

Guide to Living in Alexandria, Virginia

WHAT MILITARY FAMILIES SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LIVING AND WORKING IN THE ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA AREA



About MilitaryByOwner



MilitaryByOwner Advertising, Inc.

is a national leader of online real estate, advertising homes for sale or rent near U.S. military bases.

We understand military life and the challenges of PCS, relocation, acting as a long-distance landlord, and more.

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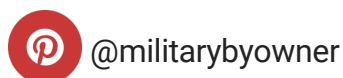
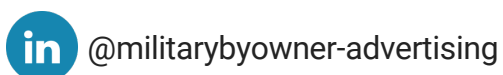
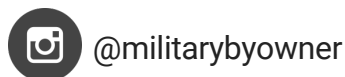
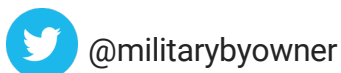
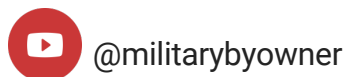
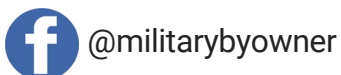


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Intro to Living in Alexandria



Welcome to Alexandria!

Get ready, because your time in Alexandria is going to fly by!

It's not just because of the city's fast pace, it's also due to the bucket list you'll write during your time here.

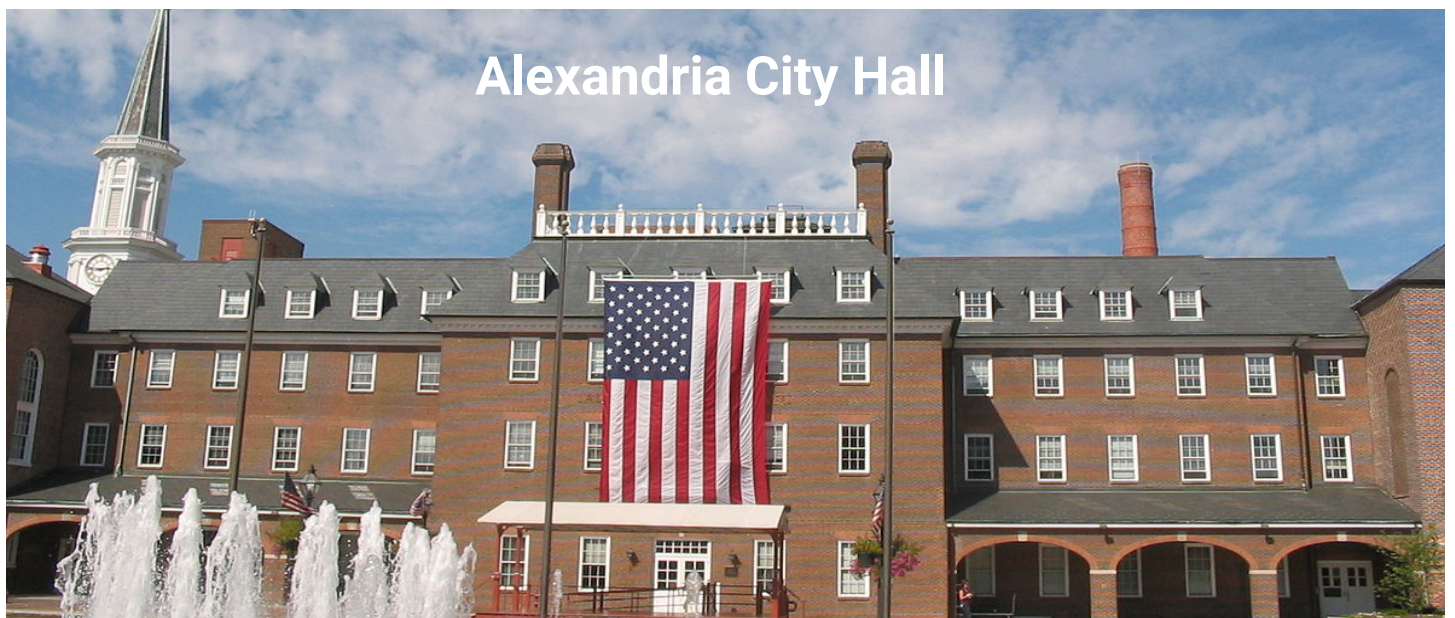
You'll probably find yourself making tough sightseeing choices as your duty station time dwindles.

All of this is to say: get busy, get involved, and try to save some extra money before arriving so you can Better fund all your adventures!

Whether or not Alexandria remains your forever home, there's no way you'll live here and walk away without a cache of memories and once in a lifetime experiences, even if you don't make a major effort!

You'll be amazed by the one-off opportunities that come your way simply by talking to a neighbor or joining a spouses' group.

You never know who wants to share extra White House Easter Egg Roll tickets or passes to Mount Vernon!

