



# 10 best budget family vacations that give the best bang for the buck

Make some priceless memories with your kids – for a price that won't break the bank.

## Best coastal vacation: Crystal Coast, North Carolina



*Crystal Coast*

Imagine an 85-mile stretch with Atlantic waves, golden sands, and stories of pirates that'll leave your kiddos spellbound. Welcome to North Carolina's Crystal Coast, a cluster of communities each with its own flavor, from the historic charms of Beaufort to the serene beaches of Emerald Isle.

The Crystal Coast's lack of high-rise hotels contribute to its serene atmosphere and lack of crowds. Visitors can enjoy both value and tranquility with numerous public beaches and diverse lodging options, including vacation rentals and beachfront cottages. Activities centered on the area's natural beauty and historical sites offer plenty to do without shelling out for expensive Boardwalk-type entertainment.

For example, [Cape Lookout](#) – a public seashore recently certified as an International Dark Sky Place – invites you to gaze at the stars without the glare of city lights and see the Milky Way with your own eyes. During the day, take advantage of the beach by boogie boarding and building sand castles. You can also tour a restored Civil War fort at [Fort Macon State Park](#) or see wild horses at [Rachel Carson Reserve](#), both free.

**Heads up:** Plan your visit during the off season (the first week of September and through most of May) to enjoy the best rates and fewer crowds. Also, some attractions, like climbing the lighthouse at Cape Lookout, may have limited availability or require reservations, so be sure to check ahead.

**Parents say:** "We went to Emerald Isle, North Carolina, and we had the absolute best time – zero official plans, spent all week at a beachside condo ... Spring break is considered off-season and is much cheaper. I spent way less than two grand and drove there."