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## 20+ Fun Things to Do in Emerald Isle and Nearby

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Emerald Isle is one of [North Carolina's best beach towns](#) and a favorite family-friendly destination attracting visitors from all over. After years of visiting this place and its surroundings, we've created this guide to cover the best things to do in Emerald Isle and nearby.

If you're planning a vacation or live in the area, this guide will answer all questions about what to do in Emerald Isle, no matter the season. Of course, this article features the most fun Emerald Isle attractions in [summer](#) and any weekend you visit.





Here's how we've organized this guide:

- Where is Emerald Isle?
- Annual Events
- Year-Round Things to Do in Emerald Isle
- Where to Eat in Emerald Isle
- Where to Stay in Emerald Isle
- Nearby Things to Do

You can skip to any section or keep reading about how to find Emerald Isle.

**Read More: [20+ of the Best Beaches in North Carolina \(+ Our Personal Tips\)](#).**

## Where is Emerald Isle?



Map by Seth Ilys at English Wikipedia. CC-BY SA  
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Emerald Isle, [North Carolina](#) is in Carteret County and is part of a collection of beaches known as the Crystal Coast. The Crystal Coast is a stretch of barrier islands running from [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#) to Emerald Isle.



 **Atlantis Lodge in Pine Knoll Shores**

Emerald Isle NC is one of five Bogue Banks barrier island towns. The others include:

- [Atlantic Beach](#)
- Indian Beach
- Pine Knoll Shores
- Salter Path

Bogue Banks is separated from the mainland by the Bogue Sound. It is reachable by the B. Cameron Langston Bridge from Cape Carteret.

It's reachable via the Atlantic Beach Bridge from Morehead City. However, the B. Cameron Langston Bridge will take you directly into Emerald Isle from the mainland.



You can visually travel to Atlantic Beach using the following maps:

- [Map of NC Beaches](#)
- [Eastern North Carolina Map](#)
- [North Carolina Travel Map](#)

**Read More: [Eastern North Carolina \(and 100+ Awesome Places to Visit\)](#).**

## The Best Time to Visit

Summer is the most popular time to visit Emerald Isle, North Carolina, thanks to the beautiful beach strand, clear water, fantastic rentals, and great local restaurants. However, we've also enjoyed spring, fall, and winter vacations here.

You'll often find 70-degree days and beautiful sunshine even in [December](#) and [January](#).

While the weather is excellent throughout the year, things could change. Tropical storms and hurricanes have landed at Emerald Isle, so we recommend trip insurance.

## Minimum Stays

The weather is beautiful during much of the off-season (between November and April to mid-May), and you won't run into minimum night requirements with accommodations.



During the summer, rental companies often require a 7 or 3-night minimum, but we have found that they are much more flexible during the offseason! Book a place to stay in Emerald Isle then and enjoy fewer crowds, warm days, and salty air!

Also, some businesses and restaurants may not yet be open for the season, but plenty are still open year-round!

**Read More: [Why and How to Support Amazing Local Businesses Every Day](#)**

## Where to Stay in Emerald Isle North Carolina

Emerald Isle has many great places to stay. In addition to beach houses available for rent, some hotels and inns are open for business.

### Emerald Cay East





We stayed at [Emerald Cay East](#) and loved every minute! It is a 3 bedroom/2 bathroom rental owned by a local North Carolina-based family.

The house is inside the private community of [Spinnaker's Reach](#) and steps away from the community pool and beach access.



We especially loved how quiet and kid-friendly this rental was! The bunk beds, black-out curtains, and kid gear furnished in this Emerald Isle rental were perfect for our family, and we appreciated the extra touches.

**Read More: [Atlantis Lodge in Atlantic Beach \(Our Piece of Paradise on Bogue Banks\)](#)**

## Annual Events



Even though [summer](#) is the most popular time to visit Emerald Isle, there's plenty to do throughout the year. The town hosts fun annual events and festivals you can partake in during any season!

