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MAY/JUNE 2015

*surf and sky*EMBRACE THE ELEMENTS
IN COASTAL VIRGINIA

BY BRIAN JEWELL

It's safe to assume that many of your group members have traveled by plane. But how many of them have flown in an authentic

World War II aircraft?

If you're looking to create some fantastic, over-the-top experiences for your group, coastal Virginia has a surprising wealth of wonderful offerings. From the historic aircraft flight to eco-safaris, glassblowing classes and insider access to military bases, the quartet of cities in the southeast corner of the state can provide a host of moving and memorable activities for groups.

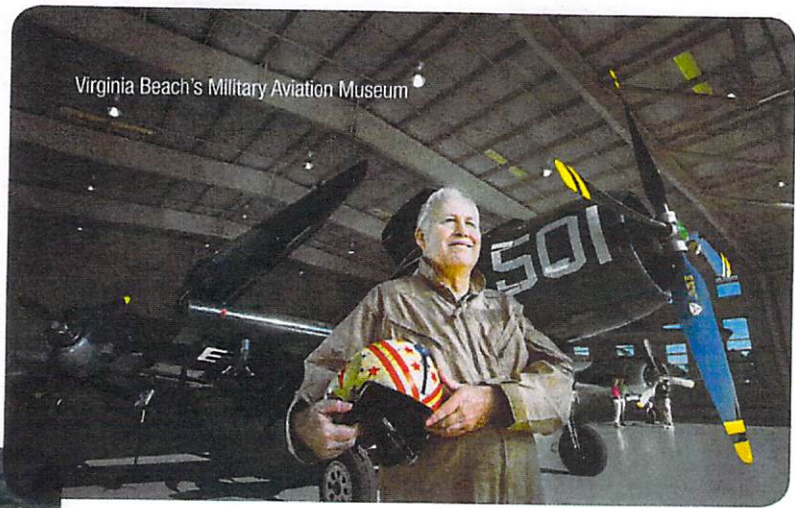
In Virginia Beach, military history and coastal environments pack a powerful punch of great experiential opportunities for groups. Just down the road, Norfolk is the cultural center of coastal Virginia, with a variety of impressive art and history institutions. Across the bay, Hampton has more military heritage and beachfront attractions to explore, as well as a high-profile annual pirate festival. And Newport News invites groups to explore the maritime and ecological history of the Virginia coast.