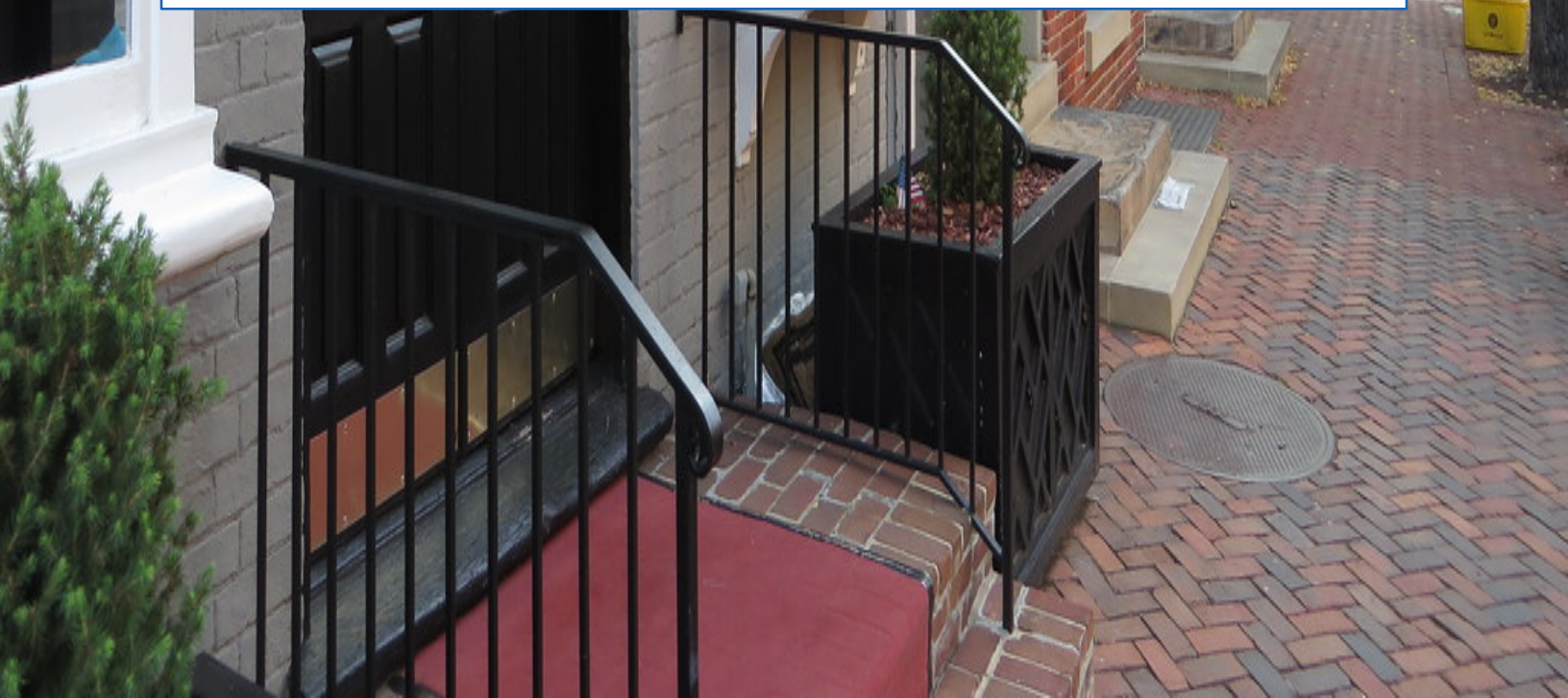


Alexandria City Hall

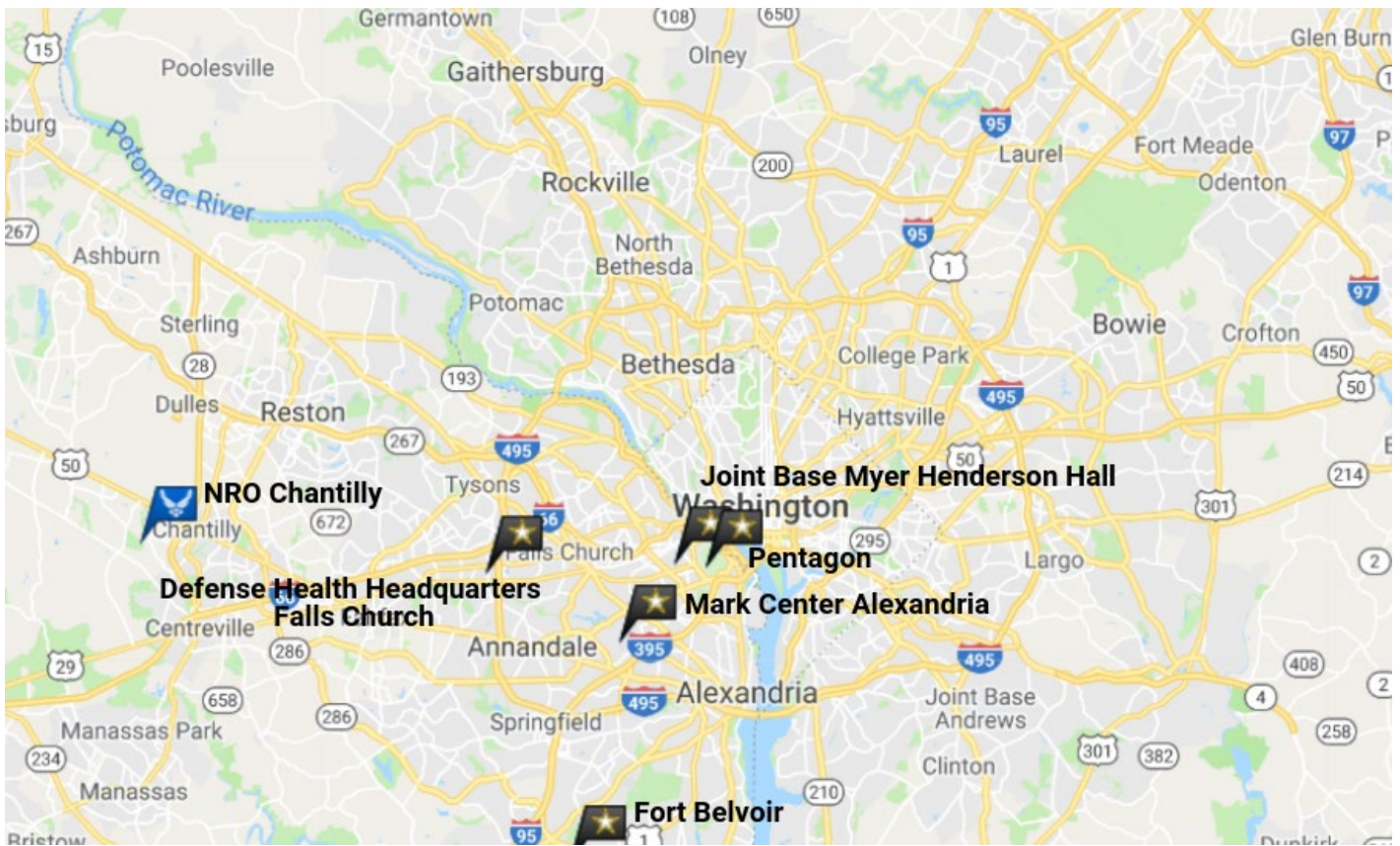


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Overview of the Alexandria Area



The Alexandria Area



[Map image via Google 2019. Visit MilitaryByOwner to see more area military installations.](#)

Geographically speaking, Alexandria couldn't be in a better location for travelers. Its proximity to three massive airports, Reagan National, Dulles International, and Baltimore Washington International, in conjunction with multiple Amtrak stations, makes for easy travel up and down the I-95 corridor.

