



NORFOLK

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Virginia is for Lovers—and Norfolk is for lovers of the sea, wine, food, art and history

story *Laurie Wallace-Lynch*

Norfolk, Virginia offers many first-time experiences for visitors to this spectacular waterfront city, where Chesapeake Bay greets the mighty Atlantic Ocean. Some 'first experiences' here may include; a tour of *USS Wisconsin* (BB-64) battleship, a sailing lesson with *Sail Nauticus Sailing Centre*, a tour of *Naval Station Norfolk*, the world's largest naval base, and glass blowing at the *Chrysler Museum of Art* glass studio where visitors can turn a bulbous mass of goop into a stunning glass Christmas tree ornament!

Regarded as the cultural, financial and entertainment heart of the Virginia waterfront, this cruiseship port is also the home to NATO and the world's largest naval base. A must-see is Nauticus, a maritime-themed science centre and home of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, an official museum of the U.S. Navy. The *USS Wisconsin* is berthed at the complex; one of the largest and last battleships ever built by the U.S. Navy, which played a role in three wars and housed 2,900 crew members. The City of Norfolk purchased the decommissioned battleship from the U.S. Navy in 2010 and opened the ship to the public for self-guided tours, interactive simulator experiences and hands-on exhibits. Each year around Halloween, the "Haunted Ship" evenings sell out quickly, according to Beth Bilderback, communications manager. "We also hold organized group events and let groups like Scout troops spend the night onboard and play spy ship espionage games. Recently we opened it up to the public so people can spend the night on board and get a taste of what it was like to live on a battleship."

Norfolk boasts a long and storied naval history as most military personnel who are stationed overseas depart from the Naval Station Norfolk. Visitors can tour the base by bus (or by water aboard the Victory Rover) to see the vast fleet of aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines, frigates and amphibious assault ships.

Each year, the City pays tribute to their naval history by hosting one of the largest Military Tattoo events in the world, featuring 850 performers. This is just one of the 130 festivals and events that take place in the city, including the annual *Norfolk Harborfest* and tall ships *Parade of Sails* in June, when 15 to 20 tall ships sail into the Norfolk harbour.

"The tall ship festival is held over a four day long weekend and at night there is a fireworks display over the water and every type of boat from kayaks to tug boats and sailing vessels are out on the water," says Erin Filarecki, media relations manager for *Visit Norfolk*. "Visitors to Norfolk must get out on the water and enjoy the experience by taking a sailing lesson with *Sail Nauticus*, enjoy a voyage on the historic *Spirit of Nor-*

folk or take a ferry ride to Portsmouth." The ferry Erin mentions is docked right outside the gorgeous *Sheridan Norfolk Waterside Hotel* where I stayed. You can hop on the ferry and enjoy a trek across the Elizabeth River for just \$1.50, but imagine this; the ferry is an old fashioned paddlewheel boat!

Norfolk makes the most of its waterfront and holds many events at Town Point Park, including the 27th Annual *Town Point Park Virginia Wine Festival* on the weekend of October 18th and 19th. It's an easy walk from the downtown hotels, but since the wine festival is held at a waterfront park, many boaters park their sailboats and schooners along the wharf to enjoy the event. Over 30 Virginia wineries offered samples of wine, included in the ticket price, as live bands entertained on the warm sunny fall day.

Fall may be the perfect time to visit Norfolk which boasts temperatures in the 70s in October, but many Canadian "Snowbirds" migrate to the sunny shores of Norfolk during the winter months to enjoy golfing, the beach and all that a waterfront city has to offer. "We get 2.5 million visitors to Norfolk annually," says Erin. German and Canadian visitors are our top two international visitors to Norfolk. We have a strong drive market from Washington D.C., Philadelphia and New York, Northern Virginia and the mid-Atlantic region. We do get a bit of snow a few times a year but it disappears very quickly. We have a beautiful waterfront and city with lots of things to see and do. And in 20 minutes you can be at the beach."

Norfolk is a great walking city boasting several distinct neighbourhoods from the historic Freemason District with its lovingly preserved historic homes and cobblestone streets to the trendy Ghent neighbourhood; a diverse and dynamic kaleidoscope of artists, students and professionals enjoying the multitude of great restaurants and sidewalk cafés, boutiques, art galleries and antique stores. Discover Virginia's first urban winery, Mermaid Winery, offering excellent wine and food pairing options. Just steps away is Pasha Mezze, a family-owned restaurant specializing in amazing Turkish cuisine. Ruzzie Degirmenci, daughter of the owners sends over a sample of their aromatic Maiden Cake—sensational! At *The Field Guide Restaurant* in Ghent, the Chili Fish is a memorable must-try meal, especially when enjoyed perched on stools at the open-air counter which offered a front porch like view for people watching.

