

SUMMER FUN GUIDE

Hampton Roads

MAGAZINE



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WEEKENDS

Harbor Of Hospitality

DISCOVERING THE HISTORY, ARTS, SCIENCE AND FRIENDLY FACES
OF DOWNTOWN ELIZABETH CITY | By Angela Blue

My fiancé and I arrive in the quaint downtown, located right beside the Pasquotank River, in just a little over an hour from Hampton Roads and immediately encounter a car rear ending another on Main Street. We keep walking and even pick up the pace, fearing the emergence of an altercation. As we pass by, we observe one driver stepping out of her car and approaching the other. "You alright?" she asks. "Yep. You?" "I'm alright." Both drivers get back into their cars and continue down the street. This is when I realize that this place is different than most.

We are visiting Elizabeth City, N.C., aptly nicknamed the Harbor of Hospitality, where I already feel my thoughts on the

meaning of community will be greatly expanded. Community is defined as a social group whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and often have a common cultural and historic heritage. I think it goes a little deeper than that—and so do the Elizabeth City locals. For them, community means working together to bring arts and culture to a small town. It means not only recognizing the historic heritage, but celebrating it daily. And it means being friendly for no reason (even if you were rear ended).

Once inside the city's Visitor's Center, we meet tour guide Charlotte Underwood, director of the Elizabeth City Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Charlotte suggests a walking tour since the sun is shining, and we oblige, happy to enjoy the warmth of the sun and gentle mist coming from the river.

As we walk, Charlotte enthusiastically tells us about a program that's had great success—Elizabeth City H.A.S. It!. Has what, you ask? Well, pretty much everything that enriches a community—history, arts and science. "We're nestled in our nice little corner of the world," Charlotte says as our stroll continues.

We experience H.A.S. It! in order beginning with history at the Museum of the Albemarle. The museum has an impressive display representing the Coast Guard since the city contains the largest Coast Guard bases in the country. One of the museum's newest installations is the *White Lightning*' exhibit complete with an actual still and setup of a moonshiner in the Carolina backwoods.

We continue the H.A.S. It! tour with the Arts of



Clipperton Inn

the Albemarle, a non-profit arts council referred to as The Center. The gallery is home to local artists, craftsmen and photographers. Upstairs we find the Maguire Theatre, which hosts many community plays, musicals and functions. One of the most community-focused aspects of The Center is the School of the Arts program, offering classes in music, art and drama. "School of the Arts is my passion and backbone of the future," explains Ray Meiggs, executive director. The first Friday of every month, The Center hosts an art walk that brings about 500 people downtown. "The way we work together is really what's bringing the art to this community," he says.

Our final guided stop is Port Discover, the science portion of Has It!. Here we meet LuAnne Pendergraft, who shows us around the science center beginning with the resident rats, Squeakers and Lili. LuAnne explains that the Port Discover center focuses on three main areas of study for local kids—aviation sciences, environmental sciences and health education.

After leaving Port Discover, Charlotte gives us the opportunity to do some exploring on our own. Everyone we encountered during our time with her has been kind and

PHOTO BY KENNEDY MOODY



Harbor of Hospitality

PHOTO BY MACK SAHNER

Weeksville Vineyards



MUST-STOP SPOTS

If you have the pleasure of visiting the Harbor of Hospitality, be sure to stop at the following places:

The Cupcakery, a tasty treat for those who revel in sugar-coated confections.

The Cypress Creek Grill, serving a delicious variety of Tex-Mex, Creole and Gulf Coast seafood favorites. www.cypresscreekgrill.com

The Chocolate House, a vintage Victorian chocolate shop offering an assortment of truffles, chocolate-covered marshmallows, candy-coated apples and pralines. www.thechocolatehouseinc.com

City Wine Sellar, Bakery, Deli & Wine Bar, a hip and contemporary joint dishing out much more than gourmet wraps and sandwiches. The Wednesday Wine Tastings and Friday night live entertainment is just as enjoyable. www.citywine.blogspot.com

Page After Page Bookstore promises to bring out the book worm in anyone with its great selection of books, art supplies, greeting cards, soy candles, stationery and yarn. Anyone could spend hour after hour here.