Dolphins near Virginia Beach



Hampton Blackbeard Pirates Festival

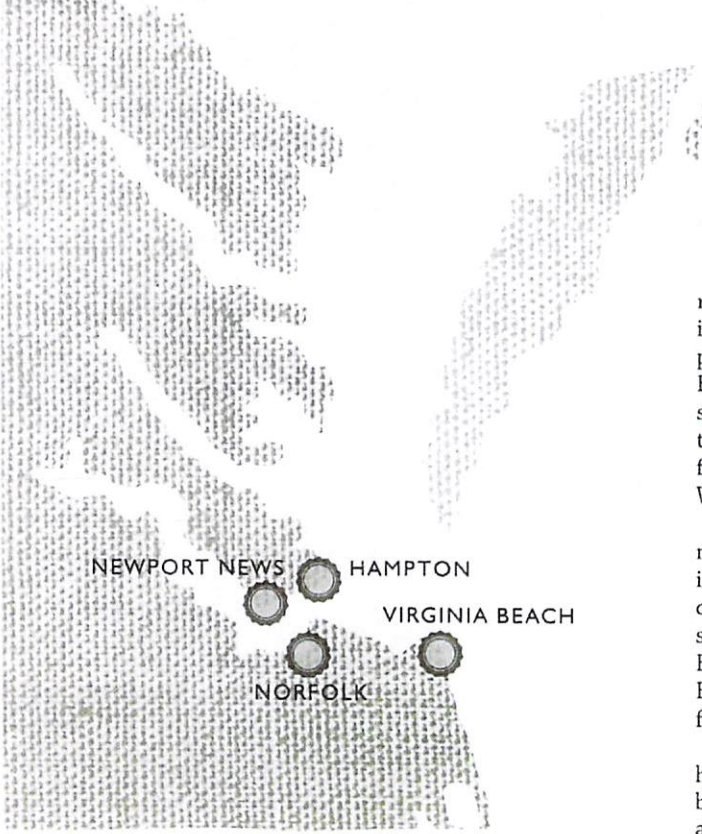


Virginia Beach's Military Aviation Museum

Courtesy Virginia Beach CVB



Courtesy Virginia Beach CVB



FLY OVER VIRGINIA BEACH

The opportunity to fly in a restored World War II aircraft is one of several experiential programs offered at Virginia Beach's Military Aviation Museum, an institution that boasts the county's largest collection of flyable World War I and World War II planes in the country.

"You can actually arrange for members of the group to go up in a vintage World War II aircraft," said Jim Coggin, tourism sales manager at the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. "It's about a 45-minute flight."

Groups can also arrange to have a tour of the museum led by an interpreter dressed up as Rosie the Riveter who talks about her experiences helping to build aircraft for the war effort in the 1940s.

After learning about historic

military aircraft, groups can see the wonders of modern naval aviation on a tour of Naval Air Station Oceana, the Navy's master jet base on the East Coast.

"Groups can get a tour of the base with a step-on docent," Coggin said. "They take the motorcoach out on the flight line, and you can sit there for 20 minutes or so and watch these billion-dollar planes take off and land. Sometimes the docents will stop the motorcoach and get one of the pilots to step on and talk to the group. It's a cool way for people to say thanks to the men and women who serve in the military."

There's more military history to discover at Virginia Beach's Old Coast Guard Station Museum. This institution sits inside the 1903 headquarters of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, the precursor to the Coast Guard, located right on the city's iconic oceanfront boardwalk.

"The museum is dedicated to the Life-Saving Service and the Coast Guard," Coggin said. "It talks about shipwrecks off of our coast and shows how they protected the shoreline in the early days before they had all of our modern equipment."

In addition to its military heritage, Virginia Beach has a number of attractions and activities that capitalize upon its location and natural surroundings. The Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center is one of the largest aquariums on the East Coast, with 800,000 gallons of water in its exhibit tanks. The aquarium also operates nature cruises in the waters around Virginia Beach, giving passengers opportunities to see the populations of bottlenose dolphins and humpback whales that feed off the coast.

For a closer encounter with dolphins, adventurous groups

can arrange for an eco-safari through Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Guided kayaking tours there take travelers into the waters where dolphins live, offering unparalleled views of these fascinating animals.

Finally, groups shouldn't leave Virginia Beach without sampling some of its culinary bounty. The Coastal Harvest Feast Tour includes visits to some of the 126 working farms in the area, and the Boardwalk Food Tour highlights restaurants on the coast that serve famous hush puppies, oysters and other local seafood.

www.visitvirginiabeach.com

EXCLUSIVE NORFOLK

Just up the road from Virginia Beach, the city of Norfolk has its share of military and nautical heritage, as well as a number of cultural institutions that have created some innovative and experiential activities for groups.

Every group touring the city should make time for a cruise on the Victory Rover, a boat that operates a two-hour narrated tour of Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval base. Another tour boat, the American Rover, is a classic sailboat that offers leisurely sight-seeing cruises in the harbor. For an exclusive touch, groups can charter the American Rover for private events with full bar and catering.

If you have sea lovers in your group, treat them to sailing lessons at Sail Nauticus.

"It's a sailing school that has been open for two summers, and all types of groups love it," said Erin Filarecki, media relations manager for Visit Norfolk. "You can learn to sail in a couple of hours. You're in tiny sailboats,

but you don't get wet."

The sailing school is based at Nauticus, a marine science center located on Norfolk's waterfront. Nauticus is also home to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum and the Battleship Wisconsin, one of the largest battleships built by the U.S. Navy. The ship earned five battle stars during World War II and is now open for tours. Groups learn about naval history firsthand as they tour the ship, including bottom decks that were only recently opened to the public.

