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Travel

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FLAVIO VELOSO/BRAZILPHOTOS

The secret oases of Rio

Love trekking lush forests as much as lazing on beaches? In this teeming Brazilian city, you don't have to choose.

BY DINA MISHEV | *Special to The Washington Post*

Capuchin monkeys are jumping from branch to branch in the trees — eucalyptus, mahogany, rosewood — towering above. On the ground, coatis and lizards are scuttling through thick mounds of decomposing rain forest biomass. Now, we haven't actually *seen* those animals while hiking along, and I get only the briefest glimpse of a lizard — its tail the length of my arm — before it disappears into deadfall and underbrush. But their rustling is nonstop. ¶ Because humans are also scarce, I don't mind the hidden wildlife. We've been walking for seven hours smack in the middle of a city with more than 6 million residents, but here, we've seen eight other people. ¶ At 15 square miles, Tijuca National Park is among the smallest of Brazil's 60-odd national parks. But, being in Rio de Janeiro, any amount of green space in a city this populous is sweet. (To compare: New York's Central Park is 1.3 square miles.) ¶ Tijuca is one of the largest urban forests in the world. ¶ The city's famous Christ the Redeemer statue is perched on the summit of one of the dozens of peaks in the park. There's a tram that takes you there and also a hiking trail to the top. Sometimes the wait for the former is hours long. The latter, despite being terribly steep, can be so busy it feels like a mule train. ¶ Elsewhere in Tijuca, though, it feels like a national park. ¶ I've come to Rio at the beginning of its summer and in the middle of our winter with two goals: 1. to hike and 2. to lie on a beach and get tan.

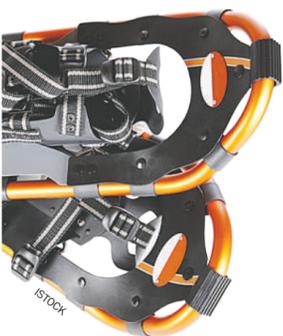
RIO CONTINUED ON F4



YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Soccer at sunset on Ipanema Beach in Rio de Janeiro. Ipanema and Copacabana are world-famous, but to the west are miles of continuous white sand and spots for surfing, paragliding and hang gliding.

At top, two Brazilian landmarks: the Christ the Redeemer statue and Sugarloaf Mountain behind it.



I am woman. Watch me snowshoe.

On imposing Mt. Washington, testing out a growing trend: the XX-country adventure

BY KAREN NITKIN
Special to The Washington Post

Mount Washington, the highest peak in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, is famous for epically awful weather that includes a 1934 record-setting

231-mph wind gust. In winter, the mercury routinely plunges past 20 below, and punishing storms move in quickly.

Seems like a good place to avoid. But on a Friday afternoon in February, I arrived at the Joe Dodge Lodge, in the shadow of the snow-covered 6,289-foot peak, to attend a Women's Winter Adventure Weekend organized by the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). The next day, we would ride a four-track all-wheel-drive vehicle up the steep and winding Mount Washington Auto Road,

then snowshoe down. To tell the truth, I was kinda terrified — of the cold, of snowshoeing (which I had never done) and, mostly, at age 48, of spending the weekend with 13 strangers, including two who would be my roommates.

Kim, 54, another Women's Weekend participant, didn't seem daunted at all. Like other women in our group, Kim said she likes woman-only organized outings because they are safe, supportive and "you're not always trying to compete

NEW HAMPSHIRE CONTINUED ON F3

NAVIGATOR

Earplugs and drink coupons: How to cope when children and air travel don't mix. **F2**

SMART MOUTH

Did someone say 120 proof? In tiny Marion, sampling Virginia moonshine at its source. **F5**

IMPULSIVE TRAVELER

In Canada, Banff's Post Hotel offers picturesque coziness — and a cure for writer's block. **F6**

Road to Rio is a hiker's dream

RIO FROM F1

Tijuca Forest is secondary Atlantic Rain Forest. By the mid-19th century, the original Atlantic Forest ecosystem — Mata Atlântica in Portuguese — that greeted the Portuguese when they first came to this area in the early 1500s had been cut down to make way for sugar and coffee plantations. In 1861, the Brazilian king, Dom Pedro II, was prescient enough to realize this deforestation would affect the city's supply of drinking water. He ordered the continent's first reforestation program. In less than two decades, employees and slaves planted over 110,000 seedlings.

