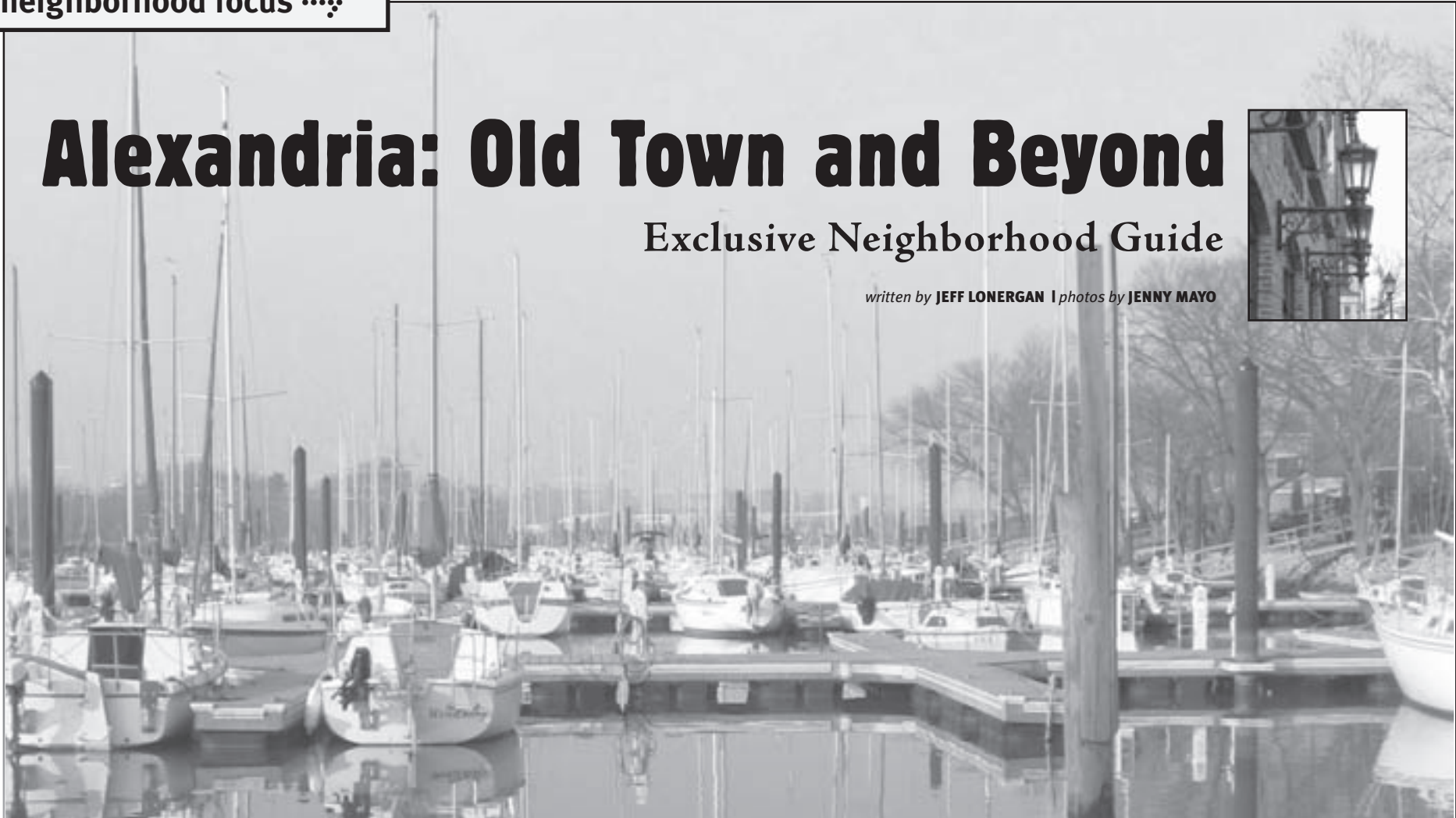


# Alexandria: Old Town and Beyond

## Exclusive Neighborhood Guide

written by **JEFF LONERGAN** | photos by **JENNY MAYO**



**H**istoric Old Town, Alexandria, is filled with rows of townhouses in every color imaginable—paisley greens and purples or bright pinks and blues. And some are large, some quaint; some are new, others ancient. Inside these dwellings are proud Alexandrians of myriad personas, linked by their close proximity to each other, as well as their snugness to D.C. And if Old Town is one body, running through its heart is King St., which serves as the cultural and economic artery from which other veins of commerce and life protrude.

