



Norfolk has treats for all senses from dawn to midnight with fall strolls from the waterfront to hip neighborhoods.



# A WALKER'S paradise

By Robin Soslow  
Special to The Roanoke Times

Surrounded by rivers, one of the world's largest natural harbors and the Chesapeake Bay, Norfolk makes a perfect getaway for water-lovers. But Virginia's stellar port caters to landlubbers too, with sensational places to walk from sun-up to late night — now with the bonus of rich fall color.

Besides the leaves, visual treats include grand statues, brightly painted boats, barges and battleships, sculptures that flash and glow, and vivid street murals. Then there are the cheery storefronts, elegant mansions and centuries-old churches. The city's sounds range from chirping birds to foghorns to musical artworks anchoring pocket parks.

I'm tempted to spend the morning on a park bench facing a sense-surround sculpture downtown. But there's no time to sit with so many streets and waterfront paths to walk, and a reward awaiting those who return to that sculpture after dark. More on that later.

Here are five terrific walks around town. Prefer to bike? That will work just as well.

## ELIZABETH RIVER TRAIL

Magnificent sights line the Elizabeth River Trail. Worth-



(Clockwise from top left) **Ghent:** Handsome Biscuit has achieved cult status for its sweet potato biscuits stuffed with fresh ingredients. Azar's Market & Cafe serves Mediterranean food such as this falafel platter. **Elizabeth River Trail:** Spend sunset watching boats along the Elizabeth River.

Photos by ROBIN SOSLOW | Special to The Roanoke Times

## NORFOLK: Hermitage Museum hugs curving Lafayette River

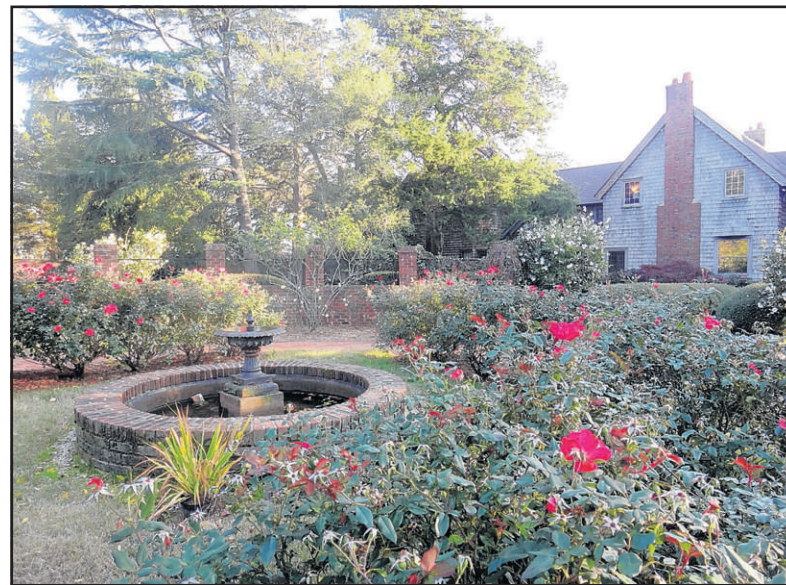
### FROM 6

while stops include Town Point Park, the setting for frequent festivals (the Virginia Food & Wine Festival takes place October 18-19); the Armed Forces Memorial's bronzed reproductions of actual letters written by soldiers (every U.S. war is represented); and the Lone Sailor and other fine-art sculptures. There's also the U.S.S. Wisconsin, a decommissioned battleship that's among the biggest in the world — the same goes for its massive cannons. In striking contrast, just steps away, a big bright pagoda towers above the charming Oriental Garden.

