VIRGINIABEACH.COM

Virginia Beach *Visitor Guide*

The Oceanfront & Boardwalk · History · Parks · Attractions · Festivals · Where to Stay



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Your free guide to the Virginia coast

Local tips from the family behind virginiabeach.com, online since 1996

virginiabeach.com

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A NOTE FROM VIRGINIABEACH.COM

Welcome to the beach!

VirginiaBeach.com has been helping visitors plan their trips since 1996. We are a small, private, family-run site, not a government or tourism office, and this guide pulls together the best of what we share online: where to stay, what to do, when the big festivals happen, and the practical stuff that makes a beach trip easier.

Hours, prices, and event dates change every year, so use this guide to plan and check the official websites before you go. Have a tip for other visitors? We'd love to hear it at **media@virginiabeach.com**.

— Steve & Rachel Jones



Photo: Greyfiveys / CC BY-SA 4.0

SECTION 01

Welcome & Getting Oriented



The resort strip from the water: hotels line Atlantic Avenue right behind the beach.

Virginia Beach sits where the Chesapeake Bay meets the Atlantic, in the southeast corner of Virginia. It has about 35 miles of shoreline, from the busy Oceanfront and its three-mile Boardwalk to quiet bay beaches and the wild dunes near the North Carolina line.

It is also a big city. Most of it is neighborhoods, farms, and marsh, so it helps to know which part you want before you book.

The Oceanfront & Boardwalk

The resort strip along Atlantic Avenue: hotels, restaurants, shops, and the Boardwalk from 2nd to 40th Street. Most first-time visitors stay here so they can walk everywhere.

North End

North of the Boardwalk blocks the Oceanfront gets more residential and quieter. It is closer to the historic Cavalier Hotel, First Landing State Park, and Cape Henry.

Rudee Inlet & the south end

The Boardwalk's south end meets a busy marina with charter boats, dolphin-watching trips, and waterfront restaurants. The Virginia Aquarium is just beyond it.

Chesapeake Bay & Shore Drive

Calmer bay beaches, marinas, and seafood spots along Shore Drive, plus First Landing State Park. You'll want a car or the seasonal bayfront bus.

Sandbridge

A residential beach about 20 minutes south of the Oceanfront, next to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Most stays here are vacation rentals.

Town Center & inland

The city's downtown, with restaurants, shopping, and the Sandler Center. Further south, rural Pungo has farms, strawberry fields, and country roads.

Getting Here & Getting Around

By air

Norfolk International (ORF) is the closest airport, about 20 miles west of the Oceanfront, or roughly 20 to 30 minutes without traffic. **Newport News/Williamsburg (PHF)** is about 45 to 60 minutes away. **Richmond International (RIC)** is 90 minutes to two hours away but sometimes has more flights and lower fares. Compare all three before you book, especially if you're renting a car.

By car

Most visitors drive. Interstate 64 brings you into Hampton Roads, and I-264 heads east through the city and ends near the Oceanfront. From the north along the Eastern Shore, US-13 crosses the 17.6-mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel and lands you in Virginia Beach. For live traffic and road conditions, dial **511** in Virginia.

Parking at the Oceanfront

The city runs three garages, open 24/7, with more than 1,670 spaces in all: **9th Street** (200 9th St.), **25th Street** (336 25th St.), and **31st Street** (209 30th St.). There are also surface lots (2nd, 4th, and 21st Streets and Rudee Loop) and metered street spaces. Paid parking at meters and lots runs April 1 through October 31. In the off-season most municipal lots and many meters are free, apart from a few posted exceptions. Rates change and go up for big events, so check the signs and the city's parking pages.

> **Tip:** On big event weekends, park once and walk or ride the trolley instead of circling Atlantic Avenue.

The VB Wave trolley

Hampton Roads Transit runs the seasonal **VB Wave**. The Atlantic Avenue trolley runs up and down the resort strip about every 15 minutes in season, and other routes go to the Aquarium, the campgrounds, and the Shore Drive/bayfront area, including First Landing State Park. Service usually runs from spring through the Neptune Festival in late September. Fares are low and kids ride free with a paying adult. Check gohrt.com or call 757-222-6100 for this season's routes and fares.



The VB Wave trolley on its Oceanfront route.

On foot & by bike

The Boardwalk has its own bike path the whole way. Rental shops along the Oceanfront rent cruisers, tandems, and surreys by the hour.



SECTION 02

A Short History of Virginia Beach

From the 1607 First Landing to a 20th-century resort town, and the city it is today

Photo: PumpkinSky / CC BY-SA 3.0

Where English America Began

Long before it was a resort, this corner of Virginia was home to Algonquian-speaking people. The Chesepian villages stood near the Chesapeake Bay, including one in today's Great Neck area.

The First Landing, 1607

On April 26, 1607, three English ships, the *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, under Captain Christopher Newport, made their first landfall at the cape where the bay meets the ocean. The colonists named it Cape Henry after Henry, Prince of Wales, raised a cross, and spent a few days exploring. Then they sailed up the James River and founded Jamestown. A stone cross put up in 1935 marks the site at the **Cape Henry Memorial**, part of Colonial National Historical Park. Today it sits inside Joint Expeditionary Base Fort Story.

Planters & Princess Anne County

Adam Thoroughgood came to Virginia as an indentured servant in the early 1620s and became one of the area's leading men. He named the Lynnhaven River after King's Lynn, his English hometown. In 1691 the area became **Princess Anne County**, named for the future Queen Anne. The county lasted until 1963, and the name still turns up all over the city. The brick **Thoroughgood House**, built around 1719 by his descendants, is now a museum, and the Lynnhaven House and Francis Land House also show colonial and early-American life.



The Thoroughgood House, one of the oldest homes in the area.

The Witch of Pungo

In 1706, Pungo farmer and healer Grace Sherwood was accused of witchcraft and "ducked" in the Lynnhaven River at what is now Witch Duck Point. She floated, was jailed, and later returned to her farm. Three hundred years later, in 2006, Governor Tim Kaine restored her good name. That's where Witchduck Road gets its name.

Guarding the Chesapeake

The **Old Cape Henry Lighthouse** was finished in 1792. It was the first public works project funded by the new federal government. In the 1870s cracks were found in the old tower, so a taller cast-iron lighthouse went up nearby in 1881 and is still working. Today Preservation Virginia runs tours of the old tower.

> **Visiting Cape Henry:** The lighthouses and memorial are on an active military base. Bring a valid photo ID and expect a vehicle check at the gate.