With this in mind, here is your exclusive neighborhood guide to the best sights, sounds and smells of Old Town, as told with the help of one of the great sages of the Western World, who'll remain unnamed.

Remember, you'll be smart to visit Old

Town, as it's full of surprises and quite impressive. In fact, after just a few hours spent cavorting, you'll probably want to move here for life. I only wish I could delve deeper into its rich history and treasured landmarks. Maybe another day. (And one should also note that Alexandria, which is much greater than simply the Old Town neighborhood, is filled with fun things to do and great places to go, some of which we've included—consider this your starter's guide.)

### HEY, I'M HUNGRY!

**Ecco Cafe**—(220 N. Lee St.)—An upscale, modern-American restaurant offering huge portions in a warm, home-style atmosphere with brick walls. Try the spaghetti/calamari entrée, or the margaritas—they won't disappoint.

**La Bergerie**—(218 N. Lee St.)—"Posh" and "French" are key words here. Is that redundant? Haute cuisine, madame! This Old Town mainstay since "Welcome Back Kotter" is located upstairs from Ecco Café. Try the London Broil. The wine list won't discourage, either.

**Bilbo Baggins**—(208 Queen St.)—A cozy hobbit hole with all exposed wood, and a nice tap room cornered into one side. What's more, there are vegetarian-delight options for all furry-footed rascals. Hobbits are plant eaters, right?

**Faccia Luna**—(823 S. Washington St.)—Offerings: grinders, best pizza in Old Town and a big, open oven and exposed kitchen. Warm, yellow walls abound. Outside

dining when weather permits. I've walked out completely satisfied and full-bellied on numerous Sundays.

**Landini Brothers**—(115 King St.)—Creamy, Northern-Italian eats in a renovated warehouse setting. The bar out front is a favorite for older regulars and the fish and pasta specials are magnificent.

**The Warehouse Bar & Grill**—(214 King St.)—Once you walk through the door, caricatures of VIPs and celebrities will pop out at you from the wall. Spicy flavors and Cajun cooking will please your taste buds.

**King Street Blues**—(112 N. Saint Asaph St.)—New Orleans, here I come! Sip at the well-tended corner bar on the first floor

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or stare at the weird, psychedelic papier-mâché statues throughout. Lots of colorful walls and good food in a relaxed setting.

**Austin Grill**—(801 King St.)—Two floors of Tex-Mex flair for all ages. Impress your date by eating the enormous portions—with precision and accuracy. If you get too full, you always can slip into the bar and drain a margarita. Start with the salsa and chips and don't look back.

**Le Gaulois**—(1106 King St.)—A traditional, French inn kind of place with heroic Viking busts out front. Surprises await your discovery.

**Stella's**—(1725 Duke St.)—High ceilings and a long bar make for an American hit. It dishes out—quite possibly—the best brunch in Old Town, too. Outside dining in a breezy, courtyard setting, means no carbon-monoxide fumes will taint your dish.

**Blue Point Grill**—(Franklin & S. Washington St.)—This hot spot is adjacent to Sutton Place Gourmet and wins with an excellent raw bar. Seafood is their specialty. There's convenient parking underground.

**Olde Towne Deli**—(109 N. Washington St.)—Rodger and his mom hold fort, serving up Greek salads, steak and cheese, and fries. The faded pictures of Greece and checkered red-and-white tablecloths equal old-school, lunch-counter food. Good food, that is.

**Dragon Eatery**—(5 Cameron St.)—Go for the General Tso! It's the best the Torpedo Factory pavilion has to offer, or so I like to think. I must obey the Dragon.

**Bruscato's**—(814 N. Fairfax St.)—Hand craft your own meal here. Fresh salads and pastas make for a tasty menu. Note: The line moves fast! (Carmen likes to get everyone moving from her command post. Carmen rocks!)

**Taverna Cretekou**—(818 King St.)—Greek food doesn't get much more authentic than this. Over the summer, Cretekou even offered an Olympic-themed ancient Greek menu that exclusively used techniques and ingredients utilized in the era of the first Greek Olympics.