Here are some you should check out:

- **Emerald Isle St. Patrick's Day Festival ([March](#))** Color yourself green with live music, food and drinks, and 75+ arts and craft vendors! Win a chance to take home a golf cart in the raffle too.
- **[Salty Pirate Waterpark](#)** (Summer Months): During the summer, cool off and indulge that need for adventure at Salty Pirate Waterpark! This family-owned spot has been fun for generations coming to Emerald Isle. There are slides and water features for kids and adults of all ages.
- **Emerald Isle Beach Music Festival ([September](#))** This music festival is free and includes great music and food trucks! Enjoy the tunes from local bands at the Western Ocean Regional Access.
- **[Emerald Isle Marathon Half Marathon & 5K](#) (October)** Push through the finish line with other dedicated athletes at the Emerald Isle Marathon.

**Read More: [The NC Tripping Events Calendar](#)**

## The Best Things to Do in Emerald Isle NC This Weekend (and All Year!)

Even if your visit doesn't align with one of the annual events, there are still many things to do in Emerald Isle year-round.

### Emerald Isle Beaches





Looking for some Emerald Isle beach time? There are 12 miles of shoreline waiting, with numerous access points, even if you're not staying on the beach.

- Blackskimmer Access (7500 Ocean Dr., Emerald Isle, NC): 4-wheel Drive Access Point in the winter and 1 accessible/handicapped parking space.)
- Cedar Street Park Access (7802 Sound Dr, Emerald Isle, NC): Parking is available for 10 cars. A pier, public sound access, and a kayak launch.
- Channel Drive Access (11001 Station Street, Emerald Isle, NC): 16 parking spaces.



- Eastern Regional Access (2700 Emerald Dr., Emerald Isle, NC): 245 parking spaces, a picnic pavilion/gazebo, outdoor showers, bathrooms, and drink machines.
- Randy's Way Access (9519 Ocean Dr., Emerald Isle, NC): 1 accessible/handicapped parking space.
- Station Street Park (11001 Coast Guard Road, Emerald Isle, NC): Small parking area.
- Third Street Access (305 Ocean Dr., Emerald Isle, NC): 10 parking spaces, a wheelchair-accessible ramp, and an overlook picnic area.
- Western Regional Access (9003 Louise Dr, Emerald Isle, NC): 167 parking spaces, bathrooms, outdoor showers, volleyball courts, and a picnic pavilion/gazebo.
- Wyndtree Access (10545 1/2 Wyndtree Drive, Emerald Isle, NC): 1 accessible/handicapped parking space.

## Accessibility at Emerald Isle

There are three ADA-compliant beach accesses in Emerald Isle. These include:

- Eastern Ocean Regional Access: 2701 Emerald Drive.
- Western Ocean Regional Access: 9803 Louise Avenue.
- Randy's Way: 9519 Ocean Drive.

The town of Emerald Isle also has 12 beach wheelchairs available. They can be found at the Emerald Isle Fire Department Station after 8 am. Reservations are not available for these beach wheelchairs, and they are on a first-come, first-serve bases.

## The Point





The Point is located on the western end of the Bogue Banks and is considered one of the best places to watch sunset in North Carolina. Most of the beaches along the Crystal Coast face south, but not at The Point.

It faces due west and gives an incredible show every evening. This beach is also an ORV beach so long as you obtain a permit and have a 4WD vehicle.

Another great place to see the Point is [Bear Island](#) and its nearby inlets. We enjoyed that view (pictured above) during a boat tour from [Swansboro](#).

**Read More: [8 Beautiful Brunswick County Beaches to Explore](#)**

## Bogue Inlet Fishing Pier

**Address:** 100 Bogue Inlet Dr, Emerald Isle, NC





One of the most popular things to do in Emerald Isle is to visit the Bogue Inlet Fishing Pier. It has been a family-owned pier since 1971 and a very popular spot for fishing.

## More Emerald Isle Fishing

One of the absolute best Emerald Isle activities is to reel in a catch. Whether you're surf fishing on the beach, fishing from the pier, taking your boat, or hiring a charter, you can bring something big home.

