

Training our sights on a new city

Art, history and shopping make Richmond perfect for a day trip



Richmond's Main Street Station services daily round trips between Virginia's capital and D.C. (Photos by Carlos Bernate for The Washington Post)

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Earlier this fall, Virginia announced a new daily round-trip Amtrak service from Richmond to Washington, and it got us thinking. We like Richmond — the art, the music, the cafes, the shopping, the breweries. What we don't like is sitting in traffic on I-95. So we started daydreaming about daytripping to Virginia's capital, especially when we noticed tickets for \$22 each way.

The guidelines were simple. We'd each catch the first train from Union Station to Richmond's downtown Main Street Station, which leaves at 7 a.m. on weekends and 7:20 on weekdays. We'd spend the day exploring the city before grabbing the last train back to D.C., which departs at 6 p.m. We mapped out itineraries in advance, figuring out how long it would take to walk between sites, but we weren't entirely wedded to them.

That's the key: The point of a road trip is to be spontaneous, or as spontaneous as you can be when you're depending on a train to get you from point to point and back. Make plans, but don't stress out about scheduling every minute of the day to make the trip "worth it." Leave time to linger at a bench overlooking the James River or to spend a few extra moments in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts's sculpture garden. Throw caution to the wind and have another beer and game of Deadpool pinball at Bingo Brewing. That way, you have a reason to come back.

A city that bursts with color

Arrive in Richmond by train, and you'll encounter art before you even leave the station — good news, for me, seeing as I've scheduled my day with enough art stops to fill a week (and won't make it to many of them). In Richmond, you'll find art all over.

Bleary-eyed and un-caffeinated, I spot John Newman's surreal sculpture "Skyrider" through a station window and nearly mistake the abstraction, which dangles beneath the highway, for construction materials. Visible from the train platform, the tower of Philip Johnson's futuristic [ChildSavers](#) building peeks out from the city skyline. Near the station entrance, a Slavery Reconciliation [statue](#) marks the city's dark history in the triangular trade. (More on this later.)

The latter reflects the Richmond you're likely to have heard about: a city grappling with its complicated legacy. Walking by Kehinde Wiley's reimagined monument "Rumors of War" outside the VMFA; repurposed Confederacy buildings; Monument Avenue's empty plinths; and moving murals such as "Say Their Names" by Silly Genius — you can see Richmond rethinking its painful past in its public space. Today, it is a place of stirring art encounters and redemptive designs.

The Shockoe Bottom neighborhood has cobblestone streets and a gritty industrial feel. **Ironclad Coffee**, my first stop, takes its name, in part, from Richmond's history as an iron manufacturing hub for the Confederacy. In a repurposed firehouse, accented with an old-timey shoeshine stand, they serve vegan (and regular) breakfast sandwiches, funky lattes and complex-tasting coffee — the House of Usher blend, named for Edgar Allan Poe's short story.

Poe called the surrounding area home for much of his life, and his **three-gallery museum** is just blocks away. Partially housed in Richmond's oldest residential building, it's complete with an eerie shrine and garden, populated by black cats. Floorboards groan and doors shriek as you peer at the childhood bed, paintings, texts and busts of one of America's best-known horror and mystery writers.

After the Poe Museum, visiting the **Institute for Contemporary Art** at Virginia Commonwealth University is a recipe for aesthetic whiplash. Clean lines and austere design create light-filled galleries and sleek outdoor areas. The building alone merits a visit.

One of a few immersive installations on view, Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste's "Set It Off" is split between the ICA and the experimental **1708 Gallery** nearby. At 1708, Toussaint-Baptiste has filled a black square basin (inspired by Malevich's "Black Square") with polluted James River water and filled the room with a low, booming white noise that makes sound feel material — and invasive.

En route to the VMFA, I stopped at **Fresca on Addison**, a plant-based restaurant with killer pumpkin burgers and pizza boasting impressive "cheese." At the gas-station-turned-cafe **Lamplighter**, I refueled with cold brew. The walk to the museum along West Cary Street featured some of Richmond's more than 100 murals — bees on bicycles buzz along one building, a giant pink foot reaches out from another.

I saved the **VMFA** for last, knowing I risked being sucked in for the entire day, lost in Dali's "The God of the Bay of Roses" or Hopper's "House at Dusk." With an hour and a half in the **Man Ray** show, I felt rushed. Fortunately, most days, the museum closes at 5 p.m., so you have no excuse to be running to the train. Unless, like me, you get caught in the sculpture garden, taken with Chihuly's "Red Reeds" at the golden hour. — *K.A.*

Thrift on down the road

My boyfriend and I discovered Richmond's robust thrifting scene a few years ago on our first date, and keep returning to the stylish, youthful city to fulfill our most niche apparel desires. On this trip, we had one primary goal: to find the clothes (blinding white snow pants) and accessories (fur hat, gaudy gold necklaces) that would let us re-create a film still of Lady Gaga and Adam Driver as Patrizia and Maurizio Gucci in "House of Gucci" for Halloween. Though the costumes seemed simple enough, we wanted to be able to rewear what we bought instead of discarding the items post-holiday. We narrowed our shopping to two neighborhoods: Scott's Addition and Carytown.

I printed our packed itinerary and we set out — and to our dismay, our train was delayed 15 minutes leaving Union Station. By the time we got off the train in Richmond, we were already 40 minutes behind schedule. We scrapped our original lunch plan at Carytown's Broken Tulip and instead would have brunch at **Capitol Waffle Shop**, a local chain with a location just a 15-minute walk from the train station. We washed down our Grandma Waffle (topped with fried chicken strips and dotted with blueberries, strawberries and powdered sugar) and Country Breakfast Waffle (a classic fried chicken, scrambled egg and waffle combination, drenched in sausage gravy) with \$5 mimosas, a deal that made our D.C. hearts soar.

