

# The Life

EXPERIENCE

## SALAMANDER RESORT & SPA

By SIMON MURRAY

**A** **S THE SUN PEEKS ABOVE** the blue-green foothills of Middleburg, Virginia and burns off the morning mist, birds sing and grasshoppers break out into a morning concerto. Mostly, though, there's a hushed silence typical of a new day here. Until the stillness is broken by a whinny echoing across the grounds of the Salamander Resort & Spa, that is. It seems to carry for miles. Hooves pound the dirt as horse and rider gallop. This is, after all, horse country, and what better way to discover Old Dominion than on horseback?

Set on 340 picturesque acres, the much celebrated, recently opened Salamander Resort & Spa is the quintessential Appalachian experience. The resort, nestled in the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains (so named for the abundance of spruce and fir that contributes to the hue, a deep shade of cobalt), is located in the historic village of Middleburg. Lying smack in



the middle of Virginia's famed horse country and lush vineyards, Middleburg is 40 miles from Washington, D.C. and a 35-minute trek from Dulles Airport.

The peace and seclusion of this region, America's horse and hunt capital, has attracted everyone from President John F. Kennedy and Elizabeth Taylor to Robert Wagner and Oliver North. Massive estates, with names such as The Meadows and Heathfield, have been built here.

Inspired by these historic homes, the Salamander Resort & Spa features 168 luxurious rooms and suites. Guest rooms look out on scenic views of the Virginia countryside or the property's Grand Lawn. For the business person, an executive desk and private seating and dining area combines with exclusive privileges to tee off at one of the area's premier private clubs, Creighton Farms (featuring a Jack Nicklaus Signature Course). With such amenities, the question "Business or pleasure?" is rendered pointless.

The property features a 23,000-square-foot spa with one-of-a-kind features such as outdoor treatment terraces and a spa courtyard. Along with being family-friendly, the resort—in keeping with its hunting theme—is one of the few dog-friendly hotels in Virginia. Even if Fido is less big-game hunter and more big-couch sloucher, rest assured that the in-room dog amenities include a comfy bed, food and water bowls, organic treats and a special toy that will have the family's favorite darling feeling pampered from head to tail.

Served throughout the day and evening, small plates of Culinary Director Todd Gray's Piedmont-inspired cuisine are paired with featured Virginia and international wines. Gray is Executive Chef of Washington, D.C.'s acclaimed Equinox Restaurant.

You'll have to decide whether to take a walking tour of one of the more than 50 local wineries or lounge at the resort's Gold Cup Wine Bar, which hosts select area winemakers each month and offers tastings,

wine dinners and classes.

And then, of course, there are the horses. In a region where U.S. Olympic riders train nearly year round, Salamander Resort & Spa has built one of the finest equestrian facilities and programs. The services range from private rides, riding lessons and carriage tours through the serene landscape and town, to full-service boarding facilities in a stunning 14,000-square-foot stable.

For businesses looking for team-building

experiences, the Equi-Spective program is a lesson in synergy. For a dose of serenity, there's yoga in the stable—and for the adventurous, yoga on horseback. With Great Meadow approximately 15 minutes from the resort, visitors can revel in the twice-annual Virginia Gold Cup steeplechase race events. During the summer, they can spend evenings enjoying Twilight Polo in a setting that provides hooves-pounding excitement, all as the sun sets on a majestic blue countryside.



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