

Jefferson County, W.Va. : history, scenery and nightlife

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Jefferson County, in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, has three very different cities with something for everyone.

Charles Town was founded by the youngest brother of George Washington in 1786. There are still many Washington family homes in town. It's also home to Charles Town Races and Slots. Shepherdstown is a college town with several exclusive boutiques and sophisticated restaurants. Harpers Ferry is nestled at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, where West Virginia borders Virginia and Maryland. It was the site of John Brown's raid and the view that Thomas Jefferson deemed "Worth crossing the Atlantic for."



You can get there from Huntington in about six hours.

What to do: Charles Town Races and Slots is open until 4 a.m., except for weekends when it runs 24 hours. There are great places to see the live horseracing all over the complex. They have thousands of slot machines, including penny slots. On weekends, live bands play.

The Jefferson County Museum (www.jeffctywvmuseum.org) has rare documents, as well as Revolutionary, Civil War, Storer College and other artifacts.

Charles Town's Back In Time Warehouse (www.bitw.com) is a one of a kind 1950s furniture and accessory restoration showroom, where many A-list movie, rock and country stars shop. It's open to the public.

Harpers Ferry (www.nps.gov/hafe) has free guided tours, Civil War re-enactors, hiking, vendors who arrange tubing and whitewater rafting, as well as shops catering to outdoor activities. The vistas over the rivers, the town and the C & O canal are breathtaking. This was also the site of "The Salty Dog Tavern" of Johnny Cash lore. Speaking of dogs, they are welcome in Harpers Ferry in the park, as well as at some outdoor dining venues.

Shepherdstown's shops include the delightfully odd O'Hurley's General Store (www.ohurley.com), the glamorous She Town Divas (<http://shetowndivas.com>), and the luxurious Skin Care Shop (www.theskincareshop.com). When the sun sets Thursday through Saturday, check out the live music at Blue Moon Café (www.myspace.com/bluemooncafe), with outdoor seating and a beer/wine license. You never know what kind of music you'll hear there, but it'll be original. There is also free Wi-Fi and an honor library.

Where to eat: John's My Pappy's Place on U.S. 340 in Rippon, W.Va., is a very family-friendly, Christian-friendly restaurant serving home-style cooking that you wish you made at home. You can get sides for under \$2, homemade soups (try the cream of crab) for under \$5, or splash out for something gourmet like the stuffed lobster. Their "hillbilly chicken" is a great deal, too. It is closed Sundays.

Charles Town Races and Slots has all kinds of dining options at all price points. Treat yourself to The Skyline Terrace Inn (www.ctownraces.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=68), so you can watch the horse races in serene comfort. You will have all kinds of exotic options on the buffet or go for some of Chef Adam Artzer's creations off the menu. He has a background working in Kansas City steakhouses, so everything has top-notch quality and freshness. Everything's homemade –though they serve thousands – including the breads and desserts.

Right on the Potomac River in Shepherdstown is The Bavarian Inn (www.bavarianinnwv.com/dining.shtml). Because they have luxury accommodations as well (river views, rose petal turndown service available), the restaurant is open 365 days a year. Its chef has just won the coveted and rare Master Chef certification and serves both traditional Bavarian and contemporary selections.

Where to stay: The Inn at Charles Town overlooks the racetrack, with many complimentary amenities including breakfast buffet, Wi-Fi and shuttle service to the slots.

The Towns Inn (www.thetownsinn.com) is right on Harpers Ferry's historic road, adjacent to the Appalachian Trail. You can also rent hostel-style accommodations from them at very reasonable rates. They also feature a pub with outdoor patio seating.