

Things to Do in Harrisonburg, VA: Best Attractions & Adventures



Harrisonburg is one of Virginia's most underrated travel destinations. Nestled in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, this vibrant city combines scenic mountain landscapes, a walkable downtown, rich history, outdoor adventures, and a thriving local food scene. Whether you are planning a weekend getaway, a family vacation, or a stop along a Virginia road trip, Harrisonburg offers something for every type of traveler.

What makes Harrisonburg unique is its location. The city serves as a gateway to Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive, and the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, while also offering museums, breweries, farmers markets, parks, and cultural attractions within its own downtown. This balance between urban convenience and natural beauty marked it among the excellent [US destinations](#) that can be visited throughout the year.

In our experience researching destinations across Virginia, Harrisonburg stands out because it offers authentic local experiences without the crowds found in many larger [*US tourist cities*](#). Visitors can spend the morning hiking mountain trails, enjoy lunch at a locally owned restaurant, browse boutiques and art galleries downtown, and finish the day with a craft beer or a scenic sunset overlooking the Shenandoah Valley. Whether you are traveling with family, friends, or exploring solo, these are the best things to do in Harrisonburg, VA.

Top 15 Things to Do in Harrisonburg, VA

Experience Harrisonburg through its charming downtown, scenic parks, local museums, nearby mountain adventures, and unique attractions that showcase the very best of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

Explore Downtown Harrisonburg

Downtown Harrisonburg is the heart of the city and the best place to begin your visit. The historic district blends beautifully restored architecture with independent shops, art galleries, cafés, breweries, and locally owned restaurants, creating a lively atmosphere throughout the year.

Walking through downtown allows visitors to experience the city's character at a relaxed pace. Public art, colorful murals, boutique stores, and welcoming sidewalks encourage visitors to slow down and explore each block. Seasonal festivals, farmers markets, and live entertainment regularly bring additional energy to the area.

We recommend setting aside at least half a day for downtown. Many travelers arrive expecting a quick stroll but end up spending several hours exploring local businesses and enjoying the friendly atmosphere.

Visit the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum

Located on the campus of James Madison University, the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum is one of Harrisonburg's most peaceful attractions. This 125-acre botanical preserve features walking trails, native Virginia plants, wetlands, gardens, and woodland habitats that can be enjoyed throughout every season.

The trails are relatively easy, making the arboretum suitable for families, casual walkers, photographers, and anyone looking for a quiet escape from the city's busier areas.

Spring and early summer are especially beautiful as wildflowers and flowering trees bloom across the property, while autumn transforms the landscape with vibrant fall colors. In our experience, this is one of Harrisonburg's hidden gems and a perfect place to experience the natural beauty of the Shenandoah Valley without leaving the city.

Discover the Explore More Discovery Museum

Families visiting Harrisonburg should make time for the Explore More Discovery Museum. Designed primarily for children, the museum features interactive exhibits that encourage learning through hands-on play. Young visitors can explore science, construction, transportation, art, agriculture, and imaginative role-playing exhibits, making it one of the city's top family attractions.

Parents often appreciate that the museum keeps children engaged while also providing educational value. Interactive activities encourage creativity, problem-solving, and curiosity in an enjoyable environment. If you are traveling with younger children, this museum is one of the best indoor activities in Harrisonburg, particularly during rainy or colder days.

Tour the Virginia Quilt Museum

Harrisonburg is home to the Virginia Quilt Museum, the official state museum dedicated to preserving the art and history of quilting. Visitors can explore rotating exhibits showcasing handcrafted quilts from different historical periods, artistic

styles, and regions of Virginia. The museum also highlights the cultural importance of quilting and the craftsmanship behind each piece.

Even travelers who are not familiar with quilting often leave impressed by the creativity, detail, and historical significance displayed throughout the exhibits. For those interested in American folk art, local history, or traditional craftsmanship, the Virginia Quilt Museum offers a unique experience unlike most museums in Virginia.

Walk Through Hillandale Park

Hillandale Park is one of Harrisonburg's favorite outdoor spaces for recreation and relaxation. The park features walking trails, playgrounds, athletic fields, picnic shelters, and large open green spaces that attract both locals and visitors.

Whether you are looking for a peaceful morning walk, a family picnic, or a place for children to play, Hillandale Park provides a welcoming environment surrounded by mature trees and natural scenery.