Selig's Jewelers is a delightful gift shop with rare treasures such as estate jewelry, fine China, dining and bar ware and handmade baby hats.

Red Rabbit Art Gallery shares an eclectic mix of paintings, pottery and glass from emerging and established local and regional artists. www.redrabbitart.info

Kelly's Color Studio is a new, upbeat art studio offering art classes for all ages and a range of works to purchase.



Top: Coast Guard display at Museum of the Albemarle. Middle: Candied apples from The Chocolate House. Bottom Left: Elaborate table setting at Bonnie Hanbury's De'Tours home. Bottom Right: An enticing first course at Culpepper Inn.

cordial, and I assumed it was because they knew her. But it turns out Elizabeth City people are just hospitable in general, offering warm smiles and cheery welcomes in every place that we stop—and the places to stop are plentiful.

After perusing the shops, we venture over to Grouper's Waterfront Restaurant to feast on a succulent seafood steam pot filled with crab legs, shrimp, scallops, clams, corn on the cob and red potatoes smothered with Old Bay. Then we head to the Culpepper Inn for a good night's sleep in the luxuriously decorated Gold Room in the Camellia Guest House.

The next morning, we trot over to the main house for a gourmet breakfast. Kathryn Scott, one of the innkeepers and a fabulous chef, seats us in the sunroom and brings out our first course, half of a grapefruit sprinkled with cinnamon,

sugar and butter; topped with a cherry; and baked just until warm. Course two includes a fluffy egg casserole, homemade biscuit with jam and slices of rich cheddar cheese.

After breakfast, we visit the oldest brick house in Elizabeth City, the residence of Bonnie Hanbury, for one of her famous De'Tours. She escorts us to her formal dining room filled with antique treasures such as hand-painted China by her great grandmother, an old fashioned contraption used for keeping butter cool and a superb selection of tea accessories. Bonnie serves a delicious and flavorful rose tea along with blueberry biscuits and scones topped with fresh Devonshire cream. (When I say fresh, I mean Bonnie milked a cow that morning.) While we enjoy our dainties, Bonnie gives us some history on the house. Harriet Tubman's second husband lived on the third floor as a slave and did all of the brick mason work. In 1867, Thomas Harney purchased the house, and his daughter Miss Hattie Harney was a teacher and principal in Elizabeth City who was known for her disciplined list of rules. Bonnie enjoys dressing as Hattie Harney on occasion for her tea tours, giving history and antique lessons. She's been featured in many local and national magazines for the tours, and her tea room is listed in the top 10 tea rooms of the United States in *Victorian Homes* magazine.

In less than an hour, we go from sipping tea to sipping wine. About 12 miles out of town is the rustic Berry Sawyer Farm, home to Weeksville Vineyards. Grape grower Mack Sawyer sits with us in the kitchen of his gently restored 1930s farm house and pours a tasting of Fox Run Red—a blend of Muscadine, Merlot and Cabernet—as he tells us about the various events they have at Weeksville, including Wine Down in the Country Nights. We move on to sample two more wines from the vineyard, Deerfield White and Huck-a-Buck. We could have stayed on the porch for hours, enjoying the sweet, Muscadine wine and pleasant conversation, but the day was coming to an end, and it was time to head back to the city.

As we bid farewell to our new friends and drive past all the wonderful places we'd stopped, we agree that Elizabeth City was definitely a place that we could spend more than a weekend. The rich arts and history, eclectic shops and enticing restaurants are enough to make it worthy of a visit. But the friendly faces and strong sense of community are the defining characteristics that keep the Harbor of Hospitality in the heart.

For more information on visiting Elizabeth City, visit www.discoverelizabethcity.com. **HRM**

The NC Potato Festival, an annual local's favorite, praises North Carolina's biggest cash crop with a full day of family fun. Visit the Kick Off Party on Friday, May 20 to prepare for the array of fabulous festivities on May 21 at the Downtown Elizabeth City Waterfront. www.ncpotatofestival.com.