From Seaside Resort to Big City

Railroads, hotels & the first boardwalk

The resort era began in 1883, when a railroad from Norfolk made the oceanfront an easy day trip. In 1888 the grand **Princess Anne Hotel** opened at 16th Street, with electric lights and a ballroom. That same year the first boardwalk went in: a wooden walk eight feet wide and just four blocks long. A 1907 fire destroyed the hotel and much of the boardwalk. A concrete seawall and promenade later took its place.

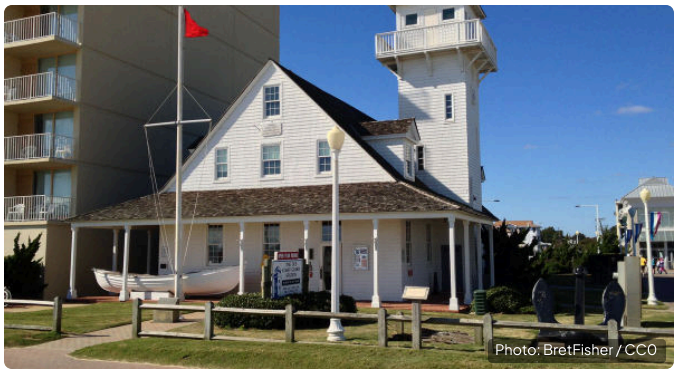


Photo: Unknown author / Public domain

The Princess Anne Hotel and the early boardwalk, on a vintage postcard.

Shipwrecks & lifesavers

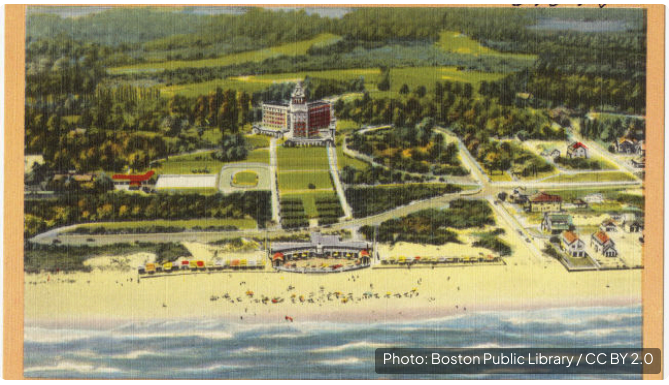
Life-saving stations kept watch over this stretch of coast. In 1891 the Norwegian ship *Dictator* wrecked off the beach, and the **Norwegian Lady** statue at 25th Street remembers her crew. The 1903 Seatack life-saving station at 24th Street is now the **Old Coast Guard Station** museum.


Photo: BretFisher / CC0

The 1903 life-saving station, now a museum on the Boardwalk.

The Cavalier era

Virginia Beach became a town in 1906. The **Cavalier Hotel** opened on its hill in 1927, and its beach club became a favorite stop for the big bands of the 1930s through the 1950s. During World War II the Navy took over the hotel for radar training. After a long restoration it reopened in 2018 as The Historic Cavalier Hotel & Beach Club.


Photo: Boston Public Library / CC BY 2.0

The Cavalier Hotel and Beach Club from the air, on a mid-century postcard.

One city

World War II also left the area with lasting military bases, including Naval Air Station Oceana. The resort town became an independent city in 1952. On January 1, 1963, it merged with Princess Anne County to form today's City of Virginia Beach, and it became Virginia's most populous city. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel opened in 1964.

QUICK TIMELINE

1607 First Landing at Cape Henry
1691 Princess Anne County formed
1792 Old Cape Henry Lighthouse finished
1888 Princess Anne Hotel and first boardwalk
1906 Town of Virginia Beach incorporated
1927 The Cavalier Hotel opens
1936 Seashore (now First Landing) State Park dedicated
1963 City and county merge
2005 King Neptune statue dedicated at 31st Street



SECTION 03

Beaches, the Boardwalk & the Oceanfront

Three miles of promenade, 35 miles of shoreline, and a beach for every mood

Photo: Greyfiveys / CC BY-SA 4.0

The Virginia Beach Boardwalk

The Boardwalk is a concrete promenade, about 28 feet wide, that runs roughly three miles from 2nd Street to 40th Street. Hotels and restaurants are on one side and the Atlantic beach is on the other. It's free and open every day of the year. A separate lane runs the whole way for bikes, surreys, and skates.

Come early for a quiet sunrise walk. From late morning into the evening in summer, it's busy, people-watching heaven.

Landmarks to look for

- **King Neptune** at 31st Street, in Neptune's Park. The 34-foot bronze by sculptor Paul DiPasquale is the city's favorite meeting spot and photo stop.
- **Virginia Beach Fishing Pier** at 15th Street. Fish, or just walk out over the waves. Check the pier for hours and admission.
- **Virginia Legends Walk** in 13th Street Park, one block west. It's a free path honoring famous Virginians such as George Washington, Edgar Allan Poe, Patsy Cline, and Ella Fitzgerald.
- **Naval Aviation Monument** and the **Norwegian Lady**, both at 25th Street.
- **Old Coast Guard Station** at 24th Street and the **Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum**, which is in the 1895 de Witt Cottage.



The fishing pier reaches into the Atlantic at 15th Street.

Fun along the strip

Summer evenings bring free music and street performers to beachfront stages through the city's Live! On Atlantic program. Families head to the Atlantic Fun Park near 15th Street for seasonal rides and games. Kids also love **JT's Grommet Island Park** at 2nd Street, a fully accessible beach playground, and the free **beach playground at 31st Street**.

Free beach wheelchairs

The city lends free beach wheelchairs at 2nd, 8th, 17th, 24th, and 36th Streets. See page 25 for how to reserve one.



The bike path runs beside the Boardwalk.

Restrooms: Public restrooms are at 2nd, 17th, 20th, 24th, 30th, and 31st Streets. Beach Ambassadors in bright yellow uniforms can point you in the right direction.

FIND YOUR STRETCH OF SAND

Beyond the Boardwalk



Photo: TheWxResearcher / CC0

Resort Beach

The wide, lifeguarded beach in front of the hotels, from Rudee Inlet to about 42nd Street. It's the place for swimming, boogie boards, and sandcastles, and it's busy in summer.



Photo: Greyfiveys / CC BY-SA 4.0

Rudee Inlet & Croatan

At the south end, charter boats, dolphin cruises, parasailing, and waterfront restaurants line the inlet. Just south of it, Croatan Beach is a local favorite with a laid-back neighborhood feel.



