



# In the Center of it All: Hampton

by King Montgomery

Photo by Buddy DeRyder

**T**he Chesapeake Bay city of Hampton sits right in the middle of some of the finest year-round salt-water fishing on the planet. Not just a fishing town, Hampton also is home to a sizeable piece of our country's history, is the original home of NASA's Mercury Seven astronaut program, is headquarters to the U.S. branch of the Cousteau Society, and much more. In fact, there is so much to do and see around Hampton, you'll need an extended stay, or plan on making more than one trip to this beautiful place.

Hampton twice has been named an All-America City by the National Civic League. This recognition is one of the nation's oldest, most prominent community recognition awards.

## Location, Location, Location

Hampton is centrally positioned in Hampton Roads, a region that comprises the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, and the historic sites of Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown. Williamsburg is a 30-minute drive to the west, and Virginia Beach is 30 minutes to the east. Whichever way you go, there's something worthwhile to see and do.

The Hampton, James, Elizabeth, and Nansemond rivers meet in a body of water called Hampton Roads. In the Queen's English the term *road* comes from *roadstead*, which means a harbor or anchorage. The original name of the area was Earl of Southampton Roadstead which, thank

goodness, was shortened to its present form. It was here in 1607, at what is now Virginia Beach, that Captain John Smith and 103 other Englishmen landed after a long trip in three ships from England. The settlers soon moved up the James River and established Jamestown. A new page in American history had begun.

## A Bit of History

The Jamestown colonists expanded into the region, and the City of Hampton was officially established in 1610, making it today the oldest continuously populated town in America. The city soon flourished as an active seaport and trading center for the young colonies. But it reached a low point when, in August 1619, 20 captive

Africans arrived at Point Comfort. This sad cargo was the first group of Africans brought to the new land, and it would not be the last. (It is fitting that in 1868 a Union major general founded the first college for formerly enslaved people, which eventually became Hampton University. Booker T. Washington is counted among its distinguished graduates.)

In the late fall of 1718, a British naval vessel sailed in bearing the head of Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard the Pirate. It was mounted high on a pole at the mouth of the Hampton River where it served as a gruesome warning to other pirates. Today, the city celebrates the Hampton Blackbeard Festival, which includes a pirates' ball, battle reenactments, pirate encampments, a procession of costumed pirates, and plenty of raucous yet harmless fun.

During the American Civil War, Hampton was solidly a Confederate town except for the imposing Fortress Monroe, built in 1819 and once home to Robert E. Lee, which remained firmly in Union hands throughout the conflict. Still an active Army post today, Monroe provided sanctuary

for runaway slaves during the war.

The first battle between ironclad ships, the Union *Monitor* and the Confederate *Virginia (Merrimack)* took place in Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862. This event signaled the end of wooden warships throughout the world.

In August 1917, as World War I continued in Europe, Hampton's Langley Field with its dirt and grass airstrip opened

as the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA); and by 1935 it had also become the center for tactical aviation for the U.S. Army Air Corps. In 1958, NACA became NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. And in the spring of 1959, America's first Astronauts, the Mercury Seven, were chosen and began training at the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton. Today, the



Hampton Roads Convention Center (Photo courtesy of Hampton Convention & Visitor Bureau)

Downtown Hampton (Photo courtesy of Hampton Convention & Visitor Bureau)





Dolphins often cavort on the Chesapeake Bay just outside Hampton. ( Photo by King Montgomery)

Commercial fishing boats mix with charter craft and private vessels at Hampton's marinas and docks. (Photo by King Montgomery)



Virginia Air and Space Center on Settlers Landing Road, next to the Crowne Plaza Hotel, has wonderful displays of early NASA ventures including the Apollo 12 Command Module that went to the moon, and many old airplanes including a 1903 Wright Flyer replica and a real DC-9.

### So Many Sights to See

The Hampton Convention & Visitor Bureau (HCVB) is staffed by some of the most active, friendly and helpful people I've ever run across, and they are always ready to lend a hand to those who want to visit. The HCVB publishes some excellent visitors' guides that provide a wealth of information on what to do when in town. And the HCVB also contributed a section on Hampton in the must-have *Hampton Roads Fishing Guide* that has information on fishing the local waters, tournament events, charter boat captains, waterfront restaurants, marinas and boat-yards, beaches, and more. The Downtown Hampton Development Partnership website lists a bunch of activities and things to do in the city. And when in town, check out the Hampton Visitor Center, located within the Hampton History Museum.

