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TRAVEL

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I owe Richmond an apology. Countless times, I've zipped past the exits for this capital city, a place not quite far enough from Washington for a pit stop on a road trip, and not quite close enough for a meal. Last month, I ran out of excuses. I pulled off Interstate 95 and entered Richmond for the first time.

Only 100 miles south of the District, this former Confederate capital felt, at times, decidedly Southern, with grayback statues lining a celebrated avenue and shopkeepers offering customers an unhurried welcome. But other times, I felt like Richmond was plucked out of the Rockies, with its steep hills, dozens of breweries and outdoorsy residents. The Richmonders I know and met enjoy "RVA" for its arts, food scene and — above all — its river. The James River Park System is

YOU'RE GOING WHERE?

Richmond

A Virginia city stuck in the middle is full of superlatives, with noted architecture, natural wonders and thriving arts scenes

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN
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unequaled, and not only for the Class III and IV white-water rapids within the city limits. The riverfront and islands are the city's centerpiece, home to an annual folk festival that attracts more than 200,000 people, not to mention their notable cycling trails and secluded bathing spots.

I crisscrossed Richmond many times during my visit, and oddly, didn't once see the Thomas Jefferson-designed Virginia State Capitol building. But I was too charmed by the rest of the city to care. Thirty-six hours after I arrived, I drove home to Washington thinking about returning to RVA with my bike and paddleboard, grinning like I had a crush on a new neighbor who had been there all along.

RICHMOND CONTINUED ON F4

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: In Richmond, manager Christina Campitell at Need Supply; the Arthur Ashe statue in the Monument Avenue Historic District; fresh loaves at Sub Rosa Bakery; pedestrians on the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge.

In Va., a capital of charm

RICHMOND FROM F1

Go

Local faves

At lunch one day, a Richmonder commandeered my map and drew an "X" in the middle of the James River. "This is where I hang out in the summer," he said. "It's kind of magical." Short of climbing onto mid-river boulders, strolling over the new, ADA-compliant **T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge** is one of the best ways to be close to the James. Step onto the smartly designed boardwalk, and you're enveloped by the calming sounds of white water. Cross the one-third-mile pedestrian bridge to the Manchester neighborhood, look down onto paddlers and tubers in the rapids, gaze west to Belle Isle, a former prison for Union soldiers, and spot picnickers drinking PBR, a.k.a. the "People's Beer of Richmond."

Nestled among the city's largest concentration of craft breweries, in the Scott's Addition neighborhood, is **Blue Bee Cider**. Housed in an old city stable, Blue Bee makes artisanal ciders and offers tours, tastings and events on the dog-friendly patio. April 28 is the annual Spring Invitational, which features berry-infused ciders this year. Founder Courtney Mailley gets fired up re-creating 300-year-old libations. Her single varietal Heve's Crab is akin to the cider our Founding Fathers enjoyed. She asked, "Don't you want to know what George Washington was over the moon about?"

Guidebook musts

The highly anticipated **Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University** is a triumph for the city and the downtown university, which already is regarded as one of the top art schools in the country. The \$41 million, Steven Holl-designed structure is a striking zinc, concrete and glass building full of natural light. During a sneak peek, I saw many gathering spots for visitors to discuss the controversial art — in the opening exhibition, "Declaration," for instance, one piece is a giant, tar-covered ball of bedsheets from a penitentiary; another is a tiny diorama calle, "The Execution of Unarmed Blacks." For additional contemporary works, head to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Both museums are free.

The **Monument Avenue Historic District**, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, includes the tree-lined roadway near Richmond's museum district with statues of Confederate figures. Last summer, the mayor formed a commission that is considering whether to remove them. But the beautiful avenue also celebrates humanitarian and tennis champion Arthur Ashe, whose statue was placed in 1996. Ashe is buried in Woodland Cemetery in northeast Richmond. If you have time, head east to the statue of business executive and trailblazer Maggie Walker, which was unveiled last summer on Broad Street. She's buried at Evergreen Cemetery, and her house is open for tours. "If you ever wonder why the outcome of the Civil War mattered," a park ranger at her house told me, "just look here."

Eat

Local faves

Residents confess to buying bread intended for friends at **Sub Rosa Bakery**, where the proprietors stone-mill their own wheat and rye, and eating it themselves. Stop in early for the best assortment of loaves and pastries — pains au chocolat and fig and mancho pastries daily, and cherry and pistachio croissants on the weekends — and stroll through Church Hill, where Patrick Henry proclaimed, "Give me liberty or give me death." Picnic at Libby Hill Park for a river view or at Jefferson Park for a city vista.

The Fan district felt like home. No surprise, because it looks enough like Capitol Hill that part of "Homeland" was filmed here. Several friends recommended **Kuba Kuba Restaurant y Bodega**, a small, bustling spot serving Cuban fare in portions large enough to be called family style. Regulars sit at tight tables or on red bar stools, drinking Lilliputian beers (\$1 Miller High Life ponies), and they know not to ask about seating incomplete parties or splitting the check. Drafts are half price from 4 to 6 p.m.,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: From Libby Hill Park, Main Street stretches toward the Richmond skyline. In her vintage attire, Emma Mednik, a salesperson at Bygones in the Carytown district, melds well with the wares. Paul Humphrey, left, and Taylor Benson work at the end of the production line at Blue Bee Cider. Andras Vidim, left, and David Umetsky relax in the lobby of the HI Richmond hostel. Crimson ankle boots by Phillip Lim sit on a shelf at Need Supply in the Carytown district.