Photo: Virginia State Parks / CC BY 2.0

Chesapeake Bay beaches

The bay side has gentler water and gorgeous sunsets. First Landing State Park has about 1.5 miles of sandy bay beach. There are no lifeguards there, so swim with care.

The North End

North of 42nd Street the beach runs past neighborhoods toward Fort Story. There's more space to spread out, and you're close to the Cavalier and First Landing State Park.



Photo: Brent Hoard from USA / CC BY 2.0

Sandbridge

About 20 minutes south, Sandbridge is all beach houses and dunes, with no high-rises. It's a quieter base for families, and it sits next to Back Bay's nature trails.

Out on the water

Rent a kayak or paddleboard, take a surf lesson, book a fishing charter, or watch for dolphins from a tour boat out of Rudee Inlet. In winter, whale-watching trips go out looking for humpbacks offshore.



SECTION 04

Parks & Nature

Cypress swamps, wild dunes, and a wildlife refuge, all inside the city limits

Photo: Virginia State Parks / CC BY 2.0

THE BIG THREE

State Parks & a Wildlife Refuge


Photo: Virginia State Parks / CC BY 2.0

First Landing State Park

2500 Shore Drive · 757-412-2300

This is Virginia's most-visited state park: 2,888 acres on the Chesapeake Bay, with cypress swamps, maritime forest, and about 1.5 miles of bay beach. The park was built in the 1930s, largely by an all-African American Civilian Conservation Corps company. It opened in 1936 as Seashore State Park and was renamed for the 1607 landing nearby. About 20 miles of trails wind through the swamp and forest, and bikes are allowed on the Cape Henry and Live Oak trails. You can camp, rent a cabin or yurt, launch a boat, or fish and crab with a Virginia saltwater license. The Chesapeake Bay Center doubles as a city visitor center. Lots fill on summer weekends, so come early.

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge

4005 Sandpiper Road (past Sandbridge) · 757-301-7329

Back Bay was set up in 1938 to protect wintering waterfowl. It has more than 9,000 acres of dunes, maritime forest, marsh, and ocean beach along the Atlantic Flyway. Walk the boardwalk trails, paddle the bay, and look for snow geese and swans in winter and loggerhead sea turtle nests in summer. It's past Sandbridge at the city's southern end. Check the refuge's website for current hours and fees.


Photo: Antony-22 / CC BY-SA 4.0


Photo: Virginia State Parks / CC BY 2.0

False Cape State Park

4001 Sandpiper Road · 757-426-7128

False Cape is one of the most remote places on the East Coast: 4,321 acres of beach, dunes, and marsh between Back Bay and the North Carolina line. Its name comes from sailors who mistook it for Cape Henry and ran aground. There's no road in. Hike or bike in through Back Bay, come by boat, or take a seasonal tram tour. Primitive campsites must be reserved ahead at 1-800-933-PARK.

City Parks & Nearby Nature



Mount Trashmore Park

A former landfill turned into one of the city's most popular parks. Its grassy hills are great for kite-flying, and it has two lakes, walking trails, a skate park, and the big Kids' Cove playground. Parking is on site.



Red Wing Park

Gardens, the Miyazaki Japanese Garden with its red bridge (honoring sister city Miyazaki, Japan), sports fields, picnic shelters, and a fenced dog park. It's on General Booth Boulevard, south of the Oceanfront.

Oceanfront parks

Neptune's Park at 31st Street, along with the 17th and 24th Street parks, hosts free summer concerts and festival stages right on the Boardwalk. **JT's Grommet Island Park** at 2nd Street is a fully accessible beach playground.

Day trips into nature

- **Norfolk Botanical Garden**: 6700 Azalea Garden Rd., Norfolk. Acres of themed gardens and waterways.
- **Virginia Zoo**: 3500 Granby St., Norfolk. Lions, giraffes, elephants, and more.
- **Great Dismal Swamp**: Suffolk, about an hour away. A huge swamp forest around Lake Drummond.
- **Town Point Park**: Norfolk's downtown waterfront park and festival grounds.



Sunset over the Chesapeake Bay at First Landing State Park.

SECTION 05

Attractions: Top Picks

Our directory lists more than 100 Virginia Beach attractions, and many of them are free. Here are the favorites, grouped by what you're in the mood for. Hours and prices change with the season, so confirm before you go.

Family favorites



Photo: Rlevse / CC BY-SA 3.0

- **Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center** (717 General Booth Blvd.): two buildings joined by a nature trail, with sea turtles, sharks, harbor seals, jellies, and touch pools. Some exhibits close for renovation, so check ahead.
- **Atlantic Fun Park**: seasonal rides and games at 15th Street on the Oceanfront.
- **Ocean Breeze Waterpark**: slides and pools for hot summer days.
- **Hunt Club Farm** (London Bridge Rd.): petting farm and seasonal fall fun.
- **Jungle Golf**: mini-golf plus an arcade.
- **iFLY Indoor Skydiving**: a wind-tunnel "skydive" that works for all ages.
- **Ripley's Believe It or Not!**: oddities on Atlantic Avenue, great for a rainy day.

Museums



Photo: Tomás Del Coro from Las Vegas, Nevada, USA / CC BY-SA 2.0

- **Military Aviation Museum** (Pungo): one of the world's largest private collections of flyable World War I and World War II aircraft, with airshows.
- **Old Coast Guard Station**: the 1903 life-saving station on the Boardwalk at 24th Street, full of shipwreck and rescue stories.
- **Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum**: decoys and wildlife art in the 1895 de Witt Cottage, built by the town's first mayor.
- **Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)**: rotating exhibits near the Oceanfront.
- **Edgar Cayce's A.R.E.**: lectures, a library, and a meditation garden at 67th Street.

MORE TO EXPLORE

History, Water & Night Out

Historic sites


Photo: PumpkinSky / CC BY-SA 3.0

- **Old Cape Henry Lighthouse & Cape Henry Memorial**: climb the 1792 tower for views of the bay. Bring a photo ID for base access.
- **Thoroughgood House**: an early-1700s brick home near the Lynnhaven River.
- **Lynnhaven House** and **Francis Land House**: colonial and early-American homes with tours.
- **Adam Keeling House**: a privately owned colonial home on the Lynnhaven River. Look from the road only.
- **Ferry Plantation House**: a historic house known for its ghost stories.