Day trips, last-minute getaways, or holiday vacations to major cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York are just hours away. If you're unfamiliar with East Coast destinations, take advantage of Alexandria's prime location to start exploring.

Alexandria fits into several sub-regions that include local and regional designations. Locals use the terms **NOVA** (Northern Virginia), **The DMV** (D.C., Maryland, Virginia), the **National Capital Region (NCR)**, and often, simply "**D.C.**" to describe where Alexandria is located.

A PCS Move to Alexandria

Alexandria, Virginia, will likely be one of the best cities you'll encounter for a transition during a PCS move.

You won't be alone if you're headed to Alexandria by way of Fort Belvoir, The Pentagon, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Mark Center Alexandria, and other nearby bases in Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland.

There's a lot of military activity around Alexandria, which means plenty of ways to jump into life in the National Capital Region.

It's a wise idea to begin tapping into your network of military friends to get their opinions on where to live.

They'll be the ones to give the real low down on commute times, which are synonymous with the Northern Virginia lifestyle.

MilitaryByOwner also has you covered with two resources:

The Military Family Guide to Washington, D.C. supplies in-depth details to help select the best new hometown.

MilitaryByOwner's partner, Military Town Advisor, offers reviews of Alexandria neighborhoods and businesses straight from military families who've lived in the city.

Read on to learn more about this vibrant area!





Understanding Alexandria's Zip Codes & Borders

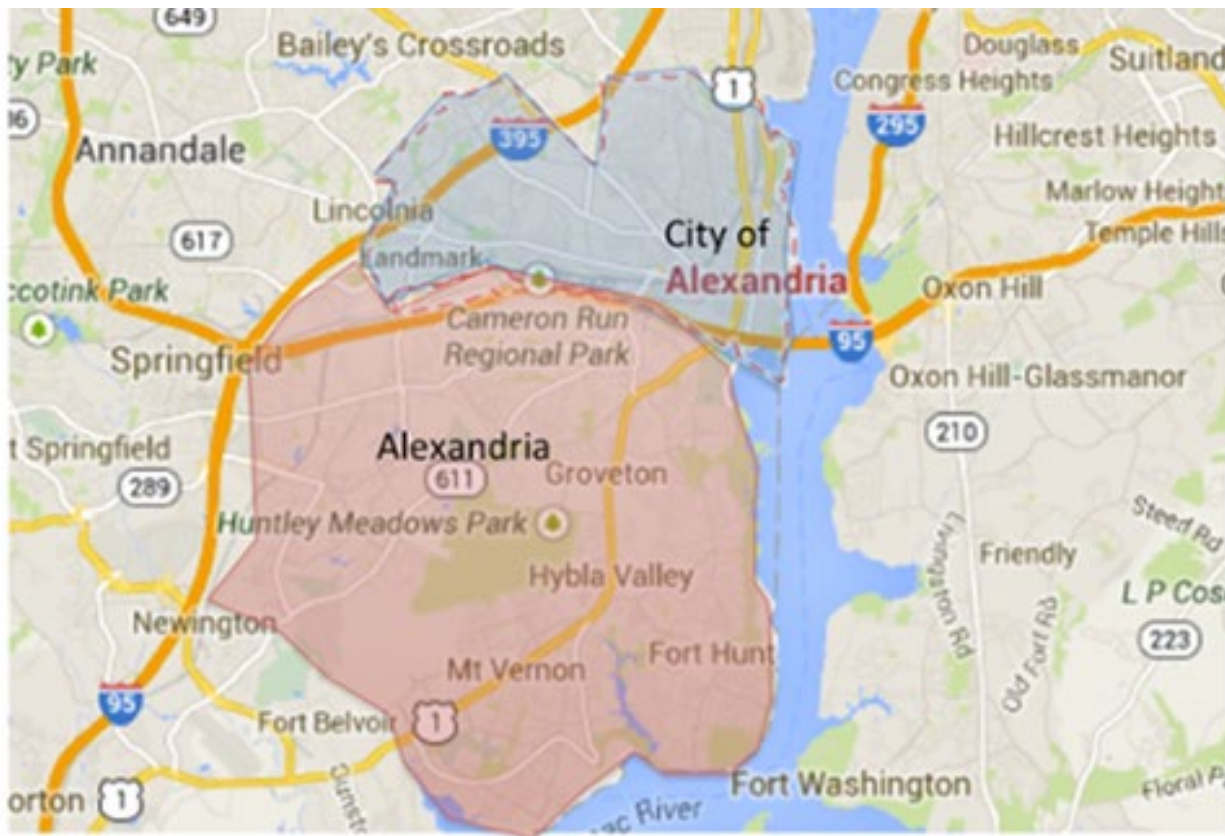
Newcomers often find it tricky to understand how the area is broken into boundaries and/or zip codes. For good reason! The collective *Alexandria*, as generally mentioned in conversation, encompasses miles and miles of distance and dozens of zip codes and neighborhoods. Alexandria is even broken down into two separate governing bodies: the **City of Alexandria** and **Alexandria, Fairfax County**.

When researching the area, it takes a coordinated effort to cross-reference zip codes and neighborhood names. In most cases, they are designated within Alexandria's borders, but sometimes the post office chooses to differentiate their names.

For example, a very popular section of Alexandria (Fairfax County) is called Kingstowne. It has its own zip code, 22315, but it's still Alexandria.

City of Alexandria

As shown on the following map, the City of Alexandria is the northernmost part of the collective known as Alexandria. The northern border is Arlington County and remaining borders meet Fairfax County.



The City of Alexandria is not in a county. Back in history, there was an Alexandria County, but this was changed to Arlington County to avoid further confusion.

It is an independent city with its own governing system. From schools to law enforcement, each entity is operated under the City of Alexandria.

Alexandria, Fairfax County

The remainder of Alexandria is housed by Fairfax County. Sometimes this part of Alexandria is referred to as Lower or South Alexandria. One of the benefits of this portion of the city is that its location is outside of the 495 Beltway, which means the option for more space and *a little* more affordability.

