As if Virginia didn't have enough reasons to attract visitors, it is also the proud host of America's 400th Anniversary, and promises you an unforgettable experience.  

By Alisa Bailey

Virginia: "an earthly paradise"

Captain John Smith in describing Virginia to his countrymen said that it was "the fittest place for an earthly paradise." Four hundred years later, it is hard to argue with Smith's conclusion, though today's visitors to Virginia will find accommodations far more comfortable than did Smith and his fellow Englishmen.

Those historic voyagers came to what they called the "New World," enticed by the promise of adventure and the chance to do something unforgettable. Today, Virginia holds the same allure and promise. If you want "unforgettable," you've come to the right place.

You've also come at the right time. America's 400th Anniversary is the most significant anniversary since the bicentennial in 1976. This commemoration of life, culture, tradition and heritage is an occasion that offers the chance to explore and discover, to be enriched and uplifted. It is a chance to be a part of something memorable and to share that experience with family and friends.

Join in the excitement

The 2007 commemoration is filled with things to see and experience. There are a wide range of Signature Events, which include family-oriented festivals, music, cultural programs and children's activities.

Throughout Virginia, communities are playing a special role in the commemoration, hosting an enticing array of events. It adds up to one of those "unforgettable" experiences that come along only so often.

Jamestown also marks the coming together of diverse cultures in America. During the commemoration, Virginia Indian tribes and African-American communities will tell their stories as part of the historic context—so fitting since both groups have been integral parts of America's legacy and drive towards prosperity and freedom.

This once-in-a-lifetime event, America's 400th Anniversary, is an opportunity to enjoy Virginia like never before. Communities throughout the Commonwealth have invested time and capital to welcome guests from around the world. From the state's Southwest to its Eastern shore, Virginians began preparing for this moment more than 10 years ago, and the commitment to ensure exceptional hospitality continues.

The impact of America's 400th Anniversary on Virginia's tourism industry will be far-reaching and enduring. Preparations for 2007 not only help us tell Americans about the Commonwealth's important
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role in the nation's past, they help us communicate Virginia's exciting future.

Virginia has been a tourism leader for decades because of our unique blend of welcoming hospitality and wide array of destination options. In fact, the state's reputation as an outstanding destination has made it one of our most important industries. In 2005, tourism generated $16 billion in revenues, supported 206,000 jobs and created $2 billion in tax revenues. The improvements made in recent years will help this vital industry continue to serve guests in an exceptional manner for decades to come.

America's roots are firmly planted in the ground of Jamestown. It was here that three cultures came together and began weaving the first threads of the fabric of our country. Jamestown is the home of our system of free enterprise. Our way of life, our system of government—all of it began here at Jamestown.

This anniversary is an appropriate time for you to come to this place and reflect on the things you hold most dear.

The Virginia experience

It is also a chance for you to embark on your own quest for adventure, and Jamestown is a good place to begin that journey. Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown form America's Historic Triangle. The area is a favorite tourism destination in Virginia, and has been for generations.

An easy drive leads you to Hampton Roads and Virginia Beach, an area filled with cultural riches and downright excitement. Richmond, Virginia's capital, is also nearby. A city of great museums, restaurants, shopping and even whitewater rafting, Richmond has a vibe all its own.

You can further extend your visit to Virginia by heading to historic Fredericksburg or to Alexandria, Mount Vernon and the hallowed ground of Arlington. Central Virginia's wine country beckons with lush scenery and great small towns. The Shenandoah Valley and Blue Ridge Mountains are incomparable in their beauty.

Southwest Virginia rings with the music of fiddles, guitars and banjos. Southern Virginia is perfect for outdoor recreation while Virginia's Eastern Shore is a nature lover's paradise.

We are honored that you have come here to experience America's 400th Anniversary, and to be a part of a moving and memorable event. We invite you now to go out and explore, for there are riches to be gained in Virginia. Walk its pristine beaches and woodland trails. Bicycle through the mountains. Tap your toes to the sound of a bluegrass band. Canoe a winding valley river. Enjoy great food; catch a sunset from the terrace of a winery. March with the troops at Williamsburg. Encounter the real George Washington. Shop 'til you drop, and then drop into a feathery bed at a romantic inn. Make memories to last a lifetime.

Most importantly, plan a return trip. Virginia will be here for you.

The Golden Weed

One purpose of the Jamestown Colony was to find gold. The colonists never found the precious metal, but instead discovered what became known as the "golden weed," or tobacco.

John Rolfe came to the Jamestown settlement in 1609 and brought tobacco seeds from the Caribbean. These plants grew well in Virginia soil. Rolfe later married Pocahontas. The Virginia Indians grew tobacco, and Pocahontas probably knew much about the crop. Rolfe produced a fine resulting tobacco and, by 1619, Jamestown had exported 10 tons of tobacco to Europe.

In 2000, Virginia produced more than 66 million pounds of tobacco and it remains a vital cash crop.

A printing wood block used by tobacco companies shows two Virginia Indians smoking pipes.

Ailsa Bailey is president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation.