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## Virginia Beach Is for Discoverers

By Nancy Dunham  
Special to The Washington Post  
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The dragons and Egyptian cobra aren't receiving visitors yet, but the cownose rays and sea turtles are pulling in the crowds at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center in Virginia Beach.

The multimillion-dollar "Restless Planet Exhibit," which opens this summer, is one of the new attractions visitors will find at the resort area this beach season.

The timing couldn't be better, with a sluggish economy that travel pros predict will keep many area residents in the region for this year's vacation fun.

Consider these 10 new or somewhat offbeat locals' favorites:

-- *Kayak fishing.* Sure, you can kayak or you can fish, but this craze combines both, and Virginia Beach is a center for it. There are plenty of places to discover more about it, including *Wild River Outfitters* (3636 Virginia Beach Blvd., 757-431-8566, <http://www.wildriveroutfitters.com>). Owner Lillie Gilbert has written books about, and gives tours of, the area's waterways. Not ready to jump in just yet? No worries. Stop and chat with the personable Gilbert, who will explain all the angles for wannabe anglers.

-- *There's something about Mary's.* You're probably not going to find *Mary's Restaurant* (616 Virginia Beach Blvd. at 17th Street, 757-428-1355, <http://www.marys-restaurant.com>) on many tourist maps, but it's a favorite of locals, with good reason. Portions are tasty and huge, the staff is friendly even when rushed and the restaurant has the old-time charm of a diner from the '60s, which is when the diner opened. Hours are 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. Get there early on Sundays.

-- *Oceanfront yoga.* For the first time, you can get your workout during an instructor-led yoga session by the water. *Oceanfront Fitness & Yoga* (3316 Atlantic Ave., 757-233-8000, <http://www.oceanfrontyoga.com>) offers a variety of classes and also hosts "Essential Yoga on the Beach" at 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays (weather permitting).

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-- *Dine like in Paris Hilton.* Of course, there's mile upon mile of restaurants in Virginia Beach, but *Salacia* at the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront



Built on a landfill, Virginia Beach's Mount Trashmore Park features a real (albeit small) mountain, a lake, children's play areas and a skate park popular with skateboarders and BMX bikers. (Michael O'Sullivan)

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(3001 Atlantic Ave., 757-213-3473, <http://www.31ocean.com>) might make you rethink hotel dining. To call the dining upscale, with a menu full of Wagyu Kobe beef and lamb porterhouse, is an understatement. Reserve outside seating (no one younger than 8, please) in a plush cushioned booth for a quiet, intimate experience overlooking the ocean. You can also dine at Salacia's sister

restaurant, *Catch 31*, which welcomes all ages and boasts fire pits outside.

-- *Stylish pampering*. It might seem silly to go to the ocean and then drive a few miles away to a spa, but the *Flowering Almond Spa* at the Founders Inn (5641 Indian River Rd., 757-424-5511, <http://www.foundersinn.com>) is worth the trip. Voted "Best Resort Spa" in the Best of Hampton Roads competition in 2008, the spa features a solarium for relaxing while waiting for your treatment, spa lunches and a friendly, attentive staff. Those who book a spa treatment can use the gym and swimming pool for the day. Book a couple's massage. (Men won't feel awkward there. Really).

-- *Soar like an eagle*. When I showed trepidation about parasailing -- basically being pulled behind a boat while sitting in a jazzed-up version of a car seat attached to the sail -- the guide assured me that his 85-year-old grandmother had parasailed and loved it. Sure enough, the ride up to 1,000 feet in the air is smooth, you have a great view and people afraid of heights just simply won't be (at least I wasn't). Worried? Guides keep watch so parasailors can signal them to come down as soon as they want. There are plenty of parasail companies to choose from. I used *Rudee Inlet Parasail* (200 Winston Salem Ave., 757-422-9600, <http://www.rudeeinletparasail.com>), owned by captain Mickey Stone.

-- *Raven-ous*. Don't look for this little restaurant in glitzy guidebooks. *The Raven* (1200 Atlantic Ave., 757-425-1200, <http://www.theraven.com>) is another local favorite founded in the '60s that has kept its great food (burgers, wings and seafood), ample portions and casual atmosphere under the radar. There's a bar, but it's not a kids' hangout so you won't be bombarded with celebrating grads.

-- *Fish stories*. You may have to wait a bit to see the new \$25 million "Restless Planet" exhibition that will feature 12,000 square feet of new habitats and exhibits when it opens this summer at the *Virginia Aquarium & Marine Center* (717 General Booth Blvd., 757-385-3474, <http://www.virginiaaquarium.com>), but there's plenty to do there right now. There are 700,000 gallons' worth of aquariums, live animal habitats, petting areas and interactive displays. Whale- and dolphin-watching trips are also available.

-- *Trash talk*. Although *Mount Trashmore Park* (310 Edwin Dr., 757-473-5237) isn't new, it has taken folks a while to discover it. The park was built over an old landfill, its main "mountain" measuring 60 feet high and more than 800 feet long. You often see folks flying kites on the mound, but there's also a "Water Wise" demonstration garden, volleyball areas, playgrounds, a lake for fishing and a skate park inside a seven-foot-deep bowl with a 13 1/2 -foot-tall vertical ramp.

-- *History tour*. No need to drive to Williamsburg for a first-rate history lesson. Guides on the *Summer History Tours* tell you about Native Americans and early colonists at the Historic Villages at Cape Henry and the First Landing Cross. The tours also take you past two lighthouses and two historic homes (which vary depending on the tour). The motorbus outings are available from 10 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. June 17 until Sept. 3. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$7 for students. For details, call the Francis Land House at 757-385-5100.

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