



TRAVEL LINE with Carol Timblin

The camellias have been blooming at Middleton Place on the Ashley River near Charleston, South Carolina, for well over a month and guided tours of 65 acres of gardens continue through March. These are the oldest landscaped gardens in America, dating to 1741, and feature the 1786 Reine des Fleurs, one of the first camellias planted in this country. Middleton Place (www.middletonplace.org) was the home of Henry Middleton, president of the First Continental Congress, and four succeeding generations, including a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a state governor, and a signer of the Ordinance of Secession. A National Historic Landmark, the plantation is one of several year-round gardens in the low country that are especially popular when springtime blooms peak. Others are Magnolia, Cypress, Drayton Hall, and Boone Hall.

Homes and gardens will be celebrated throughout Virginia during Historic Garden Week, April 17-25, now in its 77th year. Sponsored by The Garden Club of Virginia, the annual event is considered "America's Largest Open House," with more than 250 of the state's most beautiful gardens, homes, and historic landmarks open to the public. Every type of garden imaginable — from cottage gardens to water gardens to cutting gardens — representing more than four centuries of gardening in America — will be on display. In Thomas Jefferson's "Little Eden," gardens at Monticello, the University of Virginia, and the Blandemar Farms area are featured. Garden sites in northern Virginia are located in Middleburg's Hunt Country and Winchester. Richmond gardens include St. John's Episcopal Church, where Patrick Henry delivered his famous speech. Many gardens in Williamsburg, Norfolk, Alexandria, Lexington, and Fredericksburg are also open for tours. Wherever you travel in Virginia during Garden Week, you should be able to find a garden tour. Visit www.vagardenweek.org for more details.

While visiting area gardens, you might also sample some Virginia wines. Last fall I had the pleasure of touring the Williamsburg Winery, established by the Duffeler family in 1985. It has the look of a European winery and the wines it produces are some of Virginia's most popular. Virginia's largest winery, producing more than 60,000 cases annually, is open for

tours year-round (\$8 per person). On Thursday evenings, the winery pairs special wines with dinner at the tavern. For more information on this unique Williamsburg attraction, call 757-229-0999 or visit www.williamsburgwinery.com. Information on other Virginia wineries and vineyards is available at www.virginiawine.org.

Virginia's Hampton Roads area will also be a happening place from April 15 through May 30. That's when the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg host the 14th annual Virginia Arts Festival, an all-encompassing event that is similar to Charleston's renowned Spoleto Festival USA (May 28-June 13 this year). Anyone who loves music, art, dance, and theater will find something to appreciate at this stellar event. Among the many scheduled performances are the Birmingham Royal Ballet, Garth Fagan Dance, Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*, Pilobolus Dance Theatre, and the Virginia International Tattoo. Comparable to the world-famous Edinburgh Tattoo, this spectacular event will be held on April 30 and May 1-2 at Norfolk's Scope Arena. To find out more about the festival, call 757-282-2822 or visit www.vafest.org.

Elsewhere in the Mid-Atlantic

Gardens all over the Mid-Atlantic will soon be in bloom. Through the end of March, the 1,050-acre Longwood Gardens is featuring an Orchid Extravaganza in its Conservatory, with lavish displays of orchids, musical concerts, and plant sales. Beginning on April 10, the gardens will host Making Scents: The Art and Passion of Fragrance, an interactive exhibit that explores the art, science, and mystery of fragrance. Lilytopia, May 21-31, will showcase the newest varieties of lilies from Dutch hybridizers — more than 10,000 stems in all. Details are available at www.longwoodgardens.com.

More than 500,000 visitors are expected to attend the National Cherry Blossom Festival on March 27-April 11 in Washington. This year marks the 98th anniversary of Japan's gift of cherry trees to the United States, and the celebration includes special events, art exhibits, sports competitions, and other activities. Call the Festival hotline at 800-44BLOOM or visit www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org for more information.

March 25, the package may be booked by calling 800-447-8679 or visiting www.colonialwilliamsburgresort.com/packages/winter-stories-package.

Other Travel Opportunities

The Orlando Magicard, free and downloadable at www.VisitOrlando.com/deals, gives year-round savings at more than 75 establishments, including attractions, accommodations, restaurants, dinner theaters, ground transportation, golf courses, and cultural arts venues. Cost-conscious vacationers should also be on the lookout for a new Super Deal, to be announced on March 2. (The one that just expired provided some amazing discounts.)

New Orleans Wine and Food Experience, including in *Wine Enthusiast's* perennial "Top Ten" is coming up on May 25-29. If you're planning to go, you may want to take advantage of some great hotel packages that include tickets and other special perks, with optional upgrades. Here's a summary: NOWFE 101, Astor Crowne Plaza, \$101 per day, plus taxes; A Taste of Royal Street Shopping, Hotel Monteleone, \$516, taxes included; Wine, Dine, and Unwind, The Ritz Carlton New Orleans, \$1,729, plus taxes (valid May 27-30); Sip and Savor, The Roosevelt Hotel, \$359, plus taxes; Wine and Food Connoisseur, Windsor Court Hotel, \$399, plus taxes. More information, hotel reservations, and event tickets may be secured on-line at www.nowfe.com.



The Virginia International Tattoo is a unique experience that takes place during the Virginia Arts Festival.

The Oxford Experience is a residential summer program of one-week courses for people of all ages who are interested in a variety of subjects, ranging from The Crusades to the English Romantic Poets to the Beatles. This year's school will be held at Christ Church in Oxford, England, July 4-Aug. 7. The price of a one-week course, including tuition, accommodations, and all meals, is £1,050 or \$1,691. Excursions and bathrooms are extra. May 1 is the deadline for registration. For more details, visit www.conted.ox.ac.uk/oxfordexperience.

Chicago-based AHI Travel is offering the "Grand Journey around the World," a 26-day adventure that takes travelers to eight countries, three continents, and nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Places on the tour include the ancient Japanese capital of Kyoto; Beijing's Forbidden City and the Great Wall; Bangkok's Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha; Egypt's Pyramids, Valley of the Sphinx, and Petra (Jordan); Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, the Western Wall, and the Dome of the Rock; a desert safari and alfresco dinner in Dubai; and a Rhine cruise to the vineyards and medieval towns of Germany. Travel dates are Aug. 28-Sept. 22, Sept. 4-29,

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The gardens at Monticello are part of Virginia's Garden Week.

The Williamsburg Lodge in Colonial Williamsburg has a current offer that is difficult to refuse. The Winter Stories Package, starting at \$299 per couple, includes a three-day, two-night stay, a \$100 gift card, daily breakfast, length-of-stay admission to the Historic Area and museums, and access to exclusive programming, including The History of Theater in Williamsburg and an audience with a founding father. The gift card may be applied toward spa services at The Spa, golf at Golden Horseshoe Golf Club, dining in taverns and restaurants, and shopping in official Colonial Williamsburg shops. There's no additional charge for using the fitness center and the heated indoor lap pool at The Spa. Good through