

The Best Beach Towns in North Carolina



This Southern state with more than 3,000 miles of coastline (including 300 miles of barrier beaches alone) has so many wonderful towns on the water it was tempting to choose them all. Consider this collection—from the northern edge of the Outer Banks all the way to Cape Fear near the South Carolina border—the very best of the best.



Emerald Isle

This westernmost community on Bogue Banks is a treasured vacation getaway for families, with its 12 miles of clean shores, clear waters, and old-fashioned neighborhoods and vibe. Recently named one of the best North Carolina towns for buying real estate (due in part to low property tax rates compared to other coastal towns in the state), this beachy Crystal Coast town is an ideal place to stay for a week—or a lifetime.



Beaufort

Not to be confused with the South Carolina town of the same name (and pronounced differently), this small and charming harbor town at the southern end of the Outer Banks has a lively downtown marina, is dotted with historic buildings, is home to a wonderful North Carolina Maritime Museum, and is a stone's throw from the natural riches of the Rachel Carson Reserve.



Atlantic Beach

With history running through its veins (including pre-Civil War Fort Macon), the oldest town on Bogue Banks—with its back to Bogue Sound and facing the Atlantic Ocean to the south—is also home to the nostalgic (and 1,000-foot-long) Oceanana Fishing Pier plus a steady swell for surfing.