

Historical Itinerary

Anyone who enjoys history will appreciate the opportunity to experience firsthand the stories behind some of America's most colorful people, places and events. From the struggle for independence to the steamboat era, from 18th-century gardens to 21st-century artisans, the area surrounding the Tides Inn is full of historic excitement.

Day 1 - Welcome to Irvington

Check in at the Tides Inn and embark on a historical journey throughout Virginia's Northern Neck. Start with learning about the influence of steamboats and their importance to the Northern Neck and towns along the entire Chesapeake Bay. The steamboats provided an economic lifeline, with the cities of Norfolk and Baltimore acting as gateways to the world beyond. Those cities provided the markets, the towns provided the goods, and the steamboats provided a means to both. Located just a few steps or bike pedals away from the Tides Inn, the Steamboat Era Museum was established to preserve their legacy. From its grassroots inception in 1999 to its opening day in 2004, the museum has evolved to become a unique treasure for the local community and its visitors. Though numerous maritime museums exist nationwide, few reflect the steamboat era and none of them is dedicated to the steamboats of the Chesapeake Bay.

If you are visiting the Tides Inn on the first Saturday of the month, May through December, visit the Irvington Commons for an open-air market featuring local produce, herbs, flowers, meat, seafood, cheese, baked goods, art and handcrafted items, as well as live music and activities for children.

Day 2 - Explore the Potomac

Off of Pope's Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River, is the George Washington Birthplace National Monument. This includes the heart of Augustine Washington's plantation, the 17th-century homesite of the immigrant John Washington, and the Washington Family Burial Ground. Tour the Colonial Revival memorial house and dependencies constructed in honor of the bicentennial of Washington's birth and as part of the national park's creation in 1932. Visit the colonial farm where George Washington was born and took his first steps, and immerse yourself in an 18th-century experience that includes gardens, outbuildings, fields and heritage-breed animals. Walk along creekside paths to enjoy unspoiled waterfront vistas.

Continue on to the Stratford Hall dining room for lunch and a tour of the Great House. Stratford Hall is the home of two signers of the Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, and the birthplace of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The Georgian Great House was built in 1738 and the grounds still encompass 1,900 acres of the original land which sits high along the bluffs overlooking the Potomac River. Explore the many dependencies, formal gardens, grist mill and hiking/nature trails.

Day 3 - Colonial Heritage

After breakfast at the Tides Inn, visit Historic Christ Church in Irvington. Built in 1735, this National Historic Landmark is the best preserved of Colonial Virginia's Anglican parish churches. Virtually unchanged, its splendid architecture includes a three-level pulpit that towers over the individual enclosed high-backed pews.

Tour the Mary Ball Washington Museum & Library in the Lancaster Courthouse Historic District. The complex of buildings from around 1800 includes the Old Clerk's Office, Old Jail and Lancaster House. Mary Ball, born at nearby Epping Forest, was the mother of George Washington.

Stop in Kilmarnock for a small-town strolling and shopping experience. Stop in a restaurant, gift shop or gallery along Main Street or just around the corner at the Kilmarnock Antiques Gallery on School Street, featuring over 80 vendors. Visit the Kilmarnock Museum, which houses exhibits of business and commerce of Kilmarnock...and recalls the early days of the bustling town, first known as Steptoe's Ordinary, settled in 1719. (Open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 11am-3pm.)

If you are in Kilmarnock on the first Friday of the month, May through October, enjoy Steptoe's Walkabout, a joint celebration of the merchants, town and arts community, with live music and entertainment on the streets of Kilmarnock.

Day 4 - Colonial Williamsburg

Enjoy the sights and sounds of the 18th century and experience life as it was in our nation's yesterdays. Guests of Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area explore scores of original buildings, homes, and shops reconstructed on 301 acres -- most on their original foundations. Rare animal breeds, historic trades, and lovingly restored gardens add layers of authenticity to the Colonial Williamsburg experience. See The Magazine, the colonial arsenal housing a collection of muskets and cannons. Take part in musket-firing demonstrations and drills, watch the militia, and listen to the fife and drums. Pretend you are justices, defendants and witnesses at The Courthouse, and then swing into Chowning's Tavern -- one of the most popular places for BBQ, beers and ales.

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