

MARYLAND  
BYWAYS

Chesapeake Country 17



It is said that in “Chesapeake Country,” life moves gently with the ebb and flow of the tides. Your journey takes you past fertile farmland graced by handsome – often historic – manor houses. You enter small towns rich with art, culture and pure country charm, and then slip through secluded spots surrounded by unspoiled nature. And never are you far from water – either the Chesapeake Bay or one of its tidewater tributaries.

Divided into Upper Eastern Shore and mid-shore sections, this ambitious byway winds through the bulk of two Maryland Heritage Areas – first, the Stories of the Chesapeake, which takes you through the natural beauty of this special land; then, the Heart of Chesapeake Country, with its pristine

waterways, historic waterfront villages and wide natural expanses. The upper Eastern Shore section has also been designated as a National Scenic Byway.

This tidewater region has shaped the lifestyles and livelihoods of generations of watermen, shipbuilders, and tobacco farmers. Travel through this region will take you through water-related communities where the people are up with the season to reap the harvest from the bay, and towns that have been welcoming travelers for centuries.

### Upper Eastern Shore section from Chesapeake City – MD 213 & MD 18

Begin your trip in Chesapeake City, at the western end of the Chesapeake



419 miles from Chesapeake City to Elliott Island



and Delaware Canal. Among the town's many restored, 19th-century commercial and residential buildings is a museum that tells of the C&D Canal's significance as a trade route linking Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Heading down MD 213, look for a sign marking the site of Bohemia Manor, which was originally owned by Augustine Herman, a surveyor said to be the first man to map Maryland. The next town on your journey, Cecilton, is located at the largest crossroads south of the canal, just east of three bayside sidetracks onto MD 282 and beyond. First, there is Crystal Beach, popular for swimming and fishing. Then comes the Stemmer's Run Wildlife Management Area, where you can participate in upland game viewing and seasonal hunting. Finally, a sidetrack to Grove

Point takes you past the Mount Harmon Plantation, featuring an 18th-century manor home set amid a boxwood garden, tobacco prize house and nature preserve.

Back on MD 213 south, cross to the southern bank of the Sassafras River and enter Georgetown, which was raided and burned by British troops during the War of 1812. Only two houses and a church were spared. MD 213 takes a hard right turn in Galena and runs toward Kennedyville. Just north on Turners Creek Landing, the Kent Museum features displays of antique agricultural machinery and other items from rural life. Nature trails surround the museum.

Another sidetrack, this one from MD 298 to MD 292, brings you to Betterton, a Victorian resort during



the golden age of the Chesapeake Bay steamboat. The road leading to Betterton's beach and pier descends a steep hill past fine Victorian-era homes.

On MD 213 once again, you pass through rolling farmland en route to Chestertown, a Colonial port on the Chester River. Wealthy merchants and planters built the elegant brick townhouses that dominate Chestertown's historic district. Among these is the Geddes-Piper House, now the period-furnished headquarters of the Kent County Historical Society. Other attractions include a 3,000-acre wildlife and agricultural research area known as Chesapeake Farms; a schooner named *Sultana* that sails as the "Schoolship of the Chesapeake".

Here, the byway branches off toward

Rock Hall by way of MD 20. Arguably the pleasure-boating center of the Upper Shore, Rock Hall has more than a dozen marinas offering safe mooring and charter services. In addition, you'll find exceptional seafood dining, visual and performing arts, the old-fashioned Durdin's drug store (complete with soda fountain), and a nearby museum dedicated to decades past when the Tolchester Beach amusement park operated just up the road. To learn about the area's Native American, Colonial and maritime heritage, stop by the Rock Hall Museum. Next, follow MD 445 south to the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, an island ecosystem with extensive hiking trails.

Returning to Chestertown and taking a southward course along MD 213, you soon arrive in Church Hill. St.



Luke's Episcopal Church, which rests on a hill overlooking the center of town, has been restored to its early-18th-century glory. Nearby is the Church Hill Theatre, presenting classic, contemporary and children's plays in a converted 1930s movie house.

In Centreville, visit the Museum of Eastern Shore Life to see artifacts from the surrounding region, and then take a closer look at some of the town's 18th- and 19th-century homes and buildings. On the square at the town's center is a 1792 structure that is Maryland's oldest courthouse. Look also for the Federal-period Tucker House and a finely furnished, circa-1744 plantation home named Wright's Chance.