A century after the reforestation program was first ordered, Tijuca was named a national park. I hired Anna Atz Asen of Free Tours de Aventura to show me around.

We meet at the Afonso Pena metro station and together hop onto a bus (the 301, 302 or 345 all work) so stuffed with passengers and climbing up a road so steep and twisty I many times wonder whether we'll actually make it to the top. Nearly an hour after boarding, we get off at Bar da Pracinha, at the Praça Afonso Viseu in Alto da Boa Vista. And that's pretty much the last interaction with civilization we have for seven hours.

An endurance athlete, I had asked Anna to come up with a challenging day hike. From an e-mail to her: "If we could do forty kilometers, that'd be great!" A whip of a woman born and raised in Italy's Dolomites, Anna obliges, coming up with a hike that's not only 20-ish miles, but that also takes us to the summits of eight peaks, several of which have 360-degree views of the city.

I've got a GPS track of that loop, if you're interested. Instead of killing yourself though — you've got to stay alive long enough to enjoy the beaches, remember — hike just Pico da Tijuca, with a summit knob so rocky and exposed that in 1920, 117 stairs were cut into the side of it and a chain railing was installed. Also, the views from its summit are the best of the day.

Halfway up the stone staircase, we pass three of the eight people we'll see all day: a mom, dad and their daughter, who couldn't have been more than 4. They're on their way down. I'm sure Mom and Dad did/do some child-carrying — if you just hike to Tijuca Peak without the seven other mountains, it's still between six and 12 miles, depending on where you start — but she's handling the stairs just fine on her own. Smiling, even.

Who wouldn't smile with almost the entirety of Rio spread out below them? From Tijuca Peak's 3,353-foot summit, I see Guanabara Bay, Bico do Papagaio Peak, Pedra da Gávea, Maracanã Stadium, the Rock of the Topsail, Barra da Tijuca, and the Atlantic Ocean. I see Christ the Redeemer, too, but only after several minutes of searching. Seen from the northwest, it's nestled among a sea of antennas and towers.

While we sit down and snack, I pepper Anna with questions about the Serra dos Órgãos mountains, their distant, pointy spires to the south looking quite fierce. And intriguing. Part of another national park about an hour's drive from Rio, 10 of the peaks in that range are higher than 6,600 feet. I put it on my list for next time.

A peak almost directly to our south blocks views of Copacabana Beach, but we see neighboring Ipanema Beach and then Leblon.

It is from Tijuca's summit that the extent of Rio's beaches finally hits me. I thought Copacabana and Ipanema were the biggest beaches in the city. They're nothing. I mean, of course they're great — Copacabana is directly across the street from my hotel, has the softest sand my feet have felt since visiting Zanzibar's beaches nearly a decade ago and the water's warm enough to swim in — but, to the west, past Leblon, in the city's West Zone, where much of the construction for the 2016 Olympic Games is happening, stretch miles and miles and miles more of white