Another draw is access to Fairfax County Public Schools. With an abundance of very good schooling options to choose from, families usually spend plenty of time examining commute times and zip codes in relationship to their preferred schools.

[**Learn more about Alexandria Zip Codes and Borders!**](#)

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What's Unique About Alexandria?

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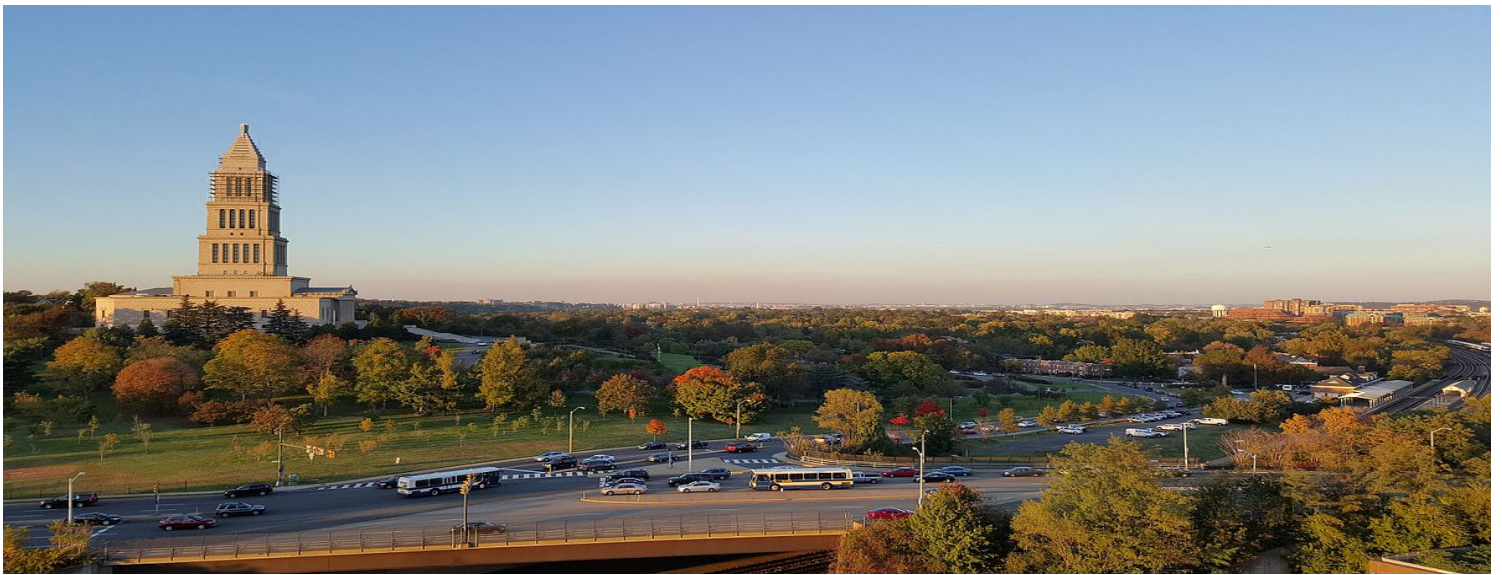


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The George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, VA. Image credit Wikimedia

The Charm of Alexandria

Military families new to Alexandria are in for an amazing experience; just ask the multitude of servicemembers who consistently return to one of Washington, D.C. area's favorite communities!

Old Town overflows with charming historic vibes and provides many chances to revisit history, explore new restaurants and shops, and find endless walkways to stroll through.

Old Town isn't the only part of Alexandria with charm to spare. The **Mount Vernon area** and its namesake, George Washington's plantation, preside over amazing views of the Potomac River. Both tourists and residents alike admire the location's sunrises and sunsets.

In the **Del Ray neighborhood**, art and street festivals abound, while music is showcased at the historic Birchmere. Locals and tourists enjoy live music from iconic performers and hometown bands.

Military families will easily find even more history and unique settings within popular residential areas such as **Seminary Hill in the West End and the Rosemont Historic District**.



The Alexandria Lifestyle

Photo by Heather Whitfield

Housing Choices

Alexandria has every type of housing you'd want! Families love the Norman Rockwell feel to dozens of neighborhoods. Apartments, townhouses, and condos are just as popular as single-family homes, but they are likely more affordable and closer to most of the military bases, which is good news for single service members.

Commuting Options

The George Washington Parkway is a gorgeous drive for those heading to Fort Belvoir or the Pentagon, while public transportation via the numerous Metrorail stations or bus system is also readily available.

Numerous Education Choices for Kids

Both the City of Alexandria and Alexandria, Fairfax County, offer highly ranked public schools. The private school scene is just as strong, along with abundant homeschooling resources and groups.

Opportunities for Military Spouses

Living in Alexandria puts spouses in the enviable position to find meaningful employment and volunteer opportunities. The local economy continues to grow, adding new jobs on a regular basis.

Dog-Friendly

Pet stores, dog walking, dog school, dog parks, dogs on Potomac river cruises, dogs that dine—the list goes on and on for pet friendly options here. Shopkeepers take pride in offering water bowls and doggie biscuits right in front of their stores, so your pooch feels welcome. Dogs can even ride on the Metro if confined in a travel crate!

Historic and Modern

The city is an ideal blend of historic and modern amenities, which makes it a high demand location. For those relocating here, the tourist population and their effects are often overlooked. Remember, Washington, D.C., is less than 10 miles from Alexandria, although in heavy traffic, this short trip could easily measure an hour or more!

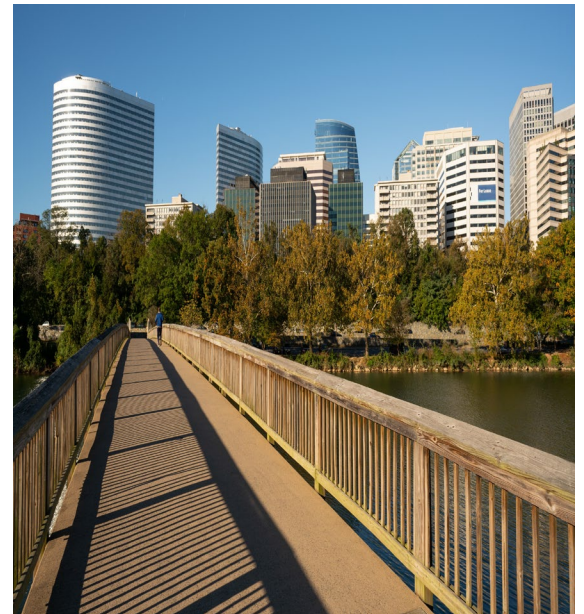
The D.C. Area

Alexandria's proximity to D.C., added to the multitude of stand-alone reasons to visit Alexandria, requires awareness of tourist commuting. Challenges with parking, traffic, and the need for reservations to popular dining attractions all exist. Each inconvenience is heightened during the tourist season and for special events like the Cherry Blossom Festival.