**The Burrito Grill**—(693 N. Washington St.)—A new establishment with a sleek design: stainless-steel, pristine tiles and all white. Fresh, well-prepared quesadillas, burritos, chips and salsa fill out the menu. Remember to say "hey" to Hector.

**Stardust Restaurant & Lounge**—(608 Montgomery St.)—A novel addition to the Old Town restaurant scene. Some describe it as "fun and kitschy." But, in all, the well-spaced tables and a nice bar, mixed with the new-fusion menu, get everyone hot.

**WHERE'S THE BAR?**

**Union Street Public House**—(121 S. Union St.)—The first Old Town pub to build an array of taps for your drinking pleasure, it now has three or four separate tap rooms. The food is unusually scrumptious (for a bar) and reasonably priced. Older, more established crowds are frequent customers. Try the crab soup and burgers.

**Chadwicks**—(203 S. Strand St.)—Conveniently located in a standalone building right at the water's edge. Upstairs and downstairs bar cater to an eclectic crowd. Stained-wood and wide staircases give it an older feel. Try the crab cake sandwich and the burger.

**Pat Troy's**—(111 N. Pitt St.)—Expect to see a host of regulars drinking and lots of military memorabilia on the surrounding walls. Luckily, the "Unicorn Ale" will make you see rainbows. You'll need it for the Irish cabaret show featuring Pat Troy as a microphone-wielding performer and host. He's half Irish songster, half mythological beast. You'll see what I mean. (Also, note that St. Patty's Day is coming, and these guys know how to put on a Party with a capital "P.")

**Murphy's Grand Irish Pub**—(713 King St.)—It has two floors, Marines wander in from Quantico, there's loud Celtic music, and the food ain't bad. Plus, the fireplace gives off a peat-scented aroma. Sounds like heaven to me.

**The Laughing Lizard Lounge**—(1324 King St.)—This place is my favorite. I like the tricky and nonsensical floor plan with one bartender/owner, but I love the classic jukebox that plays old Metallica and The Beatles. A soothing blend of pool tables, leather bench-seats and pitchers of beer make it prime-time fun.

**Founders'**—(607 King St.)—Brass kettles as you walk in, an array of home brews, traditional American flavor, comfortable booths, and, if you're lucky, a table looking out onto King St. Perfection, ladies and gentlemen, perfection.

**Joe Theismann's**—(1800 Diagonal Rd.)—Lawrence Taylor need not apply to this superb location just across from the Metro. Good value and well-prepared meals in a football-themed environment. Think big ol' chicken Caesar salads, etc.

**Bugsy's**—(111 King St.)—Pizza and beer, and beer and pizza. Brian Watson—former Red Wing and Cap—runs the joint. Can you handle the luncheon special: all the salad and pizza you can eat? How deep can you go? The pizza is bottomless.

**Hard Times Café**—(1404 King St.)—This hole-in-the-wall happens to have a juke box and renowned chili: Texas, Veggie, Terlingua and Cincinnati. The onion rings and corn bread are orgasmic. An old ❖❖❖

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**NEIGHBORHOOD:** Alexandria/Kingstowne

**YEAR BUILT:** 1992

**NUMBER OF UNITS:** 86-1BR, 98-1BR/Den, 244 2BR, 28 1BR/Loft, 100 2BR/Loft.

**AMENITIES:** On-site fitness center, two large swimming pools, two racquetball courts, tennis courts, playscapes, clubhouse, adjacent to walking/jogging trails. Walking distance to retail, food and entertainment at Kingstowne.

**AVERAGE SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 1064 sq. ft.

**DESCRIPTION:** Sussex Commons, an Archstone community, is set in the planned community of Kingstowne, just moments away from a vast array of shopping and dining. Proximity to this center and to D.C.'s major arteries is one of the property's major assets, while the community itself boast pools, game courts, a clubhouse, and tons of nearby trails for walking, running and biking.

Each apartment home boasts wall-to-wall carpeting, a built-in gas fireplace, fully equipped kitchen, and generously sized balcony (some with additional storage space). Floor plans are spacious—from the Double-Master Suites to the dens and lofts available—and all apartments include central heat and air conditioning. Storage capacity is a plus at this property, with coat closets in the entry, linen closets, and multi-rack or over-sized walk-in closets in each bedroom.