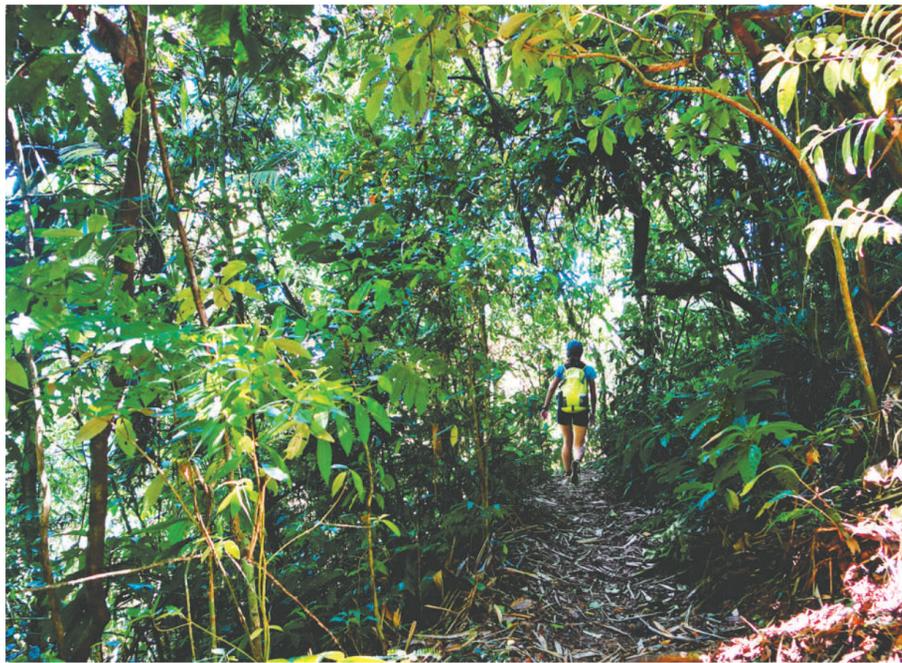
RICARDO MORAES/REUTERS



PILAR OLIVARES/REUTERS



DINA MISHEV FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



DINA MISHEV FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Above, a fisherman casts his line as birds fly over the Sao Conrado beach in Rio de Janeiro.

A woman sings to music in the Cantagalo shantytown.

Below, Sergio Tavares and Robson Costa on the rock formation known in English as Turtle Stone, which overlooks wild beaches.

At bottom, Anna Atz Asen of Free Tours de Aventura, hikes Tijuca Forest. The forest is part of a national park that's in the middle of the city.

sand.

My last day in Rio, I explore these beaches. Driving west out of the city with a crew from Rio EcoSporte Adventures, we pass more beaches than I can count, much less remember the names of.

I do remember Sao Conrado, because that's the beach where the paragliders and hang gliders who launch off Pedra Bonita land. And also Tijuca Beach, because it's there where Sergio, a true Carioca (what natives of Rio are called) and Rio EcoSporte's founder, alerts me to the presence of caimans, alligator-like creatures, in the brackish lagoons opposite the beach.

"But these are Carioca caimans," he says. "They're relaxed, like the people here. They're no problem to you." Evidently, the sharks sometimes seen off these beaches got the same memo the caimans did. "Sharks here are relaxed, too. No problem," Sergio says.

I'm told Prainha Beach, about an hour via our scenic back route from my hotel in Copacabana, is one of the best spots in the city to surf.

After the barely-there-ness of many of the bathing suits — worn by both women and men — at Copacabana Beach, I'm surprised to learn Rio has only one nude beach, Abricó, west of Prainha and east of Grumari, which is the last beach in this stretch you can drive to.

We drive past Grumari without stopping. We're headed to Praias Selvagens, Rio's wild beaches, accessible only to those willing to hike.

Two hours by car from Copacabana, the neighborhood of Barra de Guaratiba is still in the city of Rio. Walking up a residential street, past two- and three-story houses painted every shade of the rainbow but all with red tile roofs, it doesn't feel it, though.

A white toy poodle looks down on us from an unfinished third story. Houses spill down the hillside until the hillside meets the Atlantic, its water clearer and bluer here than at Copacabana, perhaps because we're further from the mouth of Guanabara Bay and its heavy shipping traffic.

