

# Hip meets history

Star chefs, chic boutiques and ghosts in Alexandria

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Just across the Potomac River from the nation's capital, sleepy Old Town Alexandria has shaken itself awake with an injection of superstar chefs, edgy boutiques and hip hotels. Yet, this riverside town, which claims George Washington and Robert E. Lee as native sons, still oozes historic charm with 40 square blocks of 18th and 19th century brick and clapboard homes and hidden gardens.

This old-meets-new ambience is particularly appealing to visitors who can explore historic sites and roam the lively arts scene at night.

Alexandrians also start getting into the Halloween mood as South Lee Street homeowners festoon their stoops with spider webs and ghoulish creatures. Restaurants along and around King Street still offer outdoor dining.

Old Town's languid pace offers a relaxing contrast to the long lines and buzz of D.C., but the capital is only 20 minutes away, as is George Washington's home, Mount Vernon.

With Alexandria just a half-day's drive or one-hour flight from New York City, it's an attractive long weekend destination for Long Islanders.

## WHAT TO DO

### Chase specters

Explore Old Town at night on a lantern-lit walking tour of ghosts and graveyards led by a guide clad in Colonial dress. The flickering gas lamps of Colonial and Victorian houses and cobblestone streets add a romantic touch to the evening stroll. The public one-hour "Ghosts and Graveyard" tours continue on Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 27 (\$10 adults, \$5 ages 7-17; 703-519-1749, alexcolonialtours.com).

Prefer to see the town by daylight? Grab a town map at the Alexandria Visitors' Center at the 18th century Ramsay House (221 King St.; 703-838-5005, visitalexandriava.com) and plot your own walking tour. Don't miss the 7-foot-wide, 25-foot-deep Spite House (523 Queen St.), built by John Hollensbury in 1830 to annoy his neighbors.

Otherwise, Alexandria Tours leads guided walks focusing on history and architecture daily through November (\$12.50, 703-329-1122).

### A dose of history

Old Town Alexandria is an open history book of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. History buffs can in-



The Torpedo Factory in Old Town is now art studios and shops. Artist Michele Hoben works there.



ON THE COVER and above: Guides with Alexandria Colonial Tours prepare for lantern-lit visits to ghosts and graveyards.

dulge their passion in multiple ways, while those without the bug also will enjoy stepping back into the past with a visit to one or two

sites (note that many museums are closed on Mondays and Tuesdays during fall and winter).

A Key to the City Pass (\$12)

opens the door to nine historic sites. See Martha Washington's request for a quart bottle of castor oil among the 8,000 artifacts contained in the Stabler-Leadbetter Apothecary, established in 1792 (\$5, 703-746-3852, alexandriava.gov/apothecary).

Steep yourself in the nation's history with a tour of Gadsby's Tavern Museum, where George Washington gave his moving farewell address to his troops (\$5, 703-838-4242, oha.alexandriava.gov/gadsby).

For pre-Revolutionary War buffs, there's the elegant Georgian Palladian Carlyle House Historic Park, where British General Braddock had his headquarters (\$5, 703-549-2997,



The town hall steeple in Old Town Alexandria

## WHERE TO STAY

### HIGH END (\$200 and up)

**HOTEL MONACO ALEXANDRIA**  
703-549-6080  
monaco-alexandria.com  
The funky hotel has an unbeatable central location across from Market Square.

**THE MORRISON HOUSE HOTEL**  
703-838-8000  
morrisonhouse.com  
Nestled in the heart of Old Town, its boutique rooms have fireplaces, marble baths and butler service.

### BUDGET (less than \$125)

**SHERATON SUITES OLD TOWN**  
703-836-4700  
starwoodhotels.com  
About a half-mile from the center of town. You'll find all the amenities plus complimentary shuttle service to Reagan National Airport.

**THE HILTON ALEXANDRIA OLD TOWN**  
703-837-0440, hilton.com  
Conveniently located within walking distance of the Alexandria Union train station and near the King Street Metro line.

