

It's possible to have an amazing summer vacation within close proximity to home. Central Virginia's six surrounding counties, and the City of Charlottesville, offer plenty of bargains, awesome attractions and family-friendly fun. MMGY Global's 2015 Portrait of American Travelers report, reveals that Americans are "staycationing" close to home as an alternative to traveling greater distances for family getaways. So fuel up the car, load up the family and explore the beauty and wonder of Central Virginia.

Nelson County Wintergreen Resort

Nestled on 11,000 acres on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Wintergreen Resort is surrounded by "lush forests, cascading streams and winding trails." You can expect to find a variety of activities ranging from golf, tennis, ice-skating, winter skiing and spa services. However, for those seeking a memorable summer family getaway, Wintergreen has a variety of activities planned weekly. Families can enjoy diverse activities such as candy bingo, workshops, outdoor movies under the stars on the big screen, camp-

Day TRIPPING One Day Vacations in Central Virginia

BY JANET THOMSON

fires, storytelling, and s'mores.

If you join the Nature Foundation at Wintergreen, you can take a family-oriented scenic trek with one of the naturalist volunteer leaders for their "Morning in the Mountains" hike. The 30 mile trail covers a range of terrain from rugged steep slopes to short beautiful strolls.

Shamokin Spring Nature Preserve and Ravens Roost Park mountain tri-

als are two favorites among family travelers, according to the Nature Foundation. But the most scenic mountainous view is located at the end of the Plunge Trial. After enjoying a morning hiking excursion, the entire family can head over to The Edge for lunch. This family friendly establishment promises a spectacular view during your dining experience, and if you're lucky you might catch a live performance.

Fluvanna County Pleasant Grove

Fluvanna County is located between two major metropolitan areas - Richmond, the state capital, and Charlottesville, home of the University of Virginia. This predominantly rural county flows along the southern boundary of the James River. With the bountiful open spaces of the Blue Ridge Mountain foothills, outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy an assortment of leisure quests. For example, hunting and fishing are good in this region of Virginia, and water-related activities on rivers, streams and fresh-water lakes can be enjoyed by the entire family. Pleasant Grove, a 960-acre tract along the Rivanna River, provides many recreational and historical attractions. Furthermore, the Heritage Trail Foundation provides an array of trails that stretches from downtown Palmyra to beyond the town's new high school. Sandy Beach Trail, one of Fluvanna's most beloved trails, starts at the Eastern Trailhead, near the dog park on Rt. 53. It's completely accessible by wheel chair and an easy walk for small children. The gentle downward slope of the winding trail passes through fields and woods before opening to a shallow portion of the Rivanna River. The en-





PHOTO COURTESY OF WINTERGREEN RESORT

tire family will enjoy splashing in the slow-moving waters. Bring a picnic lunch, because your family can enjoy it in the new picnic shelter at the top of the small hill.

Louisa County Lake Anna State Park

Located less than an hour from Richmond, Charlottesville and Fredericksburg, Louisa County offers its visitors an opportunity to experience the beauty of rural life away from the hustle and bustle of big city living. This county's diverse rural charm is popular among weekend travelers and day trippers. There's something for everyone, whether you enjoy outdoor excursions, learning about history or enjoy shopping and delicious food – Louisa County is sure to provide your family with an exhilarating and memorable experience.

There is plenty to do in Louisa County. For example, Lake Anna State Park has more than 13 miles of hiking trails, a guarded swimming beach, a children's play area, a food concession stand, a bathhouse, a children's and handicapped fishing pond, and much more.

Small Country Campground is another family recreation that includes a new championship mini-golf course, a giant bouncing pillow, giant lake toys, and fire truck rides. While camping at this family oriented campground, you'll be close to local vineyards, flea markets, historic attractions, all while enjoying a modern camping getaway. There are many places to choose for dining – whether you have the taste for Italian at Il Castello Italian Restaurant or Mexican cuisine at Los Tres Po-

trillos – your choices are both diverse and abundant. As you can see, there is plenty to do and experience in Louisa County, and it makes an ideal one day family getaway.

Orange County Historical Museums

Orange County is slowly moving into the 21st century with a thriving food and wine scene. Located in the north-central Piedmont region, visitors can expect to see stunning landscapes and a beautiful view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Orange County is located 20 minutes north of Charlottesville, and 1.5 hours west of Richmond. Its

close proximity makes a great central Virginia destination for day trippers. For those historical buffs, Orange has three museums that you can explore: The Harley Davidson Museum at Waugh Enterprises, the Civil War Museum at the Exchange Hotel, and the James Madison Museum, which happens to be the first museum to fully commemorate the fourth U.S. President and "Father of the Constitution."

The Percherons of Montpelier Wagon Rides is something the entire family can enjoy. The wagon departs from the visitor's center every half hour, and transport passengers from Chick-

en Mountain, down DuPont Circle, up Farm Road, and finally down West Gage Road for a view of the Montpelier Mansion. Adults can expect to pay \$10 while the cost for children is \$5.

The Arts Center in Orange offers drawing, painting, clay, stained glass, basketry and other arts and craft classes for both children and adults. With its large gallery shop, it's the perfect educational experience that the entire family can enjoy.

After taking in the scenery in Orange County, your family can enjoy pizza at Antonio's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria, southern style cuisine at Country Cookin, or Chinese food at the Great Wall Chinese Restaurant. The decision is yours and the options are endless.