On the water & outdoors

- **Rudee Tours**: dolphin and whale-watching, fishing, and sunset cruises from Rudee Inlet.
- **Fishing charters** out of Rudee Inlet, plus the 15th Street pier.
- **Parasailing & jet skis** at the inlet, including Pirate Parasail.
- **Kayak and paddleboard tours** on the Lynnhaven River, Back Bay, and nearby rivers.
- **Surf lessons** with local schools such as VB Surf Sessions, and **scuba** classes at Lynnhaven Dive Center.
- **Bike & surrey rentals** on the Boardwalk, such as Cherie's Bicycle and Blade Rentals.
- **Virginia Scenic Flights**: see the coast from above.

Shows & evenings

- **Sandler Center for the Performing Arts** at Town Center.
- **Funny Bone Comedy Club** at Town Center (many shows are 21+).
- **Cinema Cafe**: dinner and a movie.

Worth the drive


Photo: Ole Bendik Kvisberg / CC BY 2.0

The **Chesapeake Bay Bridge–Tunnel** is an engineering wonder in its own right, a 17.6–mile crossing of open water to the Eastern Shore. Hampton's **Virginia Air & Space Science Center** and Newport News's **Virginia Living Museum** are also within about an hour. For Norfolk, Williamsburg, and Yorktown, see Day Trips on page 22.



Photo: Watts / CC BY 2.0

SECTION 06

Annual Festivals & Events

Virginia Beach throws a party almost every month. Here's when the big ones usually happen. Dates shift from year to year, so check the official event pages and our events calendar before you plan around one.

Spring

MID-MARCH, AROUND ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Shamrock Marathon Weekend

The city's oldest road race has grown into a full weekend: a fitness expo, an 8K, a kids' Leprechaun Dash, and the Sunday marathon and half marathon on a flat course that finishes by the ocean. Expect early-morning road closures, lots of green, and a beach party at the finish.

MID-APRIL

East Coast She Crab Soup Classic

Local restaurants pour cups of creamy she-crab soup at an afternoon tasting on the Oceanfront. Bring a jacket, because April breezes are real.

EARLY MAY

Virginia Beach Taco Festival

Taco vendors, margarita bars, and live music at The Shack on Atlantic Avenue (8th Street). It's ticketed, with food and drinks sold separately.

USUALLY THE FIRST WEEKEND OF MAY

Atlantic Coast Kite Festival

Giant show kites, stunt-kite routines, kite-building workshops, and a free Best Kite contest on the beach between 16th and 18th Streets. Admission is free.

SPRING

Virginia International PANfest

Steelpan bands compete and perform at the 24th Street Stage, presented by the Virginia Arts Festival. It's a sound you don't hear every day on the Boardwalk.

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

Patriotic Festival

A ticketed country-music festival on the beach with national headliners, plus military appreciation displays along the Boardwalk.

TRADITIONALLY MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

Pungo Strawberry Festival

For decades, this was the big country fair in rural Pungo, with strawberry everything, a parade, and carnival rides. The full festival hasn't run every year lately, and smaller strawberry events have filled in. Check before you make a special trip.

Summer

A SATURDAY IN MID-JUNE

Chalk the Walk

Artists turn squares of the Boardwalk between 16th and 18th Streets into chalk masterpieces. Watching is free; come in the morning and again in the afternoon to see the art grow.

MOST WEDNESDAYS, LATE MAY TO MID-AUGUST

Oceanfront Concert Series (the American Music Festival tradition)

For years, the American Music Festival brought big stages to the Oceanfront on Labor Day weekend. Today that tradition lives on as free Wednesday-night concerts rotating among the 17th, 24th, and 31st Street parks. Shows start around 7 p.m. Bring a blanket, and note that alcohol isn't allowed in the parks.

SUMMER EVENINGS

Live! On Atlantic

Street performers and music along Atlantic Avenue and the beachfront stages, most of it free.

EVERY JULY 4

July 4th Stars & Stripes Celebration

Free concerts in the Oceanfront parks, then fireworks over the ocean, usually around 9:30 p.m. It's one of the most crowded nights of the year, so arrive early and check the list of allowed items.

TYPICALLY A MID-AUGUST WEEKEND

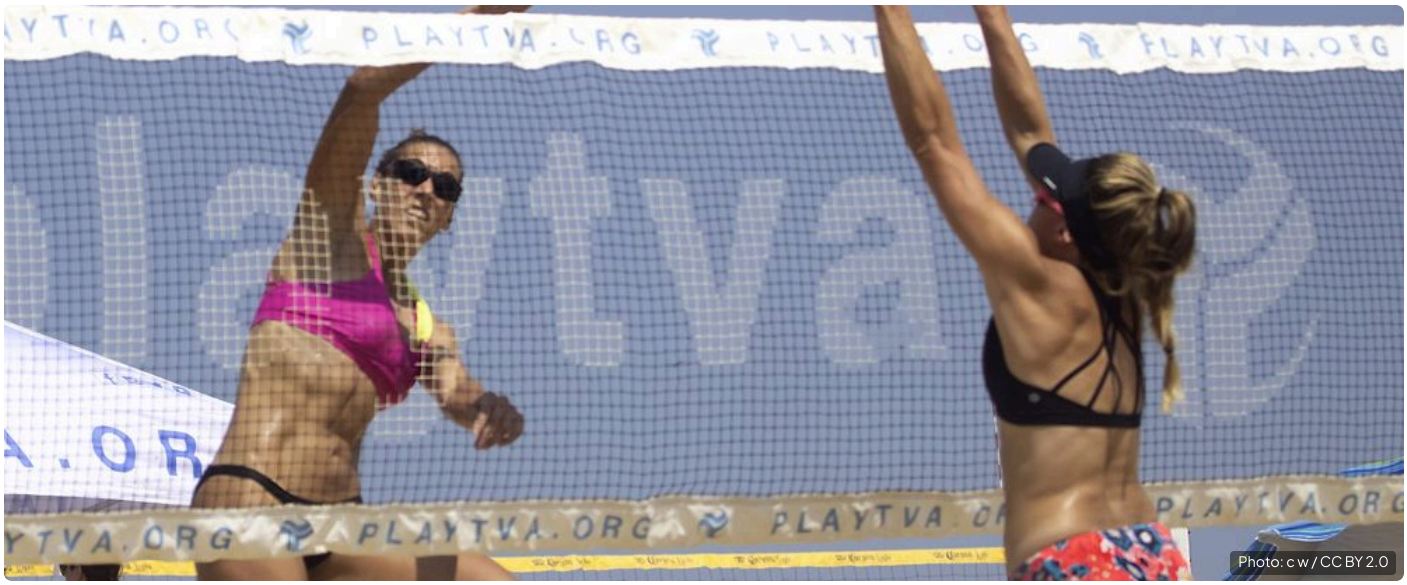
Virginia Beach Street Food Festival

Food trucks, local restaurants, drinks, and live music at The Shack on Atlantic Avenue. It's ticketed and rain-or-shine.