The paved walking paths make the park accessible for visitors of various ages and fitness levels, while the spacious layout ensures there's plenty of room to unwind. We recommend visiting in the morning or early evening when temperatures are cooler and the park is at its most peaceful.

Hike in Shenandoah National Park

One of the biggest advantages of visiting Harrisonburg is its proximity to Shenandoah National Park, one of Virginia's premier outdoor destinations. Within a short drive, visitors can access scenic hiking trails, waterfalls, mountain overlooks, wildlife viewing areas, and sections of the famous Skyline Drive.

Hiking opportunities range from short family-friendly walks to challenging mountain trails, making the park suitable for all experience levels. In our experience, many visitors choose Harrisonburg specifically because it offers

convenient access to Shenandoah National Park while providing more affordable accommodations and dining than staying closer to the park entrances.

Visit White Oak Lavender Farm

Located just outside Harrisonburg, White Oak Lavender Farm offers one of the region's most relaxing experiences. During the blooming season, fields of fragrant lavender create beautiful scenery that attracts photographers, couples, and families alike.

Visitors can stroll through the gardens, learn about lavender cultivation, browse locally made products, and enjoy the peaceful countryside atmosphere. The farm also features walking paths, picnic areas, seasonal events, and educational displays about sustainable farming practices. If you are looking for a quieter attraction away from downtown, White Oak Lavender Farm is well worth adding to your itinerary.

Explore James Madison University

James Madison University is one of Harrisonburg's defining landmarks. The beautifully landscaped campus features impressive academic buildings, public art, walking paths, gardens, and athletic facilities that visitors can explore throughout the year.

Many travelers enjoy walking through the university because of its welcoming atmosphere and attractive architecture. Sporting events, concerts, lectures, and cultural performances also take place regularly, adding even more reasons to visit. The university contributes significantly to Harrisonburg's vibrant energy and youthful atmosphere, making it an essential stop during any visit.

Browse the Harrisonburg Farmers Market

The Harrisonburg Farmers Market provides an authentic glimpse into the Shenandoah Valley's agricultural heritage. Local farmers, bakers, artisans, and food producers gather to sell fresh produce, handmade goods, baked treats, flowers, honey, cheeses, and locally crafted products.

Beyond shopping, the market offers an opportunity to meet local vendors and experience the community spirit that defines Harrisonburg. We recommend arriving early for the best selection and taking time to sample regional specialties that showcase Virginia's rich farming traditions.

Enjoy Harrisonburg's Local Craft Breweries

Harrisonburg has earned a reputation as one of Virginia's emerging craft beer destinations. Several locally owned breweries offer small-batch beers, welcoming taprooms, live music, and community events throughout the year.

Many breweries focus on using locally sourced ingredients and seasonal recipes, giving visitors an authentic taste of the Shenandoah Valley. Even if you're not a dedicated craft beer enthusiast, brewery visits provide an excellent opportunity to experience Harrisonburg's friendly local culture while relaxing after a day of sightseeing.

In our experience, spending an evening at one of Harrisonburg's breweries is one of the best ways to connect with the city's welcoming community and vibrant social scene.

Visit the Hardesty-Higgins House Visitor Center

The Hardesty-Higgins House Visitor Center is the perfect place to learn about Harrisonburg before exploring the rest of the city. Housed inside one of the area's oldest historic buildings, the visitor center combines local history with helpful travel information, exhibits, and regional resources.

Inside, you will find interactive displays highlighting Harrisonburg's heritage, the Shenandoah Valley, nearby attractions, and local businesses. Friendly staff can also provide maps, recommendations, and insider tips for making the most of your visit.

The building itself is worth exploring. Originally constructed in the early 1800s, it has been carefully restored while preserving much of its historic character. We recommend making this one of your first stops in Harrisonburg, especially if it's your first visit to the Shenandoah Valley.

Walk or Bike the Bluestone Trail

For travelers who enjoy spending time outdoors, the Bluestone Trail offers a scenic and accessible way to explore Harrisonburg. This paved multi-use trail winds through woodlands, neighborhoods, and green spaces while connecting several parks and community areas. Whether you prefer walking, jogging, or cycling, the trail provides a peaceful escape from the city's busier streets.

The relatively gentle terrain makes it suitable for visitors of all ages and fitness levels, and several sections offer benches where you can stop and enjoy the surrounding scenery. In our experience, the Bluestone Trail is one of Harrisonburg's lesser-known attractions that deserves far more attention from visitors looking for a relaxing outdoor activity.

