

Dog days of summer: 2022's Shenandoah Valley visitors are asking about pet-friendly destinations



A child spends some time having fun with a fluffy friend on Saturday, June 18, 2022, on Beverley Street in Staunton, Virginia. On weekends, the city's main street closes to allow diners to eat outside and visitors to wander its charming pet-friendly downtown. *Monique Calello/The News Leader*

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<https://www.newsleader.com/story/news/2022/06/22/pet-tourism-pet-friendly-hotels-pet-friendly-vacations-shenandoah-valley-staunton-virginia/7614725001/>

STAUNTON — Tourists visiting Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley are asking to bring their pets with them on vacation more than ever before.

“I believe this increase can be attributed to the fact that millions of Americans adopted pets during the pandemic, including myself, not to mention all the time we spent with our pets while working from home and not traveling,” said Sheryl Wagner, director of tourism for VisitStaunton.

Nearly 23 million homes in the U.S. welcomed a pet since the start of the pandemic, accounting for nearly 1 in 5 households, according to the ASPCA.

Now that businesses have reopened and the demand for travel is strong, tourists want to bring their furry companions with them. In a Mars Petcare survey, 65% of pet owners are interested in traveling with their four-legged companions.

Pet-friendly booking is the third most used search filter for Hilton hotels. And [dogtrotting.net](https://www.dogtrotting.net) said pet tourism is 2022's travel trend.

“Staunton was an early adopter to pet-friendly travel, but we've seen a rise in outdoor dining options where pets are welcome since the pandemic,” said Wagner.

Shop & Dine Out in Downtown specifically has really caught on with visitors as a unique tourism experience and it's likely to be around for quite a while. On weekends, downtown's main street closes while restaurants create pop-up patios and outdoor seating, an initiative put in place during the pandemic to create a safer environment that has now become a regular part of Staunton's charm.

McCall/Skipping Rock Beer Co.

Staunton pup-cations

Outside businesses along the charming brick laid sidewalks of Beverley Street — Staunton's Main Street — are water bowls for dogs to stop and get a drink while residents say hello to shopkeepers and neighbors, creating a welcoming environment for visitors on pup-cations.

“Want to spend an evening out having beers with your best fur buddy? Raise a glass because many of Staunton's breweries are dog friendly,” according to [VisitStaunton.com](https://www.VisitStaunton.com).

Redbeard Brewing and Skipping Rock Beer Co. allows well-behaved dogs on the patios, and Shenandoah Valley Brewing and Queen City Brewing welcome dogs inside.

Other unique pet-friendly options in Staunton include Table 44's Dogio menu, Kline's Pup Cup ice cream, and The Well-Balanced Paw for holistic treats.

Tourists looking to bring their pups on vacation have become so popular that VisitStaunton created a [blog](#) dedicated to helping visitors plan the perfect pup-cation.

It's 'Yappy Hour' at Shenandoah National Park

According to GoPetFriendly.com, 42.9% of pet owners love hiking with their pets and Shenandoah National Park is all for it.

Shenandoah is one of the few national parks that allow pets on trails. There are less than 20 miles of over 500 miles of trails that do not allow pets, said Helen Morton, director of sales and marketing at Delaware North at Shenandoah National Park.

“A lot of our guests travel with the dogs, and we have designated ‘pet friendly’ rooms at each of our properties,” said Morton.



Dogs are not only welcome to enjoy the view from the terrace at Big Meadows Lodge at Shenandoah National Park, they even get their own Yappy Hour menu.

Delaware North At Shenandoah National Park/Submitted

Park amenities offer a Pampered Pooch Package at Skyland and Big Meadows Lodge which includes lodging, the pet fee, a doggie treat, Shenandoah doggie leash and doggie bowl, and bottled water.

And yes, they even offer a Yappy Hour [menu](#) at Big Meadows Lodge. Tasty treats include puppy patties, yardbird & rice, field & stream puppy bowl and for dessert, the doggie sundae.

Check out goshenandoah.com/specials/getaways for pup vacation packages and nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/pets.htm to plan your next hiking trip with fido.

