Visit Dorchester

Eat & Drink in Downtown Cambridge

Explore Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

Follow the Harriet Tubman Scenic Byway

Heart of the Chesapeake
With a dozen fitness certifications under her belt, Dorchester native Angela Thomas choose to follow her heart and open a stand-up paddleboard (SUP) business. Once she added yoga classes on land and water, the wellness entrepreneur found the perfect union of body, mind and soul. Today, launching from pristine waterfront settings throughout the county, Angela leads hundreds of classes and outings on her state-of-the-art SUP fleet and flotation mats.
Welcome to Vienna, Maryland, situated on a bend, Vienna sparkles as a gem of the pristine Nanticoke River. Dating back to the 17th century, Vienna is one of Maryland’s older settlements. The town is busily planning for the future while embracing its historical past. Take a self-guided walking tour of historic Vienna and imagine the town when it served as an important source of goods and supplies for the Continental Army. A reminder of the days when the port was important enough to draw British attention during the war.

Envision the streets lined with horse and carriages, ships pulling into the port and the town residents bustling to finish their daily chores.

www.viennamd.org
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**ABOUT THE COVER:** Cruising by the J.M. Clayton Seafood Company on Cambridge Creek— photo by Jill Jasuta.

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**TRAILS & WATERS**

Explore the scenic landscapes of Dorchester by water or by land with John Page Williams.

- **Boating**
- **Fishing**
- **Birding**
- **Hunting**
- **Cycling**
Water is a way of life in Dorchester County. Nearly surrounded by the Chesapeake Bay and several rivers, this heart-shaped slice of Maryland’s Eastern Shore is a perfect escape for boaters, hunters, history buffs, seafood lovers, birders, cyclists, paddlers, back roads explorers, art lovers, and even endurance athletes (two IRONMAN triathlons happen here every year).

Dorchester County has a varied and fascinating history to explore, from Native American times to the oystering boom to the civil rights movement. Harriet Tubman lived and toiled in slavery here before she escaped to freedom, then returned 13 times to lead others out of bondage. Today you can walk in her footsteps through the powerful road trip known as the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway.

Here in the ‘Heart of the Chesapeake,’ you’ll feel a world apart from the frantic pace of city life, but Dorchester is only about a two-hour drive from Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Experience the down-to-earth ways of the waterfront villages, where men and women harvest crabs, oysters, and fish from local waters. Feel the revitalization vibe running strong in the county seat of Cambridge, where a small but charming downtown has become an increasingly popular dining and craft beer destination with a lively arts and music scene.

Out in the countryside, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge awaits. One of Maryland’s most popular natural attractions, Blackwater serves up dramatic marshland vistas and views of soaring eagles, osprey, egrets, and thousands of other birds during fall and spring migrations.

Whether you’re fishing, feasting, or outdoor adventuring, there’s plenty to love in the Heart of the Chesapeake.

Learn about more places and events online at visitdorchester.org, and follow us on social media for the latest news. Tag your photos with #visitdorchester to share your favorite views!

For more information and reservations call 800 769 0420 or visit chesapeakebay.regency.hyatt.com.
A round Dorchester, it’s hard to tell where land ends and water begins. In this low-lying county, the brackish waters of the Chesapeake Bay meet freshwater flowing from no fewer than seven river systems and countless creeks. The water ranges from salty to fresh, resulting in a great variety of habitat for waterfowl, furbears, crabs, and fish. The changing seasons add even more diversity and interest for cyclists, hikers, paddlers, birders, anglers, hunters, and those who tour by car. Here in Dorchester, natural resources are as inextricably interwoven with human history as its lands are with its waters. From the native Nanticoke people Captain John Smith encountered in 1608 to the renowned Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman and the generations of watermen and their vibrant waterside communities such as Cambridge, Hoopers Island, and Vienna.

WATERWAY NOTES
Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to spend serious time on these waters in vessels ranging from canoes and an outboard skiff to a friend’s 58-foot trawler yacht. Each has its value here. Come aboard for a quick tour with me; then start plotting your own Dorchester adventures. We’ll travel from North to South. Of course, covering Dorchester’s waters in a couple of thousand words is absolutely like trying to pour a gallon of water into a pint pot. We can only skim the surface here.

John Page Williams has explored and written about the Chesapeake Bay for more than five decades including 38 years as a Chesapeake Bay Magazine columnist, and in his books, Chesapeake Almanac – Following the Bay through the Seasons, Exploring the Chesapeake in Small Boats, and Chesapeake: Exploring the Water Trail of Captain John Smith. In 2013 he was proclaimed to be an official Admiral of the Bay by Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley.
The Eastern Shore’s longest river forms Dorchester’s boundary with Talbot County, from Sharps Island to the town of Secretary and three pastoral upstream tributaries—the Warwick River, Cabin Creek, and Hunting Creek. The transition from the salty Bay water to more brackish water offers a range of habitat for fish and crabs, enhanced by shallow, marshy points, deep flats, and channel shoulders enriched by oyster reefs and strong currents, as the river’s large watershed delivers fresh water to meet the tides. Anglers will find plenty to interest them, from casting flies and topwater plugs to rockfish (striped bass) and speckled trout in the shallows around Cooks Point to trolling and jigging the deeper waters for rockfish, bluefish, Spanish mackerel, and sometimes even black and red drum. Bottom fishing with bait, especially around the Clint Waters Memorial Reef in the river’s mouth and the Bill Burton Fishing Pier at Cambridge, will turn up spot, croakers, catfish, white perch, and the occasional black drum.