Drive Along Skyline Drive

Just a short drive from Harrisonburg, Skyline Drive is one of Virginia's most iconic scenic roads and an unforgettable experience for anyone visiting the Shenandoah Valley. Stretching for more than 100 miles through Shenandoah National Park, the route features dozens of scenic overlooks with panoramic views of mountains, forests, and rolling valleys.

Depending on the season, you will enjoy blooming wildflowers, lush summer landscapes, vibrant fall foliage, or peaceful winter scenery. We recommend allowing several hours for the drive so you can stop at overlooks, enjoy short

hiking trails, and fully appreciate one of the most beautiful road trips in the eastern United States.

Attend a Local Festival or Community Event

Throughout the year, Harrisonburg hosts a variety of festivals, farmers markets, cultural celebrations, concerts, and community gatherings that showcase the city's welcoming atmosphere. Popular annual events celebrate everything from local food and agriculture to music, arts, and the rich cultural diversity of the Shenandoah Valley.

These festivals provide an excellent opportunity to experience Harrisonburg beyond its attractions by meeting local residents, supporting small businesses, and enjoying live entertainment. If your travel dates are flexible, we recommend checking the city's event calendar before your visit. Planning your trip around a local festival can add another memorable experience to your itinerary.

Take a Day Trip to Massanutten Resort

Located less than 20 minutes from downtown Harrisonburg, Massanutten Resort is one of the Shenandoah Valley's premier four-season destinations and makes an excellent day trip. Depending on the time of year, visitors can enjoy skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, ziplining, golf, scenic chairlift rides, hiking, indoor and outdoor water parks, and family-friendly adventure activities.

One of the biggest advantages of staying in Harrisonburg is having easy access to the resort while enjoying the city's wider selection of restaurants, accommodations, and local attractions. Whether you are visiting during summer or winter, Massanutten Resort offers enough activities to keep visitors entertained for an entire day.

Best Time to Visit Harrisonburg

Harrisonburg is a year-round destination, but each season offers a different experience. Your ideal time to visit depends on the activities you want to enjoy, the weather you prefer, and whether you are hoping to experience the Shenandoah Valley's famous seasonal scenery.

Spring (March-May)

Spring is one of the most beautiful times to visit Harrisonburg. Blooming wildflowers, comfortable temperatures, and green mountain landscapes make it an excellent season for hiking, scenic drives, botanical gardens, and outdoor festivals.

Summer (June-August)

Summer is ideal for exploring Shenandoah National Park, attending local events, visiting farmers markets, and enjoying outdoor dining. Longer daylight hours also provide more time for sightseeing and day trips throughout the valley.

Fall (September-November)

Many travelers consider fall the best time to visit Harrisonburg. Brilliant autumn foliage transforms the surrounding mountains into a colorful landscape, making Skyline Drive, hiking trails, and scenic overlooks especially spectacular.

Winter (December-February)

Winter offers a quieter travel experience with fewer crowds. Visitors can enjoy nearby skiing and snowboarding at Massanutten Resort, holiday events, cozy cafés, and peaceful mountain scenery.

Our Recommendation: We recommend visiting during late spring or fall for the perfect combination of comfortable weather, beautiful scenery, outdoor recreation, and seasonal events.

Where to Eat in Harrisonburg

Harrisonburg has developed an impressive dining scene that reflects both its agricultural roots and its diverse community. From farm-to-table restaurants and historic dining establishments to casual cafés and international cuisine, visitors will find plenty of excellent places to eat throughout the city.

Clementine Café

Clementine Café is one of Harrisonburg's most popular local restaurants, known for its creative American cuisine, live music, and welcoming atmosphere. We recommend this restaurant for travelers looking to enjoy locally sourced ingredients while experiencing one of the city's favorite gathering places. The menu changes seasonally, ensuring fresh flavors throughout the year.

Bella Luna Wood-Fired Pizza

Bella Luna has earned a loyal following thanks to its handcrafted wood-fired pizzas made with fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Beyond pizza, the menu includes homemade pasta, salads, sandwiches, and seasonal specials. The relaxed atmosphere makes it an excellent choice for families, couples, and groups of friends after a day of sightseeing.

Local Chop & Grill House

For visitors seeking an upscale dining experience, Local Chop & Grill House is one of Harrisonburg's premier restaurants. The restaurant focuses on locally raised meats, fresh seafood, seasonal produce, and farm-to-table cuisine that showcases the best of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In our experience, it's one of the city's best choices for special occasions or memorable dinners.