Pawsome hotels

Pandemic dogs are adjusting as parents return to the workplace. To alleviate the stress and anxiety of putting your pup in a kennel while on vacation, Staunton's downtown hotels and inns offer dedicated pet-friendly rooms. Hotel 24 South was a pioneer in dog-friendly accommodations and The Blackburn Inn has opened select rooms for your furry family members.

“We have definitely seen an uptick in guests traveling with their pets,” said Michelle Davis, general manager for Hotel 24 South.

At Hotel 24 South, guests are welcome with an amenity bag featuring dog treats and potty bags.

“Staunton is a very dog friendly town with many restaurants like Byers Street Bistro offering patio seating and services such as water bowls and treats,” said Davis. “After lunch, guests can also check out the Well-Balanced Paw, a holistic pet store also in the historic Wharf district.”

When Fido needs some time to burn energy, Davis recommends guests visit Gypsy Hill Dog Park, as this fully fenced park features separate areas for small and large pups, agility equipment and benches.

Now that you've learned the Shenandoah Valley is the pet-friendly place to be, here's how to plan the best pup-cation, ever.

Pet travelers recommend visiting bringfido.com to find pet-friendly places to stay. To learn more about what to do in the Shenandoah Valley, VisitShenandoah.org.

At Jeremy West's Silver Line, theatre arts get a new place to play: 2022

Newsmakers

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<https://www.newsleader.com/story/news/local/2022/12/22/silver-line-theatre-exchange-led-by-jeremy-west-opens-opportunities-for-theatre-arts-2022-newsmakers/69696361007/>

STAUNTON — Jeremy West and Oliver Dahl sat on opposite ends of the front porch.

It was the height of COVID, lockdowns were in place and West found out his position as theater director at Stuart Hall School was eliminated. In fact, the entire theater program at the school was closing, as theaters across the world, Broadway included, were shutting down leaving thousands unemployed and quarantined at home.

The teacher and former student filled up the time talking of philosophy, the state of the world and the future. West, a professional actor and fight director, loved teaching, especially teaching kids, and felt a hole was left in the community. Dahl, a graduate, loved his hometown and talked of how he wanted to do something to revitalize areas in downtown Staunton.

The two went for a walk to pick up coffee and when they passed a building on North Lewis Street, West half-jokingly said to Dahl, what if you bought that building and we turned it into a theater?

"What started out as sort of a half joke became a reality," said West. "It's so wonderful to get to work with a former student on something like this and help him discover what it is he wants to go on and do."

As a program director at Stuart Hall, West already had experience balancing budgets, creating a season of shows and developing programming opportunities outside of the school by connecting with other organizations in town, including the American Shakespeare Center, where he began working as a professional actor almost two decades ago.

"It just made sense to go to the next level. I could keep doing what I'm doing except now I won't be doing it under the auspices of someone else," said West. "Of course, I have to raise the money, which is a whole different ball game, but I felt like I've been doing half the job already. Why not just keep doing it?"

Those porch conversations during the worst of the pandemic turned into a partnership as restrictions started to lift and kids were eager to get back into life again.

The building on 211 N. Lewis St. would become Silver Line Theatre Exchange, a student-led educational theater and conservatory taught by professionals in the field who now have a place to pursue their craft.

Because of this work, West is one of our 2022 News Leader Newsmakers. Each year our newsroom profiles people who may not be heavily in the public eye, but are part of the key pool of citizens moving forward the projects and topics our area cares about.

"We teach, perform, read and discuss theater that invigorates, celebrates and enhances understanding of ourselves and others through a shared experience."

A student-led educational theater

"It's one of the few classes left where we don't need our phones for anything," said West. "You put your phone down and talk to each other and look each other in the eye and communicate."

Coaching, classes and performances train students for a future in theater or just a season. It is up to each student.

Programs are customized to strengthen awareness, confidence and empathy, turning children and teens into better actors, and more importantly, better humans. In a virtual world, it couldn't have come at a better time after years in isolation from the pandemic.

By getting up in front of people performing and collaborating with their peers through scene work, students develop confidence and essential social skills to transition into adulthood and become meaningful members of their communities.

"Theater training is not just for future actors. Theater training is for everyone because of the powerful skills that we learn," shared West.

Whether students need a serious conservatory to help them grow as a professional actor or see it as a fun hobby, every member of the program will walk away being richer for it.

