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EASTERN SHORE

Cool Temps, Warm Hospitality



If you thought it was time to pack the Eastern Shore away for the cooler months of the year, think again. Maryland's Talbot County, a warm and welcoming year-round destination, peaks in autumn. The trees are ablaze with stunning color, the crisp air is filled with the sounds of migrating geese and an invigorating bike ride can lead to a well-deserved meal.

While some people consider the Eastern Shore a summer haven for sailors and tourists, others are attracted by the opportunity to hunt and fish. Then, there are those of us who are literally charmed by the waterfront towns of Oxford, St. Michaels and Easton. With plenty to see and do, the area is ideal for busy family day trips as well as weekend get-a-ways where the itinerary simply includes relaxing and enjoying what makes this part of the state appealing to both fishermen and financiers, not to mention nationally known writers, actors and high-ranking government types.

Located just 30 minutes from the Bay Bridge, the county features 171,000 acres of farmland outlined by 602 miles of shoreline. Each of Talbot County's main towns has a distinct flavor, and may easily be enjoyed as a whole or in bits and pieces. Once you discover the area, you'll want to make plans to return at different times of year, to different towns, with different people.

On one visit you may find Oxford is perfect for a cozy, romantic get-away for two, while Easton's shops and galleries are ideal for "just the girls," and active St. Michael's is perfect summer spot for families. The next time you visit, you can change it up and enjoy a cooking demo in Oxford, a festival in Easton or a spa treatment in St. Michaels.

Oxford: Picturesque riverfront vistas

Oxford, one of Maryland's oldest towns, located on the Tred Avon River, is perhaps the most picturesque and charming. For a small town, less than a mile long and half as wide, there's a lot going on. Morris Avenue, the main drag, features a bookstore housed in the former bank, several churches, a general store, the one-room Oxford Museum filled with history and artifacts, and quaint homes with picket fences and front porches outfitted with rockers and porch swings. In the center of the quiet town, you will find a waterfront park with huge shade trees, picnic tables, benches and swings. Pop into the old fashion Oxford Market, just across the street, for your picnic ingredients and enjoy lunch by the water.

On the other side of town, which is really just several blocks from the park, look for the Scottish Highland Creamery (314 Tilghman St.). You know a



Enjoy wonderful cuisine in Easton (top) and relax at the Sandaway Bed and Breakfast in Oxford (bottom). Talbot County's waterfront vistas are also a draw (opposite).

place is good when it's off the beat and path, has no sign, is stuck on the corner of a waterside restaurant (Schooner's Landing), is surrounded by working boatyards and still, everyone knows it and raves about it. The homemade ice cream and friendly service make it a destination by land and water through the end of October.

If relaxation and good food is your goal, the sleepy town of Oxford is definitely the place to be. Sleepy, however does not mean it is tired. Some of the area's finest restaurants are located in Oxford, and chefs take advantage of the food harvested locally in the fields and waters of the Chesapeake Bay. For a casual meal overlooking the Tred Avon River, try the Masthead at Pier Street Marina. Pier side picnic tables allow for great views, especially at sunset, and refreshing breezes. While the Masthead closes for the winter months, its sister restaurant, Latitude 38, open year round, is a favorite of locals and visitors alike. Located on Oxford Road just before the town, in what was once a gas station, the menu at the cozy bistro changes regularly.

At the other end of town, the historic Robert Morris Inn has withstood the test of time and ever-changing economies in its 300-year history. The Inn features a dining room, perfect for special occasions,



and the more casual Salter's Tavern with intimate brick alcoves and a cozy fireplace. The two restaurants have distinct menus, but come from the same kitchen under the direction of well-known Chef Mark Salter, who also hosts cooking demonstrations and wine tastings throughout the year. He says the vibrant atmosphere leads to many happy customers, especially those who take advantage of Inn's affordable packages, which include both breakfast and dinner.