The grounds are open, and include nice touches like benches and ample parking (two free spaces per apartment with assigned, covered carport parking available for a charge). Pets are welcomed on the property as well. The Commons is within five miles of two major Metro stations (Van Dorn and Springfield Station) and the Fairfax Connector bus line picks up directly in front of the community, making public transportation extremely accessible given the suburban location.

**NAME:** Carmela Williams

**AGE:** 26

**HOMETOWN:** New York

**OCCUPATION:** Retail Manager

**HOBBIES:** Listen to music, play cards.

**YEARS LIVED IN CURRENT RESIDENCE:** One.

**HOW YOU FOUND WHERE YOU LIVE NOW:** Through a friend that works in the office.

**WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT WHERE YOU LIVE?** It's nice and convenient.

**FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT THE PROPERTY:** I like living on the first floor, no stairs!

**CLOSEST/BEST GROCERY STORE:** Safeway, Giant, Shoppers, Costco.

**BEST PLACE FOR COFFEE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD:** Starbucks (at Kingstowne center).

**FAVORITE SPOTS TO RELAX AND UNWIND IN THE AREA:** Home.

**BEST PLACE TO GET DRINKS WITH FRIENDS:** TGIFridays, Uno's.

**FAVORITE NIGHTLIFE SPOTS IN THE DC AREA:** Dream, H2O, Zanzibar.

**LOCAL SHOPPING:** Springfield Mall.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF A TYPICAL DAY FOR YOU:** Go to work, come home and spend time with my daughter and husband.

**IF YOU HAD TO SAY ONE THING ABOUT YOUR HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD, WHAT WOULD IT BE?** I like it a lot and will stay here until I decide to buy a house.



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE YOUR COMMUNITY WITH US, WHETHER YOU ARE A RESIDENT OR A PROPERTY MANAGER, PLEASE CONTACT [JMAYO@ONTAPONLINE.COM](mailto:JMAYO@ONTAPONLINE.COM)

TOP TO BOTTOM: NEARBY KINGSTOWNE CENTER'S PANERA, ENTRANCE TO KINGSTOWNE, VIEW FROM SUSSEX COMMONS' POOL, THE CLUBHOUSE, AND ALEXANDRIA'S KING STREET.

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**neighborhood focus cont. ...**

truck out front evokes memories from the Depression-era U.S. It's definitely more of a place to eat lunch or dinner than drink beers.

**SHOP 'TILL YOU DROP**

**Christmas Attic**—(125 S. Union St.)—Santa is here year round (shoot me). Ornaments, Dickens Village houses, nutcrackers—they've got all the goodies. This place is scary if you're not into Christmas, and heaven if you are. By the way, there's a very nice wait staff that's schooled about Rudolph and assorted knick-knacks.

**The Irish Walk**—(415 King St.)—Soft sweaters, Waterford crystal, walking caps, plaid ties and other Gaelic pleasantries are the name of the game here, sweet lassie. Pat Troy's better-half—Bernadette—owns the place.

**Record Mart**—(217 King St.)—Lots of vintage stuff here, people! Although it's my spot to buy vinyl, there's barely enough room to walk. Very attic-like with creaky floors that smell of old records (which I wallow in). I've spent some serious money here. Verdict: coolest place for music lovers.

**Olsson's Books and Records**—(106 S. Union St.)—Records, tapes and CDs downstairs; books are upstairs. Not your Tower Records, though (which is a good thing). Get ready to spend some money on hard-to-find music and books.

**Full Metal Jacket**—(0 Prince St.)—If you're nuts, you can get your surplus military gear here. They have guns, bazookas, etc., too. I went here as a kid and bought a Green Beret hat and wore it until I died tragically in a backyard cap-gun fight.

**John Crouch Tobacconist**—(215 King St.)—Scottish stuff, pipes, dainties and other assorted treats for the dedicated smoker make their home here. There's a huge humididor in the back for all cigar lovers.

**Chico's**—(800 King St.)—Modern, eclectic American merchandise for women. Some say it's expensive, but what do they know. Come armed with a credit card anyways. Thankfully, the helpful staff will guide uninitiated males through troubled territory.

**Ann Taylor**—(115 N. Washington St.)—Offers traditional, upscale women's wear for all seasons. Hey, you can't go wrong with a well-located store with very pleasing décor, can you ladies? There are even big windows so you can more clearly see yourself in the mirror (seriously). Strike a pose! Wait for the sales and you could make out like a bandit.