LATE AUGUST

East Coast Surfing Championships

The world's longest-running surf contest, held near the 1st Street Jetty for more than 60 years. Surf heats are free to watch, and there's beach volleyball, skate demos, and music all week.



Beach volleyball is part of East Coast Surfing Championships week.

Also on the summer calendar: Latin Fest at the 24th Street Stage, plus food, wine, and craft-beer festivals that come and go. Check our events calendar for this year's lineup.

Fall

STARTS THE LAST FRIDAY IN SEPTEMBER

Neptune Festival Boardwalk Weekend

This is the city's signature end-of-summer party. More than 30 blocks of the Boardwalk fill with an art and craft show, free concerts, a family fun zone, the Grand Parade, and the International Sandsculpting Championship on the beach.

NEPTUNE FESTIVAL WEEKEND

Touch-A-Truck

Kids climb on fire trucks, construction rigs, and working vehicles. It's part of the Neptune Festival lineup, and bad weather can move it indoors to the Convention Center.

USUALLY SEPTEMBER

NAS Oceana Air Show

The naval air station opens its gates for aerial demonstrations once a year. Check the base's announcements for whether it's on this year.

WHEN HELD, MID-TO-LATE NOVEMBER

Renaissance & Fantasy Faire

Jousting, birds of prey, and costumed fun at Hunt Club Farm. It isn't held every year, so check huntclubfarm.com before you go.

THANKSGIVING WEEKEND

Virginia Beach Christmas Market

A big indoor craft show at the Convention Center (1000 19th St.), with around 175 booths of handmade gifts and holiday treats.

Winter

LATE NOVEMBER TO EARLY JANUARY

Holiday Trail of Lights

A 1.1–mile walk-through light show on the Virginia Aquarium's nature trail, with timed evening tickets. It replaced the old drive-through Holiday Lights at the Beach on the Boardwalk.

A SATURDAY EVENING IN EARLY DECEMBER

Holiday Parade at the Beach

More than 100 parade units, from floats to marching bands, roll down Atlantic Avenue between 15th and 25th Streets at dusk. It's free, festive, and easy if you're staying on the strip.

DECEMBER 31

Last Night on the Town

Virginia Beach's free, family-friendly New Year's Eve at Town Center's Fountain Plaza, with early activities, a concert, and a midnight celebration.

WINTER

Winter Wildlife Festival

Guided walks, boat trips, and exhibits about the birds and marine mammals that winter here. It's a great excuse to visit in the off-season.

Plan smart: Big festival weekends fill hotels fast and close streets. Book early, and use the garages and the trolley.

FIND THIS YEAR'S DATES

virginiabeach.com/events

Our events calendar lists festivals, concerts, holiday happenings, and races, with links to each organizer. Dates, venues, and ticket details change every year, so always confirm with the organizer before you travel.

SECTION 07

Dining, Nightlife & Live Music

Seafood is the star here: oysters, she-crab soup, and the day's catch, often with a water view. With hundreds of restaurants to choose from, here's where to start.

Where to eat

The Oceanfront has everything from boardwalk snacks to patio seafood houses. Look for Waterman's Surfside Grille at 4th Street and Ocean Eddie's at the fishing pier. **Rudee Inlet** restaurants such as Rudee's, Rockafeller's, and Big Sam's Inlet Cafe sit right on the marina. Along **Shore Drive and the bay**, local seafood favorites include Chix Sea Grill, Captain George's, and Steinhilber's, and you'll find more in the Lynnhaven area. **Town Center** has steakhouses, sushi, and date-night spots.



Charter boats at Rudee Inlet, where the day's catch comes in.

Taste local

- **Breakfast:** Pocahontas Pancake House on Atlantic Avenue has been flipping pancakes since 1974, and Doc Taylor's serves biscuits and gravy in a cottage on 23rd Street.
- **Sweets:** Forbes Candies has made saltwater taffy and fudge in Virginia Beach since 1930.
- **Local beer:** Back Bay Brew House, Pleasure House Brewing, Young Veterans Brewing, and Commonwealth Brewing pour in their own taprooms.
- **Local wine:** Mermaid Winery has a tasting room at Town Center.

Our online directory sorts restaurants by type (seafood, Italian, Japanese, Thai, steak, and more). Restaurants change often, so call ahead.

Live music venues

- **Veterans United Home Loans Amphitheater** (3550 Cellar Door Way): the area's big outdoor venue for national tours, with room for about 20,000.
- **The Dome** (400 20th St.): a year-round music hall at the Oceanfront.
- **Sandler Center** (201 Market St., Town Center): concerts, symphony, theater, and dance.
- **Oceanfront park stages** at 17th, 24th, and 31st Streets: free summer shows.
- **Elevation 27** (600 Nevan Rd.): an independent club with touring and tribute acts.

Nightlife

Atlantic Avenue's bars and rooftop decks stay lively all summer, and Peabody's is a longtime Oceanfront nightclub. For laughs, try the Funny Bone at Town Center. Norfolk's NorVa and Scope host more shows just up the road.

Shopping & Pet-Friendly Travel



Town Center, the city's walkable downtown for shopping and dining.

Where to shop

Town Center is a walkable downtown with national brands like Anthropologie and the Apple Store, plus restaurants, a hotel row, and holiday events. **The Shops at Hilltop** mixes local boutiques, such as Chartreuse and Double Take, with everyday stores near the north end. On the **Oceanfront**, Atlantic Avenue is lined with surf shops like 17th Street Surf Shop and souvenir stops like The Virginia Gift Shop. Music fans love browsing the vinyl at Birdland Music.

> **Souvenir idea:** Look for local art at the Neptune Festival's art show, and handmade gifts at the Christmas Market over Thanksgiving weekend.