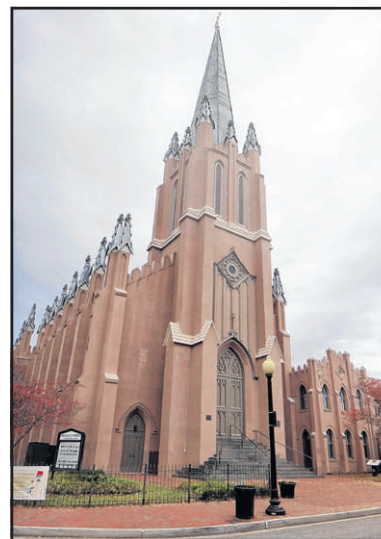
### DOWNTOWN

A short stroll from the waterfront, downtown Norfolk brims with outdoor attractions. The Cannonball Trail celebrates history block-to-block; watch for story-telling bronze plaques or use the free self-guided map available online (see If You Go box). Look for Mermaids on Parade; for this citywide project, local artists created more than 300 distinctive (and sassy) mermaid sculptures. Circling MacArthur Center, a shoppers' mecca, you'll pass 16 huge "Windows on History" wall panels illustrating four centuries of Norfolk's storied past. Urban blocks are punctuated by well-preserved early-1900s gems like the NORVA Theatre and late-1700s mansions with period gardens. They offer counterpoints to modern structures such as a high-rise garage adorned with eerie blinking-eye artworks. Saint Paul's Episcopal Church invites leisurely detours around its graveyard of fascinating tombstones dating to the 1600s. Look closely at its brick walls: One is pocked with the cannonball fired into it during the American Revolution.

In MacArthur Square, a park edging the Tide light-rail depot, look — and listen — for a tall, sun-glittered interactive sculpture. Resembling a super-sized flower bouquet, "MetalMatisse" greets you with graceful waves and tones. Its brilliant colors glow after dark, changing with the movement of passers-by. Rest your weary feet at a local concert or stage show — or dance amid centurion chandeliers, vintage



**Hermitage Museum and Gardens:** This peaceful fountain is among many havens at the Hermitage Museum and Gardens.



**Elizabeth River Trail:** The U.S.S. Wisconsin, now decommissioned, remains one of the largest battleships in the world.

**Downtown:** Handsome historic churches dot downtown streets. This one's close to centuries-old mansions and a mall.

scalloped curtains, Ionic pillars and the six-paneled art deco standee at the majestic Granby Theater built in 1916.

Other outdoor art inhabiting this area includes "Book Migration," painted-aluminum panels of flying bird-like books (or book-like birds) on the side of a post office. Closer to the waterfront, two humpback whales (well, painted ones) swim in a wall mural towering above Waterside Drive. Rounding the building's corner is a frisky whale calf.

### THE HERMITAGE

A short drive or bike ride north of downtown, the Hermitage Museum and Gardens hugs the curving Lafayette River. This hidden haven is free to stroll

every day except Wednesday and Thursday. Lovely paths weave around the Arts-and-Crafts style mansion through formal and wild gardens, around woodlands and wetlands and along river banks. There are abundant places to sit and gaze by antique millstones, superb life-size wood-carvings of birds, and kiosks that describe habitat preservation efforts. Bands occasionally add music to the serene setting.

The mansion is decorated with exquisite carved walls and several thousand intriguing artworks collected by philanthropist Florence Sloane. Among them: embroidered art from India, ancient Buddha figures, Russian tea service pieces, snuff bottles from China, early Coptic tapes-

tries, Spanish lace and stained glass windows. Even burly men gape at the dressing room's walls embedded with slick and secret compartments. No wonder the Smithsonian granted the Hermitage affiliate status several months ago.

On Oct. 12, the Hermitage opens a special evening exhibit of works by artist Bruce Munro. Interactive sculptures crafted from flickering fluorescent tubes, LED-lit water bottles, owl's-eye-like fresnel lenses and other reclaimed materials will illuminate the estate's gardens, woods and shoreline.

