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IN COUNTRY

SHUCKIN' A LIGHT FOR THE NORTHERN NECK

BY WALLY GREEVES
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Puerto Vallarta, Cabo San Lucas, and Marina Del Ray only slightly pale in comparison to Virginia's oldest-newest destination for boat and automobile owners looking for a place to relax for the weekend.

Port Kinsale Marina & Resort, located on The Yeocomico River in Northern Neck, has the right mix to accommodate the Whaler from across the river who came over to dine, the SUV (soon to be hybrid) seeking refuge from too much pavement, or the weary yacht looking for a deep water slip for a while. Tracing its history back to the 1940s as a marina, its current ownership is comprised of Georgetown residents Rod Porter and Georgia Santangelo Derrico, Linda Sandridge, and Charlie Santangelo. Next to the town of Kinsale, which has roots dating back to the early 1600s, the Marina is steeped in waterman tradition and lore.

The Skipjack Inn (Skipjack being a large flat-bottomed boat used to collect oysters) has four rooms facing the water, with each being named after an early skipjack vessel. Cottages are available for families, and "Oyster Reef" and "Poolside Haven" round out the accommodation possibilities. Hailed locally as a top dining destination since 1965, The Mooring Restaurant has been taken to new levels under Charlie Santangelo, and new Head Chef Andrew Fearce. The casual outside bar is a renovated 1950s boat that leaves a nice outdoor seating wake of tables overlooking the marina. The marina boasts a restored 104-year-old wooden skipjack boat, The Virginia W.

While I could probably have been happy just wandering around the wooded 54 acres, reading, charter fishing, and relaxing in the marina bar, there are many activities outside the haven that are well worth the effort. The Northern Neck wine trail is coming into its own and now boasts eight wineries. Vault Field Vineyards, the newest of the eight, is run by the Meenan family. Fueled by hobbyists turned professionals, the winery is state of the art viticulture personified, and the family works together to provide a quality tour and great product (three of the four wines submitted in 2007 received Governor's Cup medals). I liked the Reserve Red, but tried everything else. To learn more, visit www.vaultfield.com.

The Town of Kinsale offers historic walking tours that touch on its importance as a colonial port, its many historic wartime sagas, and its local architecture and colorful stories. Farms in the area are ripe for berry picking (strawberries when we went), and I recommend picking up some of the local oysters at any small seafood shack around. The Urbana Oyster Festival in early November is nearby, and we are going this year.

The Northern Neck of Virginia is an area I would classify as resistant to change.



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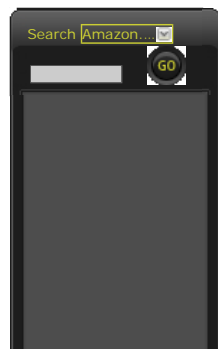
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While recently the area has been heavily invested in, some of the investments have certainly not been appreciated by a way of life that has dominated the region for hundreds of years. The owners of the Kinsale Marina have committed themselves to growing with an already existing community in a fashion that demonstrates their passion for the history surrounding them on land and water, and it shows. The humorous camaraderie that exists amongst the staff, most of whom live on site, might make you think you are at an Adirondack retreat (complete with golf carts for non-walkers).

Whether you want to dock for the winter, eat like you're in Florence, catch a monster rockfish, play volleyball on "professional grade sand", rent a sailboat, or sit around drinking and watching things take place in a more casual manner; all are available. To learn more about The Marina go to www.portkinsale.com, and guess what? Dogs are extremely welcome.



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