Jack Brown's Beer & Burger Joint

Known for its creative burgers and extensive craft beer selection, Jack Brown's is a favorite among both locals and visitors. The casual atmosphere, unique burger combinations, and friendly service make it an excellent stop for lunch or dinner after exploring downtown Harrisonburg.

Joshua Wilton House

Located inside a beautifully restored Victorian home, Joshua Wilton House offers one of Harrisonburg's most elegant dining experiences. The menu features refined American cuisine prepared with seasonal ingredients, making it an excellent choice for couples celebrating a special occasion or travelers looking for fine dining.

Beyond Restaurant & Bar

Beyond Restaurant & Bar brings together Asian-inspired cuisine, sushi, steaks, seafood, and creative cocktails in a modern setting. Its diverse menu and contemporary atmosphere make it a popular option for visitors with varied tastes, and it's an excellent place to end a day of exploring Harrisonburg.

Where to Stay in Harrisonburg

Whether you are visiting Harrisonburg for a weekend getaway, a family vacation, a college visit, or an outdoor adventure in the Shenandoah Valley, you'll find accommodations that suit every travel style and budget.

For first-time visitors, we recommend staying near downtown Harrisonburg or along East Market Street. These areas provide convenient access to restaurants, major attractions, James Madison University, and nearby highways leading to Shenandoah National Park and Massanutten Resort.

Hotel Madison & Shenandoah Conference Center

Hotel Madison is widely considered Harrisonburg's premier hotel. Located adjacent to James Madison University and within walking distance of downtown, it offers spacious rooms, modern amenities, an indoor pool, and an on-site restaurant. We recommend this hotel for first-time visitors, couples, business travelers, and anyone wanting a convenient location close to the city's top attractions.

Hyatt Place Harrisonburg

Hyatt Place combines contemporary accommodations with spacious guest rooms, complimentary breakfast, a fitness center, and easy highway access. Families appreciate the larger rooms, while road-trippers find the location convenient for exploring both Harrisonburg and the Shenandoah Valley.

DoubleTree by Hilton Harrisonburg

Known for its comfortable accommodations and excellent customer service, DoubleTree by Hilton is one of the city's most reliable full-service hotels. Its location makes it easy to reach downtown, James Madison University, and nearby outdoor attractions.

Fairfield Inn & Suites Harrisonburg

Fairfield Inn & Suites offers modern rooms, complimentary breakfast, an indoor pool, and excellent value for travelers seeking dependable accommodations. It's a popular choice for families, couples, and visitors making overnight stops during longer road trips.

Hampton Inn Harrisonburg South

This well-rated hotel offers clean rooms, free breakfast, a fitness center, and quick access to Interstate 81. We recommend it for travelers looking for affordability without sacrificing comfort.

Residence Inn Harrisonburg

Residence Inn is an excellent option for extended stays thanks to its spacious suites, full kitchens, complimentary breakfast, and separate living areas. Families and business travelers often appreciate the extra space and home-like amenities.

Courtyard by Marriott Harrisonburg

Located near James Madison University, Courtyard provides comfortable accommodations, modern facilities, and convenient access to restaurants and shopping. Its central location makes it easy to explore Harrisonburg without spending excessive time driving.

Country Inn & Suites by Radisson

Country Inn & Suites is known for comfortable rooms, complimentary breakfast, friendly service, and good value. It's particularly suitable for families and travelers planning multi-day stays.

Quality Inn Harrisonburg

Travelers looking for budget-friendly accommodations often choose Quality Inn because of its affordable rates, convenient location, and essential amenities.

Sleep Inn & Suites Harrisonburg

Sleep Inn & Suites provides modern rooms, complimentary breakfast, and easy highway access, making it a practical choice for both vacationers and business travelers.

The Village Inn

Located just outside Harrisonburg, The Village Inn offers a quieter atmosphere with beautiful Shenandoah Valley views. Guests often appreciate the peaceful setting while remaining only a short drive from downtown.

By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages

For travelers seeking a unique experience, this charming bed and breakfast offers historic cottages, personalized hospitality, and a relaxing countryside atmosphere. It's especially popular with couples looking for a romantic getaway.

