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## TANGIER AND SMITH ISLANDS, CHESAPEAKE BAY

*Historic—and endangered—communities of a bygone America*

IN THE MIDDLE of lower Chesapeake Bay, practically facing each other across the Maryland-Virginia state line, sit two centuries-old, remote, and threatened communities.

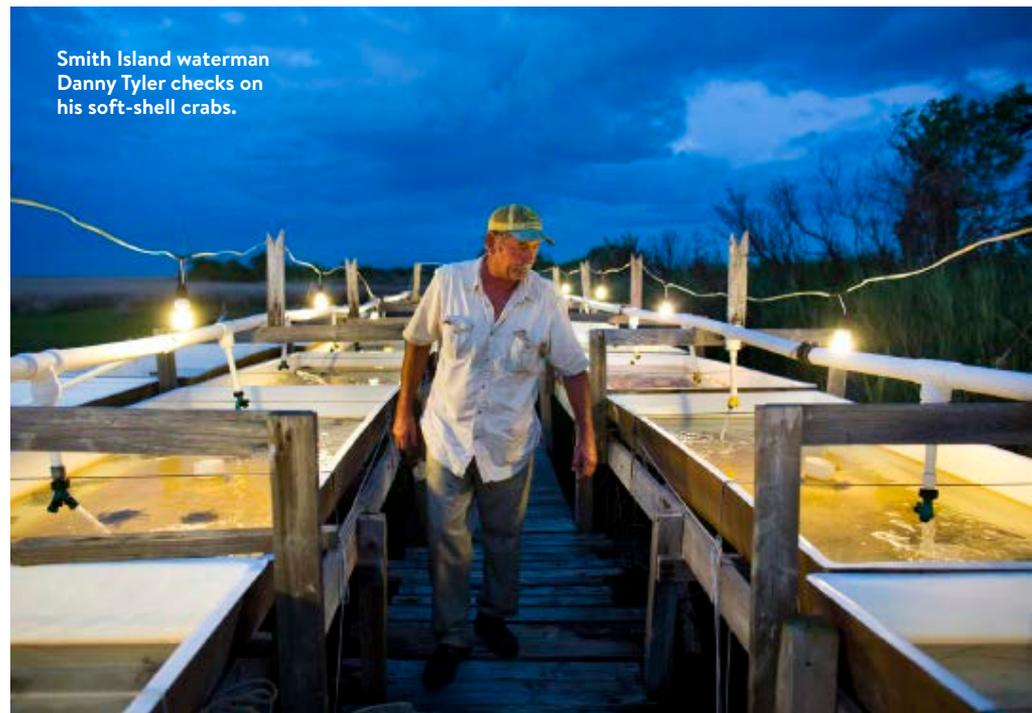
Both Smith Island, Maryland, and Tangier Island, Virginia, were first mapped by Captain John Smith in 1608. Welsh and English settlers mainly took to Smith, while natives from England's West Country favored Tangier. Residents of both islands retain unique "relic dialects," passed down from their ancestors and preserved by isolation. Watermen here have lived off the bay's oysters, crabs, and fish for almost 200 years. Their family names resound throughout the islands: Evans and Tyler on Smith; Parks, Pruitt, and Crockett on Tangier.

Life here is slower and quieter than on the mainland. Even with regular ferries, these are secluded places: few stores, almost no cars, and no

bars (both Tangier and Smith are dry). The islanders constitute a tough and independent lot: Tangier folks refused to join the Confederacy over slavery, while Rhodes Point village, on Smith Island, was once known as "Rogues Point" for area pirates who operated from there.

Visitors can explore on foot, by bike (rentals are available on-island), and by boat. Both islands offer overnight accommodations in a few B&Bs—and take pride in distinct local fare. Smith Island Cake, a towering layered confection, is Maryland's official dessert, while Tangier justly claims to be "the soft-shell crab capital" of the nation.

With their low-lying shores yielding to erosion and storm surges, these two marshy "islands out of time" may be running out of time. Yet islanders are fighting to hang on, holding fast as long as they can to their thin and vulnerable home. —STEPHEN BLAKELY



Smith Island waterman Danny Tyler checks on his soft-shell crabs.