## Emerald Isle Boat Ramps





If you've brought your kayak or powered boat, these boat ramps will help you get out on the water:

- Cedar Street Park Access (7802 Sound Dr, Emerald Isle, NC): Kayak launch
- Emerald Isle Boating Access Area (6800 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC): 4 ramps, 112 vehicle/trailer spaces, and open 24 hours a day.
- Emerald Isle Woods Park (9404 Coast Guard Rd, Emerald Isle, NC): Kayak launch

## Emerald Isle Fishing Charters



If you're seeking a fishing charter in Emerald Isle, here are some local operators who'd love to take you out for a half day or longer:

- [Emerald Isle Adventures, Inc. | Fishing Charter & Pontoon Boat Rentals](#) (910-538-2749)
- [Nancy Lee Fishing Charters](#) (910-326-4304)
- [Pirates Life 4 Us Fishing Charters](#) (919 285-9072)
- [Southern Tides Fishing Charters](#) (252-424-2252)

Personally, operators respond quickly to phone calls, so that'd be my first method of contacting them.

We try our best to keep up with website links and phone numbers. However, if you find one or more of these listings are incorrect, please kindly let us know by [email](#).

You can also check out these Atlantic Beach fishing charter operators.

**Read More: [How to Explore the NC Oyster Trail \(10+ Adventurous Ways!\)](#)**

## Emerald Isle Boat Rentals

Renting a boat and getting on the water for a day is one of the best activities in Emerald Isle. Here are some local operators, with one in Atlantic Beach:

- [AB Watersport](#) (612 Atlantic Beach Causeway, Atlantic Beach, NC): Boats, kayaks, canoes, paddle boats for full or half days, jet skis hourly, and guided jet ski tours.



- [Crystal Coast Boat Charters and Rentals](#) (330-285-0565)
- [Jenny Red Charters](#) (910-746-8176)
- [Soundside Tours](#) (910-448-4218)

**Read More: [40+ of the Best Things to Do in The Outer Banks \(Food, Where to Stay, and More!\)](#)**

## More Attractions at Emerald Isle NC

Here are some more things to do on Emerald Isle NC, no matter when you decide to visit!

### Emerald Isle Woods Park

**Address:** 9404 Coast Guard Rd, Emerald Isle, NC





Looking for nature while in Emerald Isle? Emerald Isle Woods Park is a shaded nature preserve with 41 acres to explore. Play disc golf, walk the trails, and enjoy coastal hiking in Emerald Isle.

**Read More:** [25 of the Most Amazing Winter Hikes in North Carolina](#)

The Growler Bar Emerald Isle

**Address:** 200 Mallard Dr, Emerald Isle, NC





The Growler Bar Emerald Isle is our favorite spot to sip on local craft beers, and of course, for their growlers. Rotating taps are joined by wine, making this the perfect place to kick back and relax with friends in Emerald Isle!

## Our Favorite Emerald Isle Restaurants

Work up an appetite by relaxing on the beach? Emerald Isle has great restaurants, from local seafood to fluffy sweet donuts!



Summer is, of course, peak season in Emerald Isle, and many of the restaurants get crowded, and few take reservations. So we recommend eating out for lunch or arriving early to avoid long waits.

Also, some restaurants close during the off-season (between late [October](#) and Memorial Day with some exceptions). Please visit the websites we provide and call to confirm whether or not these local businesses are open.

## Flip Flops Donut Shop

**Address:** 7702 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC



You'll find a line out the door at [Flip Flops Donut Shop](#). First recommended to us by one of our Instagram followers, Flip Flops now holds a top 5 best



donuts seat in my heart.

Giant, fluffy, and made fresh, you'll want a donut to start your morning in Emerald Isle.

## Flipperz Family Bar & Grill

**Address:** 311 Mangrove Dr, Emerald Isle

Looking for live music and an extensive menu? Flipperz has something for the whole family- from burgers to spaghetti, it's all delicious!