**Choptank River**

**Little Choptank River/Taylors Island**

**Dorchester Bayshore**

From James Island down to Lower Hoopers Island, Dorchester’s Chesapeake shore is slowly sinking and eroding as winter’s Northwest winds blow across the open Bay and gnaw at the edges. Years ago, an elderly farmer from one of the oldest families on Taylors Island told me that he used to drive a Model T Ford down a shoreline road to play baseball against Hoopers Islanders, but the Bay claimed that road half-a-century ago. The deep, 50- to 75-foot waters of the ancestral Susquehanna channel swing within a couple of miles of shore, with rough shell bottoms on the shallower shoulders. Further inshore are the inlets where Punch Island Creek enters at the lower end of Taylors Island and along the Hoopers Island chain. They offer many of the same angling opportunities as the lower Choptank, but with the proviso that these waters are exposed, currents are strong, and there are only a couple of harbors. The historic Hoopers Island Light and the rough bottom around it offer a range of fish for rigging and bottom fishing with bait.

**WATER & LAND TRAILS** Dorchester County offers excellent water trails for paddle craft and skiffs. Here are a few resources to help you make the most of them:

**Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Area**—The largest publicly owned tidal area in Maryland, with maps available free from dnr.maryland.gov.

**Nanticoke River**—The most biologically diverse watershed on the Delmarva, and home to the highest concentration of bald eagles in the northeastern United States. More info at paddlenanticoke.com.

**Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Paddling Trails**—These maps can be purchased at the refuge visitor center. For more information visit fws.gov/refuge/blackwater.

**Birding in the Heart of Chesapeake Country**—Dorchester’s expansive wetlands are home to many native and migratory birds. Plan your bird-watching trip with mdbirdingguide.com/dorchester.
4 Honga River/Hoopers Strait/Bloodsworth Island

Behind the Hoopers Island chain lies the broad Honga River, flanked by watermen’s communities, marshes, and wild islands leading to the head of Tangier Sound. Look at a chart and you’ll see a narrow channel with sharp turns, shell bottoms, and deep holes that attract spot, croakers, and occasional drum, along with marsh banks and drains where rockfish and speckled trout feed. The inlet and bridge pilings between Fishing Creek and Upper Hoopers Island can be a hot spot for rockfish, especially on moving water early and late in the day.

To the South lie Hoopers Strait, Bishops Head, and Bloodsworth Island, with more powerful currents, low marshes, and broad open waters. This sparsely populated “big sky” country is beautiful, rich in wildlife, and seriously fishy, with multiple launch points, but it requires prudent boat operation at all times. Bloodsworth Island is especially tempting, but it is a U.S. Naval Reservation, with unexploded ordnance in its marshes and dangerous sunken obstructions in the shallow waters around it. Please keep a careful distance away.

5 Fishing Bay/Elliotts Island

Fishing Bay lies between the lower Dorchester mainland and Elliots Island. It’s broad and shallow, receiving the outflows of the Blackwater/Little Blackwater and Transquaking/Chicamacomico river systems. Flanking it are pristine marshes and pine hammocks of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and Maryland’s 29,000-acre Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Area. It’s a magnet for waterfowl hunters, paddlers, and birders.

6 Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

The natural heart of Dorchester County is the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge—28,000 acres of brackish marshes, pine hammocks, and hardwoods, one of the Chesapeake’s epicenters for bald eagles as well as beautiful, formerly endangered Delmarva fox squirrels, wintering migratory waterfowl, and a host of other birds. There’s a visitor center with bird-viewing opportunities, a wildlife drive, and several short hiking trails—fws.gov/refuge/blackwater and mdbirdingguide.com/blackwater.

7 Blackwater/Little Blackwater River System

The Blackwater Refuge offers three water trails for paddlers. Two of them are simple, up-and-back trips of 7 6 and 8.0 miles. There is much to be said for this format.

8 Transquaking/Chicamacomico River System

This may be the most overlooked fresh/brackish water stream complex in the Chesapeake watershed. It’s full of wetlands, wooded swamps, water birds, and fish. Actually boasts its own small but native genetic stock of rockfish that spawn in April and May. Fishing for them is closed then, but there are plenty of other species, including yellow perch, crappie, rockfish (striped bass), and white perch.

Blackwater/Little Blackwater River System

The Blackwater Refuge offers three water trails for paddlers.

There’s no time-consuming shuttle to set up, and it’s easy to shorten the trip if necessary, or to slow down and fish. Moreover, there’s more than enough marsh, wildlife, and birds to be worth seeing twice. The Orange Trail up Coles Creek from Shorters Wharf offers saltmarsh vegetation, white perch, and channel catfish. The Green Trail upstream from the Route 335 Bridge is fresh water and has recently become known for the invasive but feisty and tasty Northern Snakehead fish. The Purple Trail is a one-way run straight through the Refuge’s tidal waters between Route 335 and Shorters Wharf. It’s closed between September 30 and April 1 to avoid bothering bald eagles nesting in the pine hammocks.

Hunting in Dorchester

Dorchester County is known for some of the best waterfowl and deer hunting on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. The National Outdoor Show, which celebrates the sporting life every year, has become world famous, and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge offers world-class special permit hunting for the elusive sika deer, the “marsh ghost.”

Fall brings Canada geese, and hunters come to Dorchester from all over the world for a spot along the Atlantic Flyway migratory path, or to set their decoys to attract diving and dabbling ducks later in the season.

Dorchester is home to many guides and outfitters who will be happy to help you explore this outdoorsman’s paradise.

Connect with outfitters and learn more online at visitdorchester.org/hunting.
white perch, pickerel, largemouth bass, catfish and, yes, snakeheads. For paddlers, two easy itineraries in fresh water are down-and-back from the upper Transquaking access on Drawbridge Road and New Bridge on the upper Chincoteague. The Basspit landing on the lower Transquaking offers a loop past broad, brackish marshes and two large harbor seals made possible by The Canal, a cut through the base of a large meander in the river. The upper Transquaking and New Bridge ramps also offer explorers in small outboard skiffs a circumnavigation of some 30 miles, running from fresh water through the transition to brackish, down to the point where these two river systems meet, just above Basspit, and back up to fresh again. For really adventurous skiff crews, there’s nothing wrong with making a one-way trip down the lower Transquaking to Fishing Bay and back.

