

north carolina's
brunswick islands

More beach for your blanket

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

How to Hold a Family Reunion at the Beach
30-year veteran shares organizational tips

BOLIVIA, NC (December 4, 2013) – The holiday season is when families begin planning their summer reunions. According to Mitzi York, Executive Director of the Brunswick County Tourism Development Authority, North Carolina's Brunswick Islands hosts hundreds of these long-anticipated annual events. In fact, intergenerational vacations are one of the top reasons why people visit this area between Myrtle Beach, SC and Wilmington, NC.

These folks say that the area's central Mid-Atlantic location, miles of un-crowded beaches, plenty of affordable rental homes and many fun activities make it the perfect North Carolina Beach vacation. So much so that people return year after year as their families grow.

Here are some tips on making the most of a family reunion, from planning to feeding a crowd, from a mom with decades of experience. Ohioan Cheryl Sumner has been visiting North Carolina's Brunswick Islands for more than 30 years. What started as a few couples has grown into a 20-person, two-house annual reunion, with family and friends traveling from around the country. Here's the link to the video: <http://www.ncbrunswick.com/videos/55048877>

Where to Stay:

For hosting a family reunion, one of the most popular accommodations is a vacation rental home. Cheryl recommends one or more large houses, with spacious, equipped kitchens, lots of bathrooms, laundry facilities and plenty of areas to gather.

Plan Well in Advance:

As the logistics expert, Cheryl starts preparations for each beach reunion a year in advance. "We reserve the same two houses for two weeks every September," she says. "We have families that stay for various lengths of time, and attendees from the current year get first pick on dates for next year's reunion."

Organize and Delegate Shopping and Meals:

Feeding 20 people three times a day is no small feat. Cheryl assigns each family a night to provide dinner. "They buy and prepare the main course, dessert and beverages," says Sumner. Through the years, it's developed into a friendly competition as each group tries to outdo the other. To save on labor, they use paper plates and cups. "We don't come on vacation to do dishes," she laughs.

For the other meals and staples, every person contributes \$30 to the "kitty." At the beginning of the trip, Cheryl and her two organizing friends, Rosie and Debbie, make a grocery store run to purchase breakfast and lunch items, paper towels, zip bags, ice and other kitchen items.

"We designate one house for breakfast and lunch," says Sumner, "and the other for dinner." This provides the dinner crew a clear kitchen and enough prep time. "But both refrigerators have drinks, snacks and condiments for everyone," says Sumner.

Through the years, Cheryl has learned to accommodate the attendees' changing needs and preferences. "When our kids were young, we'd come in July," says Sumner. "But now that they're grown and out of the house, we visit in September, when the weather is a bit cooler and the summer crowds have dispersed."

Themes and Games Make it More Fun:

Perhaps the most fun and memorable part of each reunion is the changing theme. "We have a different theme each year. Once it was Christmas in July, another it was pirates," says Sumner. "This year's theme is the 80s. We vote on the next year's theme at the end of the reunion."

Tuesday is designated as party night, with everything revolving around the theme, from costumes, décor, quizzes, music and activities. "The year of the pirate we created a treasure hunt throughout the house and onto the beach," says Sumner. "Participants searched the house for clues, and followed a map onto the sand, where we had placed nine different 'Xs' to mark potential treasure."

Choose a Location with Many Activities:

Sumner recommends that families pick a beach that's not too busy and crowded, such as those in this southernmost corner of North Carolina. Yet the location should have enough else to do for every age group, especially teens and grandparents. While each of the beaches of North Carolina's Brunswick Islands – Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Holden Beach, Oak Island, Caswell Beach and Bald Head Island – has its own character and charm, they all offer plenty of activities for every age and interest. On the islands and the mainland are mouthwatering dining, museums and shops, boating, kayaking, fishing and championship golf, and riveting maritime and military history.

Book Far Ahead:

Here's a final tip: while North Carolina's Brunswick Islands is a well-loved, best-kept secret, it's best to book a vacation beach rental, especially very large or oceanfront homes, a year ahead or at least by January if visiting from May – August, for many families come back year after year to build upon what they call their best vacation memories ever. To create the perfect beach reunion, start by visiting www.NCBrunswick.com.

About North Carolina's Brunswick Islands: In the southernmost corner of North Carolina, stretching from south of Wilmington and the Cape Fear River to the South Carolina border, five barrier islands provide some of the best North Carolina beaches for family vacations, weddings, reunions, and nature-lovers. Quaint coastal towns like Southport, Calabash, Shallotte and Leland beckon with restaurants, galleries and shops. On the islands and the mainland are lighthouses, abundant fishing, championship golf, and riveting maritime and military history. To learn more, please visit www.NCBrunswick.com

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