Oh, and don't skip the drink menu at this Emerald Isle restaurant. Try their Flippin' Sweet Tea for a refreshing cocktail that tastes freshly brewed.

**Read More:** [80+ Tasty North Carolina Breweries \(The Best of the Best!\)](#)

## Gaffer's

**Address:** 9106-A Coast Guard Rd, Emerald Isle, NC





One thing we are particular about regarding seafood restaurants is that they serve local fish. At [Gaffer's](#), you can guarantee NC seafood on your plate!

We had a fantastic meal of NC Shrimp and Oysters, but we've been told they also have some of the best breakfasts in Emerald Isle!

**Read more: [How to Explore the NC Oyster Trail \(10+ Adventurous Ways!\)](#)**

Rucker Johns

**Address:** 8700 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC



If you are looking for a more upscale restaurant in Emerald Isle, we highly recommend [Rucker Johns](#). Southern classics include shrimp and grits, flavorful pork chops, and perfectly seared steaks.

## Surf's Up Grill & Bar

**Address:** 102 Bogue Inlet Dr, Emerald Isle, NC



[Surf's Up](#) is the only Emerald Isle restaurant located on the beach. The vibe is casual pub food, and they are known for their refreshing frozen drinks. Surf's Up has a lively bar and plenty of open space to accommodate your family. It is also located next to the Bogue Inlet Fishing Pier!

## The Trading Post

**Address:** 8302 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC



[The Trading Post](#) is more than a meal, whether you've come for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Cornhole and hula hoops are just some of the fun things that await.

They do not take reservations so plan accordingly if you want to eat at this fantastic Emerald Isle restaurant!

**Read More: [40+ North Carolina Gifts from Amazing Local Businesses](#)**

## The Village Market

**Address:** 7802 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC

Pick up a sandwich, salad, or a delicious cup of coffee from [The Village Market](#). The menu has various hot and cold sandwiches and freshly made desserts.

The Village Market is also connected to an outdoor sporting goods store with fishing gear and high-quality brand-name clothing.

## Cap'n Willis Seafood Market

**Address:** 7803 Emerald Dr, Emerald Isle, NC





If you want some seafood but want to stay in, we highly recommend Cap'n Willis Seafood Market. Willis Seafood Market is our family go-to for the best fresh seafood.

Stocked with locally caught fish, shrimp, and crab, take home something to cook! We recommend crab cakes and a pie to complete your meal.

**Read More: [17 of the Best Topsail Island Restaurants \(Great Food for All!\)](#)**

## Where to Eat Nearby

Just up the road in Atlantic Beach, these restaurants are among our favorites along the coast.



## Amos Mosquito's Restaurant and Bar

**Address:** 703 E. Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, NC

A casual, fine-dining restaurant, [Amos Mosquito's](#) is a family-owned restaurant that must not be missed when in the Crystal Coast!

Choose from starters like steamed pork dumplings and buzz buzz shrimp and entrees such as different styles of tuna, shrimp & chicken pesto alfredo, crab cakes, and so much more.

Thursday nights feature sushi specials, and the desserts are a perfect end to your night.

## The Shark Shack

**Address:** 100 S Durham Avenue, Atlantic Beach, NC





The Shark Shack is one of our favorite places to eat in Atlantic Beach! Founder Chef Tom's five-year stint inspired the Shark Shack in the Bahamas.

Chef Tom has traveled and cooked worldwide, perfecting the recipes he has brought to Atlantic Beach. In 2018, his daughter and son-in-law bought the restaurant, which continues to be the heart of the community.

The Shark Shack specializes in fresh seafood, with a local favorite being their fish bites. Other homemade dishes include jumbo crab cakes, shrimp, fried oysters, clam strips, traditional mahi mahi, and sea bass.

For non-seafood eaters, there is a selection of burgers, sandwiches, and tacos off the grill.



## Big Oak Drive-In

**Address:** 1167 Salter Path Rd, Salter Path, NC 28575



If you know NC Tripping, then you know we are big suckers for old-school, traditional, and iconic classics. Big Oak Drive-In is a must-eat when in Atlantic Beach. This cash-only spot is dubbed as the best shrimpburger on the Crystal Coast.