Making a sharp right at a tree decorated with bright buttons nailed into it in the shape of flowers, the street eventually morphs from a potholed lane to a dirt path. "Tijuca Forest is nice, but now you'll get to see the real wild," says guide Julián Espinosa.

Cutting across a steep, vegetated hillside, we're soon out of Guaratiba's residential area and looking several hundred feet down onto the Atlantic Ocean, which fills the horizon.

Walking the 1½ miles to the closest wild beach — several beaches are stacked one after the other, with increasingly exiguous trails linking them — something takes me back to a walnut forest I hiked around in Kyrgyzstan.

If I were to be transported anywhere, somewhere coastal would make sense. But Kyrgyzstan? I can't figure out what here, 23 degrees south of the equator, makes me think of Central Asia. It's certainly not the salty air, the petrified dirt beneath my feet, or the deadlocked guide with Christ the Redeemer tattooed onto the back of his muscular calf.

I puzzle over this until it's time to hike up Pedra da Tartaruga — turtle stone in English. Turtle Stone looks like its name would suggest, a rocky double mound rising out of the ocean, attached to the mainland by an isthmus barely wider than some of the bikinis at Copacabana. We do the steep walk up the shell part,

RIO CONTINUED ON F5



THE WASHINGTON POST

If you go

WHERE TO STAY

Belmond Copacabana Palace1720 Av. Atlântica, Copacabana
011-55-21-2548-7070www.belmond.com/copacabana-palace-rio-de-janeiro

One block from the famous beach, the lobby of this gracious art deco hotel smells of lemongrass. Its beach service includes sun loungers, umbrellas and attendants that watch your belongings while you swim. Rooms from \$590.

Mama Ruisa132 Rua Santa Cristina, Santa Teresa
011-55-21-2508-8142www.mamaruisa.com

A late 19th-century palace in the hilly, bohemian Santa Teresa neighborhood, this hotel is far from beaches, but convenient to Tijuca Park. Rooms from \$245.

WHERE TO EAT

Casa da Feijoada10 Rua Prudente de Moraes, Ipanema
011-55-21-2523-4994bit.ly/1HveJr6

Usually reserved for Sunday, the traditional meat and side-dish-heavy Brazilian stew feijoada — pronounced “fedj-wa-da” — is available daily at this Ipanema cafe. Entrees from \$50.

Le Blé Noir19 Rua Xavier Silveira, Copacabana
011-55-21-2267-6969

Expect to wait for a table at this tiny traditional creperie in Ipanema unless you arrive shortly after it opens. The Ouessant includes caramelized figs, Porto wine, vanilla, goat cheese, cured ham and crushed walnuts. No reservations. Open nightly at 7 p.m. Entrees from \$11.

Boulangerie Guerin920 Av. Nossa Senhora de Copacabana, Copacabana
011-55-21-2523-4140www.boulangerieguerin.com.br

Dominique Guerin’s grandfather opened a bakery in the Paris suburbs in 1921; Dominique opened one here focusing on “revolutionized French classics” in 2012. Open daily from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Entrees from \$5.

WHAT TO DO

Jardim Botânico do Rio de Janeiro

1008 Rua Jardim Botânico, Jardim

Botânico

011-55-21-3874-1808

www.jbrj.gov.br

Wide pathways wind past upwards of 6,000 species of plants, including collections of bromeliads, cacti, orchid and carnivorous plants. Open Monday noon to 5 p.m.; Tuesday to Sunday 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Adults older than 60 and children younger than 7, free; \$2.50 otherwise.

Rio EcoEsporte Adventures

011-55-21-96416-4930

www.rioecoporte.com.br

Get away from the hustle and bustle of downtown by hiking to a wild beach, taking a surf lesson, paragliding or stand-up paddleboarding. All adventures are custom. From \$150.

Tijuca National Park

011-55-21-2491-1700

www.parquedatijuca.com.br

The urban forest is in the heart of Rio. The park includes several popular trails as well as miles of less-traveled hiking trails, howler monkeys and ocelots. Open daily 8 a.m.-5 p.m. during Rio’s winter and 8 a.m.-6 p.m. during Rio’s summer.