Hampton area sites are much too numerous to cover, but here is a tantalizing short list to pique your interest:

- Air Power Park – A 15-acre site with aircraft, rockets, and missiles provided by the military services and NASA.
- Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World – Mecca for the outdoors-minded.
- Bluebird Gap Farm – A 60-acre city park home to domestic and wild animals, playground, picnic area, trails, aquarium, and antique farm machinery
- Casemate Museum at Fort Monroe – The largest stone fort ever built in the U.S. Weapons, uniforms, and video presentations. Confederate president Jefferson Davis was incarcerated here for two years after the Civil War.
- Cousteau Society – U.S. headquarters has photo and model displays and artifacts from

the expeditions of Jacques Cousteau.

- Grandview Nature Preserve – A 578-acre estuary preserve with 2 ½ miles of beach on Chesapeake Bay. Watch wildlife, kayak/canoe, hike, and fish.
- Sandy Bottom Nature Park – A 456-acre wetland recreational areas with trails, fishing, kayaking/canoeing, picnicking, horse riding, and more.
- *Miss Hampton II* harbor cruises – Take a 2½ hour narrated boat tour of Hampton Roads. See Forts Wool and Monroe, the Norfolk Naval Base, and other sights.
- The Hampton Carousel was built by

### Water's Bounty

The Hampton area has great Chesapeake Bay fishing, with its many fish-attracting currents, rips, shoals, humps, shipwrecks, and several bridges and bridge tunnels. But it is the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT), an engineering marvel, that provides perhaps the best light tackle and fly fishing opportunities 24/7/365!

The CBBT is a four-lane, 20-mile toll road between Hampton Roads and Virginia's Eastern Shore. The crossing consists of a series of low trestles and two mile

tunnels. Man-made islands anchor the ends of the tunnels, and these rip-rap structures usually yield the best fishing. The rip-rap, the 11,000 bridge pilings, and the rip currents caused by the structures provide ideal fishing year-round. Water depth along the CBBT ranges from 10 to 100 feet. Gamefish of all kinds, including striped bass, bluefish, black drum, various sea basses, spadefish, flounder, mackerel and others hang out and chase schools of menhaden and other baitfish. Some of the best fishing for striped bass is during the winter months, and at night under the bridge's



The 83rd Annual Hampton Cup Regatta will take place August 14-16. It is the nation's oldest continuously-running hydroplane boat race. (Photo courtesy of Hampton Convention & Visitor Bureau)

Colby Trow and friend Jessica Tomey, from Mossy Creek Fly Fishing in Harrisonburg, Virginia, cradle an 85 pound black drum caught on a fly at the CBBT. The fish was released. (Photo courtesy of Captain Tommy Mattioli)

European artisans employed by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company in the 1920s and was originally located at Hampton's Buckroe Beach Amusement Park. In the 1980s it was restored and moved to a pavilion on the downtown waterfront. Further restorations were made to the carousel just last year.

And much more, including theaters, art museums, superb restaurants, great shopping and wonderful sportfishing.





Some of the 11,000 pilings that support the CBBT. Most provide ambush spots and hiding cover for many gamefish. (Photo by King Montgomery)

many lights in warmer times.

There are small and large charter boats operating from marinas in Hampton Roads—see the *Fishing Guide* mentioned earlier. I fish with Captain Tommy Mattioli on the *Matty-J* out of Hampton's Sunset Boating Center on the Hampton River. Tommy is adept at finding fish for spinning and fly-tackle enthusiasts, and his fly-tying expertise is known far and wide. Tommy can put anglers onto fish within minutes of clearing the mouth of the Hampton River, but his specialty is fishing the CBBT, and no one knows the terrain and the fish better.

Here's a typical fishing trip for me when I visit Hampton. I check into the just-renovated Crowne Plaza Hampton Marina Hotel and have a nice lunch in the hotel's Regatta Grille or Oyster Alley restaurants. Nearby on Queen's Way are shops and restaurants, something is always going on there, and Bass Pro Shops is only 15 minutes away. The next morning, I walk out the front door of the hotel, turn right, go 150 feet, and I'm at the town dock next to the

Cousteau Society where Captain Mattioli is waiting for me in his 20-foot Grady White center-console bay boat. I climb aboard, shake his hand, take the offered cup of coffee, and go fishing. It really doesn't get much better than that.