Go west on MD 18 and follow it to Queenstown. Several existing struc-

tures are evidence of the area's rich Colonial heritage. Plus, you can shop at local outlet stores before entering Grasonville, home of an environmental center operated by the Wildfowl Trust of North America. Beyond the Trust's visitors center are recreational opportunities ranging from hiking and canoeing to spying on captive and migrating waterfowl and raptors.

The Kent Narrows channel separates Maryland's Eastern Shore mainland from Kent Island. Waterside restaurants in this area feature contemporary entertainment while serving seafood fresh from the dock to your table. Information regarding island history, such as the establishment of a trading post here in 1631, is available at the Chesapeake Exploration Center, which is also one end of the six-mile-long hiking, biking and



rollerblading route called the Cross Island Trail.

In Stevensville, hints of the community's past are offered at the Cray House and Train Depot. The house, built circa 1809, is a rare example of post-and-plank construction, and the adjacent train station, constructed a century later, harkens to a time when steamboat and railroad traffic from the western shore of the bay.

Your next move could be to travel four miles across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to Maryland's capital of Annapolis, where you can hook into the Roots & Tides byway (page 121). Otherwise, return to the Eastern Shore mainland via US 50 and start the Mid-shore part of your journey.

### **Mid-Shore Section from Centreville – US 50, MD 662, 331, 318, 313**

To begin the second leg of this byway, either start from Centreville and follow MD 213 south, or take US 50 past a sidetrack to the Wye Mills Natural Resource Management Area. In the actual town of Wye Mills, look for a gristmill that ground flour for George Washington's troops during the Revolutionary War. Visit where the largest white oak in the nation, fell in 2002 during a vicious storm, and a true genetic clone of the tree was planted here in 2006.

Follow MD 662 until it ends, at which time you can pick up US 50 and enter Easton. Its reputation as one of the best small towns in America is partly attributable to its variety of arts and entertainment options, from the art-



deco Avalon Theatre to the Academy Art Museum. Easton's history comes alive at a 325-year-old Quaker meeting house, and on streets lined with elegant Victorian homes and an enticing array of long-established specialty shops. You'll also find championship golfing nearby, as well as nature trails and a canoe launch at the 400-acre Pickering Creek Audubon Center.

Branch off on MD 33 to visit St. Michaels, an important shipbuilding center since the earliest Colonial days. Explore the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, which features a working boatyard, various hands-on activities and a restored 1879 lighthouse. From here, it's a short drive to Tilghman Island, home of skipjack cruises, great restaurants and one of the largest one-marina charter fleets in

Maryland. The place is even admired by monarch butterflies, thousands of which stop here every August as they wing their way toward Mexico.

Return to the main route by way of MD 329 toward Bellevue, crossing the Tred Avon River on board what is believed to be America's oldest privately owned ferry, which dates back to the 17th century. On the opposite shore of the river is Oxford, where you'll find a sizable fishing and oyster fleet along with many fine marinas. Exhibits on the area's heritage and maritime history are found inside the Oxford Museum, while just down the road is a replica of the first Oxford Customs House.

After making your way back to Easton on MD 333, head east along MD 331, crossing the Choptank River



on the Dover Bridge. During Civil War times, people, horses and cows were charged a five-cent toll to use the bridge. Beyond the river in Preston, you link up with the Underground Railroad byway (page 153), but then veer off toward Hurlock. This is where an authentic paddlewheel boat waits to take you river cruising.

Pass through East New Market on MD 16, first settled in 1660 as a Native-American trading post and later serving as the center of American Methodism. As you hug the Choptank River shoreline, move through a small fishing village called Secretary, and then cross paths once more with the Underground Railroad byway as you branch off toward Cambridge. Bike routes around here incorporate both small-town scenes and wide-open country, while local

history not only includes brushes with Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman, but also Wild West sharpshooter Annie Oakley and several former Maryland governors. Water adventures are available via skipjack sailing cruises and custom boat tours, or glimpse the life of an Eastern Shore waterman at the Richardson Maritime Museum and Boatworks in Cambridge.

Continue on MD 343 toward Hudson and sight your binoculars on the Sharps Island Lighthouse offshore. Now it's time to doubleback to Cambridge, venture south on MD 341, and face your next decision about which way to turn. One option is to head south on MD 341 into the heart of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, which beckons bikers to view a vast salt-marsh ecosystem,



and canoeists and kayakers to enjoy relaxing tidewater excursions. Blackwater also boasts the largest nesting population of bald eagles on the East Coast.