Christ the Redeemer

Rua Cosme Velho, 513, Laranjeiras

011-55-21-2558-1329

www.christtickets.com

Trams leave every 30 minutes or so to escort you to the 2,300-ish foot summit of Corcovado and the base of the 98-foot art deco statue of Jesus. The statue was designed by French sculptor Paul Landowski and named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007. Open daily from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. From \$17.

Free Tours de Aventura

011-55-21-98002-7520

www.freetoursdeaventura.com

Group hikes go out almost daily and focus on the city’s wilder places — Urca Hill (an easy hike next to the more popular, and strenuous, Sugarloaf hike), Primatas Waterfall, Corcovado, Pico do Papagaio, Tijuca Peak, Vista Chinesa, and Pedra Bonita. Group tours are free, but tips are encouraged. Private hikes are also available, starting at \$75.

INFORMATION

www.rcvb.com.brwww.rioofficialguide.com

— D.M.

RIO FROM F4

although a trail does go to the turtle’s head.

Resting at the top of the shell, 300 feet above the ocean, we get the day’s best view of the wild beaches; four of them of varying sizes and separated by rock outcrops spilling down the hillside and into the ocean. They have as much in common with Ipanema or Copacabana as Washington, D.C., does with Washington state.

My day on Copacabana was wonderful, and exactly what would be expected at a major beach in a big city: reading a novel for the first time in over a year and, with an attendant from the Copacabana Palace watching my lounge and belongings, getting up every so often to wade into the ocean to a point where it is just deep enough the waves knock me over. There was great people-watching. And every five minutes, someone came over wanting me to buy a beach towel, or hat, or massage, or temporary tattoo.

Walking back across the isthmus, we head for the first wild beach, Praia do Perigoso. Its sand squishing up between my toes, I’m no longer in Rio, but on some exotic, remote island. Or so I think. On a beach the size of five football fields, there are half a dozen people. This is not what I expect in Rio.

In the distance, islets rise out of the ocean. At our feet, emerald green waves — taller than those at Copacabana — crash into clean, white sand. “Perigoso means ‘danger,’ so this is ‘Danger Beach,’” Julián says. “But I think the only danger here is that you won’t want to leave.” Sergio adds: “It’s Carioca danger.”

We swim, then find rocks to rest on. The sun dries us off quickly, and leaves a gritty layer of salt behind on my skin.

The salt won’t last, so I look for a seashell to take home as a memento. There are none. But, where the beach meets the forest, there are nuts, still in their shells, everywhere. They could be

walnuts — the Kyrgyzstan connection! — but I’m not sure. I ask Julián. He doesn’t know the name, but says the energy bar he gave me earlier had a picture of one its wrapper. Duh. Of course the forests around the wild beaches are full of Brazil nut trees.

Brazil nuts are an entirely different beast than walnuts, but evidently, the trees they grow on are close enough to be reminiscent. (At least, for someone who’s only exposed to nut trees when hiking in exotic places.)

My time in Rio could end now, and I’d be happy. But Sergio has another adventure planned. “It’s not hiking, or a beach, but I think you’ll like it,” he says, his English much better than he gives himself credit for.

Less than an hour later, we’ve dropped off our beach supplies at the car and are standing, feet hip-width apart, on stand-up paddleboards and making our way across the mouth of the Canal do Bacalhau in the protected area of Restinga da Marambaia. Safely across — not that the crossing is at all technical — Sergio points deep into a thicket of mangroves, most of their rainbowed roots exposed because it’s low tide.

He’s indicating the spot where he once saw one of the prettiest birds found in the area.

I can’t bring myself to look for birds, though. In addition to living in the Barrio da Tijuca lagoons, caimans live here, too. I might risk an afternoon on a beach that is dangerous Carioca-style, but I don’t know whether I’m yet ready to meet any caimans, no matter how relaxed they are.

