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Worth the Drive: Nicewonder Farm & Vineyards

The Virginia Highlands offer a serene getaway, with a glass of wine or two

In a new regular column, journalist Margaret Littman highlights unusual luxury travel experiences, particularly those that are an easy trip from Nashville.

NICEWONDER. IT'S NOT JUST a clever name. In fact, it was the actual last name of Don Nicewonder, a business executive and philanthropist who had the vision for what is now a luxury golf getaway in Bristol, Va. Nicewonder (the man) dreamt of having a PGA-worthy golf course in the Virginia Highlands. Over the years, he developed The Virginian Golf Club and Nicewonder Farm & Vineyards, an adjacent destination for visitors.

It is a wonder how nice this oasis is. As you drive in, you're surrounded by rolling hills, some sport-

ing their natural topography and others planted full of foliage and blooms that provide four-season interest. You see neat rows of vineyards, and eventually, a white inn rising over the surrounding landscape, feeling more like a European villa than a spot just 20 miles from a popular NASCAR track. All befitting a place with this name.

Your arrival is anticipated. As soon as you approach the inn, the staff is waiting in the parking lot to grab your luggage and start your vacation with impeccable service.

Thanks to the vision of Mr. Nicewonder — and his family, who have taken the reins since his passing in 2022 — this is a serene mountain retreat. It's a place for low-key lounging and reflection.



WHAT'S NEARBY

Nicewonder is on the Virginia side of the city of Bristol, a charming town in the Appalachian Mountains that straddles the Tennessee-Virginia line. Bristol is bustling and historic, and sometimes caught up in its campiness of being in two states at once.

It's home to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum, and it's thought to be the first place country music was ever recorded. Other country music street cred includes being the home of Tennessee Ernie Ford and the last place Hank Williams was seen alive. Head to the Burger Bar diner on Piedmont Avenue to have a sandwich and visit that last spot in Williams' history.

All that activity — including bars, restaurants and shops (check out the denim at LC King Manufacturing) — is less than a 20-minute drive from the bucolic hills of Nicewonder.

WHAT TO DO

On a clear day, start with a helicopter ride over these 450 verdant acres, and take in all that is nestled in these mountains. Play 18 holes on the Tom Fazio-designed course at The Virginian Golf Club, Nicewonder's sister property. Go fly-fishing. Head to the spa. Look out at the landscape from the infinity pool. Take a yoga class. Shoot arrows at the archery range. Go hiking. Or, most luxurious: Do nothing. Enjoy sitting in the occasional swing or bench built along the walking trails for a respite.

Whether or not you're an oenophile, it's worth taking a farm tour followed by a wine tasting. Learn about the Virginia-grown viognier, chardonnay, merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot grapes that have been cultivated here since 2013.



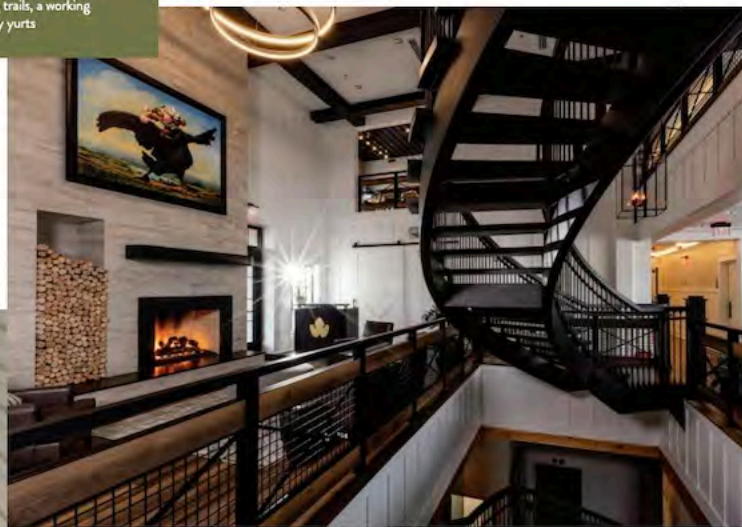
THE BASICS

What: Nicewonder Farm & Vineyards

Where: Bristol, Va.

Distance from Nashville: 300 miles

Why it stands out: An 18-hole golf course, walking trails, a working vineyard, luxury yurts



WHERE TO EAT

Certainly, you can go into town to eat at some of Bristol's hot spots, including Blackbird Bakery, known for their specialty from-scratch pastries. But the urge to stay put once you arrive will be strong.

Hickory, the inn's restaurant helmed by James Beard Award-nominated chef Travis Milton, offers enough variety to lure you back multiple nights (and for brunch). This farmland grows herbs and vegetables, not just grapes for wine, and Milton uses much of the local bounty in his recipes.

In addition to Hickory, there's Taste, the indoor-outdoor tasting room at the winery, popular with locals and hotel guests who want to have a glass of wine with a view.

HOW TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Choose between the 28-room inn, with large rooms and ample amenities, or the yurt village, which has its own firepits and private community vibe. The yurts aren't roughing it, with their high ceilings, 500 square feet (or more) of space, and luxury appointments. The pet-friendly yurt village is a short walk from the gym, spa, inn and restaurants, but is also self-contained enough to be a good spot for a private wedding party or corporate retreat.

The inn is a traditional boutique hotel, with large windows looking out on the landscape and plenty of places for relaxing, including in front of a cozy fire. Walls are dotted with art that, at first blush, is simply aesthetically pleasing, but after examination includes many nods to Nicewonder family history. The inn has both open staircases and elevators and may be better suited to those with mobility concerns than the yurt village. [📍](#)

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NICEWONDER FARM & VINEYARDS