Alexandria Views

Clockwise from top left: American and Virginia state flags on Alexandria homes, downtown Alexandria buildings and Potomac River, Alexandria waterfront with view of Woodrow Wilson bridge. Many of the photos in this e-book are courtesy of Heather Whitfield.

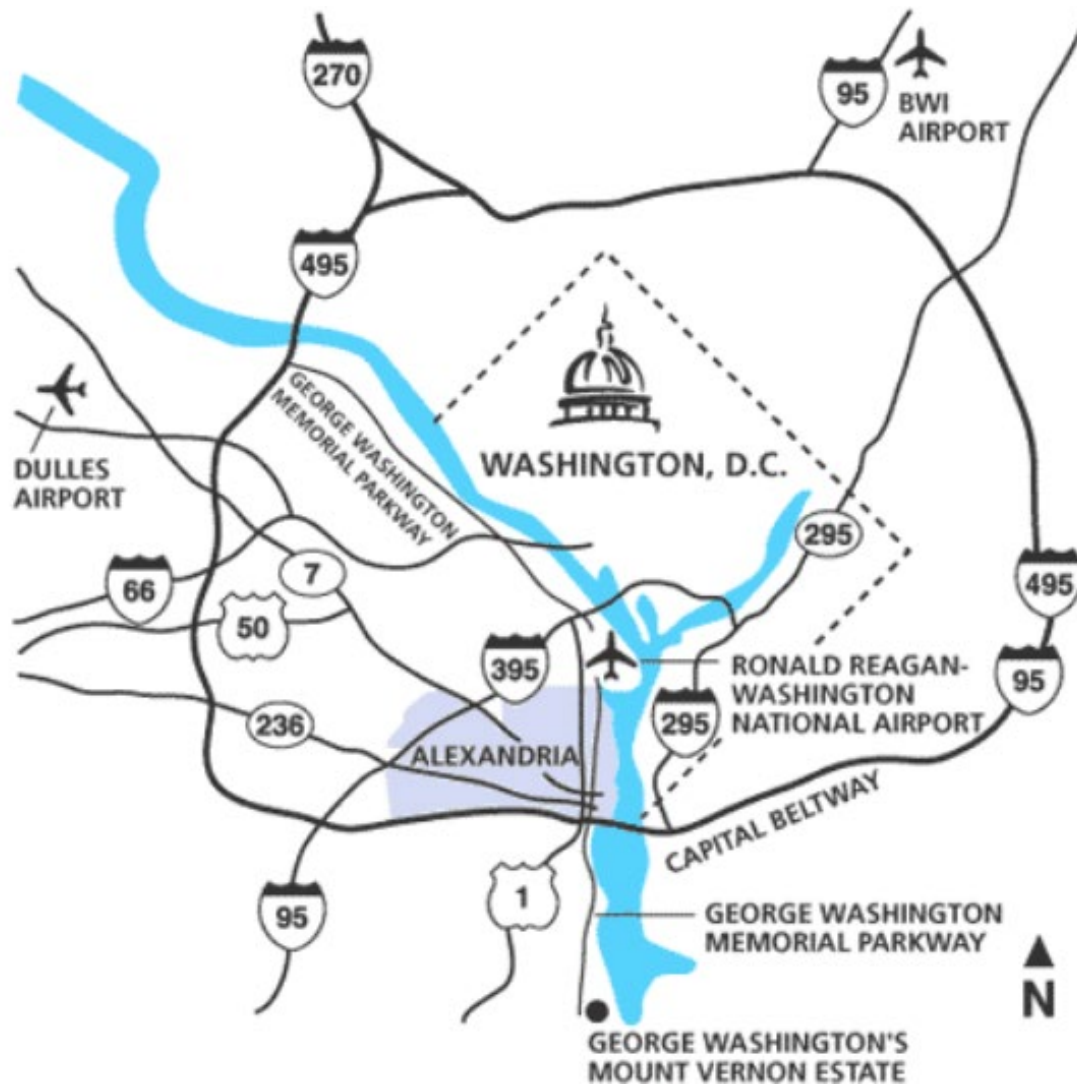


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Getting Around Alexandria

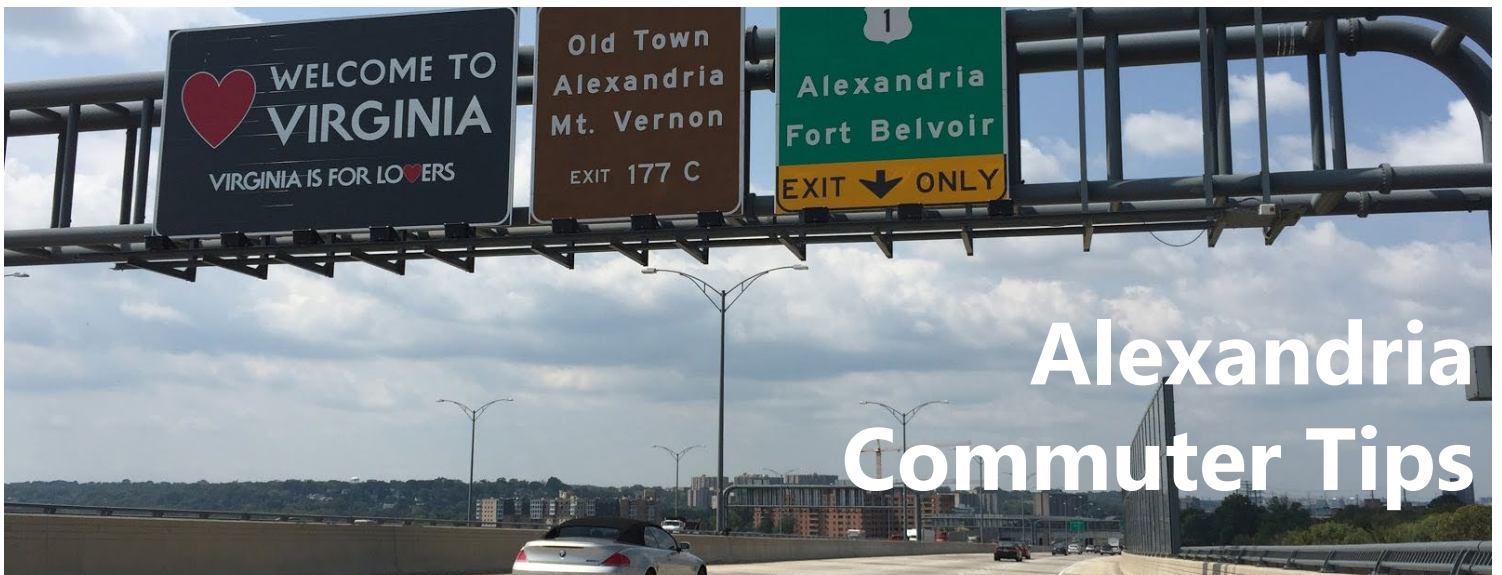


Overview of Alexandria



Alexandria Area overview map via Visit Alexandria. See the Visit Alexandria site for more helpful information and maps, including:

- Old Town Map
- King Street Trolley Map
- Alexandria Biking Map
- D.C. Area Map
- Metrorail Map
- Metrorail Directions & Tips
- And more!



Alexandria Commuter Tips

Commuting is a big deal in Alexandria. Granted, it is one of the better places in the National Capital Region to commute--that's why so many people call it home--but there are strategies involved whether you drive, ride, or bike (yes, bike) to work.

As a very general baseline, the drive to the Pentagon or Fort Belvoir will be about 20-30 minutes if avoiding peak times. Public transportation will put you in the 30-45-minute range without any delays or dense traffic.

Driving

The major source of anxiety for drivers will be parking. Leaving home and work at a specific time for the shortest ride in the car will be your second commute problem to solve. Depending on your duty station, the parking options will be varied.

Driving to Fort Belvoir? Become familiar with gate opening and closing times. The GW Parkway offers a quick ride home to most parts of Alexandria.

The Pentagon presents a larger challenge. Just because you work there doesn't mean you have a spot waiting for you each day. Parking isn't a simple task, as the spaces are so restricted. Typically, parking assignments are handled by your incoming office.

Trains and Buses

- **The Virginia Railway Express (VRE)** - commuter rail service that operates Monday through Friday, from the Northern Virginia suburbs to Washington, D.C.
- **Fairfax Connector** - a bus system to assist commuters of the area. Alexandria riders from Fort Hunt, Kingstowne, Fort Belvoir, and the Mount Vernon Area are particularly well served from these bus routes, which run to important Metro and VRE stops.