For an interactive map with addresses and contact information, visit wapo.st/richmond

Spanish music dances from overhead speakers, breakfast is served all day, and the tres leches cake is legendary.

Guidebook musts

Recently named Southern Living's top restaurant in the South, **L'opossum** is David Shannon's four-year-old house of whimsy in Oregon Hill. The Richmond native is meticulous in everything, including his French-style com-

fort food and the nightly playlist. At the bar, as I savored trumpet mushrooms impersonating scallops, I was just as taken by the witty, naughty menu and the playful, eclectic art, all from Shannon's personal collection. Vintage decorative plates emblazoned with images of Bruce Lee and Liberace adorn the walls, "Flintstones" pillows embellish a sofa, and a terrarium with a plastic Jesus and dinosaurs is on display

in the bathroom. But the food's no joke. Tip: If you can't get a reservation, eat at the bar before 6 or after 9 p.m., or try Mamma Zu up the block — with excellent fare, despite the prison-esque appearance of its building.

For many Richmonders, weekend worship means brunch. **The Fancy Biscuit** is one of many spots where you can join the crowds for colossal portions of Southern fare, pared with a

Bloody Mary or mimosa. Order off the menu or build your own buttery biscuit dish with favorites such as pimento cheese and shiitake mushroom gravy. Sister business Shyndigz Market shares the space, tempting customers with house-made cakes, ice cream and caramel sauce. In the next block, date night means a slice o' cake and glass o' wine at Shyndigz Cafe.

Shop

Local faves

If ever I could resist a bookstore, it wouldn't be one called **Chop Suey Books** with a resident cat named Wonton. The shop has a lovely two-floor assortment of new and used titles, its own book club and regular readings. A "Feminism is for Everyone" section sits near the front of the shop, as does a shelf of books wrapped in brown paper with online dating-type profiles — tempting if you're adventurous enough to purchase an unknown title — what the staff calls a "blind date" or "casual encounter" with a book. A paperback-size canvas tote pictures a tin man and reads, "My heart beats for books."

Hear ye, fixer-uppers! **Caravati's** is an 80-year-old architectural salvage shop in the warehouse district of Manchester, formerly Dogtown. Browse two floors and multiple outdoor lots to find the perfect ornate door handles and mantles, Pepto-Bismol-colored toilets, oak flooring, marble, stained glass or old barn wood. Stop at nearby Legend Brewing for a brown ale or Camden's Dogtown Market for a deli sandwich.

Guidebook musts

An antidote to shabby second-hand shops, **Need Supply** is a concept store that ships high fashion worldwide. Here, the hangers are (unnervingly) perfectly spaced on the racks, and you'll find a sharp-looking Japanese black matte grater (\$64), Stella McCartney Adidas flip-flops in swimming-pool blue (\$60), Nike Air Max limited editions and Warhol coffee-table books. I lusted after a pair of Phillip Lim stretchy satin ankle boots the color of Dorothy's slippers but clicked my heels and escaped, saving 695 smackers.

Among several vintage shops in the Carytown district, **Bygones** might be the only one where you can find bejeweled reproduction flapper dresses and fringed suede jackets under one roof. The shop has fedoras, estate jewelry, tuxedos, evening gowns and '50s skirts. I mourned the dearth of costume parties on my calendar and nevertheless tried on a Mad Hatter hat and elbow-length hot pink gloves.

Stay

Local faves

Just a few blocks from the James River, **HI Richmond hostel** is one of the newest properties for nonprofit organization Hostelling International. In the stylish lobby: a pool table, halfway completed jigsaw puzzle, book swap and board games. My fellow guests included a gray-haired tourist couple and a team of AmeriCorps volunteers who were cleaning up Evergreen Cemetery. Breakfast and snacks are included, and the kitchen's stocked. The hostel has warm wood floors and generous ceilings; even the top bunk is spacious.

Guidebook musts

Visitors to the delightfully pink **Quirk Hotel** recline on raspberry sorbet-color sofas, scoop ice from pink buckets and borrow pink umbrellas. The dog-friendly downtown property features a barista in the lobby, a Tesla charging station outside and a spectacular bar on the roof, where guests may enjoy craft cocktails. Shop in the adjoining Quirk Gallery for pieces from local artists, including DIY felt fortune cookies.

Explore

Local faves

Starting at Byrd Park, drive across the James at Nickel Bridge (now a seven-nickel toll) to the neighborhoods around 105-acre **Forest Hill Park**, where locals picnic, stroll and bike. First you'll pass Outpost Richmond, a bike store with specialty groceries, and Little Nickel, a new "vacation food" restaurant. Less than a mile to the east, you'll hit Crossroads Coffee & Ice Cream, a popular cafe with live music most days, and Laura Lee's, the newest of Kendra Feather's five RVA restaurants. The South of the James Farmers Market convenes every Saturday on the park's west end.

Guidebook musts

Say you're a vintage-lover, letter-writer, gamer, smoker, vaper, skater, runner, cyclist or old-school reader. Or you want to eat, drink, get inked or get caffeinated. Or you're still hung up on cupcakes. **Carytown**, an eight-block strip of shops and restaurants along Cary Street, has something for you. At Rocket Fizz Soda Pop & Candy Shop, find Stalnade (the "Real Red Soda") and a Rosie the Riveter action figure. The 90-year-old Byrd Theatre shows second-run movies and series for film buffs, such as Tarantino Tuesdays and Mob Mondays.

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