"And that's the importance of theater and how we grow as a community. Everyone needs that, especially young people today in the world. We need a

place where we can come together as a community to understand each other and appreciate one another."

Programs designed for every stage of adolescence

Currently, there are eight programs offered at Silver Line Theatre Exchange:

- Trolley drama (PK-1)
- Elementary acting (grades 2-4)
- Middle school acting (grades 5-7)
- Acting the musical (grades 8-12)
- Musical theatre/jazz dance (grades 2-5)
- Musical theatre/jazz dance (grades 6-12)
- Stage combat/swords (grades 8-12)

Programs are open for all students, whether they are homeschooled or in a private or public education setting in the Shenandoah Valley. Classes are not performance-based to allow kids the time they need to develop skills. Students that do want to be in a theater production also have opportunities to audition, rehearse and perform on stage.

"You start small in the classroom, performing just for the people in the classroom," explained West. "If you are scared to perform, then you don't start by jumping into a play, you start by taking a class and learn to be comfortable in front of your peers. Then you make that a little bit larger and a little bit larger and before you know it, you're performing in a play in front of 200 people."

West hopes to help students learn to appreciate others and have a better understanding why people say and do things, even if those things hurt someone else.

"You are quite literally walking in the shoes of another person," said West. "You put on these costumes and then you pretend to be somebody else. And in order to pretend to be that person, you have to try and understand, why does this person say and do the things that they say and do? What is their intention? What is their motivation? And by trying to think about how people are motivated, that naturally brings about a sense of understanding and a sense of empathy."

A conservatory

In his role as artistic director, the faculty that West hires are trained theater professionals who are still working as professionals in the field. But if they don't believe in student-led teaching, they are not the right fit, said West. Self-importance and arrogance are character traits that might work on stage but not off stage at Silver Line.

"In that regard, we are a conservatory. If you're a student who's looking to continue the profession in college, then you're going to be able to get that training from us along with the network connections."

The feedback instructors provide is individualized right down to the scene between two students. "You are not teaching a class. You are teaching a student."

All students play an important role in the arts, he explained. Those who see it as a hobby and never do it again, may go on to be theater supporters as adults.

"They buy season tickets to their local theater and go see plays," said West. "I don't have to produce Tony Award winning actors. But I do feel very confident that I and my teachers in my company can produce that."

On the one hand, the professionally trained instructors at Silver Line Theatre Exchange do want to work with students who want to go into the profession and really push and challenge them to be the best that they can be during their time at the conservatory.

"But I don't want that to be intimidating to the other child who just needs a place to be, because sometimes having a community, having a place where you can go after school, where you can have friends who understand you, that could be the biggest saving grace for some."

A professional theater

The theater recently opened its first professional production, the holiday-themed show, "[The 12 Dates of Christmas](#)."

Their next area of growth is to offer more opportunities for professionals.

"I've always felt a bit frustrated that American theater feels this necessity to force actors to gravitate towards large metropolitan areas in order to have work," said West. "For many years before I became a teacher, that's what I was doing, bouncing around different theaters, wherever I could go."

When West and his wife Phoebe decided to settle down in Staunton, he didn't want to give up his professional career. There are others like him who feel the same way, he said. Right now, the only options in the area are American Shakespeare Center and a theater in Charlottesville that operates during the summer. "So, where else can you work?"

Offering more professional opportunities is next while maintaining the educational backbone.

A big supporter of community theater, it's not about competing with other organizations, he said. "Places like Shenan Arts or Oak Grove Theatre that have been around for quite some time are incredibly, incredibly important to our community."

The theater just started rehearsals for its next youth play. By offering a nonmusical option, kids who aren't interested in auditioning for their school musicals can now come to Silver Line to perform a drama. "I want to augment all of the theater offerings for young people."

Classes do not hold auditions. Instead, they have a performance element, like a skit or a scene, to showcase what they have learned.

"It's more about progress than product," said West. "Every class performs, but not every class is a play. We offer both. For some kids, especially those who are new to it, a class is the best way to go."

West describes himself as down to earth and a bit sarcastic and goofy around his students so they feel comfortable. "I'll joke around and be goofy, but I don't let it derail the rehearsal. OK, we've goofed off long enough. Now, let's get back to work."