### GRANBY STREET

Recently revitalized Granby Street makes a lively stroll thanks



**Granby Street:** This futuristic sculpture is one of several adorning transit stops.

to high-energy local artists now occupying its historic buildings. The street cuts through downtown and rambles into Ghent. Wide walkways pass numerous cool sculptures made from found materials as well as pop art on building walls, windows and billboards. Art happenings sponsored by Norfolk Arts and Design District volunteers bring the street to life on select nights. Recently opened eateries that quickly landed on locals' favorites list include cozy Chartreuse and garage-doored Field Guide, where juicy sandwiches require fistfuls of napkins and hand-cut sweet potato fries prove addictive.

### GHENT

The historic neighborhood of Ghent keeps feet shuffling with cheerful, inventive restaurants, outdoor cafes, pubs and shops. Artsy boutiques include Kitsch, stocked wall-to-wall with wares from salvage-craft to plush cushions embroidered with amusing scenes. The neighborhood teases the eye with merrily decorated windows and outdoor wall murals, some featuring wacky creatures sprung from dreams.

Spend one lunch hour at a free glass-blowing demo at the Chrysler Glass Studio — it's quite a show. Leave time to wander next door through the Chrysler Museum of Art. This world-class treasure reopened in May with new wings, shimmering glass galleries and a black box theater.

The aromas and wallet-friendly prices make it hard to resist sampling the town's takes on world cuisines from Thai to Turkish. For global street foods, hit Streats, a relative newcomer. Craving something southern? Handsome Biscuit serves up habit-forming stuffed sweet potato biscuits in a perky shack near the railroad tracks.

Wherever you walk, you'll encounter plenty of man-made sights. For nature's art, grab a bench by the river or stretch out in the sand of Norfolk's Ocean View beach, where Chesapeake Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean. You'll enjoy the views — and your feet will appreciate the rest.

Robin Soslow, an award-winning writer who travels on foot and bike, can be reached at rsoslow@gmail.com.

### If you go

Getting there: Norfolk is four hours east of Roanoke.

### SIGHTS TO SEE:

#### ■ Hermitage Museum & Gardens

Riverside paradise for walkers and browsers of fine art and furnishings. Friday-Tuesday.  
7637 North Shore Rd.  
757-423-2052  
www.thehermitagemuseum.org

#### ■ Chrysler Museum of Art

Newly remodeled and

expanded art pantheon. Free demonstrations at the Glass Studio at noon Tuesday-Sunday.

1 Memorial Place  
757-664-6200  
www.chrysler.org

**Free walking tour maps**  
www.visitnorfolktoday.com/things-to-do/tour/self-guided

### DINING:

#### ■ Field Guide

Saucy eats made with regionally sourced ingredients served at

communal tables. The garage door cranks open to let in the nice weather.

429 Granby St.  
757-943-9805  
www.fieldguide.is

#### ■ Chartreuse Bistro

European-inspired organic farm-to-table cuisine.  
205 E City Hall Ave.  
757-965-2137  
www.chartreusebistro.us

#### ■ Pasha Mezze

Mediterranean delicacies, expanded with big patio.  
350 W. 22nd St.

757-627-1318  
www.pashamezze.com

#### ■ Charlie's Cafe

Tasty fresh-meets-diner dishes, homemade doughnuts, half-gallon mimosas.  
1800 Granby St.  
757-962-7701  
www.charliesamericancafe.com

#### ■ Elliot's Fair Grounds

Freshly roasted coffee and locally baked treats.  
806 Baldwin Ave.  
757-640-2899

www.fairgroundscoffee.com

#### ■ Handsome Biscuit

Sweet potato biscuits generously stuffed with fresh ingredients.  
2511 Colonial Place  
(no phone)  
www.handsomebiscuit.com

### LODGING:

#### ■ Tazewell Hotel and Suites

Conveniently located historic property.  
245 Granby St.  
757-623-6200

www.thetazewell.com

#### ■ Page House Inn

Rooms with private baths and home-cooked breakfasts.  
323 Fairfax Ave.  
757-625-5033  
www.pagehouseinn.com

### VISITOR INFO:

757-664-6620  
www.visitnorfolktoday.com

