

SOMERSET COUNTY SOJOURN

SPEND A DAY, OR SPEND A WEEK. IT'S TIME WELL SPENT!

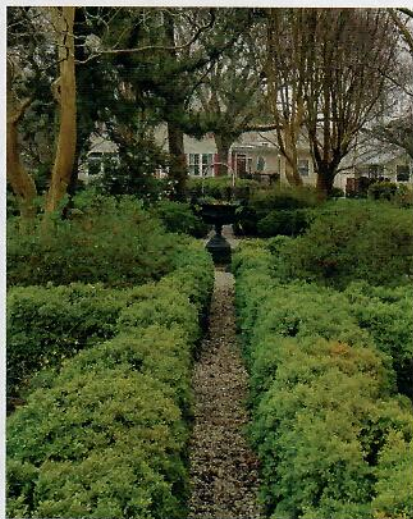
By *Barbara Aiken*

For a Spring weekend away, consider visiting one of the 23 counties or Baltimore City that comprise Maryland. I recently visited one of the more remote counties in the Old Line State, Somerset County on the Eastern Shore. There's a wealth of natural beauty and history worth investigating.

From Annapolis, it's about a two-hour drive to reach Somerset County. On the way there, stop at Layton's Chance Vineyard and Winery in Vienna and Bordeleau Vineyards located in Eden. Check out their websites for events and specials. Unwind a little with a sampling of wines in their tasting rooms. Both wineries have outdoor tables if you want to bring your own al fresco picnic and relax in the tranquil settings of these Eastern Shore wineries.

Deal Island, a three mile long spit on the Chesapeake Bay with a population of about 350 is home to Maryland's skipjacks. You'll pass through the Deal Island Wildlife Management Area to reach this quiet little slice of Maryland.

In the harbors of Deal Island and Wenona, you may see some of the few remaining wooden skipjacks still in use on the bay by commercial oyster fishermen. It's a view into the past to see these elegant vessels from the 1800s. The state boat of Maryland, the skipjack is the last of the working fishing boats



The historic boxwood garden can be found on the southeast corner of Somerset Avenue and Washington Street in Princess Anne. (Barbara Aiken)

to ply the waters of the bay under sail.

Stop by the Gothic Revival-style St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church (about. 1879) and the Greek Revival-style Joshua Thomas Chapel (about. 1850). Here and at the African American John Wesley United Methodist church (1889; rebuilt 1914), sadly now a ruin of late Victorian architecture, the graves are covered with concrete slabs to prevent wooden coffins from floating out of the ground, due to the high water table in the area.

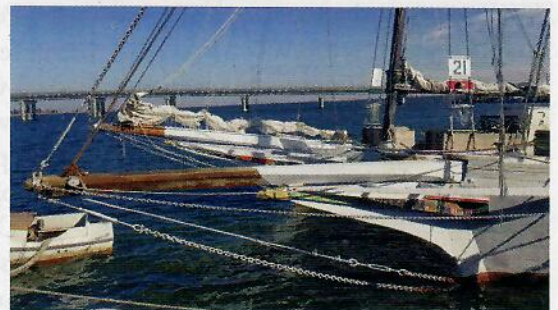
If you're in the mood for fishing, check out Kingfish II Charters in Deal Island. Captain Harry arranges trips for hooking rockfish, drum, flounder and other bay delicacies. Visit Captain Harry's website for a list of his rates and arrangements. Perhaps a sunset cruise would fit the bill or a hunting expedition. Captain Harry can fix you up.

On the way to Crisfield, stop at Janes Island State Park on the Tangier Sound. There are over 30 miles of water trails to discover and sandy beaches to comb; camping is allowed and they have cabins for rent. If planning on staying here, reserve your spot well in advance. This beautiful park is a nature lover's wonderland.

Crisfield is the Eastern Shore gateway to Smith Island and Tangier Island. Consider extending your visit

and take a cruise to the island of your choice where you can visit for the day or spend a night or two. The blue crab capital of Maryland, Crisfield is Maryland's southernmost town. Built on a base of oyster shells this quintessential waterman's town is pure Maryland.