Sometimes, he worries his physical presence might come across as intimidating so he plays up the goofiness to make sure kids know he's a nice guy and this is going to be a fun place.

"Don't let the shaved head fool you."

Silver Line Theatre Exchange is located on 211 N. Lewis St. in Staunton, Va. To learn more about the theater's classes, performances and instructors, visit them online at silverlinetheatre.org.

New Directions for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault



Joy D. Ingram is the community engagement program coordinator for New Directions Center on 110 W. Johnson St. in Staunton. New Directions Center is a non-profit organization working to reduce the impact of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and stalking through survivor-centered advocacy, support services, community education, and awareness. *Monique Calello/The News Leader*

Monique Calello

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<https://www.newsleader.com/story/news/2022/12/14/domestic-violence-sexual-assault-survivors-in-shenandoah-valley-va/69627740007/>

STAUNTON – The young woman knew what it felt like to be alone.

When she was 14 years old, she was raped by someone she thought was a friend. “I did not know what it was that happened to me. I knew it was horrible, but I didn’t have the words to call it rape.”

At 14, she thought that rape was the woman walking down the street at night carrying groceries who gets brutally attacked and raped. When she enrolled in Mary Baldwin University’s PEG program, as part of first-year student

orientation, the students watched, “But I Said No — Campus Rape,” and she came to understand what acquaintance rape was.

“Now, I have a word for it. But what do I do with this word?” she thought. It defined things but not in a comfortable way. It didn’t make her feel better, or like she had solved a problem. So, she held on to it, and put it in the place where those memories were. And the word settled down inside her.

About seven years later while at the doctor’s office, she saw a brochure for a rape crisis center, and something told her to pick it up. But she didn’t call them. Like the word, she “stashed it away.”

Not too long after that, she was hanging out at her boyfriend’s house, and they were having fun play wrestling on the floor. When he pinned her arms over head, she had a flashback. “Suddenly, I wasn’t in the room with him anymore. I was back with my rapist, and I started kicking and screaming and crying. It was almost like I blacked out.”

She knew that she couldn’t do this by herself anymore.

“After that, I called the rape crisis center, and I really feel like they saved my life.”

Hundreds of people call for help each year. They answer.

Joy Ingram has heard countless stories like this one. Stories that come from the women who walk through the doors of New Directions Center hoping to find someone who understands. Stories other people wouldn't believe, didn't want to believe. Hundreds of them each year; over 300 calls came into the center in the first six months of 2022.

Ingram has a peaceful way about her. She smiles warmly while sitting behind her desk at New Directions Center, Inc. in Staunton. A colleague sings to himself as he walks down the hallway. Another one pops her head in to ask a quick question. They rely on one another to answer the domestic violence hotline day or night, ready to drive to a public place to pick up another victim and bring them to shelter.

The nonprofit provides support and advocacy to those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking. While its service area is Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro, if a domestic violence shelter in a nearby city calls Ingram for help, the priority is getting a victim to safety no matter where they live.

Typically, agencies work together to find space for victims. If the domestic violence shelter at New Directions Center is out of space, Ingram will reach out to Project Horizon in Lexington, She Shelter in Charlottesville or First

Step in Harrisonburg to see if any of them can accommodate the victim, oftentimes with children, who need shelter.

It is a collective effort, Ingram said. Domestic violence nonprofits, social services, court advocates, mental health professionals, police officers, homeless shelters, supportive housing and places that give micro-grants to turn on a donated cell phone or pay for a U-Haul so victims can move out. Somehow, it must be pieced together to get victims of domestic and sexual violence and their children to safety.

But it's not enough. The number of people receiving domestic violence and sexual violence advocacy services in Virginia is staggering.

In 2021, advocacy services in Virginia helped over 20,000 adults and nearly 5,000 children who suffered from domestic violence, and over 5,000 adults and 1,700 children were given help after experiencing sexual violence. Over 50,000 calls were placed to the hotline in 2021.



"Powerful Voices: Stories of Survivors" is an art story exhibition created by students at James Madison University to bring awareness to the work of New Directions Center in Staunton, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the impact of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking. *Courtesy Of James Madison University & New Directions Center, Inc.*

Adequate shelter is desperately needed

Funding for adequate shelter and transitional housing is needed. Agencies must rely on communal living situations which present a multitude of challenges.