Not a Shrimpburger fan? Then go for an oyster burger, soft-shell crab, or a barbecue sandwich. We've discovered they tend to close early, so call ahead for their hours and enjoy one of North Carolina's iconic bites!

## Things to Do Near Emerald Isle NC



Emerald Isle is one of five communities on Bogue Banks Island, so you might be interested in visiting the other four while visiting!

These include **Atlantic Beach, Indian Beach, Pine Knoll Shores, and Salter Path.**

## Atlantic Beach



We keep returning to [Atlantic Beach](#) and I don't see us forgetting about the fun things to do around Emerald Isle's neighboring town.

- At least once or twice a year, you can find us parked at [Atlantis Lodge](#). This family-owned hotel has been around for decades, and



we've enjoyed it with our family and the two of us.

- Some great restaurants are up and down NC-58, also known as Fort Macon Rd.
- Our favorites include the [Shark Shack](#) (great for takeout) and Amos Mosquitos, and the list continues to grow yearly.
- The [Crab Shack](#) in Salter Path (between Atlantic Beach and Emerald Isle) is always penciled in for lunch or dinner.
- We're also big fans of [Crystal Coast Brewing](#), a newer [brewery](#) with taps and cans for you to take home.

**Read More: [15 of the Best Day Trips in North Carolina](#)**

## Fort Macon State Park

Address: 2303 E Fort Macon Rd, Atlantic Beach, NC 28512





[Fort Macon State Park](#) is one of the smallest state parks, but it's still one of the most visited! Its high level of traffic can be attributed to its beautiful location just northeast of Emerald Isle.

The state park consists of 424 acres around the restored Fort Macon. Pivotal in the Civil War, Confederates took the fort at the start of the war, but Union forces regained it in 1862.

Explore the fort, browse the visitor center and museum, relax on the beach, or walk on the nature trails that wind through the park. We highly recommend a visit!

**Read more: [Fort Fisher State Historic Site \(20+ Facts and How to Visit\)](#).**



## NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores

**Address:** 1 Roosevelt Blvd, Pine Knoll Shores, NC



North Carolina has 4 aquariums, and the [NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores](#) is a wonderful way to beat the heat, the rain, and the cold! Check out native wildlife and enjoy an educational experience for curious learners of all ages.

**Read More:** [North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher \(5 Important Things You Need to Know\)](#)

Swansboro





[Swansboro](#) sits between [Jacksonville](#) and Cedar Point and is more than a nice stop on the way to Emerald Isle. The town is primarily known for its wonderful waterfront.

We love walking around Front St, where you can shop and [eat](#) all day.

**Read More: [50+ Easy Day Trips from Fayetteville \(Great Getaways!\)](#)**

## Hammocks Beach State Park

**Address:** 1572 State Rd 1511, Swansboro, NC





You can also take a boat from Swansboro or nearby Hammocks Beach State Park to reach [Bear Island](#), just across the inlet. It's one of the best places to go shelling and enjoy some isolation along North Carolina's coast.

**Read More: [Map of Topsail Island and Nearby Places \(200+ Great Attractions Listed!\)](#)**

## Cape Lookout National Seashore

[Cape Lookout National Seashore](#) is a few miles offshore and the perfect thing to do near Emerald Isle. The [National Park Service](#) protects 56 miles of undeveloped beach on the remote barrier island.



## Cape Lookout Lighthouse



[Cape Lookout Lighthouse](#) has a distinct black-and-white diamond pattern and is a [North Carolina bucket list](#) item for many visitors. Unfortunately, claiming the lighthouse is closed until at least 2025 while repairs are made on the lighthouse.

## Cape Lookout Shelling

Visitors access Cape Lookout National Seashore and Shackleford Banks from Beaufort or Hawkers Island via passenger ferry. We also highly recommend booking a UTV in advance and going to The Point for some of the best shelling in North Carolina!



