

WHERE: Syria, Va.

WHY: Mountain cascades, fried oysters, roller skating and a serene Buddhist temple.

HOW FAR: 58 miles from Manassas, or about 1¾ hours.

September is the perfect month to dust off those hiking boots: Up in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, the sun shines brightly but the air is cool. And nestled into the Shenandoah Valley is Whiteoak Canyon—a magnificent place to spend a couple of hours roaming. Six waterfalls tumble through steep terrain, scattered along a six-mile, round-trip hike. Some of them end in swimming holes, where sweaty hikers can splash around and rejuvenate, or sit back and watch monarch but-

terflies flit through green foliage and wildflowers. For a more strenuous hiking circuit, Old Rag Mountain looms nearby, its craggy facade beckoning to rock climbers. The round trip of that mountain is about seven miles and includes a natural staircase and sweeping views. Entry to both parks is \$5 (the pass lasts a full week).

On the drive up, pause to get your chi in tune and stroll through the gardens at Wat Long Buddhavong in Catlett. At the Buddhist temple, adorned with golden finials, monks meditate daily at 6:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. More into heart-stopping adventure? Hop in a biplane at the Flying Circus in Bealeton, where you can spin, loop and roll in an open-cockpit ride.

Next, get fortified in the quaint hamlet of Remington, where the Corner Deli dishes out Philly-style hoagies and sweet iced tea. Then

visit the Graffiti House in Brandy Station, where the walls are covered with the signatures and drawings of Civil War soldiers who passed through long ago.

In Culpeper, make a pass through Clarke Hardware for a bit of nostalgic window shopping—they've got Radio Flyer tricycles, scooters and wagons, as well as the iconic red sleds. And once in Syria, stop at Graves Mountain Lodge, a rustic, family-run establishment. You can have a hearty meal in the restaurant or take an hour-long horseback ride before tackling the mountains ahead.

— **Andrea Caumont**

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