We braved the rain that day by Uber, stopping by **Diversity Thrift**, created in 1999 to aid the area's LGBTQ community, and **Class and Trash**. Diversity Thrift has a traditional thrift store feel and layout, with a wide range of inventory — stacked shelves of DVDs (including at least five copies of "Mad Men" Season 1), a corner sparkling with glassware and dinnerware. At Class and Trash, we enjoyed meandering through narrow walkways of crammed furniture, finding a few McDonald's novelty cups and vintage Art Deco-style lamps.

We saved Carytown, one of the most recognizable neighborhoods for the city's thrift scene, for last. You stumble out of one store and into another — we visited five stores on one half-mile stretch of West Cary Street. We started at **Clothes Rack**, walked to **Ashby** and then **Bygones**, which specializes in vintage pieces (and where I was able to find the faux fur hat Gaga wears, an item I knew would be hardest to find). The shop is a blast from the past, with gorgeous dark wood framing clothing racks and glamorous glass counters filled with jewelry, cuff links and more. After scoring the elusive hat, we hit **Goodwill Second Debut**, an old favorite full of wearable basics (some still with their Macy's tags attached), which will close in December. The final shop we hit was **Luxor Vintage Clothing**, a shop cluttered beautifully with antiques, clothes, various knickknacks and lots of jewelry.

Before heading back to catch our 6 p.m. train, we refueled at **Burger Bach**, a New Zealand burger joint with over 15 dipping sauces. We watched the sky over Carytown dim as we relished in our new finds and new favorite sauce — blueberry chipotle barbecue. — A.G.

A complicated history

The removal of five Confederate statues on Monument Avenue have dominated conversation, but it was the recent arrival of a very different memorial that became the central point in my wanderings around Richmond.

More than a decade ago, the city established the **Richmond Slave Trail**, connecting sites related to slavery and its legacy, beginning at Ancarrow's Landing, a park about two miles from Main Street Station where ships once unloaded their human cargo.

Armed with apps and maps, I skipped around a bit: Two of the major attractions are in Main Street Station's backyard. Across the street is the Slavery Reconciliation Statue, showing two figures in an embrace — and covered with images of shackles and slave ships. There are identical statues in Liverpool and Benin, representing three points of the triangular trade. A block north, in a parking lot hemmed in by train tracks is the site of Lumpkin's Slave Jail, where enslaved people were imprisoned before they were sold at auction.

Walk through an overpass and you're on the site of the African Burial Ground, one of the oldest in the area, and once home to the public gallows. By the early 1800s, according to signs at the site, local Black leaders were complaining about neglect; by the 20th century, the site had been used as a dump and a dog pound. A highway covered part of the site, which was eventually paved over and turned into a parking lot. But community organizers have rallied people to support a proper memorial, including a place for quiet reflection, covered with tributes to General Gabriel, who was executed on this spot in 1800 after organizing a revolt of enslaved people, and is probably buried here.

From there, it was down to the **Riverfront Canal Walk**, beautifully restored canalside trails marked with historic plaques and one of my favorite statues: A tribute to Henry "Box" Brown, an enslaved man who climbed into a two-foot-by-three-foot crate and mailed himself to freedom in Philadelphia in 1849 after his wife and children were sold. The plaza contains a replica of Brown's box, in case you want to visualize yourself squeezing in, while reading about the horrors of slavery and details of his escape.

Following the water finally led to the open green space of **Brown's Island**, where I was struck by a pair of bronze statues: A man, 12-feet high, his back latticed by scars, snapping out of shackles. A woman staring off into the distance, protectively cradling a baby in her arm, and defiantly holding a paper reading "January 1, MDCCCLXIII," the day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect.

The Emancipation and Freedom Memorial was dedicated in late September, shortly after the statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee was removed from Monument Avenue. The base under the female figure honors 10 Virginians, including slave revolt leader Nat Turner and the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, who led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the 1960s. It's a reminder that Richmond has come a long way since 2003, when the Sons of Confederate Veterans protested against a statue of Abraham and Tad Lincoln.

Leaving Brown's Island, it's a 15-minute walk to the grounds of the Virginia Capitol, where the **Virginia Woman's Monument** was unveiled in October 2019, celebrating the contributions of a diverse group of women to the state. (Seven life-size statues are in place around a sundial, with more scheduled to be added.) On the other side of the Capitol building, a reminder of Virginia's complicated legacy finds the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial in the same row of statues as Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.

After all that walking, I caught an Uber to Scott's Addition, Richmond's brewery district. I've been writing about the joys of visiting the neighborhood [since 2016](#), but what continues to impress me is the diversity of the area, in both what's coming out of the taps and range of experiences that can be had within a few blocks. **The Veil**'s juicy tropical IPAs pair with an industrial patio and grub from food trucks. **Vasen** excels at funky goses and barrel-aged stouts. I could happily spend an afternoon sipping Franconian lager or a malty ESB in the beer garden at **Ardent**, unless I was meeting a friend over at **Bingo**, a lager-centric brewery with firepits on the patio and rows of Skee-Ball and pinball machines in the indoor arcade.

It's worth making a plan here, given that brewery hours are all over the map. Also, double-check for private events: While I'm usually charmed by the cobbled courtyard at **Blue Bee Cider**, once home to Richmond's stables, I was disappointed that the space was closed for a wedding. I suppose that gives me another reason to come back. — *F.H.*

