

# Need a Getaway?

TRY HARRISONBURG,  
*Virginia*



BY LINDA BARRETT

I had the privilege of attending college in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the same town where my ancestors found their footing in America, and where their names, stories, homes, and businesses still survive today. But after school, I left what was then a small town to seek my fortunes in the larger cities of Virginia.

Recently I went back, and was excited by the changes in the 'burg. Harrisonburg is now making a name for itself in cultural, arts, historical and foodie circles. In fact, it was designated the first Culinary District in Virginia.

Check into the **Joshua Wilton House Bed & Breakfast**, the only downtown B&B. This elegantly-restored Victorian home is the perfect place to rest your head and enjoy a great deal of what Harrisonburg offers within walking distance. Select from one of five elegantly appointed rooms that include a full gourmet breakfast, and book at least one night's dinner there to enjoy upscale dining featuring high-quality ingredients from the area's local farms and an extensive Wine Spectator award-winning wine list.

If pastry chef Elizabeth Stover offers you one of her baked goods, say "yes." In her words, "I get to make edible love and feed it to people every day." I smuggled out several of her creations for an afternoon treat.

Make your first stop at the **Hardesty-Higgins House Visitors Center**, a block away. Here you'll find a downtown map, brochures, gift shop, and cafe. History buffs will enjoy the Civil War Orientation Center and Valley Turnpike Museum. Note the signed records book in the front room display; it is one my great-great-grandmother saved from a local courthouse after the Yankees set the building afire (another is displayed inside the Courthouse).

Across the street, visit the Virginia Quilt Museum, with three floors of rotating, curated quilt exhibits celebrating Virginia's art and cultural heritage. Then wander two blocks past the Farmer's Market to the **Hugo Kohl Museum of American Jewelry Design and Manufacturing**—and jewelry store.



American Celebration polar bear float with director of marketing



Staff at Bella Gelato



Hugo Kohl, jewelry museum



All photos credit: Linda Barrett





*pastry chef at Joshua Wilton House*



Joshua Wilton House B&B and restaurant

While traveling, jeweler Hugo Kohl stumbled across some workers dumping boxes of steel parts into a dump truck to be sold for scrap metal. One box broke open and pieces tumbled out onto the ground, and Kohl went over to investigate. He discovered valuable hubs—blocks of steel with intricate hand-carved designs used to create jewelry in the 1800s. Beginning with those, Kohl’s collection now contains more than 3,000 hubs, dies, and rolls, along with many of the original manufacturing equipment pieces used to create Victorian jewelry in the Industrial Age. He uses this equipment today to create his unique designs, and offers daily tours of the manufacturing process. Save time to shop!

Enjoy lunch at **Bella Luna Wood Fired Pizza** (voted Best Pizzeria in the Shenandoah Valley and Harrisonburg’s first farm-to-table restaurant). Watch your pizza cook in the massive 900-degree wood-fired oven, or order from the artisanal and seasonal menu featuring produce, meats, and cheeses from Valley farms. Organic flours are used in making the hand-made pizza and pastas and an extensive wine list is available.

Then cross the street to **Bella Gelato & Pastries** for something sweet (same owners). Try the hand-crafted chocolate gelato sandwiched between two lavender cookies, or a crumbly scone.

You could literally eat your way through the 40-block culinary district of Harrisonburg where 40 restaurants showcase innovative menus ranging from mainstream to ethnic selections, and fine dining to casual. Take a 2.5-hour **Rocktown Bites! Food Tour** for samples and the behind-the-scenes “dish”.

Harrisonburg also earned the nickname “Beertown” for its influx of craft breweries. Sample brews at **Three Brothers Brewing** microbrewery (you can find their beer in Northern Virginia stores) or attend the twice-annual Rocktown Beer & Music Festival (April and September).

Nestled in the embrace of the Shenandoah Valley, visitors enjoy a peaceful yet rich getaway. The 10-block vibrant downtown area was designated Virginia’s first Arts & Cultural District, with a dozen or more galleries featuring local artisans and artists, museums, and exciting performances at the **Forbes Center for the Performing Arts**.



Breakfast foods at Joshua Wilton House

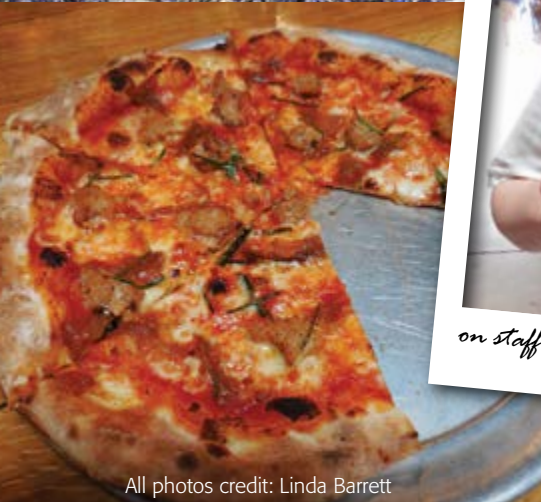


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*Harrisonburg Farmers Market*



All photos credit: Linda Barrett

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## *Exploring the Valley*

Plan a day or two to enjoy the serene rolling hills and mountain vistas of the Shenandoah Valley. With stunning settings, Bluestone Vineyard, CrossKeys Vineyards, the Purple WOLF Vineyard, and Old Hill Cider are open for weekend tours and tastings. At The Purple WOLF, part of the **White Oak Lavender Farm**, sample the unique taste of a lavender infusion or warm lavender mulled wine.

The Lavender Farm is a destination itself, with more than 32 varieties of aromatic lavender, farm animals, meditation areas, a labyrinth, and plenty of places to kick back. You might find yourself quite content in a hammock amidst the fragrant meadow.

Don't be surprised to see a horse and buggy along the roads; the Harrisonburg area is home to a thriving Mennonite population. Visit the Old Order Mennonite-Amish **Dayton Farmer's Market**, or the **Shenandoah Heritage Market**, where locally-owned shops offer hand-made quilts, gourmet foods, candy, kitchenwares, Amish-made furniture and more. Book lovers also flock to the **Green Valley Book Fair**, a 25,000-square foot discounted book outlet only open several times a year.

For a quirky adventure, cool off in the 56-degree **Shenandoah Caverns** on a one-mile trek through seventeen spectacular rooms. Look for the "Breakfast Bacon" that appeared in *National Geographic* magazine. Also at their complex, don't miss **Celebration on Parade**, especially in this election year. You'll see the massive floats and platforms used in Presidential parades and Inaugural ceremonies, as well as the Tournament of Roses parade—up close. Sit inside a float and learn how they maneuver down the street.

Then pop into the nearby **Route 11 Potato Chip factory** for handmade specialty chips in 10 gourmet flavors including Chesapeake Crab and Dill Pickle. Sample each kind as you watch the chips move down the conveyor belt into take-home packages.

So close to D.C., Harrisonburg still leaves you with the feeling that you've traveled afar. Its warm and friendly people, fabulous foods and plethora of interesting attractions offer more than one reason to visit. ❖

### **Harrisonburg Tourism**

[www.visitharrisonburgva.com](http://www.visitharrisonburgva.com)



*on staff at Bella Luna Restaurant*

**AUTHOR:** Linda Barrett is a graduate of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA as are her brother and sister. Her grandmother attended the college in the 1920s, and her grandfather was born in a house just off Court Square. The town was almost named after the family even—but that's another story. When not traveling, Linda is owner of All the Buzz, a corporate copywriting firm for websites, brochures, blogs and business communications. [www.allthebuzz.net](http://www.allthebuzz.net).