Cave Hill Farm Bed & Breakfast

Situated on a historic farm, Cave Hill Farm Bed & Breakfast provides visitors with an authentic Shenandoah Valley experience. The peaceful surroundings and welcoming hosts make it an excellent alternative to traditional hotels.

Massanutten Resort

Located about 20 minutes from Harrisonburg, Massanutten Resort offers condominiums, vacation homes, and hotel-style accommodations. It's an excellent option for travelers planning to spend significant time enjoying skiing, golf, mountain biking, hiking, or the resort's indoor water park.

Tips for Visiting Harrisonburg

Planning ahead can help you enjoy more of Harrisonburg while making the most of your time in the Shenandoah Valley.

- **Visit During Fall:** Autumn foliage makes Harrisonburg and nearby Skyline Drive especially beautiful from late September through October.
- **Start Your Day Early:** Popular hiking trails and scenic overlooks are quieter during the morning hours.
- **Explore Downtown on Foot:** Many restaurants, shops, galleries, and attractions are located within walking distance of one another.
- **Book Hotels Early During Peak Seasons:** Fall foliage, university events, and graduation weekends can significantly increase hotel demand.
- **Pack Layers:** Mountain weather can change quickly, even during warmer months.
- **Allow Time for Shenandoah National Park:** Many visitors underestimate how much there is to see and do within the park.
- **Visit Local Farmers Markets:** They provide an excellent opportunity to support local businesses while sampling fresh regional products.
- **Bring Comfortable Walking Shoes:** Downtown streets, parks, museums, and scenic trails are best explored on foot.
- **Check Local Event Calendars:** Festivals, concerts, and seasonal celebrations can enhance your visit and provide unique local experiences.
- **Plan a Multi-Day Stay:** While Harrisonburg is enjoyable as a day trip, spending two or three days allows you to experience both the city and surrounding Shenandoah Valley attractions.

Conclusion

Harrisonburg offers the perfect blend of small-city charm, outdoor adventure, local culture, and Shenandoah Valley hospitality. Whether you are exploring the vibrant downtown, hiking in Shenandoah National Park, visiting museums, enjoying local restaurants, or taking scenic drives through the Blue Ridge Mountains, there is no shortage of memorable experiences waiting to be discovered.

Its central location also makes Harrisonburg an excellent base for exploring many of Virginia's most iconic natural attractions while enjoying comfortable accommodations and a welcoming community atmosphere. Whether you are planning a weekend getaway, a family vacation, or a longer Virginia road trip, Harrisonburg deserves a place on your travel itinerary.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Harrisonburg, VA known for?

Harrisonburg is known for its location in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, its vibrant downtown, James Madison University, nearby Shenandoah National Park, outdoor recreation, and locally owned restaurants.

Is Harrisonburg worth visiting?

Yes. Harrisonburg offers a unique combination of mountain scenery, historic attractions, outdoor adventures, museums, local breweries, and easy access to Shenandoah National Park, making it one of Virginia's most rewarding destinations.

How many days should I spend in Harrisonburg?

A two- to three-day visit is ideal. This gives you enough time to explore downtown Harrisonburg, enjoy nearby hiking trails, visit local attractions, and take scenic drives through the Shenandoah Valley.

What are the best family-friendly things to do in Harrisonburg?

Families often enjoy the Explore More Discovery Museum, Edith J. Carrier Arboretum, Hillandale Park, White Oak Lavender Farm, local farmers markets, and nearby Massanutten Resort.

What is the best time to visit Harrisonburg?

Late spring and fall are generally considered the best times to visit due to pleasant temperatures, colorful scenery, and excellent hiking conditions. Fall is particularly popular because of the Shenandoah Valley's spectacular foliage.

Is Harrisonburg close to Shenandoah National Park?

Yes. Harrisonburg is located just a short drive from several entrances to Shenandoah National Park, making it one of the best gateway cities for exploring Skyline Drive, hiking trails, waterfalls, and mountain overlooks.

What are some free things to do in Harrisonburg?

Visitors can explore Downtown Harrisonburg, walk through the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum, browse the Harrisonburg Farmers Market, hike local trails, visit Hillandale Park, and enjoy scenic drives throughout the Shenandoah Valley.

Where should I stay in Harrisonburg?

First-time visitors often prefer staying near downtown Harrisonburg or close to James Madison University. Hotels such as Hotel Madison, Hyatt Place Harrisonburg, and DoubleTree by Hilton offer convenient locations with easy access to the city's top attractions.