**Nanticoke River & Marshyhope Creek**

The Eastern Shore’s second-longest river includes an important part of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, centered in the historic river town of Vienna, the “Gateway to the Nanticoke.” Within Dorchester’s section of the river, the channel makes the transition from the salt waters of Tangier Sound and the East side of the vast Elliotts Island marsh to the tidal fresh wild rice marshes of lovely Marshyhope Creek, the northwest branch of the Nanticoke, which played an important role in Harriet Tubman’s portion of the Underground Railroad. Vienna itself offers access, the Emperor’s Landing waterfront park, and other amenities. The park is part of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network.

For paddlers, a great up-and-back option is Chicone Creek, just upstream of the Route 50 Bridge, which winds for several miles through tidal fresh marsh and wooded swamp conserved by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Be aware that the Nanticoke has powerful currents and is still very much a working river, with tugs pushing barges upstream with fuel oil to the port of Seaford, Delaware, and downriver with sand and gravel. For more adventurous paddlers and skiff crews, continue a mile upriver from Vienna, turn left into the Marshyhope, and explore upstream for ten miles past the villages of Brookview and Eldorado toward Federalsburg, which lies just over the Dorchester line in Caroline County. There is no better waterway in the whole Chesapeake to contemplate the ways that natural resources have driven centuries of human history than this part of the Nanticoke River system.

**VESSELS FOR DORCHESTER**

One of the joys of exploring Dorchester County by water is that there are many opportunities for every kind of vessel and skill level.

**Paddle Craft**, canoes, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, (and even good rowing boats) are made to order for exploring countless Dorchester creeks and rivers.

**Sailboats** are great for riding the winds of the lower Choptank, whether aboard your own or on a cruise with Cambridge’s historic skipjack, *Nathan of Dorchester*, which celebrates the county’s boatbuilding and oystering heritage.

**Outboard Skiffs** from 14- to 20-feet long, whether tiller-steered johnboats or center consoles, when prudently operated can open the world of Dorchester waterways to their crews. For creeks, rivers, broad waters, fishing, birdwatching, or simply touring to see what’s around the next bend, skiffs are ideal craft for taking advantage of the county’s broad offering of launch ramps.

**Larger “Day Boats,”** whether dual consoles, center consoles, or pure sport boats, are made to order for river cruising on Dorchester waters, especially the Choptank and the Nanticoke. There is no shortage of lodging options with marina access and waterfront restaurants offer dock ‘n’ dine opportunities for local seafood.

**Cruising Boats** are great for the Choptank and Nanticoke rivers. Accommodations range from luxurious destinations like Cambridge’s Long Wharf and Hyatt Chesapeake’s River Marsh Marina to the simpler but lovely and historic Emperor’s Landing at Vienna on the Nanticoke.
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For more information and events calendar, visit restorehandsell.org

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DORCHESTER
Food & Drink

BY JEFF HOLLAND
It's practically an island unto itself—all of Dorchester County. As the Chesapeake Bay reaches out her arms to embrace the Blackwater marshes, the mighty Choptank River arcs around by the north, the graceful Nanticoke sweeps up from the south, and somewhere among the farmer’s fields, fingered creeks of the two rivers nearly meet. There are 1,700 miles of shoreline circling nearly 600 square miles of forest, wetlands and farms, and it's that very distinct combination that gives Dorchester County its particular flavor, and one worth savoring.

It’s a flavor that’s reflected throughout the county, one you can taste at farmer’s markets, restaurants and brew-pubs, crab houses and roadside diners. The water that flows all around, in and out with the tide—that’s brackish: a little bit salty, a little bit fresh. But the bounty from the water and the land in Dorchester County, that’s all as fresh as can be, straight off the boat, right out of the barn.

Connect with the heritage of Dorchester’s watermen

If you’re up at dawn, you might see the watermen’s workboats heading out to the river from their slips along Cambridge Creek and other waterways throughout the county to begin their daily tasks of pulling up crabs in the summertime, scraping oysters off the bottom in the winter, hauling in rockfish in season. If you’re not a morning person, you can still get a feel for traditions of the men and women, black, white and Latino, who work the water to earn their pay and deliver the culinary bounty that defines Dorchester.

For a sense of the hard work and struggle of those watermen and waterwomen, visit the Richardson Maritime Museum, or stop by the Dorchester County Visitor’s Center, right across the Choptank River bridge, underneath the giant white sail. There you can see a dynamic mural by local artist Michael Rosato, titled “Ode to Watermen,” showing a crew aboard a skipjack struggling to haul a dredge bag full of oysters onto the deck.

This mural is one of seven epic works of art on display in public places throughout the county, each one reflecting a different aspect of Dorchester life through the ages, from Harriet Tubman’s struggles to the natural beauty of the water birds that grace her shores. You can see all of the murals that are part of the Chesapeake Mural Trail when you download the Dorchester County Audio Tour, a free app that offers self-guided walking tours and driving tours at the touch of your smart phone screen. Look for it on Google Play and the iPhone store; search “Visit Dorchester.”

Skipjacks once harvested oysters by the millions

While the motorized workboat is the modern waterman’s medium, skipjacks once plied out of the creek under sail by the hundreds, but now there are only a precious few of these graceful watercraft left afloat. A century ago, they would bring oysters back to market by the millions of bushels.

Fortunately, the Skipjack Nathan of Dorchester is at Long Wharf in Cambridge to represent the country’s last fleet of boats harvesting seafood under sail. With the Nathan at the dock, you can see the distinct features that define Maryland’s official state boat, features like the clipper bow, the raked-back mast, the pushboat on the stern davits. Between May and November, you can go along for a sail and get a real hands-on feel for the watermen’s life on the water.