- **DASH** - Alexandria specific, helps commuters make connections between Metro trains and buses, the VRE, and local bus routes.
- **Metrorail trains and buses move a lot of commuters to and from Alexandria**. The official website for maps, schedules, and locations answers many questions and will calculate your best commute options between rail and bus.

Biking

More people than you'd think bike to work from Alexandria. It's very doable, given the bike trail access on the GW Parkway and the ability to load bikes on and off Metro trains and buses.

Two resources to check for designing your route include the City of Alexandria's Bikeways Network and Bike Washington.



THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GETTING AROUND ALEXANDRIA



Five Metrorail stations service Alexandria and provide easy access to Washington, D.C., northern VA, and MD.



Parking can be a challenge. Check for allotted parking at your residence and expect to pay for parking, even at gov't buildings.



Many people bike to work! The network of bike trails and ability to load bicycles on Metrorails and buses makes it easy.



Metro buses, the Fairfax Connector, and the DASH bus system have stops all over Alexandria.



5

Finding a Home in Alexandria

Before You Go House Hunting

Newcomers to Alexandria often envision the colonial homes found in Old Town, as what they'll find if moving to the area.

The charming rows of houses are what we see in tourist marketing and TV shows, after all!

Old Town does have many lovely Federal and Georgian style homes with history to spare, but these only begin to showcase the diversity of housing throughout Alexandria City, and Alexandria, Fairfax County.

Alexandria is so large that you'll find most styles of living, built during many time periods, even within the same neighborhood.

Remember, Alexandria is older than the U.S. itself, and its population created homes reflecting each time frame, even up until now.

The ages of the homes are also the reason that home buyers and renters come across plenty of options in need of updates, cosmetic and otherwise.

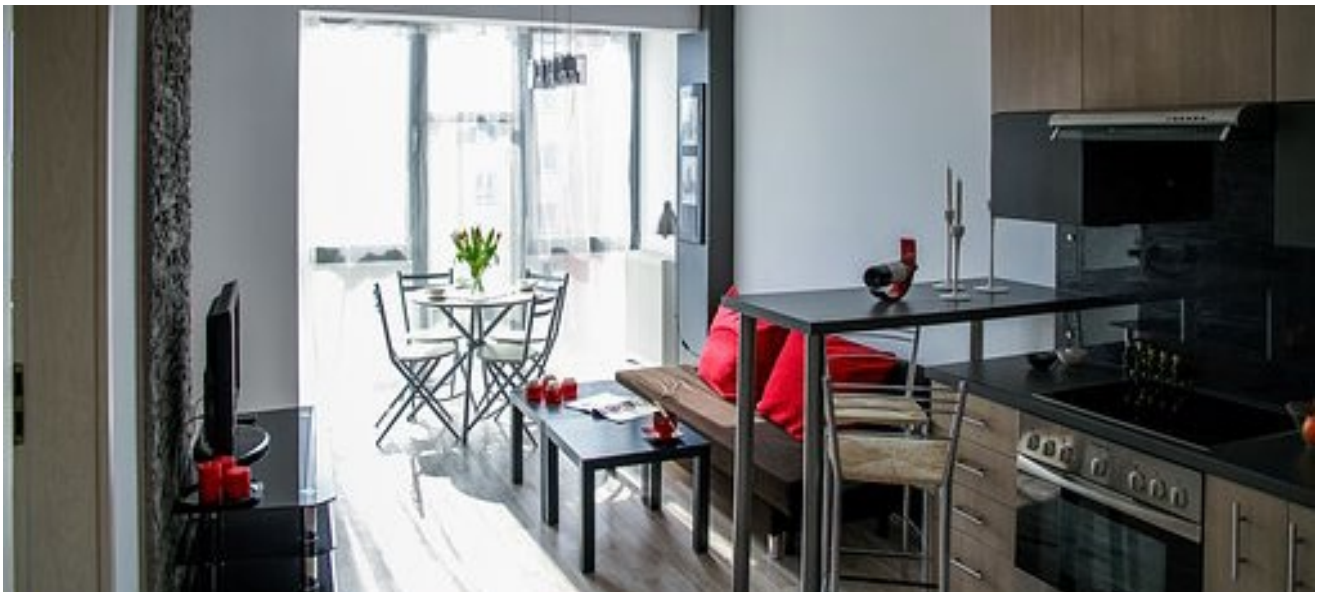
[Learn more about the Alexandria rental market, including tips for working with an agent.](#)