Madison County Skyline Drive Tour

Madison Chamber of Commerce Executive Director and Tourism Coordinator, Tracey Gardener, said in a recent article that visitors to Madison learn what residents already know—that Madison is a great place to be. And with its booming tourism recognition, it makes the perfect day vacation spot, too.

The Skyline Drive is a popular scenic driving tour that draws more than two million people annually. The 105-mile road runs the entire length of Shenandoah National Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains. While gazing out at the view, you are bound to run across wild turkey, deer, black bear and other wildlife. The scenic Skyline Drive also produces beautiful vegetation such



as cardinal flowers, black-eyed susans, and colorful goldenrods. When traveling along Skyline Drive pay particular attention to the milepost because they will help navigate you through the park. Because the speed limit is 35 mph it will take approximately three hours to travel the entire length of the park.

There are many family attractions that are bound to get your kids excited. For instance, the garden maze at Luray Caverns, Black Home on the Farm pig races, and Hess Corn Maze are favorites with visitors. The opportunity for

Greene County also has a history walking trail for those interested in learning more about the history of Stanardsville. You can expect to see such landmarks as the Old Toll House, built in 1815 by John Sorrille, and considered the oldest house still standing. After exploring the history and culture of Greene County, your family should have worked up a hardy appetite by now. Greene County has many restaurant options to choose from, including Fabios and Vinny's for wonderful Italian food or Mi Casa and El Agave

how widows wore symbols of mourning; view a display illustrating the lives of African-Americans after the war, and much more.

If you're still up for more exploration and adventure, the Scottsville Community Farmers' Market is the perfect venue. It features locally organic grown produce and handmade items all produced on nearby farms. There's also Teddy Roosevelt's presidential retreat, called Pine Knot - a small hunting cabin, located between Scottsville and Charlottesville. This is one of

City of Charlottesville Historic Downtown Mall

Charlottesville's Downtown Mall stretches along seven blocks of brick and tree lined streets. This historic district has a thriving theater, music and cinema scene, and attracts visitors from around the world. With more than 120 shops and 30 restaurants—many with outdoor cafes—it is impossible to visit Charlottesville without exploring one of the most beautiful pedestrian malls in the nation.

Carter Mountain Orchard has been a Charlottesville tradition since 1912. Located next to Michie Tavern and minutes from Monticello, it's the perfect family summer vacation. Although the fun starts in the spring with their annual Easter Egg Hunt, during the summer you can pick your own peaches and apples. You can even find nectarines, white-fleshed peaches, and fresh local veggies. The kids will enjoy eating ice cream and donuts as an added incentive.

Your family can also visit the Virginia Discovery Museum, which is an educational oasis. The Museum features two exhibit spaces: the Back Gallery exhibit, and the Museum's Front Gallery. The galleries are filled with interactive exhibits about art, history and science. And, your kids are guaranteed to light up when they see the historic Carousel that features six painted aluminum horses.

As you can see, the surrounding counties in Central Virginia offer family travelers many choices for excitement, adventure and education. If you want to "staycation" close to home, then load up your family and hit the highway before the kids return to school. Virginia is not only just for lovers, but it's a great vacation destination for the entire family. ■

Janet Thomson is a freelance writer, copywriter and military wife residing in Charlottesville.



exploration, adventure and education is extensive, and it's filled with plenty of activities for the entire family. Madison provides an assortment of restaurants and cafes. If you've got a taste for some comfort food, Pig-N-Steak offers barbecue ribs, steak and hamburgers and they are also known for their famous "Mountaineer Platter."

Greene County Historical Society and Museum

Greene County is one of the final stops before the Shenandoah National Park, the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Mountains. Like much of Virginia, Greene County possesses a rich history that's full of wonder that the entire family can experience.

The Greene County Historical Society and Museum has an 110,000-name genealogy database that allows visitors to learn about descendants of Greene County. This learning experience helps children research their own lineage and perhaps discover that they too have family ties to the County. In addition, your family can enjoy the Society's collections and artifacts that illustrate the 8,000 years of pre-history and current history of the County.

for Mexican cuisine. If you want to go where the locals gather, you can choose from Blue Ridge Café, Olive's Grill and Rylie's Diner. Lord Hardwicke's, whose original location is in Charlottesville, has another restaurant adjacent to the Best Western.

Albemarle County Scottsville

Scottsville is located just 20 minutes south of Charlottesville. It has many organic farms, bed and breakfast accommodations, day hikes, and local wineries and brewers. If you want to see the town's history come to life, start your day trip at the Scottsville Museum. There the entire family can watch a video and learn the history behind why the James River is shaped like a "horse shoe bend." During the visit, you'll hear stories of floods that plagued the town for centuries, and view artifacts and replicas used during the Civil War. Currently on display is the "Scottsville in the Civil War" exhibit. The exhibit provides an educational assessment of how the war affected Scottsville families and residents during this time. For example, your family will learn about medical items used to tend wounds at the Scottsville Confederate hospital;

Scottsville's hidden gems and can only be viewed by appointment.

At this point, your entire family should be famished, which is why you should head over to the historic downtown where you'll find a handful of locally own restaurants to choose from. The kids can enjoy burgers and pizza, while you indulge in one of the chef's special entrees. Most of the restaurants serve beer and wine and, if you have time, you can walk up the street to learn how the local beer is made.