Once you’ve got a sense of how that seafood makes its way from the Bay to your plate, you can savor it all the more. There are plenty of places to whet your appetite near at hand right there in Cambridge as well as in the far corners of Dorchester. ✦
Downtown Cambridge Teems with Dining Choices

A number of restaurants boasting local crabs, oysters and fish line Poplar Street and Race Street in the historic district of downtown Cambridge. These restaurants offer a tantalizing array of settings and a range of menus including traditional French bistro, fresh Southern BBQ and seafood, brick oven pizza, as well as classic seafood dishes along with steaks, hand-crafted burgers and spirits. No dining experience would be complete without a sweet ending, and Cambridge comes through with the bakeries, ice cream and sweets shops. Many of the restaurants boast homemade pies and other desserts on their menus.

COME DOWNTOWN
With so many choices, all in walking distance, downtown restaurants are sure to satisfy. Here are just a few:

Ava’s Pizzeria & Wine Bar
543 Poplar St., Cambridge
443.205.4350

Bistro Poplar
535 Poplar St., Cambridge
410.228.4884

Black Water Bakery
429 Race St., Cambridge
443.225.5948

Canvasback
420 Race St., Cambridge
410.221.7888

Jimmie & Sook’s
527 Poplar St., Cambridge
410.228.0008

RAR Brewing/RAR Eats
504-506 Poplar St., Cambridge
443.225.5664

Theo’s Steakhouse
305 High St., Cambridge
410.264.1295

LOCAL SEAFOOD GOES BEST WITH LOCAL WINE, BEER AND COCKTAILS

The newly opened Blue Ruin is a cocktail lounge in the heart of downtown Cambridge that creates and serves up fresh and fun craft cocktails as well as beer and wine. “Blue Ruin” was what they called homemade bathtub gin in Prohibition days, and they have created a 1920s vibe. Their menu includes cleverly delicious cocktails inspired by Dorchester County’s history, like the “Underground Railroad” made of Journeyman Rye, flavored black cherry and star anise or the “Long Wharf Punch” made with Bounty Dark and Light Rum, exotic fruit juices and—just to make sure, a floater of Lyon’s Overproof Oak Rum on top.

Wine aficionados will enjoy sampling at Cambridge’s multiple wine bars or making a visit to Layton’s Chance Vineyard and Winery at Lazy Day Farms in nearby Vienna. Owned and operated by two generations of the Layton family, Layton’s Chance has been named the first certified craft winery in Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic. They feature vineyard-crafted wines like Joe’s Cool Red, a tasting room where you can sample all their varieties, a picnic area, and walking trails throughout their 14-acre vineyard.

Nothing goes better with local seafood than locally brewed beer, and Cambridge has one of the best microbreweries on the Delmarva peninsula in RAR Brewing’s pub on Poplar Street in downtown Cambridge. Their Nanticoke Nectar is among the favorites, but they have an array of brews on tap that changes throughout the year. They’ve opened a new restaurant next door called RAR Eats with creative food truck-style bites.

Set on more than 14 acres of beautiful vineyards, Layton’s Chance has a variety of great wines, a large picnic area with outdoor games, a nature trail, and a friendly staff that can’t wait to greet you!
As one of the most waterfront-rich counties in the state, there’s no shortage of delicious waterfront dining options. You could dine on a riverboat, have a picnic on the shoreline, or enjoy drinks on the dock. The choice is yours!

### Dining Options

- **Blue Point Provision Co.**
  
  **100 Heron Blvd., Cambridge**
  
  **410.901.6410**

- **Old Salty’s Restaurant**
  
  **2560 Hoopers Isl. Rd., Fishing Creek**
  
  **410.397.3752**

- **Palm Beach Willie’s**
  
  **638 Taylors Island Rd., Taylors Island**
  
  **410.221.5111**

- **Portside Seafood Restaurant**
  
  **201 Trenton St., Cambridge**
  
  **410.228.9007**

- **Snapper’s Waterfront Café**
  
  **112 Commerce St., Cambridge**
  
  **410.228.0112**

- **Suicide Bridge Restaurant**
  
  **6304 Suicide Bridge Rd, Hurlock**
  
  **410.943.4689**

With so much water, it’s no wonder Dorchester has so many options for travelers coming by boat. And even if you don’t have a yacht of your own, these are great places to watch other people’s boats go by.

Portside Seafood Restaurant has a great view of the drawbridge across Cambridge Creek, Snapper’s Waterfront Café on Commerce Street at the mouth of the creek features a wide range of American, Southwestern and island cuisine. You can hang out in the tiki bar and watch the boats come and go with the tide.

Come by boat or by car to enjoy floating waterfront dining at Palm Beach Willie’s, about 20 minutes from downtown Cambridge. This unique restaurant was once a floating Coast Guard barge. It’s berthed at the Slaughter Creek Marina just before you cross the bridge to Taylors Island.

Serving what many consider to be one of the finest all-lump no filler crab cakes, Old Salty’s is located in beautiful Fishing Creek, one of Dorchester’s storied, “island” villages.

Located on Cabin Creek off the Choptank River, Suicide Bridge Restaurant is one of Delmarva’s favorite waterfront dining destinations. Enjoy their renowned Friday night seafood buffet, steamed crabs or specialties from the waterfront deck.

And finally, the Blue Point Provision Co. at the Hyatt Regency in Cambridge features Chesapeake seafood favorites with a modern twist as well as great sunset views across the Choptank River. The Hyatt also boasts the Water’s Edge Grill that offers fine dining with creative takes on Eastern Shore cooking, including award-winning crab cakes.

Read more about dining options, both waterside and inland, at visitdorchester.org eat-and-drink.
Step back in time

Experience the history and heritage that is the Heart of the Chesapeake

From the boom days of boatbuilding to the art of decoy carving, from Native American culture to the Underground Railroad, from colonial religious traditions to the agricultural and maritime industries, experience the past in Dorchester County on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Our history in the Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area is celebrated through places where stories of human struggle, ingenuity, and triumph still resonate today. Here are a few of those places.

