

## LONG WEEKEND BY SHERRY AMATENSTEIN

# The toast of Va.

**T**he Northern Neck, the northernmost of Virginia's three peninsulas on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay, was the birthplace of George Washington.

But to some, this lush and laid-back region 2½ hours from Washington, D.C., has an equally important claim to fame:

It boasts a winemaking history dating back 400 years and is currently home to some of the county's hottest wine producers.

What better time to visit the Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail than October – the 21st Virginia Wine Month, with many events planned?

Award-winning, artisanal products are showcased by nine Northern Neck boutique wineries, each with a background nearly as tantalizing as the wine.

You can spend a delightful weekend moseying your way along the trail – all the wineries offer picnic facilities and free tours. Essential sipping stops include:

**Athena Vineyards & Winery**, Heathsville (804-580-4944; [athenavineyards.com](http://athenavineyards.com))

The three owners – women in their 60s, longtime friends and former nurses – started Athena in 2002 as a retirement project. Their first vine planting was torpedoed by Hurricane Isabel in 2003. They soldiered on, and today Athena, named for the Greek goddess of wisdom, grows 20 varieties of grapes on 14 rolling acres. Indulge in the Jacques Recht Pinot Noir with tones of blackberry and blueberry. Tastings are \$3.

**Ingleside Vineyards**, Oak Grove (804-224-8687; [inglesidevineyards.com](http://inglesidevineyards.com))

This local favorite, nestled on a 3,000-acre plantation, began as a boys' school, Washington Academy, in 1834 – morphing into a Civil

War garrison, courthouse and dairy farm before settling into its current incarnation in 1980.

Ingleside's handcrafted wines consistently win top honors in state, national and international wine competitions. The Blue Crab Blanc, light and fruity in a festive blue bottle, is a surefire crowd-pleaser. Ingleside's \$5 tastings include a souvenir wine glass.

**White Fences Vineyard & Winery**, Irvington (804-438-5559; [whitefencesvineyard.com](http://whitefencesvineyard.com))

It's hard to miss the two 25-foot-tall corkscrew sculptures "guarding" the vineyard's entrance, built by the feisty owner to get around the town ordinance forbidding large signs (the corkscrews are considered monuments).

The premier wine label here is Meteor, named for the spectral visions that occasionally light up the near-total blackness of the country sky. The slightly oaky, crisp Meteor Glow, a Chardonnelle, will light up your palate. Tastings are \$4. ♦

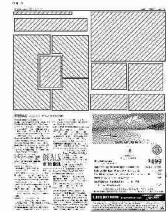
### If you go ...

Check [farecompare.com](http://farecompare.com) for cheap flights from New York to Richmond, an hour from the Northern Neck. The "Passport Program" on [ChesapeakeBayWineTrail.com](http://ChesapeakeBayWineTrail.com) lists discounts and prizes available until Dec. 20, including free stays at member bed-and-breakfasts.

**The Tides Inn** (1-800-843-3746; [tidesinn.com](http://tidesinn.com)), the only Virginia resort included in Travel & Leisure's latest Top 100, offers great savings via its Women Wild About Wine weekend packages.

When you've sipped to satiation, check out the region's myriad other charms, including the George Washington Birthplace National Monument ([nps.gov/geswa](http://nps.gov/geswa)), nature and birding trails, great and affordable dining – and an atmosphere that still resonates with the grace and quietude of Revolutionary times.

For more information on the region, go to [VirginiaWine.org](http://VirginiaWine.org) or [NorthernNeck.org](http://NorthernNeck.org).



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