"Norfolk, has seen an explosion of craft breweries," explains Anne Phillips of *Phillips DMC* as we sampled tasty craft beer and toured the *O'Connor Brewing Company*. Anne graciously toured us around the city, along with a group of meeting and convention planners who seemed very impressed with what Norfolk had to offer. "Norfolk is Virginia's cultural capital," ➤

Left A bird's eye perspective of Norfolk's skyline featuring the *USS Wisconsin*, Nauticus (a maritime themed science centre and museum) and Town Point Park where many Norfolk events are held annually. *photo by David Hills provided by Norfolk Convention and Visitors' Bureau*

✈️ said Anne. “We have seven performance arts venues including the Virginia Opera or Virginia Symphony.”

The Chrysler Museum of Art and the Chrysler Museum Glass Studio tour should be top of the list of things to see and do. Admission is free to the world-class Chrysler Museum of Art. “The museum was closed for 15 months while two new wings were added,” says Seth Feman, who toured us around the museum. A stunning European style open courtyard welcomes visitors and acts as the nucleus of the collections and exhibits which range from American Impressionist works to an extensive glass exhibit to modern works of art to a Smokey the Bear exhibit honouring the 100th Anniversary of the Virginia Forestry Service. The mummy sarcophagus is certainly a big draw, as is the Worn to Be Wild history of the black leather jacket exhibit, including jackets worn by several iconic Hollywood movie stars.

The museum is one of only two comprehensive art museums in the United States with a glass studio. Visitors can tour the glass studio for free and watch fascinating glass blowing demonstrations. The studio also offers classes where you can make your own glass pumpkin, Christmas tree ornament or candy dish.

Norfolk proudly boasts yet another first for the record books, namely *Doumar's Barbeque*, home of the world's first ice cream cone. The original waffle cone maker is proudly displayed right inside the front door of this “Happy Days” style drive-in diner, as waitresses in old-fashioned ice cream parlour outfits zip by to offer patrons curb service in their cars. *Doumar's* has been serving the Norfolk area since 1904 and the black and white photos on the wall are a testament to the company's history. Perched on stools at the counter, enjoying *Doumar's* top sellers; vanilla ice cream in homemade cones and Limeade Floats, Randy Windley (son-in-law to the late owner Abe Doumar) proudly told us the history of *Doumar's*.

“In 1904, Abe Doumar travelled to the St. Louis Exposition world's fair to sell his paperweights,” explains Randy. “One night while at the fair he noticed that an ice cream vendor was preparing to shut down his booth because he had run out of dishes to serve his ice cream. Abe had also noticed another exhibitor making thin wafers on a single waffle iron. Abe picked up a wafer, rolled it into a cone shape, put the ice cream in it and suggested the vendor stay open and use the waffle cones to continue to serve his ice cream. The vendors combined operations, and the ice cream cone was born. Abe then developed a four-cone machine which we still use today.”

A giant red sign in *Doumar's* front window reads “Guy Ate Here”, referring to Guy Fieri, host of the popular *Food Network* show *Diners, Drive-*



above Chrysler Museum of Art comprises over 30,000 objects and spans over 5000 years of history. USS Wisconsin (BB-64). photo by David Hills provided by Norfolk Convention and Visitors Bureau. Additional images from Laurie's visit can be viewed on the [GoodLife Mississauga Magazine facebook page](#) and [mississauga.com](#).

ins and Dives. “Guy loved it here,” says Randy. It's no wonder—the prices are so low it seems like there are typos on the menu! Milkshakes are \$2.80, a beer is \$2.00, Carolina style Pork Barbeque Sandwich is \$2.60, and a fresh-ground (on the premises) hamburger is \$2.20!

Norfolk boasts a population of about 250,000 people—and about 30 mermaids! You see mermaids all over town; the same idea as the moose, once seen all over Toronto. With 144 miles of coastline and Norfolk's prime location, just minutes from Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, it seems appropriate that the Welcome to Norfolk sign in the harbour sports a giant mermaid looking out to sea, keeping watch over Norfolk—the heart of Virginia's Waterfront.

For more information on Norfolk, Virginia visit www.visitnorfolktoday.com, 1-800-368-3097. GL