A more westerly route on MD 335 takes you on this byway's Hooper Island Branch, skirting the Blackwater refuge en route to a chain of three, narrow islands named for one of the first families to settle in the area. Come prepared to fish, boat and scan the bay for the 63-foot-tall Hooper Island Lighthouse. To the east is the Elliott Island Branch, which includes a stop at the Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Area. Fishing Bay's lush tidal wetlands have earned it the nickname "Maryland's Everglades."

Finally, you're ready to drive along the Nanticoke River up to Eldorado, from

which you can either continue north toward Federalsburg and the Idylwild Wildlife Management Area, or turn southeast to investigate the Lower Eastern Shore on the Blue Crab byway (page 161). The two byways join in the vicinity of Sharptown, which features a boat launch for easy exploration of the scenic Nanticoke and its tributaries.

**OLD LINE LORE:** *Celebrated author James Michener wrote an outline for his novel Chesapeake in an Oxford-based tavern that won his heart with its succulent crab cakes. The original manuscript for Michener's work is kept at a library in Easton.*

#### **Avalon Theatre**

40 E Dover St  
Easton, 21601  
410-822-0345  
www.avalontheatre.com



#### **Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge**

2145 Key Wallace Dr  
Cambridge, 21613  
410-228-0401  
www.friendsofblackwater.com

#### **Chesapeake & Delaware Canal Museum (1837)**

815 Bethel Rd  
Chesapeake City, 21915  
410-885-5622

#### **Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum**

Navy Point  
St. Michaels, 21663  
410-745-2916  
www.cbmm.org

#### **Chesapeake Farms**

7319 Remington Dr.  
Chestertown, 21620  
410-778-8400

#### **Cray House and Train Depot**

Cockey's Ln  
Stevensville, 21666  
410-604-2100  
www.historicqac.org

#### **Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge**

1730 Eastern Neck Rd  
Rock Hall, 21666  
410-639-7056  
www.kentcounty.gov/parkrec/parks

#### **Geddes-Piper House**

101 Church Alley  
Chestertown, 21620  
410-778-3499  
www.hskmd.com

#### **Kent Museum**

Turners Creek Landing  
Kennedyville, 13685  
410-348-9149  
www.kentcounty/farmmuseum

#### **Mount Harmon Plantation**

Grove Neck Rd to Mt Harmon Rd  
Earlville, 21919  
410-275-8819  
www.mountharmon.org

#### **Museum of Eastern Shore Life**

120 Dulin Clark Rd.  
Centerville, 21617  
410-758-8640, 410-758-0979

### **Oxford Museum**

101 S Morris St  
Oxford, 21654  
410-226-0191  
[www.oxfordmuseum.org](http://www.oxfordmuseum.org)

### **Oxford-Bellevue Ferry**

End of MD Rt 333  
Oxford, 21654  
410-745-9023  
[www.oxfordferry.com](http://www.oxfordferry.com)

### **Pickering Creek Audubon Center**

11450 Audubon Ln  
Easton, 21601  
410-822-4903  
[www.pickeringcreek.org](http://www.pickeringcreek.org)

### **Richardson Maritime Museum and Boatworks**

401 High St  
Cambridge, 21613  
410-221-1871  
[www.richardsonmuseum.org](http://www.richardsonmuseum.org)

### **Rock Hall Museum**

5585 Main St  
Rock Hall, 21661  
410-639-2296  
[www.rockhallmd.com/museum](http://www.rockhallmd.com/museum)

### **Schooner Sultana 1768 and the Sultana Center**

Cross St  
Chestertown, 21620  
410-778-5954  
[www.schoonersultana.com](http://www.schoonersultana.com)

### **Wildfowl Trust of North America Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center**

600 Discovery Ln  
Grasonville, 21638  
410-827-6694  
[www.cbec-wtna.org](http://www.cbec-wtna.org)

### **Wye Grist Mill and Museum**

Rt 662 14296 Old Wye Mills Road  
Wye Mills, 21657  
410-827-6909  
[www.ce.jhu.edu/mdcive/wyemill.htm](http://www.ce.jhu.edu/mdcive/wyemill.htm)