Explore three cultures – Native American, colonial, and African American – at Handsell historic site. Walk the grounds where a 1700s house is undergoing restoration, sit in the Native American longhouse, and meet living historians during Handsell’s annual events.

Watch boatbuilders restore and build wooden boats – a disappearing art – at Ruark Boatworks, part of the Richardson Museum.

Wander Spocott Windmill & Village and explore life in the 1800s through a windmill, schoolhouse, doctor’s office, cottage, and more.

Peer into the past at the county’s historic churches, such as Old Trinity Church, which was built in the late 1600s and is still in active use today (pictured here) and the Taylors Island Chapel of Ease, which dates back to the early 1700s.

Squeeze into one of the school desks at Stanley Institute, a one-room schoolhouse built after the Civil War by African American families committed to educating their children.

Trace the history of Dorchester County through the wide range of exhibits at the Heritage Museums and Gardens of Dorchester. See local Native American artifacts and agricultural tools from yesteryear. Learn about the Maryland governors who hailed from Dorchester. Marvel at the re-created workshop of decoy carver Ron Rue (pictured here).

Find information and resources to plan your trip at VisitDorchester.org

What path will you take?
Dorchester’s Cherished Heritage Restaurants

Dorchester’s oldest and beloved dining spots are far afield—or rather, farther afield. By boat, follow the Choptank upriver, past the little town of Secretary and turn into Cabin Creek. There you’ll find two replica Eastern Shore stern-wheeler riverboats, the Dorothy Megan and the Choptank River Queen. They're tied up at the dock by the Suicide Bridge Restaurant.

The restaurant owners and staff have been serving local seafood for nearly four decades, and their offerings will quickly make you forget about the quirky name. The seasonal menu includes signature Kool’s deluxe crab cakes, composed of all lump crabmeat, broiled to perfection. The riverboats offer waterborne crab feasts and lunch and dinner cruises while plying the Choptank River.

At the opposite end of the county, about 23 miles from Cambridge, perched on the strip of roadway connecting Taylors Island with Hoopers Island, you’ll find another classic crab house: Old Salty’s. It was established in the 1980s in a historic schoolhouse on Hoopers Island Road in a waterman’s village called Fishing Creek, where the watermen have been working for generations, fishing, crabbing, and harvesting oysters. The menu boasts jumbo lump crab cakes among a dozen other crab dishes, and they serve steamed crabs on request, along with prime rib, Delmonico steaks, and homemade desserts.

WORTH THE TRIP
Here are a couple of Dorchester’s classics:

Suicide Bridge Restaurant
6304 Suicide Bridge Rd., Hurlock
410.943.4689

Old Salty’s Restaurant
2560 Hoopers Island Rd., Fishing Creek
410.397.3752

CELEBRATE SEAFOOD & MUSKRAT WITH FEASTING AT FESTIVALS

The biggest event of the year in downtown Cambridge is devoted to celebrating Dorchester County’s culinary delights. The Taste of Cambridge, which takes place every year in mid-July, is a free street festival with a crab cook-off, music, kids’ activities, and a professional crab-picking competition. All around town there are gallery openings, late shopping, and other family activities. You can purchase a ticket to taste all entries in the Crab Cook-Off competition that has local top chefs competing in categories of best crab cake, crab soup, crab dip, and crab specialty dish—and then cast your vote for your favorites.

The Seafood Feast-I-Val is a 40+-year-old tradition held every year in mid-August at Governor’s Hall at Sailwinds Park on the shores of the Choptank River. This all-you-can-eat feast includes steamed crabs, fried fish, crab soup, fried clams, BBQ chicken, sweet potato fries, ranch fries, watermelon, corn on the cob, sliced tomatoes, hot dogs, cake, and freeze pops.

For a real feel for Dorchester County culture, you can’t miss the National Outdoor Show, which takes place each February in Church Creek. The event celebrates the best that comes from Dorchester’s “boot-sucking marshes” and the flowing water that surrounds them. You’ll discover the unique spirit and character of the hard-working people who keep local traditions alive. You’ll savor local seafood delicacies, not to mention muskrat cooked the old fashioned way, and root for contestants competing in goose calling, oyster shucking, venison cooking and other traditional skills. But the big attraction is the World Championship Muskrat Skinning contest, where men, women, and youth compete to see how fast they can trim the hide off of a “marsh rabbit.”

For more information on other events and dining in Dorchester County, visitdorchester.org.

Old Salty’s crab cake sandwich
Today their granddaughter, Darlene Goehringer and her husband, Arthur Wilson, are carrying on the family tradition while harrowing back to their agricultural roots by raising rare heritage breeds of cattle, pigs and sheep. The same family has farmed the same land for more than 100 years, and it’s earned the distinction of being designated a Maryland Century Farm by the governor, one of only 187 farms out of the state’s 12,200 farms that has received the designation. You can visit them and buy their pork, lamb and beef on weekends at their farm market.

Another farm market, Emily’s Produce, has been around 20 years and is family-owned and operated. So much so that the owners, Kelly and Paul Jackson, named the place after their baby daughter, who, of course, is by now all grown up and an active partner, along with her brother, Kyle. Emily’s is not just family-run, it’s family-oriented, with prepared naturally without chemicals, additives or preservatives.

South of Cambridge, on the road to Taylors Island, in the village of Woolford, you’ll find Lindy’s Seafood, where Terry Vincent launched his small-scale live crab business more than 40 years ago. Since then, it’s grown to become a wholesale crab company specializing in live crabs, fresh Maryland crab meat, and oysters. Their fleet of 15 trucks transport and deliver seafood directly to wholesale customers in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Illinois and as far away as Canada.

