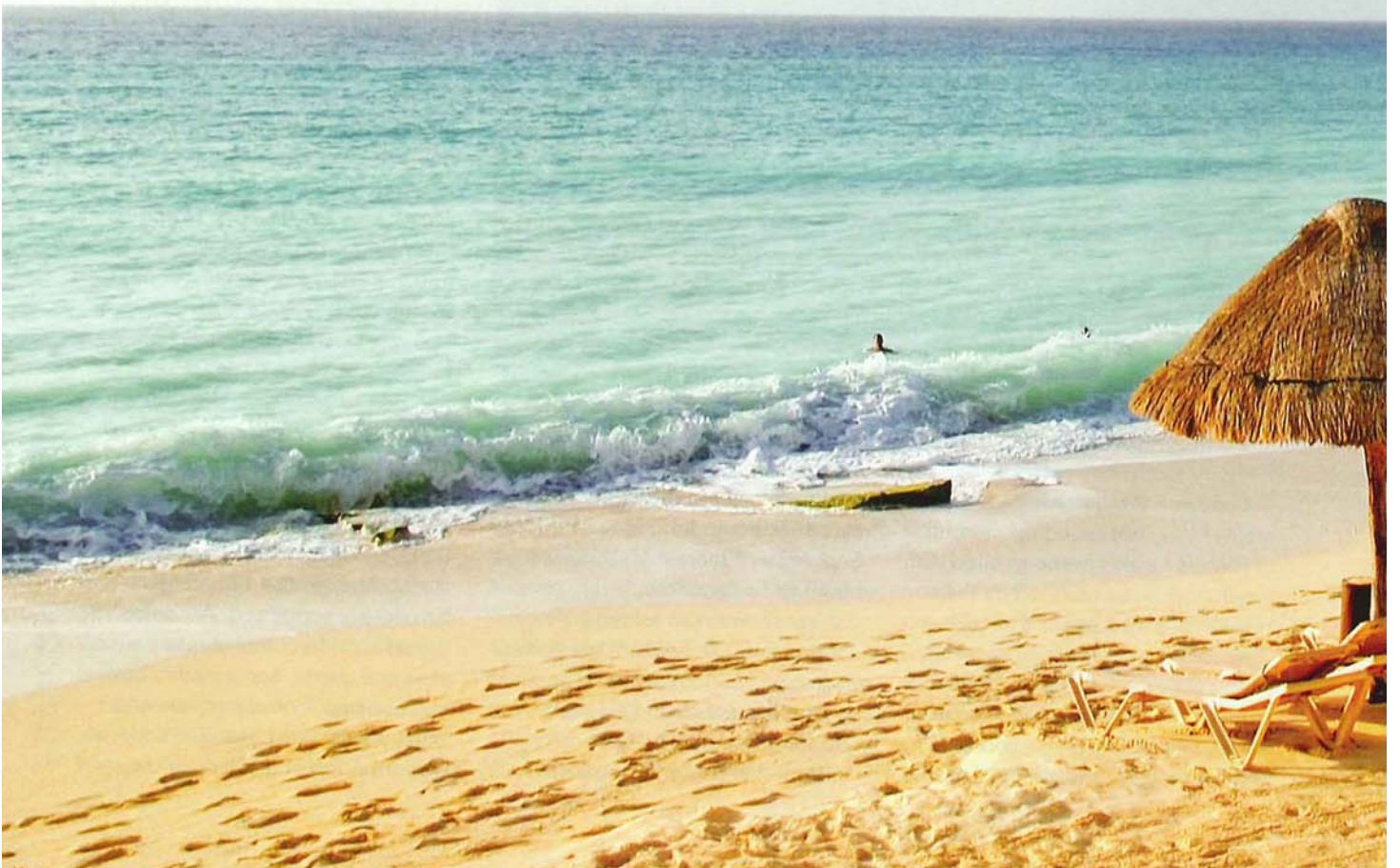


great escapes

By Natalie Foor





Whether you prefer high-class pampering in a countryside B&B or a resort that allows you to sail on the sea, are looking for serene quarters by mountains practically begging to be explored, or an oceanfront suite on the boardwalk—which ensures your kids won't get bored—get ready to plan a stress-free spring/summer getaway!

Countryside Cooling Off

According to Catherine Payne of the Fauquier County Department of Economic Development, "Fauquier, Albemarle and Loudoun County have the highest concentration of wineries and vineyards statewide." And, thanks to the new Fauquier County Wine Trail card, available at the Fauquier County Visitor's Center and www.visitfauquier.com, planning a winery tour is easier than ever.

Looking for a quick escape from reality? Why not round up a group of friends for an afternoon filled with Virginia wine, surrounded by the beauty that is Fauquier County?

As for other great reasons to unwind in Fauquier this spring/summer, the kids will love the Flying Circus Air Show in Bealeton on Sundays May 4 through October 26, the 30th

annual Old Town Warrenton Spring Festival on Main Street in Warrenton May 17 and 18, Upperville Colt & Horse Show on Grafton Farm June 2 to June 8, the 56th annual Fauquier County Fair at the county fairgrounds in Warrenton July 17 to July 20, and much more.

Of course, Saturday, May 3 means it's time to break out the big hats thanks to the Virginia Gold Cup at Great Meadow in The Plains. And you won't want to put those hats away because Saturdays from May 31 through September 13 Great Meadow will be home to Twilight Polo.