Stop by the Smith Island Baking Company and check out the multitude of flavors of Maryland's very own Smith Island cake. This multi-layered delight can be shipped to your



The state boat of Maryland, the skipjack is the last of the working fishing boats to ply the waters of the bay under sail. You can find them in Wenona Harbor. (Barbara Aiken)

doorstep. From traditional yellow cake with chocolate frosting to strawberry cream, a Smith Island cake is a taste sensation not to be missed.

Consider the 1744 Washington Inn for lodging. Located in the county seat of Princess Anne, this historic inn is charming and cozy and there's one dog friendly room on the first floor. Breakfast is complementary in the tavern where you'll likely meet the affable breakfast regulars who can't get enough of the inn's hearty breakfast fare.

An evening meal at the Washington Inn was memorable. A table in the front dining room by the colonial, green painted fireplace was a delight after a long day of driving and sight-seeing. Starting with a glass of pro-

secco, I enjoyed the warm, multigrain bread and butter; thick slices of tender goodness. I chose one of my favorites as a starter, oysters Rockefeller. The Deal Island oysters were plump, large and succulent. The topping was creamy and smooth with spinach, Parmesan and bacon. These were some of the best I've ever devoured. Care was taken in the kitchen to release the oyster from its muscle.

Next, salmon was on the menu garnished with crispy fried leeks and accompanied by bright green asparagus; whipped, buttery mashed potatoes; and a citrus beurre blanc sauce that complemented the plate. A Bordeaux rose paired beautifully with the meal. To end the feast, sticky toffee pudding with caramel sauce and vanilla ice cream.

The young chef, James Daniels, is producing some excellent cuisine in Princess Anne. James, a self-taught chef hailing from Deal Island, says he watched lots of cooking shows over the years. He has recently taken over as chef at the Washington Inn and is receiving rave reviews from patrons. James says that folks from down south, who relish their grits, have told him that his shrimp and grits are by far the best they've ever savored.

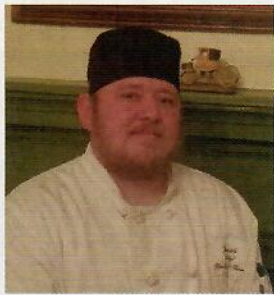
Take a walking tour of charming Princess Anne and visit the Teackle Mansion, completed in 1819. This 10,000 square foot neoclassical home had 19th century modern conveniences ahead of its time. At the southeast corner of Somerset Avenue and Washington Street, you'll discover the romantic historic boxwood garden. This privately owned garden is open to the public during daylight.

Other places of interest in Princess Anne are St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, established in 1692. The Georgian Revival style courthouse

(1904) stands where the 1747 court originally stood. Beckford, a late-Georgian-style home (1803); Nutter's Purchase cottage (about 1733); Linden Hill, boasting Federal and Greek Revival woodwork (about 1835); Colonel George Handy House (1805) a fine example of the Federal period are walkable points of interest among others.

Whether you have one night as I did, or a week or more, you'll enjoy your time in Somerset County. This gem of Maryland awaits your visit of discovery and holds numerous possibilities for the adventurous outdoorsman.

Barbara enjoys traveling as often as possible and can be reached at: barbara.s.aiken@gmail.com.



Washington Inn chef James Daniels is proud of his grits. (Barbara Aiken)

DRINK

Bordeleau Vineyards; <https://www.bordeleauwine.com>
Layton's Chance Vineyard and Winery; www.laytonschance.com

EAT AND STAY

Washington Inn; www.washingtoninnandtavern.com

DISCOVER

Teackle Mansion; www.somersetcountyhistoricalsociety.org/teackle-mansion.html
Somerset County Historical Marker Database; www.hmdb.org/results.asp?Search=Place&Town=Princess%20Anne&State=Maryland

NATURE

Janes Island State Park; dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/eastern/janesisland.aspx
Kingfish II Fishing Charters; www.fishandduck.com



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