**Read More: [How to See Outer Banks Wild Horses \(Tour Info, History, and More!\)](#)**

## Shackleford Banks



*Remain 50 feet away from the wild horses (this was taken with a zoom lens)*

Many of the ferries to Cape Lookout also stop at Shackleford Banks, home to North Carolina's wild horses. Visitors can see the horses (from a safe distance) while on the island.

**Read More: [The North Carolina Bucket List Book](#)**

## Beaufort





Just a 30-minute drive from Emerald Isle, Beaufort is a beautiful place, home to chic boutiques and a friendly community.

- Don't forget to grab some grub at Beaufort Grocery CO and [Moonrakers](#). The latter will give you a nice view of boats, Taylor Creek, and Carrot Island.
- The wild horses of the [Rachel Carson Reserve](#) were the main reason we first stopped by Beaufort, and we were hooked on the town. You don't need a lot of luck to see the horses from the waterfront, but you can get a closer look by hiring a boat to the Reserve.
- [Beaufort Historic Site](#) is a must for North Carolina history buffs! The town was built in 1713 and has about 150 restored homes today.
- [Crystal Coast Ecotours](#) are a great option, and they offer dolphin cruises, too.



- You can also come here to visit the [North Carolina Maritime Museum](#). They have some cool things to see throughout the year but watch for special events.

**Read more: [40+ of the Most Amazing Museums in North Carolina \(for ALL Ages!\)](#)**

## Morehead City



Morehead City is located on the mainland and is one of our favorite [NC coastal towns](#). Catch a big one at the [Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament](#) in June and the [North Carolina Seafood Festival](#) in the fall.





If you're hungry in Morehead City, we highly recommend Sanitary Fish Market for dinner (and have a slice of Atlantic Beach pie!). And stop by Friendly Market and pick up some freezer meals for your beach week.

**Read More: [125+ Important Facts About North Carolina You Should Know \(History, Geography, and More!\)](https://www.nctripping.com/things-to-do-in-emerald-isle-nc/)**

## Things to Do in Emerald Isle NC FAQ

What is Emerald Isle known for?

Emerald Isle is known for beautiful beaches, excellent fishing, great local restaurants, and gorgeous sunsets from the Point.

What is the offseason for Emerald Isle?



The offseason varies along the North Carolina coast but is typically from Labor Day through Memorial Day. Some businesses will close during the offseason and others will extend their open dates through late October and early November.

## Is Emerald Isle Considered the Outer Banks?

Emerald Isle is south of the region referred to as The Outer Banks. Definitions vary but Emerald Isle typically falls into the Crystal Coast region.

## Ready to Visit Emerald Isle, North Carolina?

Emerald Isle is usually one of our first picks when we think of the Crystal Coast. The town has idyllic beaches, crystal-clear waters, and amazing local restaurants.

After years of visiting, we recommend Emerald Isle as an excellent adventure base. With so many things to do in Emerald Isle and nearby, we'll keep coming back for more!

Have you ever spent time at Emerald Isle? What are your favorite things to do in the area?

Let us know here in the comments or by [email](#). Don't forget to share your Crystal Coast adventures in our [North Carolina Travel Facebook Group](#)!

## More Emerald Isle NC Things to Do (NC Travel Guides

After years of living in North Carolina and traveling throughout the state, we've created many NC travel guides that include these attractions in Emerald Isle and nearby! Here are a few of them.





## NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores (5 Important Tips to Enjoy!)



## Atlantis Lodge in Atlantic Beach (10 Things We Love!)





## Bear Island in Hammocks Beach State Park (How to Reach It and 10 Fun Things to Do!)



## The Rachel Carson Reserve in Beaufort (Wild Horses and 4 More Things To Do!)





Fort Macon State Park (Interesting Facts and 7+ Things to Do!)



20 Fun Things to Do in Atlantic Beach and Nearby!





## 20 Amazing Restaurants in Jacksonville, NC (+ Onslow County)



## Cape Lookout National Seashore (How to Get There + the 10 Best Things to Do!)



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