Communal living. "You have total strangers, from all walks of life, living in the same house with all of their multiple traumas, their multiple lifestyles, their kids, the ways they raise kids, their addictions, and it can just get more traumatic," said Ingram.

Multi-unit housing for the area's emergency shelter is essential, but the cost of housing in the Shenandoah Valley makes this nearly impossible. And victims need help to move forward, permanently.

In the meantime, survivors must make living in one house work as best they can. Depending on the number of people in the shelter, getting a bedroom to yourself is a luxury.

"When there's a lot of people in shelter, you're doubling up, tripling up in a room with folks that you've never met before," said Ingram.

Staying in hotels only works in the short term due to a lack of funding.

The nonprofit receives some funding from the Department of Criminal Justice Services and Department of Social Services while also applying for grants and fundraising. Volunteers are essential.

Services are free and confidential and include 24/7 hotline, emergency housing, court advocacy, emotional support services, support groups, hospital accompaniment and educational programs to raise community awareness on the issues of violence and abuse.

Ingram's role at New Directions Center is community engagement program coordinator. But she and everyone at the nonprofit wear many hats. She answers the hotline, talks with police on a domestic call to determine the lethality of a situation, arranges to meet victims at a safe place to pick them up and bring them to the shelter (day or night), helps victims who cannot leave yet get their safety planning in place and manages outreach programs to coordinate care. The list is long and often determined by the vast needs in the area, and the individual.

New Directions Center received 459 hotline calls in 2021. Records show they have received 320 calls between Jan. 1, 2022 through June 29, 2022, which marked the end of its fiscal year.

Ingram is passionate about making sure survivors know they are not alone. She knows how essential it is to be understood and supported no matter the situation. Because that 14-year-old frightened teenager — who finally turned to a rape crisis center for help at 21 — was her.

“I want them to always know that they have somewhere to go, they have someone who cares, someone who wants to help.”

In 2016, Ingram saw a table for New Directions Center at an event and decided to volunteer. She had volunteered answering calls for a rape crisis center and thought she could do something similar to help. Over time, she began to work directly with survivors and work on outreach initiatives, eventually becoming the nonprofit’s community engagement coordinator. Ingram continues to do the work because she doesn’t want anyone to have to walk alone, she said.

“Because I walked alone for so long. I don’t want anyone else to go through that.”

Ingram remembers reading about a place somewhere overseas where people can go into a pharmacy and there's a code word that they can say that lets the pharmacist know they're in a domestic violence situation and the pharmacist will hide them in the store and notify the police.

“I was like, yup, my spot would be one of those spots. You come in and order a coffee that's not on the menu or wine that's not on the menu. And from that, we know, and we'll get you help. I'll be doing this work in some capacity for the rest of my life. I'm just that passionate about it.”

For now, her spot is a little more straight-forward. There's a phone number to call for help right away. There's an old brick building on W. Johnson Street where Joy Ingram and her teamwork. And there's a site you can access, on your phone, to find out how to get help.

New Directions Center is located at 110 W. Johnson St., Suite 102, next to the Wharf parking lot in downtown Staunton. You can reach them at 1-540-885-7273. Visit newdirectionscenter.org to learn more.

Persons receiving domestic violence advocacy services in Virginia

Jan. 1, 2021 – Dec. 31, 2021

- Total adults served: 20,579
- Total children/youth served: 4,526
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 41,749

Jan. 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2020

- Total adults served: 19,565
- Total children/youth served: 4,723
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 40,242

Jan. 1, 2019 – Dec. 31, 2019

- Total adults served: 22,230
- Total children/youth served: 5,246
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 39,681

Persons receiving sexual violence advocacy services in Virginia

Jan. 1, 2021 – Dec. 31, 2021

- Total adults served: 5,136
- Total children/youth served: 1,741
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 11,086

Jan. 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2020

- Total adults served: 5,408
- Total children/youth served: 1,670
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 10,653

Jan. 1, 2019 – Dec. 31, 2019

- Total adults served: 6,922
- Total children/youth served: 2,094
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 9,555