And we don’t. An hour later, we’re returning our paddleboards. We didn’t see any caimans, but neither did we see Sergio’s bird. Maybe it’s hanging out with Tijuca’s coatis and monkeys.

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SMART MOUTH



Rise and ‘shine at a rural Virginia distillery

PHOTOS BY JIM BARNES FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

BY JIM BARNES

In one block on Main Street in Marion, Va., you can enjoy first-rate barbecue at Wolfe’s, watch live bluegrass performances at the historic Lincoln Theatre and rest your head at the equally venerable General Francis Marion Hotel.

But what drew me here was the opportunity to sample some Virginia moonshine at its source.

Over the past few years, I had noticed moonshine products on the shelves of liquor stores in Virginia and heard that some of them were even hosting moonshine tastings.

But despite having lived half my life in Kentucky and Virginia — two states rich in the liquor’s lore — I had never tried the stuff. So I persuaded my wife, Juli, to join me on a weekend drive to have our first tastes of moonshine in a place where it is made, in the back of a store on Marion’s Main Street.

Marion is a picturesque town of about 6,000 situated alongside Interstate 81 about 100 miles southwest of Roanoke. One of its landmarks is the art deco Mayan Revival-style Lincoln Theatre, built in 1929 as a cinema and renovated and repurposed in recent years as a performing arts venue. It is home to the PBS bluegrass music series “Song of the Mountains.”

Just a few steps away is the General Francis Marion Hotel, which was touted as one of the finest hotels in the South when it opened in 1927. Renovated in 2006, it now houses the Black Rooster restaurant and bar.

When Juli and I rolled into town about noon on a Saturday, we stopped for some tasty barbecue at Wolfe’s before strolling down to the Appalachian Mountain Spirits Mercantile and Stillhouse Store to inquire about a tour of the Virginia Sweetwater Distillery, which is housed in the back.

We were greeted by co-owners Scott and Dana Schumaker, as well as three flame-point Siamese cats, which had the run of the place. The Schumakers sell gifts, crafts and books in the front; the back area is licensed as a Virginia ABC (Alcoholic Beverage Control Department) store, where they mostly sell their own brands. Scott informed us that his distiller, Matt DeHart, had already fired up the still in the back room and that he would be happy to give us a demonstration.

Matt introduced us to Miss Kelsey, one of the operation’s two stills. Named after the couple’s daughter, Miss Kelsey is the smaller of the two, holding 30 gallons. The other still, Miss Dana, stays on the couple’s property on the side of a mountain about two miles from downtown Marion. With a 200-gallon capacity, Miss Dana produces 95 percent of the distillery’s output.

Matt gave a quick rundown on what

moonshine is and how the still works. It’s simply corn liquor that hasn’t been aged, he said. When aged in barrels, it takes on colors and flavors from the barrels and thus becomes whiskey.

He pointed to a gauge that showed the alcohol content of the liquor. As he opened a spigot to release a jet of clear moonshine into a bucket, the gauge read 90 percent, or 180 proof. Water would be used to dilute the moonshine until it attained the desired level — 85 proof for the standard Virginia Sweetwater Moonshine, and 101 proof for the stronger Shiners’ Gold, which is currently available only at the stillhouse store in Marion.

We decided it was too early in the day to begin our \$7.50 tasting, so we returned early in the evening, as most of Marion’s visitors were converging on the Lincoln Theatre to see a live performance of “Song of the Mountains.”

Matt, stationed behind the bar, explained that Virginia law limits tasters to three half-ounce shots of their products — the regular moonshine, Shiners’ Gold or the distillery’s War Horse Whisky (Scott uses the Scottish spelling), winner of a gold medal at the Great American Distillers Festival for the past two years. We could also choose small shots of the moonshine flavored with peach, blackberry or apple pie “mixin’s.”

