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Virginia Beach: History

From the city's rich Native American heritage to playing host to the first English settlers in America, Virginia Beach has a storied history that has played an important role in the foundation of the United States. While, less than an hour away, the Historic Triangle of Jamestown, Yorktown and Williamsburg may have sparked the beginning of the United States, it all began where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Chesapeake Bay. Fortunately, there is an abundance of ways to experience that history firsthand through the many landmarks that still stand today.

FIRST LANDING

On April 26, 1607, English settlers aboard the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed* and the *Discovery* touched down on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Upon landing, the crew of the London Company, including Captain John Smith, set up a cross on the beach of the newly-named Caped Henry shore, before heading inland to establish the first permanent English settlement of Jamestown. In 1935, the landing was commemorated with the [First Landing Cross](#); a granite monument that is a national landmark.



The historic arrival is also reflected in the name of [First Landing State Park](#), Virginia's most visited state park. Along with its historical significance, the park offers opportunities to explore a unique habitat featuring lagoons, large cypress trees and rare plants. More than 19 miles of hiking trails wind through the natural area, guided kayak ecological tours allow exploration of the marshes and bays, and the visitor center exhibits explain much about this coastal environment.

Overlooking the First Landing Cross, [the Cape Henry Lighthouse](#), the first federally-funded construction project under the constitutional government, towers over the beach below. The historic lighthouse, built in 1792, served as a beacon of safe passage for ships bound for northern ports. It was operated until 1881 when a replacement lighthouse, which is still in use by the U.S. Coast Guard today, was built right beside the original. Though it is no longer in operation, the "old" lighthouse is open for tours. If you are willing to work up a sweat and get a great calf workout, then you can climb your way to the top for one of the best views in the area.



SUN-KISSED HISTORY

The history of Virginia Beach as a vacation destination begins with the rich history of the regal [Cavalier Hotel](#). Built in 1927, the Grand Dame of the Shore, as it was affectionately known, was an East Coast destination for society's elite of the day. Presidents, movie stars, writers, musicians and even old Scarface himself, all made their way up the hill across the Atlantic to be immersed in the hotel's grandeur and to see and be seen. The Cavalier is currently undergoing a massive renovation to return the hotel to its former glory by mixing historic opulence with the comforts of modern amenities, and will reopen to the public in 2017.

Nearby, the [Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum](#) is located in a historically registered and last remaining Virginia Beach boardwalk cottage, the de Witt Cottage, built in 1895. The theme of the museum is the preservation, promotion, perpetuation and exhibition of wildfowl artifacts and contemporary wildfowl art forms. The museum places high importance on providing an accurate representation of the early history of Virginia Beach, as captured through pictures, oral reports and the physical presence of the de Witt Cottage amid the oceanfront.

Down the road from de Witt Cottage, the [Old Coast Guard Station](#) museum tells the story of the men who served in the U.S. Life---Saving Service and the U.S. Coast Guard. Housed in a 1903 former life---saving station on the oceanfront boardwalk, the museum galleries offer guests a glimpse into the early days of shipwrecks along the Virginia coast and the efforts of the life---savers at the stations. The interactive tower camera allows visitors to view vessels entering the port of Hampton Roads, as well as scan the boardwalk and beach. The museum store offers a wide variety of maritime and other items.



Just north of the Resort Beach, the [Ferry Plantation House](#), which dates back to 1642 when the "ferry" service was started by Adam Thoroughgood to connect plantations by waterway, is a 10-room, central passage Federal plan farmhouse facing the Western Branch of the Lynnhaven River. Near this site was the famous trial of Virginia's only convicted witch, Grace Sherwood. Today, the house serves as a museum and special events space, open to visitors for tours year-round. The Ferry Plantation House is one of several historic homes in Virginia Beach, including the [Adam Thoroughgood House](#), the [Francis Land House](#), the Adam Keeling House and the [Lynnhaven House](#), all of which offer visitors a first-hand glimpse of what life was like for some of the area's earliest residents.

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