

# Virginia Beach...Locavore Destination

## It's not just for Seal Team 6 anymore

Pamela Hess

Forget what you think you know about Virginia Beach (Seal Team 6 and t-shirt shops). This old-school resort town is a locavore heaven if you know where to look.

Nearly one third of the city's 28,000 acres is farmland, and 9,000 acres are protected by a city-financed conservancy that pays farmers not to sell their land to developers. It boasts nearly two dozen restaurants that source from local farms. There is a city-run farmers market. And if you time your trip right, you can forage for sweet wild blueberries with one of the nation's foremost experts on edible wild plants, Vickie Shufer, a naturalist interpreter in False Cape State Park.

The dunes, bogs and forests speak volumes to this pint-sized, blue-eyed firecracker; the rest of us are deaf and blind to the edible banquet it offers. Wild greens, tea made from Yaupon Holly, lotus seeds, pine seedlings, cat tail roots, wild grapes, and the ubiquitous wild blueberry are just a taste of what the park offers. Hook up with Vickie, author of the just-published "The Everything Guide to Foraging," for a tour or a survival workshop, and the natural world will whisper its secrets to you, too.

Don't miss the 30-year old farmers market. As local fields start producing, the market is filled with local fruits and vegetables—some of which are put to delicious use in Gilly's Creamery, which sells homemade ice cream made from Virginia cream and, on a recent visit, sweet local strawberries. Behind the main market is the can't-miss Seasons Best Bakery & Candy where you'll find (in season) freshly baked Southern Tomato Tarts, Strawberry Sour Cream pies, and Pecan Praline Sweet Potato Cheesecake. The tomatoes and basil are grown in containers just outside the shop, the tubers are dug locally, and the strawberries come from nearby fields. Then head next door to Virginia Garden, a small but well-stocked organic grocery that carries local greens, Virginia flour and honey, and Polyface chickens.

If you've brought kids along, duck into the Rural Heritage Center in the same building, which explores Virginia Beach's agricultural past (and present). You can milk a fiberglass cow (really).

Stocked with picnic supplies, head down



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to the beach—not to sunbathe but to commune with some local residents: dolphins. Chesapeake Outdoors owner Matt Redford outfits paddlers with stable sea kayaks. After a brief safety lesson on the beach, you'll get a push out into the waves. Past the break it's nothing but peaceful—and dolphins appear seemingly out of nowhere around the boats. Stick close to Matt and he'll let you listen to them chatter underwater on a hydrophone.

If you prefer to ride the waves yourself, check out VB Surf Sessions. Owner Tony Pellino spends almost as much time on land teaching the basics as he does in the water with you for your first lesson, the hallmark of a good instructor.

Hungry? Head to the crown jewel of Virginia Beach's farm-to-table restaurants: Terrapin. Chef/owner Rodney Einhorn grew up on a 76-acre farm in Chesapeake and takes local sourcing to a new level. He's been known to hop

**Vickie Shufer** [www.ecoimages-us.com](http://www.ecoimages-us.com)

**Chesapeake Outdoors** [www.chesapeake.com](http://www.chesapeake.com)

**VB Surf Sessions** [www.vbsurfsessions.com](http://www.vbsurfsessions.com)

**Virginia Garden Organic Grocery** [www.vagarden.com](http://www.vagarden.com)

**Terrapin** [www.terrapinvirginiabeach.com](http://www.terrapinvirginiabeach.com)

on a tractor at local farms to harvest greens for the night service himself and walk tomato patches to pick up fallen green orbs. Because he serves such strictly seasonal fare, his food costs are lower than that of a conventional restaurant, but transforming the menu twice a week and making everything from scratch requires many hands. The bread is leavened with captured wild yeast, and even the vanilla extract, Worcestershire sauce, and grenadine behind the bar is made on site. Einhorn's food is elegant and inventive but simple. He consistently wows with just three things on the plate. ♦

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