For a completely different experience, take culture lovers to the Chrysler Museum of Art, a wide-ranging institution that features one of the world's top collections of Tiffany glass. After touring the museum, groups can try the art form themselves in the adjacent glass studio.

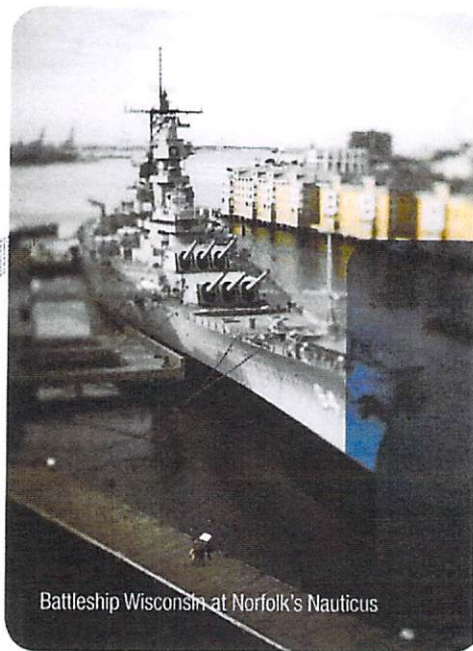
"I highly recommend the glass studio, where you can go and learn to blow a piece of glass yourself," Filarecki said. "The classes aren't cheap, but it's a state-of-the-art facility. You can make a Christmas ornament, a candy dish or a paperweight. It's a several-hour process."

www.visitnorfolktoday.com

HISTORY AND REVELRY IN HAMPTON

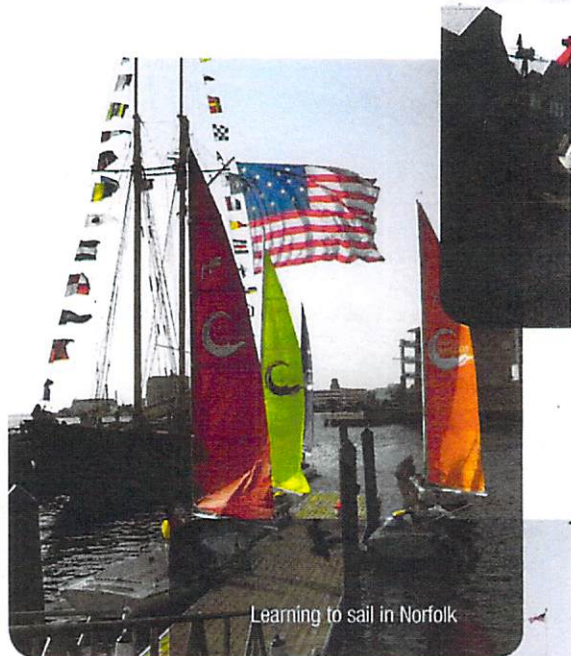
Located halfway between Virginia Beach and Williamsburg, Hampton offers groups a blend of historic attractions and waterfront fun.

The city's premier historic attraction is Fort Monroe National Monument, a site that has seen many events in national history



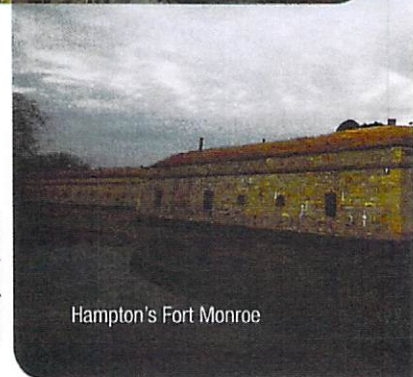
Courtesy Visit Norfolk

Battleship Wisconsin at Norfolk's Nauticus



Courtesy Visit Norfolk

Learning to sail in Norfolk



Courtesy Hampton CVB

Hampton's Fort Monroe

from early Colonial days to present times.

"Edgar Allen Poe was stationed at the fort for a little while, and President Lincoln visited there as well," said Ryan Downey, media relations manager for the Hampton Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The fort has the Casemate Museum, which chronicles its history. It has a special emphasis on the Civil War and has the cell where Confederate President Jefferson Davis was held during the war."