## WHERE TO EAT

Alexandrians love to eat out, and restaurants abound. You can choose from three restaurants owned by award-winning chef Cathal Armstrong. Among them: the trendsetting **Restaurant Eve** for a special lunch focused on local produce and meats (entrees from \$18, 703-706-0450, restauranteve.com). The cheeky **Eamonn's A Dublin Chipper** for crunchy slabs of fried cod with a choice of seven secret sauces, chips with malt vinegar and a fried candy bar to top it off. For the ultimate indulgence, try a Chip Butty, a fall and winter specialty sandwich of French fries, Irish butter and curry sauce (703-299-8384, eamonnsdublinchipper.com).

### DINE ON THE EDGE

Make reservations early to dine at the coolly elegant **BRABO** by Robert Wiedmaier. Seasonal produce drives the Belgian-inspired cuisine with a contemporary twist. Expect to pay a minimum of \$60 a person without wine. Or sip a signature cocktail, such as the divine Lavender Breeze (\$13) at BRABO's hammered copper bar and then head next door to the less-pricey, but equally chic, BRABO's Tasting Room (703-894-3440, braborestaurant.com).



ALEXANDRIA CVB PHOTO

Seared scallops at BRABO in Old Town

### GOOD FOR DRINKS

Wrap up the evening at the swanky 1920s-style speak-easy **PX** (728 King St.), where cocktail guru Todd Thrasher's concoctions will make any respectable modern flapper swoon with delight. Look for the blue light in the alley, knock on the door and state your business when the window opens. Walk-ins welcome, but reservations are recommended (make them online at eamonnsdublinchipper.com). Alternatively, grab a mojito and give your inner dancer a whirl at **Café Salsa** (808 King St.). There's a DJ spinning Latin tunes every Friday and Saturday at 10:30 p.m. — no cover charge (703-684-4100, cafesalsagrill.com).

nvrpa.org/park/carlyle\_house\_historic\_park). Halloween is celebrated at the house with a re-enactment of owner John Carlyle's funeral on Oct. 30.

Unravel the secrets of the Freemasonry at the George Washington National Masonic Memorial, which also offers sweeping views of Alexandria and the Potomac River. (\$5, 703-683-2007, gwmemorial.org).

### A blast of art

Fast-forward to modern times at Alexandria's art center, the Torpedo Factory, where torpedoes actually were manufactured from 1918 through World War II. First-

floor retail stores abound with pottery, colorful fiber crafts and fanciful jewelry. You also can make a purchase directly from the artists at work in the upper-level studios. Be sure to catch the current juried exhibit at the Target Gallery on the first floor (703-838-4565, torpedofactory.org).

### Out and about

Get an early start at the Old Town Market Square Farmers' Market, where you can sample Virginia farm bounty, including homemade pastries and handicrafts (5-10:30 a.m. Saturdays, year-round).

Alexandria's still a boutique town, with specialty

shops surrounding Market Square and along King Street. La Cuisine may ring your culinary chimes with answers to all your kitchen needs (703-836-4435, lacuisineus.com). Look for killer shoes by designers such as Butter or Bettye Mueller at The Shoe Hive (703-548-7105, store.theshoehive.com) or dive into designer clothes and accessories (think Tory Burch and Trina Turk) at Hysteria (703-548-1615, shophysteria.com).

Hop on the free Old Town Trolley, which runs daily from 11:30 a.m. until 10 p.m. between the Torpedo Factory and King Street Metro station, and head uptown for more selections.

### Pay your respects

Worship where Robert E. Lee and George Washington both had pews at the historic red brick Christ Church, built in 1753 (703-549-1450, historicchristchurch.org) or at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, where mourners held George Washington's memorial services in 1799 (703-549-6670, opmh.org). Amble through the Meeting House's cemetery, where the remains of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier rest. Or raise your voice in praise at the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church, one of the oldest African-American churches in the area (703-683-2222, alfredstreet.org).

## IF YOU GO

**BY CAR** Alexandria is about 235 miles from New York City.

**BY TRAIN** Some Amtrak trains stop in Alexandria's historic station (fares \$57-\$131 each way).

**BY AIR** Delta and US Airways shuttles offer nonstop flights between LaGuardia and Reagan National Airport, a 10-minute cab ride to Alexandria. Round-trip airfares begin at \$273. A car is not needed to get around Old Town, which has free buses and trolleys.

**MORE INFO** Alexandria Convention and Tourist Association, visitalexandriava.com.