If your get-away is truly about getting away, consider the Sandaway Bed and Breakfast, located just down

the road from the Robert Morris Inn, tucked away at the tip of the peninsula that is Oxford. The waterfront rooms of the Victorian mansion are an ideal retreat. Private porches offering sweeping views of the Tred Avon, and the shaded lawn, dotted with Adirondack and lounge chairs is the perfect place to soak up the sun, watch breathtaking sunsets and marvel at the ever-changing views of the river as it laps up on the property's small, sandy beach. A basket of breakfast goodies and coffee is delivered your door each morning and may be enjoyed on the lawn, in the library



Ice cream is not just for summer at Scottish Highland Creamery in Oxford (left); St. Michaels' famous Hooper Strait Lighthouse.

or in the privacy of your room.

If your plans call for a visit to the town of St. Michaels, the quick, scenic and fun way to travel is aboard the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry. The ferry, which began operation in 1683, runs from April through November and can accommodate nine cars as well as those traveling by bike. The landing, located at the end of Morris Street, is easy to find and the wait is usually short as the crossing only takes about five minutes. After reaching the Bellevue side it's seven miles into St. Michaels through country roads and cornfields. Like Oxford, St. Michaels sits on the water, but unlike its neighbor, the town's main thoroughfare, Talbot Street, is busy with one-of-a-kind shops, restaurants and galleries. The rich maritime history of the region is celebrated at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and there are numerous opportunities to explore the area by boat from a hands-on adventure on the skipjack *Rebecca T. Ruark* to a narrated cruise aboard the *St. Michaels Patriot*.

If you like to combine a bit of wine with your history, head to St. Michaels on Oct. 15-16 for the Fall Winefest at St. Michaels where you can enjoy a variety of food offerings and over 100 wines at the Kemp House of the Old Brick Inn and on the Patriot cruise ship.

Easton: Artists' haven

Of Talbot County's main towns, Easton, the county seat, has the most

year-round residents, many of who are attracted to the area for the variety opportunities it offers. Not only does Easton feel like the quintessential small town, it also rightfully claims to be a center of arts and culture. Debbi Dodson of the Talbot County Office of Tourism puts it this way: "Easton features metropolitan art, sophisticated shopping, big city dining and small town charm."

A stroll through town will reveal a variety of one-of-a-kind shops, and a dozen art galleries in addition to the Academy Art Museum. The historic 400-seat Avalon Theatre, in the center of town, is host to nationally recognized comedians and classical musicians, as well as movies and the Metropolitan Opera broadcast, live in HD.

Be sure to check the town's calendar of events to discover the variety of activities that appeal to every interest. When it comes to festivals, Easton's Waterfowl Festival, held annually on the second weekend of November, attracts sportsmen and nature lovers alike. Crisp temperatures, thousands of migrating Canadian Geese and the small town charm provide the perfect backdrop for the Festival that features wildlife art in many different forms, retriever and duck calling contests, Maryland food and wine, in addition to hunting and fishing gadgets and gear. Proceeds from the festival benefit waterfowl and wildlife habitat preservation, conservation and education.

When it comes to dining, Easton

offers food-lovers a variety of innovative options prepared by chefs who use local ingredients to create menus that range from fusion to French and upscale to down home. If you have to choose just one restaurant, try Mason's on South Harrison Street. The restaurant, a sunny yellow clapboard house with a blue wrap-around porch features a menu, which is both comfortable and sophisticated. An adjoining house is home to gourmet foods featuring Mason's signature chocolates, a coffee bar and cozy seating.

Biking in Talbot County

For some people, strolling through the small towns is sufficient activity, but for others, the flat terrain of the Eastern Shore is the perfect place for a bike ride. The Talbot County Office of Tourism in Easton offers a map suggesting six different routes exploring area history and beauty. Averaging 30 miles each, they include the popular Easton/Oxford/St. Michaels loop, recognized as one of the "Top 25 cycling routes in the country." Many accommodations have bicycles available for their guests and they may also be rented at Easton Cycle and Sport.

At first blush you may think you can cover all of Talbot County in a weekend, and the good news is you can't. There is something about the pace of the Eastern Shore towns that invites visitors to slow down, take it all in and dream of what they will see and do the next time they come. 🌻