Dorchester County is the hub of Maryland oyster farming. Dorchester oyster farmers produce more than a million oysters every year in the waters of the Choptank and Hooper’s Island, and you can savor succulent local favorites like ‘Choptank Sweets’ and ‘Mermaid’s Kiss’ at a number of restaurants, either shucked raw and presented on the half shell, or lightly fried in batter.

For farm-fresh produce, head straight for the farm

Not only can you take home fresh seafood, but any number of veggies and meats are available straight from the farm. Dorchester’s abundant farming community is exemplified by the families who have worked their land through the generations.

One farm at the top of the county where tributary creeks of the Choptank reach out toward tributaries feeding the Nanticoke is called Pop’s Old Place. That’s where Gustaf and Christiana Goehringer founded a 70-acre farm in 1909, on Skinner’s Run Road outside of Hurlock.

E.G. Webster & Son has been a family-owned mainstay in Cambridge since 1939, and owner Roger Webster has been working there for 45 years. This is one of the few places where you can pick up some of Dorchester’s famous muskrat between January and March.

Nearby, you’ll find a grocery store that’s nearly as old. Kool Ice was founded in 1972. They buy directly from the local watermen and process it on site, they still market Captain Johnnie’s Epicure™ Crabmeat, crabs, fresh Maryland crab meat, and oysters. Their fleet of 15 trucks transport and deliver seafood directly to wholesale customers in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Illinois and as far away as Canada.

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Get Outside at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

The Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge boasts more than 28,000 acres of woodland, tidal marsh, freshwater ponds, and managed cropland, making it a great place to encounter the wildlife of the Eastern Shore, from the majestic bald eagle to the adorable Delmarva fox squirrel, as well as migrating birds making a stop on their journeys.

The refuge’s Visitor Center is a prime viewing spot for bald eagles as they soar above and forage in the nearby marsh, but it also boasts exhibits interpreting the habitat and its wildlife, an upstairs observation area and library, an authentic eagle’s nest, and TV monitors for watching live video from the osprey and eagle cams. There’s also the “Eagles Nest” bookstore and gift shop. Outside the center, you can stroll through the Butterfly and Beneficial Insect Garden.

Visitors can drive, bike or walk the approximately four mile Wildlife Drive along the Blackwater river, with turnouts at different points where it’s safe to stop and observe the wildlife and the astonishing scenery. The Wildlife Drive is open from dawn to dusk every day; there is a nominal fee.

There are four hiking trails: the Marsh Edge Trail, the Key Wallace Trail and the Tubman Road Trail. They’re open daily, dawn to dusk. The Marsh Edge Trail is typically closed January through early August so people don’t bother nesting eagles and herons.

If you’re there during warm weather, it’s advised that you bring insect repellent. Also, the trails can get soggy in wet weather, so be sure to wear appropriate footwear if it has been raining. During the fall hunting season, the Key Wallace Trail may be closed periodically for safety reasons.

Pets are not permitted on trails, even if on a leash, but may be walked in an area around the Visitor Center. Please be sure to pick up after your pets.

There are three paddling trails: Purple Trail, Orange Trail, and Green Trail. The trails are open daily, dawn to dusk. The Purple Trail is closed between October 1 and April 1 to protect wintering waterfowl. Big cordgrass and saltmarsh cordgrass thrive along the Orange and Purple Trails, which generally have the highest overall salinity and the lowest diversity of plant species. The marsh hibiscus blooms with white and pink blossoms in late July and August.

On the Green Trail, the water in the marsh ranges from slightly brackish to fresh. During the summer, it’s covered with fragrant waterlily, and narrow-leaved cattails line the water’s edge.

Blackwater offers several bike routes for the novice to experienced cyclist. You can bike along the paved Wildlife Drive on a four-mile route or a seven-mile route. Or you can get maps from the visitor center for 20-mile and 25-mile routes that follow county roads through the various habitats of the refuge and surrounding area.
The annual Kite Festival at Sailwinds Park

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Plenty of Fun For the Whole Family

Take a poll and see what your kids would most like to do: take a ride on a riverboat, climb up a lighthouse, sail on a skipjack, see a bunch of bald eagles, play on a farm truck, get lost in a corn maze. Follow it all up with ice cream. See what they say. They’ll probably want to do it all, and you can do all of this and more when you take your family along on your next visit to Dorchester County.

Start your tour at the Dorchester County Visitor Center just off of Route 50 as you cross the Choptank River on the Malkus Memorial Bridge. There you can plan your visit and make sure you don’t miss any of the fun. There’s a colorful playground with a view of the river where the kids can burn off all the antsy-ness built up on the car ride.

To the east of Cambridge on Route 50, older kids can check out the paintball at Breckenridge Farms while younger ones hit the playground, and in-season everyone can enjoy the corn maze. Ages four and up can take part in riding clinics and camps at windy Way Horses, in Hurlock, and young locomotive enthusiasts will want to check out Hurlock’s renovated train station, which serves as the hub of the annual Fall festival and will soon house a Hurlock museum.

If they’re still feeling a little rambunctious, Cabin Fever, on Race Street in Cambridge, offers a full-on climbing playground, with obstacle, slides, swing, and more.

Stroll through the historic district of downtown Cambridge to Long Wharf, where you’ll find an authentic reproduction of a traditional Chesapeake Bay screw-pile lighthouse. Unlike most lighthouses, these local versions were six-sided cottages built on pilings literally screwed down into the soft, muddy bottom. Once there were 42 such structures around the bay. This replica was built in 2012 and is open daily between May 1 and October 31. Kids can climb the winding staircase to the upper deck, where they can see views of the town and the boats sailing up and down the river. Inside is a small museum celebrating the rich maritime heritage of Dorchester County and the Eastern Shore.

Docked nearby is the skipjack Nathan of Dorchester. This traditional Chesapeake Bay boat was built in 1994. The skipjack is the official Maryland state boat, representing the last fleet of boats harvesting seafood under sail in America. A hundred years ago, there were hundreds of these graceful craft dredging millions of bushels of oysters from the bottom of the bay. Now there are only a dozen or so left afloat. This is one of the few that offers public sails May through early November, weather permitting. It’s an impressive way to help your kids understand how seafood gets from the bay to the table and appreciate how the men and women who work the water make their living.