Bringing your dog

Oceanfront beach rules for dogs:

- **Off-season** (after Labor Day weekend until Memorial Day weekend): dogs are welcome on the public beaches and the Boardwalk any time. Keep them leashed on the Boardwalk; on the sand they may be off-leash if they reliably come when called.
- **Summer** (Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend): no dogs on the sand or in the water in the Resort Area, between Rudee Loop and 42nd Street. Leashed dogs may use the Boardwalk from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- North of 42nd Street and south of Rudee Loop (including Croatan and Sandbridge), dogs are allowed on the beach in summer before 10 a.m. and after 6 p.m.
- Always pick up after your pet. Service animals are exempt. Rules can change, so check the city's beach-rules page.

Dog parks & services

Let them run at **Red Wing Dog Park**, **Woodstock Dog Park**, or **Bayville Farms Park**. Our pet directory also lists kennels, groomers, sitters, walkers, and trainers. Many hotels welcome pets, but policies and fees vary, so ask before you book.

Don't let your dog drink seawater, and if the sand is too hot for your hand, it's too hot for paws. Bring fresh water and shade.

Rainy Days & Free Fun

A gray day doesn't have to sink a beach trip, and a great day here doesn't have to cost much. These ideas come straight from our most-read local guides.

When it rains

- **Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center** on General Booth Boulevard: two buildings of tanks, touch pools, and live animals. Plan a half day.
- **Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum**: decoys and carvings in the 1895 de Witt Cottage, right on the Oceanfront.
- **iFLY Indoor Skydiving**: try a skydive in a vertical wind tunnel. No experience needed.
- **Lynnhaven Mall**, with Dave & Buster's for arcade games and a meal. Town Center and Pembroke Square are other indoor options.
- **Sky Zone** trampoline park at 1736 General Booth Boulevard, and bowling at **Pinboy's**.
- **Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)** for changing exhibitions, or the Chrysler Museum of Art in nearby Norfolk.
- A movie, or a long, lazy lunch at one of the restaurants in our directory.

> **Thunderstorm rule:** Summer storms usually pop up in the afternoon or evening. When they do, leave the Oceanfront and wait it out indoors.

Free (or almost free)

- **The beaches.** No beach charges admission; the only cost is usually parking.
- **A Boardwalk walk** past King Neptune at 31st Street, the Norwegian Lady at 25th, the sea-creature sculptures, and the military tributes.
- **Playgrounds by the sand** at 2nd, 15th, and 35th Streets, including Grommet Island Park, plus beachfront parks at 17th, 24th, and 31st Streets.
- **Hillier Ignite Fitness Park** near 36th Street: outdoor workout stations with an ocean view.
- **Free festivals and concerts** at the Oceanfront most of the year (see pages 16 to 18).
- **Virginia Legends Walk**, a free, self-guided path near the Oceanfront honoring famous Virginians.
- **Farmers markets:** the seasonal Saturday-morning Old Beach Farmers Market in the ViBe Creative District, and the city's year-round Virginia Beach Farmers Market at 3640 Dam Neck Road.
- **Parks and refuges** such as Mount Trashmore, First Landing, and Back Bay. Some charge a small parking or entrance fee.



Town Center is a good rainy-day base for shopping, dining, and a movie.

On the Water & Day Trips

Dolphins

Bottlenose dolphins are a familiar sight off Virginia Beach in the warmer months, and on many days you can spot a pod from the Boardwalk or the sand. Look in the morning or late in the day, when the water is calmer, and bring binoculars. For a closer look, Rudee Tours and other outfitters run dolphin-watching cruises from Rudee Inlet. Give the animals space, and remember that sightings are never guaranteed.

Whales in winter

Humpback and fin whales travel along the coast from about late December through mid-March. Whale watching is done by boat, not from the beach. The Virginia Aquarium's winter wildlife boat trips and other operators look for whales, seals, porpoises, and seabirds.

Fishing

You can fish from a pier, from the beach, or on a boat. The **Virginia Beach Fishing Pier** near 15th Street is seasonal and has had storm repairs, so confirm it's open. For surf and shore fishing you'll generally need a Virginia saltwater fishing license from the Marine Resources Commission. Charters leave from Rudee Inlet and other docks, including Rudee Tours, Dockside Seafood & Fishing Center, Waterman Sportfishing, and AquaMan Fishing.



The Oceanfront skyline seen across the water from the south.

Surfing

Virginia Beach is a real East Coast surf town with friendly beach breaks. Fall is often the sweet spot: warm water and thinner crowds. In summer the city limits surfing at certain hours and places, so read the posted rules. Shops like 17th Street Surf Shop and schools like VB Surf Sessions can set you up with rentals and lessons.

Day trips

- **Norfolk** (next door): tour the battleship *Wisconsin* at Nauticus, see the Chrysler Museum of Art, walk the Norfolk Botanical Garden, visit the Virginia Zoo, or cruise the Elizabeth River on the Spirit of Norfolk.
- **Williamsburg**: Colonial Williamsburg's living-history town, plus Busch Gardens Williamsburg.
- **Yorktown**: Revolutionary War battlefields and the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.
- **The Eastern Shore**, across the 17.6–mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (a toll road).
- **Knotts Island**, just over the North Carolina line by way of Princess Anne Road.

Many of these are full-day trips. Check hours and tickets before you go.

PICK YOUR BASE

Where to Stay, Area by Area



The Historic Cavalier Hotel, on its hill at the north end since 1927.

Pick the neighborhood first, then the hotel. Summer weekends and holiday weeks are the busiest and priciest. Spring and fall are milder and easier on the budget. Many Oceanfront hotels charge for parking, and pet policies vary, so ask when you book.

The Boardwalk

The middle of the action: walk to the sand, King Neptune, the pier, and dozens of restaurants. It's the classic first-visit choice.

Examples: Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Hyatt Place Oceanfront, The Sitio, Holiday Inn Oceanside, Hilton Garden Inn Oceanfront, Sheraton Oceanfront, Ocean 27

North Oceanfront

Quieter blocks north of the main strip, close to First Landing State Park and the north-end beach.

Examples: The Historic Cavalier Hotel & Beach Club, Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront Resort, Embassy Suites Oceanfront, Wyndham Oceanfront, Holiday Inn & Suites North Beach

South Oceanfront

Near Rudee Inlet and the Boardwalk's south end, a short walk from inlet restaurants and the Aquarium area.

Examples: Schooner Inn, Barclay Towers, Moxy Oceanfront, SpringHill Suites Oceanfront, DoubleTree Oceanfront South, Ocean Key Resort

Chesapeake Bay & Shore Drive

Away from the crowds, near bay beaches and boat ramps. Plan to drive to the Oceanfront.

