

HOW 'MOUNTAINS' ARE YOU?

Shenandoah Valley getaways for nature-lovers,
from outdoors enthusiasts to comfort seekers

BY RACHEL MARSH

The mountains are calling ... how do *you* answer? Maybe you're an extra-crunchy trail trekker who can't get enough of the great outdoors; or perhaps you prefer to answer the call with electricity nearby at all times. The Shenandoah Valley, stretching along the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains, from Lexington and Rockbridge County in the south up to the border with West Virginia, hosts a blend of cities, towns and natural space. So, wherever you fall on the spectrum, this destination has options for every brand of mountaineer.

JUST HERE FOR THE INSTA PHOTOS

Hey, the mountains are great for all kinds

of gritty outdoor activities – but if you're a creature-comfort-prioritizer, they do just as well as a scenic backdrop.

Start your fresh-air vacation with a leisurely stroll through downtown Winchester. For a concentration of the best things the city has to offer, meander along the Loudoun Street Pedestrian Mall, peppered by shops, patios, museums, musicians, friendly faces and restaurants.

The dining scene in this area is dense and diverse, but if you're like me and want to try as much as possible ... look no further. Taste Winchester History Tours brings your palate the variety it craves with small bites from five to six different walkable restaurants around the pedestrian strip,

each stop unique – from tacos to sundaes to German schnitzel. And, as the name implies, there's a little history sprinkled in with the nosh as well.

Speaking of history, take a detour to peruse the personal artifacts of Winchester's arguably most-famous resident. The Patsy Cline Historic House, located in the very home where she resided as a teenager, now serves as a museum and homage to the country music icon. Explore her rise from impoverished to legend through stories and photographs – even hear the recording of her breakout performance on *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*.

Then head back downtown and unwind from your day of mountain viewing at the



Shenandoah Valley

George Washington Hotel, an elegantly quaint getaway in the heart of Winchester.

I LIKE NATURE LIKE I LIKE MY IN-LAWS: IN SMALL DOSES

For you middle-of-the-road outdoor explorers – who love nature, as long as the situation is controlled and there’s a light in the form of a thermostat at the end of the tunnel – Shenandoah has many ways to merely dip your toe into nature without getting soaked.

Traverse the underground chambers at Shenandoah Caverns, a one-mile (and well-lit!) exploration of the world under our feet that we tend to forget even exists. These caverns harbor a vivid array of stalagmites, stalactites and formations, with “cave bacon” so realistic it was once featured in *National Geographic*.

If the way to your heart is through your stomach, let Mother Nature woo you in the form of fresh fruit. The family-run “pick-your-own” Mackintosh Fruit Farm yields dozens of seasonal varieties – from cherries and strawberries to peaches and pears to apples and pumpkins. But no fruit farm would be complete without a market, and this one stays stocked with fresh produce straight from the farm itself, plus locally made provisions like preserves, pickles, relishes and honey – from their very own bees!

Or, if grapes are more your fruit of choice, scuttle over to Veramar Vineyards for a lush glass of wine paired with aston-

ishing views: ideal for both the vino lover and the selfie lover.

To catch your z’s on that perfect balance between rural and luxurious, book a night at the Smithfield Farm B&B in Berryville. The eighth generation, 400-acre organic farm is still active today, with a cherry-on-top manor loaded with age and charm to entice locals and visitors alike. And in the morning, breakfast consists of local fare – much of it from the farm itself. Just try to get more farm-to-table than that, I dare you.

IF YOU HAVE A CLOSET FULL OF PATAGONIA ...

To really dig your feet in the dirt and become one with the woman we call Mother Earth, root yourself in the mountains at Shenandoah River State Park. This 1,600-acre park graces the planet with dense trees, boasting five miles of river frontage and ample amounts of eye candy in the form of mountain ranges. Hike along a handful of its 24 miles of trails, or just pull over and enjoy the many scenic views the park offers.

Seeking a more creative way to soak in the outdoors? Glide down the river on a kayak, canoe or tube. Or drift through the trees on a Virginia Canopy Tours ropes course – eight ziplines, two nature walks and up to 90 feet of pulse-quickenning heights.

Satiate your outdoors-induced appetite at Blue Wing Frog. Just a quick drive from the park, this neighborhood dining spot prioritizes sustainability and “keeping it local.” Find sandwiches, salads, entrées and desserts that all taste carefully homemade, local and the way Mother Earth would have made them.

Return to the arms of Shenandoah’s state park and rest your sun-kissed head in the comfort of a park lodge. These woodsy cabins are spacious and comfortable, but still rustic enough to keep nature at your fingertips. They contain full kitchens, with porches for fresh air and windows for fresh views. They also come with backyard fire pits: feeling extra outdoorsy? Grill up that fish you caught earlier, you mountaineer, you. **B**

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Shenandoah Caverns