILIA



PENINSULA FINE ARTS CENTER (PFAC)

With "Art Is What You Make It" as its slogan, this intimate art center affiliated with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond offers four curated theme shows a year ranging from national touring exhibits to local art displays and combinations of both.

"Dream House Remix—25th Anniversary" features 200 works from 76 local artists. Running July 8 through October 8, it transforms the art center into various rooms you might find in an imagined home. "We did a similar exhibit 25 years ago that's still talked about," says the museum's Janelle Burchfield.

PFAC also offers adult and children's art classes (pictured), and youngsters can enjoy the Hands on for Kids Gallery, featuring activities such as weaving on a giant loom.

Admission \$7.50; ages 6–12, \$4; ages 5 and younger, free; tickets are valid for one week, beginning on the day of purchase. 101 Museum Drive. (757) 595-8175; pfac-va.org.

WHAT'S BREWING

Tradition Brewing Company is Newport News' first craft brewery with offerings brewed on-site. The reclaimed-wood interior invites drinking a pint or sampling flights. In keeping with the local theme, beers have names such as Sounder American Pale Ale and Mothership Cream Ale. There's no kitchen, but patrons can bring food, have it delivered, or order from a visiting food truck. Enjoy regional bands on weekends. *700 Thimble Shoals Boulevard. (757) 592-9393; traditionbrewing.com.*

Downtown offers **Ironclad Distillery Co.** in a 1913 warehouse near Newport News Shipbuilding. "We age bourbon in oak barrels for one to four years depending on the barrel size," says Kara King, creative director. The four grains—rye, corn, wheat, and malted barley—come from nearby Charles City. While sipping bourbon straight or in a cocktail, learn about the ironclads' 1862 battle and study the *Monitor's* blueprint displayed in the distillery. *124 23rd Street. (757) 245-1996; ironcladdistillery.com.*

Be sure to designate a driver if you plan to drink alcohol.



NEWPORT NEWS PARK

This nearly 8,000-acre jewel in the city's north end features tree-lined pathways and an arboretum. "The 5-mile bike trail passes what was once George Washington's headquarters," says Andy Lunsford, park operations superintendent. In April 1862, Confederate Maj. Gen. John Magruder ordered a dam built here to block the progress of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's Union Army toward Richmond. The conflict became known as the Battle of Dam No. 1.

Sports lovers can access an archery range, sand volleyball courts, two 18-hole golf courses, and a reservoir (pictured) with fishing and boating. The Discovery Center has an animal rehabilitation center.

Free. *Intersection of Jefferson Avenue and Fort Eustis Boulevard. (757) 926-1400; nnparks.com.*

SHOP, SIP, AND PLAY

Surrounding a display of 12 spouting fountains, **City Center at Oyster Point** (pictured) offers local, regional, and national restaurants and retailers.

Entertainment includes a Paragon movie theater with recliners; The Lock In, where you can engage in an interactive mystery-solving game; and Wine and Design, a paint-and-sip studio. *700 Town Center Way. (757) 873-2020; citycenteratoysterpoint.com.*

With buildings that were constructed between 1918 and 1920, **Historic Hilton Village** features locally owned shops and restaurants. Cozy's Comedy Club and Tavern, Virginia's oldest such venue, is open daily and comedians perform every weekend. *Corner of Warwick Boulevard and Main Street. (757) 886-7777; greaterhiltonneighborhoods.org.*



Susan Smigielski Acker recently wrote about The Lost Colony production for Tidewater Traveler.

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CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY THE NEWPORT NEWS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OFFICE (2); COURTESY CITY CENTER AT OYSTER POINT

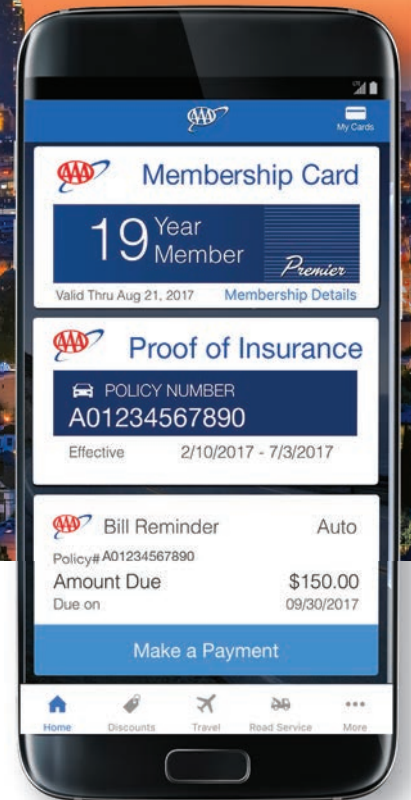
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