Examples: Delta Hotels Virginia Beach Waterfront Suites, Quality Inn Little Creek, Howard Johnson by Wyndham Virginia Beach (Shore Drive)

Sandbridge

Beach houses and condos next to Back Bay, best for families and longer, quieter stays.

Examples: Vacation rentals through Sandbridge Realty, Sandbridge Blue, Siebert Realty, and others

Inland & Town Center

Easier parking and good value for business trips, Sandler Center shows, and mixing the beach with shopping.

Examples: The Westin Town Center, Hilton Garden Inn Town Center, Hyatt Place Town Center, The Founders Inn and Spa

Hotel names are examples from our directory, not paid endorsements. Browse all listings at virginiabeach.com.

FOUR SEASONS OF FUN

When to Visit

Virginia Beach gets more than 200 sunny days a year, and every season has its own appeal.

- **Spring** brings blooming trees, empty beaches, kite festivals, and the Shamrock Marathon. The water is still cold, so pack a sweater and a rain jacket. It's a great time to rent a bike or surrey without the summer crowds.
- **Summer** is high season: swimming, surf lessons, parasailing, mini golf, free concerts, and the East Coast Surfing Championships in late August. It's also the most crowded and expensive time.
- **Fall** is a local favorite. The water is still warm in September, Neptune Festival takes over the Boardwalk, and the season wraps up with farm fun, haunted attractions, and food and wine festivals.
- **Winter** is quiet and great for long beach walks, whale-watching trips, the Cape Henry lighthouses, holiday lights, and lower hotel rates.

Month	Avg high	Avg low	Water
Jan	48°	34°	47°
Feb	50°	35°	48°
Mar	58°	41°	48°
Apr	67°	50°	48°
May	76°	59°	58°
Jun	82°	67°	67°
Jul	87°	72°	73°
Aug	85°	72°	76°
Sep	80°	67°	72°
Oct	70°	53°	67°
Nov	61°	46°	60°
Dec	52°	37°	53°

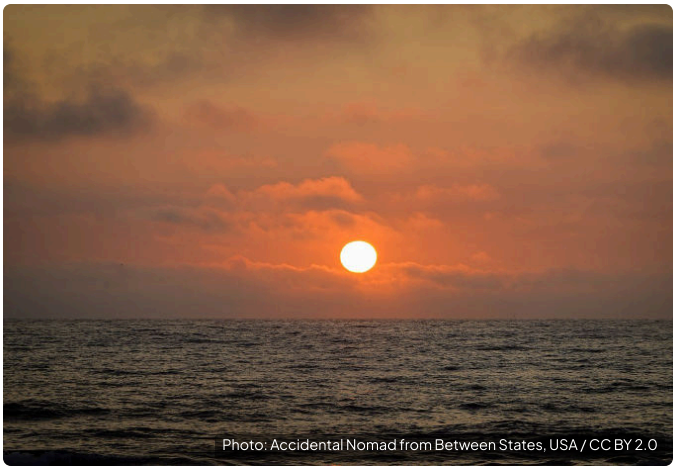
Typical averages in °F. Actual weather varies, and spring can surprise you with a hot day or a cold snap.

Pack for the beach

- Broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher). Reapply after swimming, and on cloudy days too.
- A wide-brimmed hat, a cover-up, and a well-staked umbrella. The Oceanfront can be windy.
- Sandals or water shoes. Midday sand gets hot, so wait until you reach the wet sand to go barefoot.
- Shoes you can walk in. You'll cover a lot of Boardwalk.

Smart-travel tips

- Check the events calendar before you book. Festivals and holiday weekends change crowds and parking.
- Don't leave phones or valuables alone on the beach or in plain sight in your car. If your group swims, have someone watch the bags.
- Cards are accepted almost everywhere, so you don't need much cash.
- In an emergency, call 911 and give the nearest cross street, such as "31st Street and the Boardwalk."



Early risers get the Atlantic sunrise.

Beach Rules, Safety & Accessibility

Lifeguards

From Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, city lifeguards are on duty at the Oceanfront, Croatan, and Sandbridge from 9:30 a.m. to at least 6 p.m. The North End is patrolled from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Swim near a lifeguard, never swim alone, and stay within 50 yards of shore. If a lifeguard whistles, you're probably too far out, or your towel is blocking their path to the water.

Rip currents

Rip currents are channels of water flowing away from shore. They pull you out, not under. Look for a gap of darker, calmer-looking water between breaking waves, a choppy channel, or foam and debris moving out to sea. If you're caught, relax and don't fight it. Swim parallel to the shore, then angle back in, or float and wave for help. If someone else is in trouble, get a lifeguard or call 911 and throw them something that floats. Don't swim out after them.

Beach & Boardwalk rules

- No alcohol and no glass on the beach, Boardwalk, bike path, sidewalks, or parks, except at permitted events.
- No skateboards on the Boardwalk, bike path, or Atlantic Avenue. Skates are OK on the Boardwalk, and bikes and surreys belong on the bike path.
- No sleeping on the beach or benches from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., and no camping on the beach.
- From May through September, jet skis can't launch or land in the posted Oceanfront and Croatan zones from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays, or until 6 p.m. on weekends and holidays. Surfing also has seasonal limits.
- Umbrellas, chairs, coolers, and sand toys are all fine. Pack out your trash.
- See a stranded seal, dolphin, or sea turtle? Keep your distance and call the Aquarium's stranding hotline at 757–385–7575.

Accessible beach days

- **Free beach wheelchairs** at 2nd, 8th, 17th, 24th, and 36th Streets. Reserve one at 757–439–9565 (May through October, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.), or call 757–385–1100 off-season. Little Island Park in Sandbridge also lends them (757–385–7324; bring a photo ID).
- **Ramps to the sand** at 2nd, 8th, 13th, 17th, 24th, 30th, 36th, and 40th Streets, and at every Resort Area beach access.
- **Accessible restrooms** at 2nd, 17th, 20th, 24th, 30th, and 31st Streets.
- **Parking:** on-street disabled meter parking is free for up to four hours. Garages and lots still charge.
- **Grommet Island Park** at 2nd Street is a fully accessible oceanfront playground. At First Landing, the Cape Henry Trail is the accessible route.

Rules and hours can change. The City of Virginia Beach's Beach Rules & Safety and ADA pages have the latest.

