



BILL WHALEY

# WYLDER TILGHMAN ISLAND

A socially distant getaway where you bring your pandemic pup along for the fun

BY SARAH ZLOTNICK

The first pandemic cliché my husband and I succumbed to was to be expected. Both fortunate enough to retain our full-time jobs and be able to work from home, we went stir-crazy living, cooking, exercising and fielding conference calls within the confines of our 900-square-foot condo.

The second cliché was more unexpected. After a close friend's father died in April, we agreed to foster one of his four dogs. Our few-week arrangement inevitably turned into a more permanent thing—one look at Jumbo, our adorably fluffy Pomeranian-American Eskimo mix, and you'd understand why we, like many others in Montgomery County, became proud parents of a pandemic pup. But the

addition to our household only added to the cramped-ness of quarantine.

Come July, we were in desperate need of an escape, but we were also barely getting the hang of the whole dog parent thing. The thought of sending Jumbo to a boarder was almost as overwhelming as bringing him home in the first place. If we were going somewhere, he'd have to come too. But what kind of place that would suit our tastes—small and secluded, upscale but with a casual bent, plenty of open-air space, Covid safety protocols—would also allow dogs? It felt like an impossible ask.

Thankfully, it's not. A scenic two-hour drive from downtown Bethesda, the 54-room Wylder Hotel on Maryland's sleepy Tilghman Island was the answer to



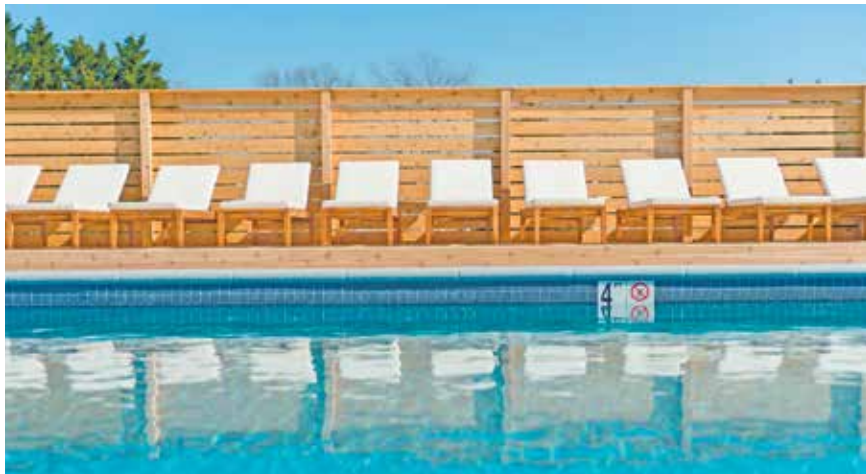
BILL WHALEY

## Where to Stay

Choose from waterfront or waterview rooms, suites or an assortment of houses and cabins.

## Where to Dine

Enjoy open-air seating at Tickler's Crab Shack and Restaurant.



CASSEY WISLER

Once a boarding house for fishermen, Wylder Tilghman Island is now a trendy boutique hotel with a bed-and-breakfast vibe on the Chesapeake.

**What to Do**

On-site activities include swimming, bonfire pits, water sports and lawn games. Or, borrow a bike for some island beach cruising.

our prayers. Set on 9.5 acres of a secluded 3-mile hamlet on the Chesapeake—roughly 20 minutes past the more bustling St. Michaels—Wylder began its life in 1898 as a boarding house for crab fishermen. In its next chapter as Harrison’s Chesapeake House, it served as a launching point for fishing excursions until it fell prey to the ’08 economic downturn, when L.A.-based hospitality guru John Flannigan (his resume includes managing and opening many beloved boutique hotels in New York) snatched up the property. In April 2018, it reopened as the flagship location for Flannigan’s burgeoning Wylder

hospitality brand, which, according to a 2018 interview in industry mag *Hotel Business*, “is all about finding surprising locations with adventure attached.” (For reference, his second location is a collection of rustic yurts and cabins at the base of the Sierra Nevada.)

Wylder Tilghman Island was, in many ways, built for pandemic life before there even was a pandemic. The spare-but-chic nautical-themed rooms (expect rope tie door stops and lots of navy and brass) in the two-story main building are accessed via outdoor walkways; there are no elevators. Fun and relaxation centers on the expansive back lawn, which butts right up to the water. There, guests can play bocce and corn hole, or wile away an afternoon reading in one of the many socially distanced Adirondack chair groupings, where s’ more roasting around fire pits become a regular occurrence as the weather cools.

Though the heated saltwater pool closes at the end of October, the complimentary paddle boards, canoes and kayaks are available throughout the season. (Charter fishing and sunset cruises from the on-site marina can also be arranged.) And for an additional \$50 a night, Jumbo enjoyed on-leash frolicking with other furry friends, long Bay-water-kissed walks through the quaint nearby neighborhoods and treats from the staff at Tickler’s, the on-site, open-air marina restaurant and bar where we spent more than one delightful evening watching the sun set while cracking open fresh Maryland crabs and downing Orange Crushes.

Sure, if you’re feeling antsy, you could head back into St. Michaels for shopping and lunch, but here’s a better idea: Hop on one of the (also complimentary) beach cruisers parked out front and peddle the other way. Because to do this place right is to really escape—and that’s better accomplished whizzing past cornfields than bumbling through a crowded main street. *From \$133 a night; [wylderhotels.com/tilghman-island](http://wylderhotels.com/tilghman-island). MIM*