Sailors and powerboaters ply the waters of Hampton River and the nearby Chesapeake Bay, and many of them are based at the nicely located and appointed Hampton Yacht Club on the river's bank. The club, initially established in 1903, owes its present form to a re-founding in 1926. Members compete in sailing and power races and regattas around the country, conduct an active training program for young and older sailors alike and serve as advisors to the sailing teams of Old Dominion University, Christopher Newport University, and Hampton University. The latter is the only historically African-American university to boast a collegiate sailing team.

### A Happy Place

Yes, Hampton is a special place for me because of many things, but it's the synergy between its friendly people, rich history, fine shopping, excellent restaurants, fun events, and fishing year-round that keeps me coming back. Whether you have two days or two weeks, there are always things to do, sights to see and wonderful experiences to enjoy with the whole family.

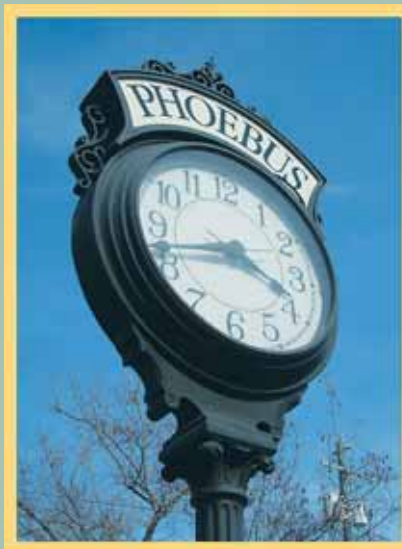
For more information on what the City of Hampton has to offer, contact the HCVB at (800) 487-8778, [www.visithampton.com](http://www.visithampton.com); and the Downtown Hampton Development Partnership at (757) 727-1271, [www.downtownhampton.com](http://www.downtownhampton.com).

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King Montgomery is a frequent contributor to *The Virginia Sportsman* magazine. He lives in Burke and fishes all over the world. Contact him at [kingangler1@aol.com](mailto:kingangler1@aol.com).

# It's Time for. . . .

- Hampton Visitor Center, located with the Hampton History Museum:  
(757) 727-1102 or (800) 800-2202
- Air Power Park:  
(757) 727-1163  
[www.hampton.gov/PARKS/](http://www.hampton.gov/PARKS/)
- Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World:  
(757) 262-5200, [www.basspro.com](http://www.basspro.com)
- Bluebird Gap Farm: (757) 727-6739  
[www.hampton.gov/PARKS](http://www.hampton.gov/PARKS)
- Casemate Museum at Fort Monroe:  
(757)788-3391  
[www.monroe.army.mil/monroe/](http://www.monroe.army.mil/monroe/)
- Cousteau Society : (757) 722-9300 or (800) 441-4395  
[www.cousteausociety.org](http://www.cousteausociety.org)
- Grandview Nature Preserve:  
(757) 850-5134  
[www.hampton.gov/PARKS/](http://www.hampton.gov/PARKS/)
- Miss Hampton II harbor cruises :  
(757) 722-9102  
[www.misshamptoncruises.com](http://www.misshamptoncruises.com)
- Hampton Roads Charters – Ocean Eagle:  
(757) 868-FISH  
[www.hamptonroadscharter.com](http://www.hamptonroadscharter.com)
- Crowne Plaza Hampton Marina Hotel:  
(757) 727-9700  
[www.cphamptonmarina.com](http://www.cphamptonmarina.com)
- Captain Tommy Mattioli:  
(804) 314-2672, [www,matty-j.com](http://www.matty-j.com)
- Sunset Boating Center:  
(757) 722-3325  
[www.sunriseboatingcenter.com](http://www.sunriseboatingcenter.com)
- Captain Chris Newsome:  
(804) 815-4895  
[www.bayflyfishing.com](http://www.bayflyfishing.com)
- Hampton Yacht Club:  
(757) 722-0711, [www.hamptonyc.com](http://www.hamptonyc.com)
- Peninsula Pilots Baseball:  
(757) 245-2222  
[www.peninsulapilots.com](http://www.peninsulapilots.com)



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