The good news is that the housing market in Alexandria offers choices beyond a standard single-family home.

If you've never lived near a major metropolitan area like Washington, D.C., one of the first things you'll notice is the abundance of housing choices that aren't single family living housing. Land is expensive and space is limited, so the natural answer to these restrictions is to build vertically and in close proximity.

You'll find townhouses, condos, apartments, and even rooms for rent in the area.



One of the advantages of moving to Alexandria is the option to explore different housing styles than you're used to. Choosing your main priorities, whether they include commute, schools, or affordability, is the best way to determine which style of home suits your needs. After making a priority list, monitor MilitaryByOwner's inventory to select availabilities.

Take a look at Alexandria neighborhood reviews from fellow military families on the following pages to help narrow down your choices!

[**View Alexandria Apartments and Homes for Rent or Sale**](#)

Alexandria Neighborhood Reviews

Before you look for a home in Alexandria, read neighborhood reviews from military families who've lived there! All the following reviews are courtesy of Military Town Advisor.

Cameron Station, Alexandria 22304

“Cameron Station is an amazing neighborhood with a park and playground on either end. It is a mix of single family and townhomes. Very affluent neighborhood with well-maintained grounds and strict

HOA policies. Very family-friendly and has a great elementary school within the neighborhood.”

Beverly Hills, Alexandria 22305

“Neighborhood is made up of beautiful single-family homes built in the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's. Many homes have great views of Alexandria or easements full of trees. The neighborhood is well maintained, neighbors are friendly, and very dog friendly.”



More Alexandria Neighborhoods Popular with Military Families



Grove at Huntley Meadow, Alexandria 22306

“Close to the Huntington (yellow line) metro station, which is only a few stops from the Pentagon stop. Close to Old Town Alexandria, Mt. Vernon, GW Parkway, and Ft. Belvoir Very dog friendly and they have doggie bags for your dogs, too. There’s also a pool and lots of social events and parties. Town homes, but there are also detached single family homes.”

Oakbrooke, Alexandria 22308

“No outlet neighborhood, so cars

aren't zooming through. Fun neighborhood with activities such as Halloween party, quarterly happy hours, annual picnic, ornament exchange, and book club. Great schools and churches nearby. Easy commute to Pentagon. Bus stop at front of neighborhood. Very close to GW Parkway biking trail.”

Kingstowne, Alexandria 22315

“Lots of military and retired military. Very easy drive to Ft. Belvoir, short bike ride or medium walk to metro, right next door to a school parents love.”

Tips for House Hunting in Alexandria



RENTERS

It's common for renters in Alexandria to work with a real estate agent who conducts a rental search for you. Those from other areas of the country might find this practice odd, but house hunters often prefer the expertise of an agent.

HOME BUYERS

Keep an open mind as you look for a home to buy, as you'll find many options beyond the typical single family home. Also note that many home sellers will refuse to work with you if you're not represented by an agent.



COMMUTING

Narrow down your preferred location first before even looking at homes. The commute in this area will be one of the biggest factors when it comes to deciding where you choose to rent or buy a home.

A photograph of a classroom. In the background, there are blue lockers and a round clock on the wall. The foreground shows blue metal desks and chairs with brown seats. The room is brightly lit, likely from windows on the left.

6

Schools & Education



Alexandria Public Schools

Alexandria is unique in that it offers two public school systems operated by two different governing bodies: Fairfax County Public Schools and Alexandria City Public Schools. Together, they provide more than 200,000 children with educational services each school day.

Fairfax County Public Schools

There's a good chance your children will be attending a school within FCPS, either because you were aware of its solid reputation and wanted to take full advantage of the resource, or that the Alexandria, Fairfax County, borders are so encompassing you've simply moved within its boundaries. It is the country's 10th largest school system.

Serving more than 187,000 students and maintaining a fleet of 1,600 buses that could rival a small city's bus fleet, there are bound to be some issues that parents are unhappy about. But, because FCPS has so many resources to offer their students, there's a generous amount of positive opinions and observations online to consider.

**[For more information:
An Overview of Alexandria's Two Public School Systems.](#)**

Alexandria City Public Schools

ACPS has a distinguished and long history in public education. Its earliest iterations were created with help from President George Washington to educate orphans and poor children.

Modern ACPS history includes the struggle of black Americans during the Civil Rights Era and the challenges faced during the desegregation of schools.

Today, families continue to choose ACPS for many reasons, including their traditional academic and special education programs which are offered in addition to the Dual Language Program and the Talented and Gifted Program. The walkability to many of the community schools is also a huge draw.



FCPS Fast Facts

- #6 in Best School District in Virginia, according to Niche.com 2019
- \$15,160 is spent per student
- FCPS has nearly 200 schools and centers
- 2020 Budget: \$3 billion
- Almost 92% of students graduate after 4 years of high school.

