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Town Talk

The Tides Inn — A Sweet Virginia Retreat

Some of the tastiest [food](#) in Virginia can be found at [the Tides Inn](#) — which also happens to be Travel and Leisure's number one choice for Best Resort in Virginia (and the only Virginia resort mentioned in their Top 100 issue last year). The evidence for the reason of the accolades can be found, first and foremost, in [the savory fare of executive chef T.V. Flynn](#).



The 50 year old inn sits along the shores of the Rappahannock River. The river — a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay — snakes along the southside of The Northern Neck of Virginia (on the northside, flows the Potomac) — just three hours from Baltimore — and lucky visitors can dine on Flynn's grilled oysters, while they overlook the water and wait for the tasty Seared Sesame-Encrusted Tuna. The tuna is so fresh (the one rule at the Tides is that nothing frozen is ever cooked here) that those without a high marine biology I.Q.'s, might swear it had just been caught off the dock. There's something exquisite in the way Flynn pulls together the crunchy vegetables and seared outer part of the fish, blends it with the sushi-grade rare meat inside, and then serves it on top of black, chewy, seasoned wild-rice. It's one of those dishes that, once eaten, becomes a daily crave. A conundrum! How can a diner choose between a new favorite and all the other delicious sounding food served up from such a focused, epicurean menu? One can't, which is why the Tides often gets people coming in for longer weekends. There's just too much to do here — and too much food to [eat](#) — to leave early.

It's very impressive to have a chef of such standing found in a place where a traffic jam is a "Combine followed by three cars," says George Beckett, the Tides' official tour guide (and co-owner of the Northern Neck Heritage Tour group — [nnht.com](#)). The year round population skinnies in at around 50K, yet — thanks partially to the reputation the Tides has given the island, and partly to the island itself — high season tops out at 100k (leaving a much longer line of cars behind those Combines).

Bicycles, boats, box [lunches](#) and babysitting services queue up nicely on the to-do list for a long weekend getaway splurge here. As do croquet, nature trails and golf (the par 72 Golden Eagle Golf Club, designed by George Cobb, has beauty, wild life and a lot of water—requiring at least two different tee times to feel duffer-satisfied). And for oenophiles — not the ones who lip off vintages at parties as fast as they lap up the freebie canapes, but those who actually know how to admire legs — the vineyards around the Tides Inn are worth the exploration; which is where Beckett comes in — not only is he familiar with each vineyard, his grasp of the area's history — along with his humorous vernacular — makes the trip a valuable frolic.

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There are nine vineyards on the Northern Neck, with more purportedly on the way. The white wines tend to rule the day (for those who love a good Bordeaux, the reds just aren't quite strong enough yet, but they're getting there). Highly recommended are the Athena Vineyards and Winery (athenavineyards.com), the Vault Field Vineyards (vaultfield.com), the Ingleside Vineyards (inglesidevineyards.com), and, most impressive of all, the White Fences Vineyard (whitefencesvineyard.com) — it being the closest to the Tides. Nestled in front of this particular vineyard are two gigantic corkscrew sculptures marking the entrance. (A cute off-side story. The town of Irvington doesn't allow large signs, so Bill Westbrook, the owner, had two monuments made instead, i.e., the corkscrews.) A wine tasting with a food pairing (by genius chef, Anne Kirkmyer) here is the only reason to be pulled away from Flynn's cooking — once.

Flynn is just that good.

The 125' "boats" (they don't take up the entire view of the river) and their International guests stop in from all over the world to stay and eat at the Tides. The mood here is always set for taking it easy and taking it in—it, being the sweet views and Flynn's Tasmanian Salmon, grilled with a perfect, perfect, perfect honey glaze, and his Filet Mignon, served with cheddar grits and snappy [green beans](#), which almost threaten to make a diner forgo the signature She-Crab soup, chock full of soft-white fresh local crab. But, it's a simple matter — a bowl is required.



The rooms, decorated in a calming British Colonial theme (dark, enormous wooden furniture and rice beds, against creamy colored walls) seem more luxury than "family beach week," and the big soaking tub seem more appropriate for a glass of Virginia wine than rubber duckies and [toddlers](#). But don't think for a minute that children don't belong here. This is one of those destination resorts that magically blend families and couples, without either one's ambiance feeling interrupted.

A family should always start their stay by walking the boardwalk from the main part of the inn to the pool — and proceed from there to join the CrabNet Kids (ages 4-12), where they can go crabbing, learn to babysit an oyster bed, build sandcastles and do arts and crafts. Suffice to say, the kids spend as much time outside as possible, with counselors there at all times (parents are invited to stay and interact with the kids, or go off and play by themselves). For girlfriend getaways, the spa beckons, and the cute little shops in the town of Irvington are within walking distance from the inn; they run the gamut from dressy clothing boutiques, to southern garb, to souvenir tee-shirts, all the way to needlework and yarn shops. Plus, the hotel also has a roomy gift shop with everything from gorgeous handmade knits, to books, to Little MissMatched socks and more. For couples, the spa really does become the focus (it's no surprise that the resort is becoming a major wedding destination) — the hot stone massage for two (using heated basalt river rocks and VOYA organics aromatherapeutic products), followed by a Chesapeake Seaweed Leaf Wrap, is a couple's blessing.



Family, friend or simply favorite kisser, do take a dining companion or two for dinner in the Chesapeake Club restaurant. And for a treat, send a request into the kitchen, asking Flynn to make your dining decisions, then sit back and enjoy everything. Expect nothing short of crabcakes that can even give Baltimore a run for its money, and some fresh fruit straight from the chef's garden to make the trip back to Charm City seem so much closer — because, after all, you will be coming back soon.

The Tides Inn

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Weekends in October will once again bring together friends and fine wine in Virginia's Northern Neck. The Women Wild About Wine Weekends at the Tides Inn returns in time for October's wine harvest and Virginia's wildly popular wine month.

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