THANK YOU, PHOTOGRAPHERS

Photo Credits

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3. **Virginia Beach Oceanfront hotels seen from the water**: Harrz, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_Oceanfront_06-04-2023.jpg
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5. **Old (1792) and New (1881) Cape Henry Lighthouses, Fort Story**: PumpkinSky, CC BY-SA 3.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cape_Henry_Lighthouses_(1881_left,_1792_right).jpg
6. **Thoroughgood House (c. 1719), Virginia Beach**: PumpkinSky, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adam_Thoroughgood_House_-_West_LR.jpg
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8. **Old Coast Guard Station museum, 24th Street and the Boardwalk**: BretFisher, CC0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Coast_Guard_Station_24th_Atlantic_in_Virginia_Beach.JPG
9. **Historic postcard: aerial view of the Cavalier Hotel and Beach Club**: Boston Public Library, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_view_of_Cavalier_Hotel_and_Cavalier_Beach_Club,_Virginia_Beach,_Va.jpg
10. **Virginia Beach Boardwalk**: Greyfiveys, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_Boardwalk_-_October_9,_2022.jpg
11. **Virginia Beach Fishing Pier at 15th Street**: Greyfiveys, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_Fishing_Pier_and_Restaurant.jpg
12. **Oceanfront bike path beside the Boardwalk**: Greyfiveys, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_Oceanfront_Bike_Trail_-_Curve.jpg
13. **Boardwalk railing and resort beach in late summer**: TheWxResearcher, CC0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_Oceanfront_2024-08-31.jpg
14. **Rudee Inlet at the south end of the Oceanfront**: Greyfiveys, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudee_Inlet,_Virginia_Beach,_VA.jpg
15. **Chesapeake Bay shoreline at First Landing State Park**: Virginia State Parks, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FLSP_First_Landing_State_Park_-_along_the_Chesapeake_Bay_(25257356225).jpg
16. **Sandbridge beach looking south**: Brent Hoard from USA, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_(Sandbridge,_VA),_Looking_South_(4004690897).jpg
17. **Sunrise over the dunes at False Cape State Park**: Virginia State Parks, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunrise_at_False_Cape_State_Park_(21412395215).jpg
18. **Bald Cypress Trail boardwalk, First Landing State Park**: Virginia State Parks, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bald_Cypress_Trail_First_Landing_State_Park-boardwalk-5_(33051845892).jpg
19. **Dune path and boardwalk, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge**: Antony-22, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Back_Bay_National_Wildlife_Refuge_2019f.jpg
20. **Marsh view at False Cape State Park**: Virginia State Parks, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:False_Cape_State_Park_(26791413213).jpg
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22. **Japanese garden bridge, Red Wing Park**: PumpkinSky, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Japanese_Bridge_Miyazaki_Gardens_Red_Wing_Park_3.jpg
23. **Sunset over the Chesapeake Bay at First Landing State Park**: Virginia State Parks staff, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FL_-_Chesapeake_Bay_Sunset_(6298799594).jpg
24. **Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center entrance**: Rlevse, CC BY-SA 3.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VirginiaAquariumEntrance.jpg
25. **Hangar at the Military Aviation Museum**: Tomás Del Coro from Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, CC BY-SA 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Military_Aviation_Museum,_Virginia_Beach,_Virginia_(31422275738).jpg
26. **Old Cape Henry Lighthouse**: PumpkinSky, CC BY-SA 3.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cape_Henry_Lighthouse_(1792,_old)_1.jpg
27. **Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel from the Virginia Beach shore**: Ole Bendik Kvisberg, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chesapeake_Bay_Bridge-Tunnel,_Virginia_Beach_Area.jpg
28. **Monster fire truck at the Neptune Festival parade**: Watts, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monster_fire_truck_-_Neptune_Festival_-_Virginia_Beach_(53227454390).jpg
29. **Beach volleyball at the East Coast Surfing Championships**: c w, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East_Coast_Surfing_Championships_-_women%27s_beach_volleyball_-_ECSC_Virginia_Beach_(51410698219).jpg
30. **Charter boats at Rudee Inlet**: PumpkinSky, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudee_Inlet_Bridge_and_boat_LR.jpg
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32. **Town Center towers**: Kubigula, CC BY-SA 3.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VA_Beach_Town_Center.jpg
33. **Virginia Beach Oceanfront skyline seen from Back Bay NWR**: Antony-22, CC BY-SA 4.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_Beach_from_Back_Bay_National_Wildlife_Refuge_2019.jpg
34. **The Historic Cavalier Hotel on the hill**: Steve Jones, used with permission. Owner photo
35. **Sunrise over the Atlantic at Virginia Beach**: Accidental Nomad from Between States, USA, CC BY 2.0. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunrise_over_Virginia_Beach_(53961368808).jpg

KEEP THIS PAGE HANDY

Helpful Phone Numbers

All area codes are 757 unless shown. Numbers were checked against official city, state, and federal websites in November 2026. In an emergency, always call **911**.

Safety & emergencies

Emergency: police, fire, EMS, ocean rescue	**911**
Virginia Beach Police & public safety non-emergency	**757-385-5000**
VB311 city information & towing inquiries	**757-385-3111**
Virginia Beach EMS headquarters (non-emergency)	**757-385-1999**
Virginia Beach Lifesaving Service (Oceanfront lifeguards), HQ	**757-756-4700**
Beach Ambassadors (Oceanfront help, free beach wheelchairs)	**757-439-9565**
Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response hotline (sea turtles, dolphins, seals)	**757-385-7575**
U.S. Coast Guard Sector Virginia, 24-hour command center	**877-722-5727** On the water: VHF Ch. 16
Poison Help line (24/7)	**1-800-222-1222**

Visitor info, travel & parks

Virginia Beach Visitor Information Center 2100 Parks Ave.	**757-385-7873** or 1-800-822-3224
Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation	**757-385-1100**
Hampton Roads Transit (HRT, VB Wave trolley)	**757-222-6100**
Norfolk International Airport (ORF)	**757-857-3351**
Virginia 511 traffic & road conditions	**Dial 511**
VDOT 24-hour customer service (road hazards)	**1-800-367-7623**
First Landing State Park	**757-412-2300**
False Cape State Park	**757-426-7128**
Virginia State Parks reservations	**1-800-933-7275**
Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge	**757-301-7329**
Virginia Relay (TTY)	**711**

virginiabeach.com
Hotels, things to do, events, and restaurants, online since 1996.
Questions or tips: media@virginiabeach.com

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