ACPS Fast Facts

- #8 in Best School Districts in Washington, D.C. Area, according to Niche.com 2019
- Total student enrollment: 15,737 in 2018
- 18 total schools include: 1 pre-K, 12 elementary, 2 K-8, 2 middle, and 1 high school
- 2018 Budget: \$283,997,814
- Per Pupil Cost: \$17,193



Alexandria Private & Homeschool Options

When searching for alternatives to public education, it's important to remember the distinction between Alexandria, Fairfax County, and the City of Alexandria, not because there is a great divide in quality education, but because the commute between home and a private school could be a significant factor. Parents typically have the options to drive individually, carpool, or pay for private bus transport.

Private School Review and Niche each have dedicated reviews for private schools in both sections of Alexandria. Many families living in Alexandria who prefer private education take advantage of charter schools in nearby Washington, D.C. Fairfax County Schools has two magnet schools accessed through a lottery system, while Alexandria Public Schools also offer magnet education opportunities.

Homeschool families find Alexandria to be filled with opportunities because of the direct access to world class museums, art performances, science centers, and other educational support throughout Northern Virginia. Parents can tap into Belvoir Homeschool Educators and Alexandria, Virginia Homeschoolers on Facebook for more information. Don't forget about accessing a Student Liaison Officer. They have resources for the homeschool audience, as well.



7

Things to Do in Alexandria



Alexandria Seasonal Events

Every hometown is known for something locals and visitors alike love. Alexandria is no exception! Each season brings a must-see or do activity.

Winter: One of USA Today's 2017 **Top 10 Holiday Parades in the U.S.** is the Holiday Boat Parade along the Potomac. Santa water skis! The city's Scottish Christmas Parade is nearly as popular and has Scottie dogs and kilts galore.

Spring: The Cherry Blossom Festival. While technically in D.C., plenty of Alexandria events revolve around the iconic event. You'll find plenty of restaurants offering once a year drinks and dishes with a cherry theme. Take a river cruise on the Potomac for a different vantage point of the blossoms.

Summer: Alexandria's birthday is July 13, so the city extends July 4th activities another week. Waterfront activities include the Alexandria Symphony orchestra (with cannons!), general merriment, food (free birthday cake!), drinks, and a Grand Finale fireworks display.

Fall: There's nowhere better to **take in fall colors** than a drive along the GW Parkway right into Mount Vernon. Any fall day is glorious to visit, but the September and October calendars are packed with on-site activities. The Colonial Market and Fair and the Fall Wine Festival and Sunset Tour are well loved annual events.

Alexandria Area Day Trips



View in Shenandoah State Park

Between Alexandria and Washington, D.C, it'll take months, to visit all the major attractions, let alone the hidden gems. Every now and then, however, there's a good reason to take a day trip to a nearby getaway destination. And depending on your interpretation of "day trip," the choices are almost as endless as those back in Alexandria. Here are a few!

Shenandoah National Park. To get away from city life for awhile, the trip westward will change your busy state of mind in less than two hours. World famous Skyline Drive is 105 miles of gorgeous vistas with

plenty of picnicking options. Depending on the season, park rangers conduct various adventures and talks for visitors. Keep up with the park's website for fun festivals like the Apple Butter Festival. Don't be surprised to leaf peep with hundreds of your closest friends during the park's peak fall season.

Hershey and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Two hours north, the PA line welcomes visitors to explore two new worlds. Whether it's to taste Amish baked goods or chocolate straight from the factory, a day trip visit is worth the drive every time. Hershey's Chocolate

World is the place to be all seasons of the year! Experience chocolate bar making, factory tours, and all the Hershey products you can eat. Hershey Park, the amusement center of the city, hosts guests all year round with special events during the Halloween and Christmas. Summertime is full-on play mode with roller coasters, a water park, and even a zoo!

Not too far away in Lancaster, a thriving Amish community invites visitors to experience their way of life. Working farms, restaurants, home stores, bakeries, and gift shops are all owned and operated by Amish business owners. Keep your eyes on the road, as you'll be sharing it with iconic horse and buggy commuters right alongside traditional drivers.

East Coast Beaches. Atlantic Ocean, Chesapeake Bay, local lakes: just take your pick, as there's plenty of waterfront to lay claim to, all within two to three hours away. From Ocean City, Maryland, down to the most northern point of North Carolina's Outer Banks, with Virginia inland lakes in between, water activities are very popular during the hot, humid Mid-Atlantic summers that stretch well into September.

Mount Vernon. Just 8 miles south of Alexandria at the southern end of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a stop at Mt. Vernon is a must for your time in Alexandria! [Get details and a complete planning guide for your day at Mount Vernon.](#)





8

For Military Spouses



Career & Volunteer Opportunities for Milspouses

It's good to be a military spouse in Alexandria.

You'll be hard pressed to find any other military location with access to as many resources as the NOVA region has. Regardless of your need, someone, somewhere, has support to offer.

Career and education opportunities are prevalent, but widespread. Start with your closest base and watch for programs sponsored by the USO, Blue Star Families, National Military Family Association (NMFA) and Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). These all have offices near or in Alexandria and regularly provide guidance and/or scholarships for back to school opportunities in addition to career assistance. All these organizations are excellent outlets for volunteer experience if working isn't part of your life plan.

Major corporations like Amazon, Marriott, Hilton, Capital One, and dozens of defense contract companies have regular hiring fairs and employment programs created specifically to help military spouses find careers they love.

Area Childcare

For families with two parents working, you'll probably need childcare. Affordability and availability is a challenge, as it is in many other areas.

Begin your search early, ask for referrals, and don't forget to check school-aged before and after school care. Public schools typically have waitlists and fill up immediately.

Military Child Care In Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) is a resource frequently used in the area. The program provides financial assistance to those families who cannot get care through on base CDC's.



Connect with Area Groups!

- MOPs and MOPs Next
- Base/Branch Specific Spouse Groups - Capital Area Military Spouses is all ranks/all branches
- Stroller Strong Moms DC/NOVA
- Alexandria Chamber of Commerce Networking Events

Volunteer Ideas

- PTA
- Local Church Groups
- DAR
- Junior League



Enjoy Alexandria!

Want more information?

Keep up with our monthly calendar of Alexandria events.

Browse our extensive library of articles about the Alexandria area. All on MilitaryByOwner!