Take a ride on the skipjack Nathan of Dorchester

Maiden Maryland Sweets & Treats in Cambridge

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SPRING

Spring offers low boat traffic, runs of spawning fish, and bird migrations—all great season-openers for adventurous but prudent skippers in appropriate boats. The best fishing action is in the creeks feeding the major waterways. Open waterways will see the first ospreys arriving from the south. This is also the time when waterfowl prepare for their migration north and some loons pass through from winter grounds offshore, headed for the northern lakes. In April, Chicone Village Day is well worth checking out, with its celebration of Native American culture or for more recent history, the Cambridge Classic Powerboat Regatta happens in May. For a challenge, consider the 70.3-mile Ironman Eagleman triathlon, and swim, bike and run your way through the Choptank, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and Cambridge.

BY JEFF HOLLAND

SUMMER

Summer is the classic time for trotlining crabs in creeks and rivers, bottom-fishing for white perch and spot over oyster reefs, and leisurely visiting Dorchester river towns like Cambridge and Secretary on the Choptank; Fishing Creek and Hoopersville on the Honge; and Vienna on the Nanticoke. Waterside restaurants offer steamed and softshell crabs. Consider exploring the Blackwater/Little Blackwater complex and the Nanticoke’s Chicone and Marshyhope Creeks by kayak or canoe. Summer festivals abound, including Cambridge’s Groove City Culture Fest and Seafood Feast-i-val in August, and the Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race in September.
FALL

Fall brings Canada geese arriving from their northern breeding grounds, rockfish feeding heavily to get ready for winter, and temperatures more comfortable for folks in fleece and wool. This is an excellent time for cruising the rivers and creeks as the maples, sycamores, and other hardwoods turn to flaming colors. Oysters—raw, fried, roasted, stewed, and Rockefellered—are featured at just about every restaurant. Fall brings with it the Beckwith Apple Festival for dumplings, pies, and more, and Crabtoberfest for clams, music, crabs, and beer in Cambridge. In September, the Dorchester Center for the Arts presents the Annual Showcase Art Walk and Street Festival in Cambridge, and IRONMAN Maryland pits triathletes from all over the world against the Dorchester landscape as the swim, bike, and run through 140.6 miles in and around Cambridge. In October, Dorchester’s largest living history event, the Nanticoke River Jamboree, brings demonstrations and reenactors to historic Handsell, in Vienna, Maryland, for a day of family fun. On the first weekend in October, Hurlock hosts its Fall Festival, celebrating the town’s history and featuring the Fall Festival Express, a scenic train ride to Federalsburg, Md., and back.

WINTER

Winter requires more serious care and prudence on these waters, but it’s a great time for explorations by paddlecraft and skiffs to look for wintering tundra swans, Canada geese, and multiple species of ducks. Note that the Blackwater complex is closed to boat traffic to avoid disturbing nesting bald eagles. Visit by land starting with the refuge’s Visitor Center and its Wildlife Drive. Make sure you stop on the way home for a bowl of local oyster stew, or if you are around for the National Outdoor Show in February, consider extending your visit to take in the Crawfish Boil and Muskrat Stew Fest. December visitors will get to see one of Maryland’s largest nighttime parades, the Cambridge-Dorchester Christmas Parade, as it winds through downtown Cambridge.
Cycling is one of the best ways to see the unspoiled landscapes of Dorchester County, traveling our flat, quiet roads through scenic farmland and water views. Roads through Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge allow cyclists to glide through protected marshland, woods, and fields. Dorchester’s Neck District is also a popular destination for cyclists, passing historic landmarks such as the Spocott Windmill. The northern part of the county offers a chance to bike through the historic towns of East New Market, Hurlock, Secretary, and Vienna. Take part in one of our many cycling events including the Six Pillars Century, the Heart of Chesapeake Bike Tour, and the Wild Goose Chase Women’s Bike Tour.
DORCHESTER’S

Underground Railroad

BY JEFF HOLLAND
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The story of Harriet Tubman is one of great heroism and dedication. Born in Dorchester County, Maryland, she led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom along the Underground Railroad, risking her life in the process. Her journey to freedom was not easy, as she had to navigate through dense forests and marshes, and avoid the watchful eyes of slave catchers. Despite the dangers, Tubman remained steadfast in her mission to help others gain their freedom.

The Underground Railroad Byway offers a self-guided driving tour that begins along the network to freedom known as the Underground Railroad. It is a network of places and people who helped enslaved African Americans escape to freedom. Visitors can explore the history of the Underground Railroad and learn about the many individuals who played a role in this struggle for freedom.

There are many ways to discover the story of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. You can conduct your own tour of these sites by following the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway in Dorchester County. The tour starts with a stop at the Tubman Farm Historical Marker, where Harriet Tubman was born. From there, you can visit the many other sites along the Byway, each with its own unique story of courage and determination.

Along the way, you’ll be inspired by the landscapes of Dorchester County. The beautiful forests and marshes reflect the struggles and triumphs of the people who lived and worked there. The towns and villages along the Byway are also rich with history, offering visitors a glimpse into the lives of those who built and lived in this place.

You can also take a self-guided tour using the Visit Dorchester Audio Tour Guide. This guide provides directions from site to site, and fills in the drive time between sites with fascinating stories, including first-hand accounts of historic figures, brought convincingly to life by reenactors.

The tour starts with a stop at the Dorchester County Visitor Center in Cambridge, at the southern end of the Mullica Bridge crossing the Choptank River. There you can plan your tour, find accommodations, take a break with a walk along the riverfront boardwalk, and whet your appetite for history with exhibits about Dorchester County’s rich heritage.

