

[From Winter 2001]

Point Me to the Water

When I first arrived on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, I was surprised. Where were the ocean beaches? The goal seems simple enough. In fact, it becomes a knight's errant quest on these shores.

Due to the geography of the shore, beach access is limited. The natural barrier of dynamic islands and ensuing salt marshes preserves the area from overcrowding. Not many tourists are interested in trudging through mud instead of on white sandy beaches. Many beaches fall way to those who can manage boating out to the barrier islands. Such limited access reduces the human impact and safeguards the beaches from being loved to death.

Indeed, there are many good points of the Eastern Shore of Virginia provided by its geography. The Shore not only funnels migratory birds but also concentrates true beach lovers. Those stout of heart do not mind the hassle of not having convenient stores next to their staked out spot. The survivors of the natural selection are rewarded with protected beaches and fabulous sunrises and sunsets over water.

I spent most of my childhood on Texan shores. I have logged many hours of beach living and still am partial to the natural dune lines of the Gulf of Mexico. But I am impressed with the beaches along the Eastern Shore of Virginia. They are clean and the best part is that one does not have to compete for a little patch of sand (if you know where and when to go). That breathing space provides a more natural seaside experience. Nature lovers watch out because the Eastern Shore of Virginia has that concept covered.

There is nothing better than to walk on a beach that is devoid of condominium after condominium. Our avian friends, who are also fellow beach lovers, make up for the low condominium population. Terns, cormorants, sanderlings, and pelicans deepen the marine backdrop into a significant artwork without distracting, towering buildings.

Not only do the birds add a scenic brushstroke to the landscape, but also a sense of fellowship. Because of the underdeveloped beaches, these and many other birds share with us many a good day by the surf. The lack of development must be due to the surrounding local communities. They have many bird and nature proponents and also just plain down-to-earth people. These areas are not characteristic of the usual distracting beach towns. They escape the mantle of frivolity that blankets many tourist areas. Everywhere you go you are met with welcoming smiles and you feel yourself matching their easygoing pace. The scenery itself is the main attraction and no bravado is needed.

The natural beaches are not the only appeal of the geography of the Shore. The light shows are a great boon. The Delmarva Peninsula provides spectacular sunrises and sunsets over marine ecosystems. The Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay get painted daily by the sun rising and dipping over their horizons, respectively. Not many areas can pull off that feat. By the way, bayside beaches have terrific sunsets and are great places to handle live whelks and sand dollars. Their gentle surf is reminiscent of Florida's gulfside beaches and worth noting.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia has quiet virtues that are worth getting to know. Hopefully if you're traveling through you'll take a closer look. Some might at first be disappointed at the subtle beaches and lack of gimmicky



tourist attractions. For one reformed beachgoer, the supposed hindrance of the Shore's geography truly is its claim to fame.

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