There's more military and aviation history on display at the Virginia Air and Space Center, which has more than 100 hands-on exhibits. Highlights include the Apollo 12 command module as well as test capsules from the Orion, Mercury and Gemini space missions. Visitors can try their hand at flight in a number of simulators at the center.

At Hampton University, the oldest African-American college in the United States, the Hampton University Museum has more than 9,000 cultural artifacts as well as African and Native American art.

After serious learning, arrange for your group to have some serious fun in Hampton. The Paradise Ocean Club opens this month in the former officers club at Fort Monroe and is being touted as the largest tiki bar on the East Coast, complete with a private beach and rental cabanas.

For some swashbuckling fun, plan your Hampton trip to coincide with the city's Blackbeard Festival, which was recently named one of the top five pirate festivals in the United States by USA Today Travel.

"The festival celebrates the demise of Blackbeard here," Downey said. "They have over 100 pirate re-enactors down on the streets, and sea battles take place. There are fireworks and a grand prize ball that kicks off the festival."

www.visithampton.com

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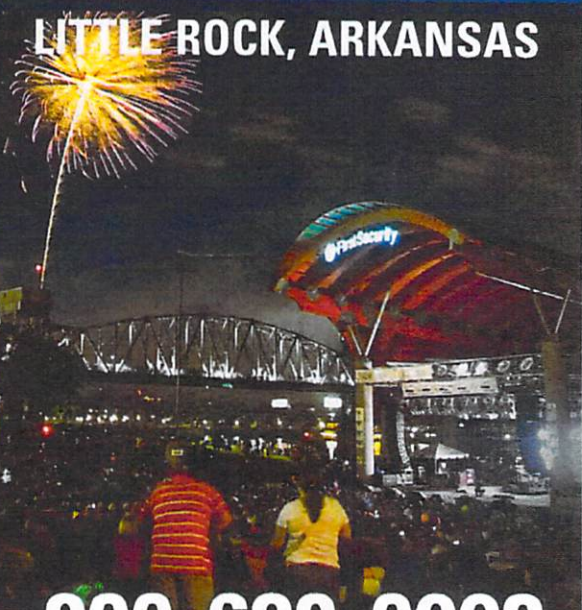


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Virginia Living Museum in Newport News

Courtesy Newport News TDO

NEWPORT NEWS' DYNAMIC DUO

Practically adjacent to Hampton, Newport News has a pair of dynamic attractions to round out a group tour through coastal Virginia.

The cornerstone of the city's cultural scene is the Mariners' Museum and Park, which covers humans' relationship with the ocean, from the early days of sea voyage to present times.

The museum's galleries feature dozens of vessels from throughout history and pay homage to the shipbuilding and maritime trades in southeast Virginia.

Among the most interesting components of the Mariners' Museum is the USS Monitor

Center, where artifacts, original documents, paintings and interactive exhibits tell the story of the USS Monitor, the ironclad ship built by the Union during the Civil War. The ship sank in 1862, but pieces of it are being restored at the Monitor Center.

"When the Monitor was found off the coast of the Outer Banks, they raised up the turret and were able to find pieces of that ship still intact," said Barb Kleiss, group marketing manager at the Newport News Tourism Development Office. "So we have the turret, some of the cannons and a lot of other pieces of it. Groups can go in and see how they're restoring the Monitor and look at some of the things they've found."

Groups visiting Newport News also enjoy touring the Virginia Living Museum, an interactive museum, zoo, planetarium and aquarium that showcases all manner of animals, fish, fowl and plants indigenous to Virginia.

www.newport-news.org



INSTINCTIVELY NORFOLK



cover Norfolk's vibrant, heritage port city filled with cultural attractions, breweries, beaches, live music, and mouth-watering, coastal culinary dishes – in a walkable downtown. With so much to see and do, the possibilities are endless. For personalized itineraries, visit us online or contact Melissa Hopper, Associate Director of Tour & Travel.

Planning a tour is easy at visitnorfolktoday.com.

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