Juli and I started with the regular moonshine, which was smooth and warming, leaving no aftertaste. I preferred the Shiners’ Gold, which had more bite and flavor, and the smoke-tinged whiskey. Juli tried the moonshine flavored with peach, which she liked best, and apple pie, which she found a little too sweet.

We took our time, sipping from our shot glasses, listening to bluegrass gospel music and letting the experience wash over us as more people came in for tastings. After a while, Scott relieved Matt at the bar, opened a bottle and let us have a taste of a new product he is developing — a whiskey flavored with the sweet smoke of red oak from his mountain property. He called it Revelations.

It had a rich, smoky flavor, and at 120 proof, it was a little strong for Juli’s taste. But I thought it was — well, a revelation. Scott plans to have a 91 proof version on the market by summer, and I promised him I would be a customer.

The four small samples of moonshine and whiskey added up to the equivalent of slightly more than one mixed drink — but even so, Juli and I were pleasantly glowing from our experience. There was no need to drive anywhere. Right across the street, our dinner and room at the General Francis awaited us.

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Jim Barnes is a freelance writer in Leesburg. His Web site is www.notesnletters.com.

Scott Schumaker conducts a tasting at his store, Appalachian Mountain Spirits Mercantile and Stillhouse, in Marion, Va. Virginia Sweetwater Distillery is in the back.

If you go

WHERE TO STAY

General Francis Marion Hotel

107 E. Main St.

276-783-4800

www.gfmhotel.com

Rooms from \$89 (\$79 on weekends) to \$199 for an executive suite (\$160 on weekends).

WHERE TO EAT

Black Rooster Restaurant

107 E. Main St.

276-783-4800

www.gfmhotel.com/the-black-rooster

Salads start at \$8; sandwiches \$6-\$14; entrees \$14-\$26.

Wolfe’s BBQ Restaurant and Catering

138 E. Main St.

276-378-0823

www.wolfes-bbq.com

Sandwiches \$3.50-\$8.50, platters \$7.50-\$18.

WHAT TO DO

Appalachian Mountain Spirits, home of Virginia Sweetwater Distillery

112 E. Main St.

276-378-0867

www.virginianwhiskeys.com

Distillery tours typically run 45 min. and are by appointment Monday to Saturday between 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tastings, \$5.

Lincoln Theatre

117 E. Main St.

276-783-6093

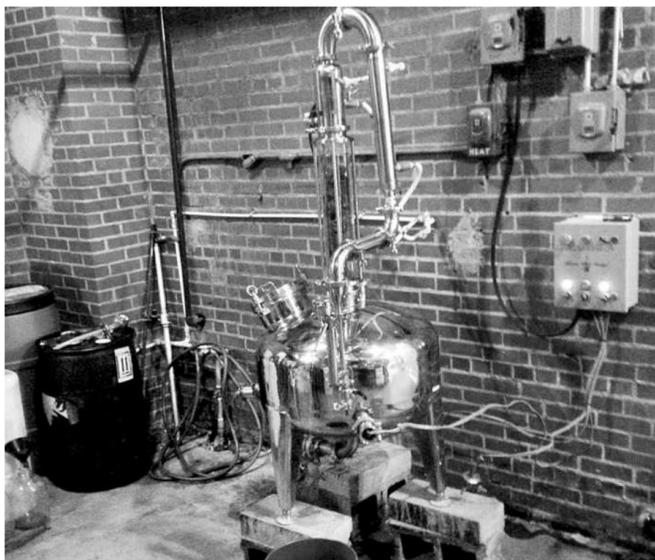
www.thelincoln.org

Musical and theatrical performances, including “Song of the Mountains.”

INFORMATION

www.marionva.org

— J.B.



The historic General Francis Marion Hotel, above, and the 30-gallon still, left, lovingly named Miss Kelsey, used to make moonshine at Virginia Sweetwater Distillery.