

Honoring Tradition, Supporting Growth

Empowering Virginia's Horse Industry and Elevating Its Legacy

I'm sitting in a window seat on a flight landing at Dulles Airport in Virginia, and all I can see below are horse farms. One after another: beautiful arenas dotted with colorful jumps, lush green pastures where horses graze, and charming stone barns. My first thought is, "Virginia is horse country." But it's more than that—it's a premier destination for hunter-jumper riders who want to train and compete.

So, what makes Virginia so perfect for horses and riders? Part of the magic lies in the climate. Virginia experiences all four seasons but is never truly too hot or too cold. Unlike New England, there's rarely a need for an indoor arena. Consistent rainfall keeps the pastures green, giving horses year-round access to grass. The landscape itself is another gift to the sport: rolling hills, varied terrain, and patches of woodlands. Think back to the origins of hunters in the English countryside, and you'll see the similarity. Not surprisingly, Virginia boasts the oldest and most established foxhunting community in the nation, shaped in part by its landscape.

Virginia's horse industry also stands out for its robust show schedule and wealth of training barns. Riders of every level, from juniors and amateurs to seasoned professionals, have access to competitions that range from local schooling shows to

nationally recognized events. The state hosts some of the country's most renowned hunter-jumper competitions, including the Upperville Colt and Horse Show (the oldest horse show in the U.S.) and the Middleburg Classic, both of which attract top horses and riders from across the nation. The Virginia Horse Show Association (VHSA) plays a pivotal role in fostering this thriving circuit. Its year-round schedule accommodates riders of all skill levels, offering opportunities both for beginners just starting out and professionals fine-tuning their craft. As one local rider put it, "You can decide on a whim to go to a horse show in Virginia and find something almost every weekend."

Virginia is also steeped in equestrian history. From General Patton showing at Upperville to the Piedmont Fox Hounds, established in 1840 in Middleburg, widely known as the horse and hunt capital of America, the state's equestrian heritage runs deep. "The whole horse culture here is a way of life, and it has deep, deep roots," says Linda Moss of Bespoke EQ Brands. Moss and her husband George moved to Virginia from California two years ago with their two off-the-track Thoroughbreds, and they couldn't be happier. "The community has been incredibly welcoming," she explains, "and our only regret is that we didn't do it sooner. In Virginia, the landscape allows the horses to be horses, and the history and

tradition are the blueprint. They teach you to honor the environment here."

Virginia also benefits from its proximity to major metropolitan areas like Washington, D.C., and Richmond, as well as easy access to other major equestrian venues in neighboring states. This location makes it possible for riders to compete at the highest levels without long-distance travel. Combined with a relatively affordable cost of living and an abundance of preserved open space, Virginia offers equestrians a unique balance of opportunity and accessibility. In fact, one Virginia horse owner mentioned a former showgrounds that allows anyone to school in their arenas for just \$25—on the honor system. That's horse community at its finest.

With its rich equestrian tradition, premier facilities, extensive competition calendar, and vibrant community, Virginia is a true hub for hunter-jumper equestrians. Whether for juniors and amateurs seeking to build their skills or professionals chasing national and international success, the state provides unmatched opportunities for development in the sport.

From that glimpse out my airplane window, I sensed it: Virginia isn't just horse country—it's one of the very best places for hunter-jumper riders and their horses to thrive.

