

Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel

Manmade Marvel Connects Eastern Shore and Tidewater

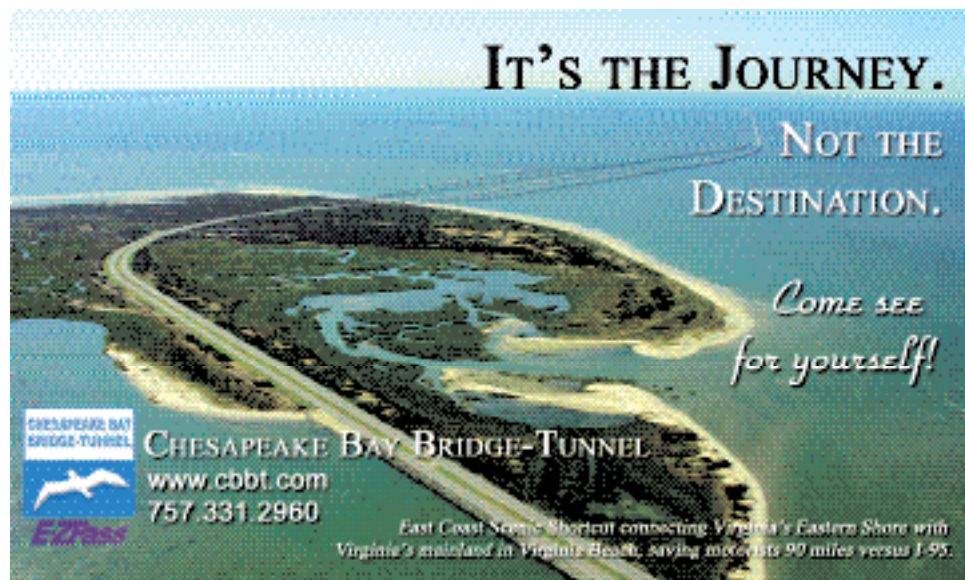
Billed as “One of Seven Engineering Wonders of the Modern World,” the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel connects Virginia’s tidewater area to Virginia’s eastern shore. “We are the largest bridge-tunnel in the world,” says Page Addison, who’s worked at the facility for 15 years.

The 20-mile-long road consists of two separate bridges and two one-mile-long tunnels that cross the lower Chesapeake Bay. “You cross 17.6 miles of open water on a combination of low-trestle and high-rise bridges and tunnels under the water,” Addison says. The CBBT offers a pleasant alternative to I-95 and a pathway from tidewater’s attractions to the slower pace of the eastern shore.

Prior to 1964, when the first bridge-tunnel structure opened, passengers rode ferries to and from the Hampton Roads area. The CBBT’s Parallel Crossing was completed in 1999. The facility is funded solely by user tolls. A one-way fare costs \$12. A same day return trip costs \$5. E-Zpass is also accepted.

The Experience

You can download a free self-guided iPod tour (tailored to either north- or south-



Lower Eastern Shore Beckons

Cross the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel to the eastern side and you enter the lower eastern shore, a world apart from the sometimes frenetic pace of tidewater. Here is a land of nature, history, and hospitality ranging from cozy bed and breakfasts to golf resorts.

Outdoor enthusiasts may prefer Cherrystone Family Camping and RV Resort’s deluxe cottages, camping cabins, or rental trailers on 300 acres overlooking the Chesapeake Bay. “We’re a destination campground with everything you need including our own charter boat, swimming pools, splash park, general store, café, and theme weekends from summer through October,” says James “Hop” Hopkins, the campground manager. (www.cherrystoneva.com)

No matter what your skill level at paddling, Southeast Expeditions helps you to discover the Mid-Atlantic’s last wild coast. Owner Dave Burden says, “I could be doing this anywhere, but I can’t think of a better place to kayak than Virginia’s eastern shore.” Kayakers can also rent gear and take solo trips. (www.southeastexpeditions.net)

bound travel) that includes CBBT facts and points of interest along the way. But not all travelers hurry through the experience; some stop to fish, view wildlife, and stroll.

Traveling over the bridge creates a sense of liberation. Cradled by the vast bay and ocean, tiny watercraft and sailboats bounce over gentle troughs below. Three miles after entering the bridge from the south, a rest stop lures drivers and passengers to walk about, fish, or peer at the Chesapeake Bay through scopes.

The tunnels take you beneath shipping channels used by oceangoing freighters and cruise ships.



One of the manmade islands along the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel even has a fishing pier.

Birding

Back on the bridge, it is commonplace to spot gulls, cormorants, and terns perched on light poles. During warm seasons, Brown Pelicans glide through the air.

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel is also part of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. Escorted bird tours cost \$50/hour for groups of up to 15.

Manmade islands comprised of concrete, steel, and asphalt, and rock islands in open water furnish rest stops for spring- and fall-migrating shorebirds. Northern Gannets, King Eiders, and other novel species make this one of the best winter birding sites in Virginia. Occasionally, harbor seals and wintering whales are also sighted.

Fishing

On the southernmost of four manmade islands and 3.5 miles offshore, the 625-foot-long wheelchair accessible Seagull Fishing Pier is open daily. “Because you are 3.5 miles offshore, you can fish from the pier for things most people have to be in a boat to catch,” Addison says. Unlimited use of the pier costs nothing. A fishing license is not required.

Depending on the season, you may catch black drum, flounder, or rockfish. There is a convenient certified weigh station and cleaning area.

Welcome Center

Opened in August, 2009, the Welcome Center dispenses information about life and attractions on Virginia’s eastern shore. Local artist exhibits and a five-minute video help acclimate visitors. Outside, travelers walk dogs and picnic or explore the adjoining Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge. A butterfly trail beckons as a way to stretch your legs and get you into the slower swing of the shore.

By Emily M. Grey

CHECK IT OUT

Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel: 757-331-2960, www.cbbt.com