

Lexington

VIRGINIA

by Layla Khoury-Hanold

Nestled between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains sits the charming town of Lexington. Though its population hovers around 7,000, Lexington's dining scene is booming, thanks to a crop of passionate restaurateurs, local farmers and producers, and support from a devoted following among residents and visitors alike. You could easily make a multiday eating and drinking itinerary in Lexington's historic downtown, chock-full of independently owned restaurants and bars, specialty shops, and boutique hotels brimming with on-site dining options. Fuel up like a local, sup on eclectic small plates, and sip conversation-starting cocktails, then stock up on pantry provisions, craft chocolates, and kitchen gadgets.

BEST LUNCH SPOT

Pure Eats

Fuel up at this popular spot, once home to a Pure gas station. Opt for a juicy beef burger with hand-cut fries plus a home-grown IPA from Devil's Backbone, or the kid-approved chicken tenders paired with a shake made with Homestead Creamery ice cream. Housemade doughnuts are a must. pure-eats.com

BEST BEER AND NOSH

Heliotrope Brewery

Heliotrope's Virginia malt-brewed beers, sourdough pizzas, and chill vibes make for an ideal hang whether it's a weekday meetup with friends or Sunday family brunch. Order a margherita or za'atar pizza and wash it all down with easy drinkers like New Boots and Contracts, a hazy IPA, or Quotidian Pils, a German-style pilsner. heliotropebrewery.com

BEST SMALL PLATES

Zunzun

Sidle up to the bar for a cocktail (like the zippy Hummingbird punch) and an order of spiced fries with smoky aioli, or reserve one of the nooks for a full-on locavore feast. The eclectic menu

includes shareables like smoked salmon with rye and labneh and seasonal mains like Apple Horse Farm pork loin with shishito slaw. zunzunlex.com

BEST SPOT TO GET A SCOOP

Sweet Things Ice Cream Shoppe

At this cash-only scoop shop you'll be greeted by the aroma of freshly rolled waffle cones and a choice of dozens of homemade ice cream flavors. Go for the best-selling Oreo, crafted with 40 cookies per gallon, fruity black raspberry, or the coffee crunch studded with Heath bar pieces for the ultimate afternoon pick-me-up. facebook.com/sweetthingsicecreamshop

BEST COCKTAILS AND APPS

Hardens

Hardens is a serious cocktail bar with whimsical flair, reflected in the seasonal drinks lineup and elevated bar snacks. The General is a stand-by smooth sipper, where muddled grapes and basil leaves mingle with lemon juice, vodka, and ginger ale, making it an ideal match for dishes like fried brussels sprouts with rum-dijon glaze and ahi tuna tostada with salsa macha. @hardenslex



Zunzun



Heliotrope Brewery



Hardens

Where to Stay

The Gin Hotel

The Gin Hotel is a stylish boutique stay in downtown Lexington located steps away from shops, restaurants, and historic attractions. The building dates back to 1926 and has an art deco vibe with marble accents, a grand lobby, and high ceilings, while the modern rooms are equal parts cozy and luxurious. Snag a seat on Juniper Lounge's veranda for alfresco cocktails and small plates overlooking Main Street, or slide into a booth inside and tuck into hearty entrees like pork rib-eye with caramelized onions. theginhotel.com

FROM LEFT: TIFFANY HANLON; STEVE SHIRES; OPPOSITE FROM TOP: SERA PETRAS; KENNEDY LAFON



Where to Shop

Cocoa Mill Chocolate Company

Confections here are best-in-category bites, from snackable chocolate bark to crunchy clusters to chocolate-dipped fruit. Fill a box with truffles to gift (or treat yourself) with standouts like milk chocolate-raspberry or one crafted with nearby Rockbridge Vineyard's concord wine. cocoamill.com

Cheese to You

Put together your ideal grazing board with wedges of aged cheese (say a seven-year Quebec cheddar or Pecorino-Tosciano), plus Spanish cured meats, olives, gourmet dips, crackers, and a bottle of wine. Stock up on pantry staples like olive oil, Soom tahini, and artisanal pastas and sauces. (540) 319-8107

Ladles & Linens Kitchen Shoppe

Find all your kitchen needs here, including chef knives, Le Creuset cookware, novelty tea towels, cookbooks, and gadgets galore, from pizza scissors to strawberry corers. Pick up Virginia-made provisions such as Lindera Farms vinegars, AR's hot honey, Red Rooster Coffee's freshly roasted beans, and Mother Shrub's mixing vinegars. ladesandlinens.com