**Gossypia**—(325 Cameron St.)—New York-style prints and other fine arts and crafts for the culturally inclined available for purchase.



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**Greetings and Salutations**—(320 King St.)— This is your place for that last-minute anniversary or b-day card, and everything else in between. It's not Hallmark, folks! Rather, it's family run, and groovier. Ask Paige for her help; she'll be glad to show you through the gauntlet of card buying.

**King's Jewelry**—(609 King St.)—Magically located next door to Founders', this jeweler has it all. If you need a battery for your watch, or a Rolex, this is your place. They have the general jewelry fair, but also more unusual stuff such as nice clocks, Waterford glasses, etc. The owner is on the floor at all times, providing swift-as-an-eagle assistance.

**Pacer's**—(1301 King St.)—Running merchandise for the running man and woman. Pretty straightforward stuff, really. They'll hook you up with a pair of shoes that'll make you soar.

**The Torpedo Factory Art Center**—(105 N. Union St.)—Local artists have open studios here where you can watch them at work or buy their wares. The structure was built during WWI and was built to last! I love the place. It's a must-see. PLUS, on weekends and select weekdays when weather permits, you may catch a doo-wop or variety act performing outside the structure.

**ONE CUP OF JOE, PLEASE**

**Misha's**—(102 S. Patrick St.)—The closest thing to Greenwich Village—in Virginia, that is. A specially roasted combo of Arabica beans will please your lips. The caffeine in the "Route 66" will take you coast to coast, in one day (ha!). There's rumored to be some sort of cult following, but don't tell anyone.

**Starbucks**—(532 King St.)—Located at the corner of King and St. Asaph, you'll find the courthouse crowd here—judges, law clerks, local lawyers, etc. You'll already know what to order.

**SHUFFLE THOSE FEET, MOVE TO THE BEAT**

**Tiffany Tavern**—(1116 King St.)—This bluegrass mainstay has unmistakable Tiffany lamps in the windows. Try and catch local teacher and coach, Doug Adams, and his band, New Mode Grass. Other musical outfits frequent this comfy diamond in the rough.

**Café Salsa**—(808 King St.)—They have salsa lessons here, as well as great, Nuevo-Latino food.

**Rock It Grill**—(1319 King St.)—Karaoke-induced mania with pitchers of beer being thrown about makes for an A+. Get there early, so you can get on the song list. Lots of seedy yet wonderful characters and fluorescent bar signs. I once sang a Prince tune here. Wild times, babe.

**Laporta's**—(1600 Duke St.)—Features a jazz combo on some nights. Italian cooking, well priced, need I say more? Lounge atmosphere for everyone with a Van Dyke, turtle-neck, master's degree and a glazed look in their eye.

**Old Town Theater**—(815 ½ King St.)—No, this one isn't misplaced. With new live music every Friday and Saturday night, the Theater will have you groovin'. Also come for movies, films, family events, live theater and more!

**OUTTA THE BALLPARK (FURTHER AFIELD)**

**Generous George's**—(3006 Duke St.)—Founded by "Generous George" himself, a mainstay of Alexandria, with a bright, kitschy interior and HUGE subs, generously topped pizzas, and pasta dishes.

**Zig's**—(4531 Duke St.)—Arguably the home of the neighborhood's best live music. Wings, sports, bands, live comedy and variety acts, and lots of Alexandria's younger residents.

**Mango Mike's**—(4580 Duke St.)—Yeah Mon! Get in here for the area's only steel drum brunch and you'll forget the snow on the ground. Salsa lessons, jerk chicken, and a real waterfall on the patio—doesn't get much closer to paradise this close to the Mason-Dixon.

**Potowmack Landing**—(at Washington Sailing Marina, One Marina Dr.)—One of D.C.'s best (hidden) romantic dinner spots. Incredible seafood, a huge waterside patio, sail boats passing by, and you can watch the twinkle of airplanes as they take off and land.

**Del Ray Neighborhood**—(Mt. Vernon Ave.)—Charming new section of Alexandria that includes its own ice cream joint (Del Ray Dreamery), elegant dining destinations (Evening Star), cozy coffeehouse (St. Elmo's), and quaint ethnic restaurants (Thai Peppers, Taqueria Poblano) and shopping.

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