After spending a relaxing afternoon in Fauquier, ensure the perfect ending to your day by heading north to The Goodstone Inn & Estate in Loudoun County.

Nestled in charming, historic

Middleburg, the privately owned 265-acre luxurious inn and estate is recognized as a member of the prestigious Small Luxury Hotels of the World organization. It's also been nominated by Conde Nast Johansens for the 2008 "Award for Excellence," and was listed in Patricia Schultz's best-selling book, "1,000 Places to See Before You Die in the USA and Canada." And that's only the beginning of the property's acclaim.

A true estate, each of its 17 guest rooms and suites, housed in five uniquely delightful cottages—some dating back to the 18th century—are luxuriously appointed. Accoutrements include complimentary wine, port and sherry, homemade cookies, fine bathroom amenities and plush robes. Moreover, recreational opportunities abound on and near



The Goodstone
Inn & Estate

the property; guests are even invited to bring their own horses. But, most importantly, visitors are blown away by Goodstone's welcoming staff.

According to Denise Benoit of Benoit Associates, Brian Crook, Goodstone's general manager, and his wife, Julie, reservations manager, personally greet each guest in the estate's carriage house upon their arrival. They sit down and review their itinerary, assisting guests in making dinner reservations in Goodstone's acclaimed fine-dining American restaurant, Hilltopper's (led by distinguished executive chef Christopher Carey), reserving a tee time at nearby Stoneleigh Golf Course or perhaps scheduling a massage.

If you don't have time to make a weekend of it, plan to enjoy one of Hilltopper's special wine-tasting dinners and sample from the estate's impressive wine cellar. Wednesday, May 7 will bring "A Celebration of Virginia Wine and Food" and Wednesday, June 11, a "French Bistro Evening."

For more details on The Goodstone Inn & Estate (including special seasonal packages), Hilltopper's Res-

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taurant or to make reservations, visit www.goodstone.com, call 540-687-4645 or (toll-free) 1-877-219-4663.

Another legendary escape in the heart of Virginia's hunt and wine country you won't want to miss: Marriott Ranch. Located in the Blue Ridge foothills of Hume in Fauquier County, the 4,200-acre ranch was discovered by Marriott International's founder, J. Willard Marriott Sr., in 1951. Mr. Marriott fell in love with the property because it reminded

him of his childhood days on his family's farm in Utah. Today it remains as pristine and serene as the day he purchased it, back before he had his first hotel.

A working farm, with over 1,500 head of cattle, Marriott Ranch remains a treasured place for the Marriott family to return to for family gatherings, and provides regular guests the same benefits. Through its plethora of recreational activities and welcoming rooms in its historic bed



and breakfast, The Inn at Fairfield Farm, which dates back to 1814, you won't be able to help but unwind.

Upon your arrival, you'll be greeted with a tray of delicious cheeses and assortment of refreshing beverages, which only foreshadow the hospitality to come. Perhaps the best part of staying at The Inn at Fairfield Farm is breakfast, according to Kelly Barrett, director of sales and marketing.

"We are famous for our three-course breakfast, as typically you will not need another meal for quite a while."

Barrett went on to explain, "Our breakfast starts off with a plate of fresh fruit and homemade pastries, followed by a chef's selection of breakfast items," which she said has included everything from ricotta pancakes to smoked Gouda grits to fried green tomatoes. According to her, the meal's basically whatever one of the ranch's four chefs, including executive chef J.C. Conklin, is in the mood for that day.

And it's a good thing that guests start the day well nourished, with activities such as horseback riding, including regular guided trail rides

and special day rides, cattle driving, hiking and much more.

Naturally, the ranch, with its three private event sites, is a favorite not only with families but among major local corporations who wish to provide employees with unique, fun team-building events.

To learn more about Marriott Ranch, The Inn at Fairfield Farm, Fairfield Farm Caterers and special packages, visit www.marriotttranch.com, call 540-364-2627 or (toll-free) 1-877-324-7344. Additional trail ride information can be obtained on the website or by calling 540-364-3741 or (toll-free) 1-877-278-4574.

Mountainside Mellowing Out

If nothing else appeals to you quite like the scenic mountains of nearby West Virginia, you should consider a trip to Black Bear Resort, in Canaan Valley. As Bonnie Branciaroli, the resort's marketing director, told us, "It's close, and yet feels very far away. In three hours, you can be transported from the busy megatropolis to the misty, enchanting mountains."

The resort, which first opened in 1987, features nearly 150 unique

pedestal homes as well as 12 suites, all owned by individual homeowners as second-home vacation units. These same owners, many of whom are from NoVa and western Maryland, together own the resort.

According to Branciaroli, the owners certainly take pride in their resort, and their care is displayed in the maintenance of the resort and its grounds, as well as in the added amenities that families love—including a children's playground, mini-golf course, tennis courts, a fishing pond with gazebo and outdoor pool.

Half of the pedestals are available for rent through the resort vacation home rental program, and the best news, according to Branciaroli, is "it's the most family affordable resort experience in the state."

What also draws families and couples to Black Bear, surrounded by the Monongahela National Forest, are tons of activities nearby, at places such as the nearby Blackwater Falls. The gorgeous Seneca Rocks area, featuring caverns and a climbing wall, is also close, as are plenty of opportunities for biking, hiking, fishing, horseback riding,