There are several sites in Cambridge, an eminently walkable town. Founded in 1684, Cambridge is one of the oldest colonial cities in the state. The Choptank River connects the town to the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Ocean and the rest of the world, and that connection is reflected in the town’s rich maritime history of building boats, sailing the waters, and catching crabs, oysters, and other seafood.

After leaving Cambridge, the Byway winds its way 125 miles up the length of Maryland’s Eastern Shore to link more than 30 sites, each one of which tells a unique chapter of the story. Along the way, you’ll be inspired by the stunning landscapes of Dorchester County, including the scenic marshes, forests, and fields that haven’t changed all that much since Tubman’s time.

It’s worth noting that the town of Cambridge, an eminently walkable town, reflects a different aspect of Dorchester life through the ages. It was once a port along the Choptank River, which connects the town to the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, and the rest of the world. Visitors can tour the many homes and government buildings that date back to the 1700s and 1800s in styles ranging from Georgian, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival to American Foursquare. The historic district includes the Italian Villa style courthouse built in 1854. It replaced an older structure where, in Tubman’s time, men, women, and children in bondage were auctioned off from the courthouse steps. On the tour, you’ll learn how she helped her niece and her two children escape from the auction block at this site.

Further down at the end of High Street, past all of the elegant homes where enslaved people cooked, cleaned and took care of privileged white children, you’ll find Long Wharf, where slave ships unloaded their cargo of kidnapped Africans before 1808, when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was outlawed. One of these Africans might have been Tubman’s own grandmother, Modesty.

While you’re in Cambridge, you can visit the Harriet Tubman Museum on Race Street. While you are there, stop to see the powerful, larger-than-life mural of Tubman reaching her hand out to you to lead you to freedom. At the museum, you’ll learn that she was born Araminta “Minty” Ross on a nearby farm. Like most people born into slavery, her birth date was not recorded, but it was sometime between 1820 and 1825. Her mother was Harriet “Rit” Green, and her father was an African before 1808, when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was outlawed. One of these Africans might have been Tubman’s own grandmother, Modesty.

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Explore Dorchester’s heritage further afield

At the intersection of Route 16 West & Bayly Road, you’ll find the Stanley Institute, a one-room schoolhouse built in 1865 for black children. This is the area of the Stampede of Slaves, where in 1857, 44 enslaved people escaped in two weeks from plantations in Dorchester County.

Head north to the East New Market National Historic District to see Faith Community United Methodist Church located near an old train station. Faith Community was built in 1880 on land deeded four decades earlier to a group of African-American trustees, including the Rev. Samuel Green, a free black farmer and Underground Railroad agent. Green was a prominent abolitionist who helped Tubman and others escape from the region. Green was later imprisoned for possessing a copy of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a case that drew national attention. He was freed in 1852.

Meet Harriet Tubman

The Byway tour will take you 20 minutes south of Cambridge to the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, where you’ll learn more of this remarkable woman’s life and legacy. This facility was opened in 2017 and has been hailed by USA Today as one of Maryland’s top ten attractions. The exhibits here illustrate the harshness of Tubman’s childhood. Three of her sisters were sold off to far plantations.

But the most severe injury, one that nearly killed her as a teenager and then again seven decades later, happened at the nearby Bucktown General Store, which still exists as one of the sites on the tour. She was sent there to pick up supplies, when she met an enslaved boy who was supposed to be out working in the field. The slave’s overseer demanded that Tubman help restrain the runaway. When she refused, the overseer threw a two-pound weight from a set of scales at the boy, missing him and striking Tubman in the head, cracking her skull. It took her months to recover, but for the rest of her life, Tubman suffered epileptic seizures, headaches and hallucinations. Tubman herself said that it was during these spells that God spoke to her giving her direction for the future.

In 1844, she married John Tubman, a freeman. About half of the African-Americans living on Maryland’s Eastern Shore were free in those days, and there were both free and enslaved people in many families. It’s unclear how long their marriage lasted, but when she decided to run away five years later, John stayed behind.

Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849, after her owner died. She followed the Choptank upriver and eventually made it to freedom in Philadelphia with the help of sympathetic “conductors” who harbored her in a string of houses of refuge along that way that became known as the Underground Railroad. “When I found I had crossed that line,” she later recalled, “I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”

In December 1850, Tubman learned that her niece Kessiah was going to be sold on the steps of that courthouse in Cambridge, along with her two young daughters. In this, her first rescue mission, Tubman helped the family make the 90-mile trek to freedom in Philadelphia. But she didn’t stop there.

Tubman made no fewer than 13 trips before the Civil War broke out, conducting more than 70 people, including her own parents, brothers and sisters, from slavery to freedom along the Underground Railroad. The little girl called “Minty” grew up to become better known as “Moses.”

During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a cook and nurse, but soon found that the particular skills she learned navigating the Underground Railroad made her an excellent armed scout and spy. She became the first woman to lead an armed incursion during the
war, when she guided the Combahee River Raid in South Carolina, liberating more than 700 slaves.

After the war, Tubman became an advocate for the woman’s suffrage movement and eventually moved to Auburn, New York. She died of pneumonia on March 10, 1913, at around the age of 93. She was buried at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn with military honors.

These stories and more are told at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center through compelling, interactive exhibits. For further study, the gift shop offers a collection of biographies on Tubman and other historical figures in the abolitionist movement, as well as an array of souvenirs and memorabilia.

Just a few miles away, you’ll find the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. Look out across these 28,000 acres of marshland and forest, and imagine being a runaway and having to find your way across this vast landscape. It hasn’t changed much since Harriet Tubman’s time. There are five miles of hiking trails and 17 miles of paddling trails to provide a wide variety of experiences.

While you and your family can learn a lot about the African-American experience by traveling the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, Dorchester County has an even broader story to tell about the diversity of the people who have contributed to this place’s unique culture and heritage through the ages.
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