



CRYSTAL COAST, NORTH CAROLINA

Why we love it: Some beaches in the U.S. are seriously polluted, overdeveloped, and overcrowded. But the low-key Crystal Coast's pristine rolling dunes overlooking the Atlantic Ocean offer an oasis for families looking for a more eco-friendly alternative. Nature tours give kids a glimpse of dolphins, wild horses, birds, sea turtles, and more. Plus, the many mom-and-pop shops and privately owned restaurants participate in sustainability initiatives like the area's Carteret Catch

program, a joint venture between retailers and fishermen that guarantees the seafood you're served comes from local waters.

Where to stay: The most convenient way to enjoy the Crystal Coast is by renting a house, condo, or duplex, from which you can walk to the beach and quaint seaside towns. Visit bluewaternc.com or emeraldislerealty.com to find one.

What to do: In between nature tours, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding, take some time to explore Beaufort, the third-oldest town in North Carolina. Kids will love Port City Tour Company's Beaufort Ghost Walk (beaufortghostwalk.com), a tour through the town's historic district that's led by pirates (or at least, guides dressed as them). Also fun: a ferry ride to Cape Lookout national park, where kids can learn about nature preservation through the "Junior Ranger" program, or Shackleford Banks, an island that's been the protected home to wild horses for more than 400 years. (From Beaufort, the trip to Cape Lookout is 45 minutes; to Shackleford Banks, it's 20 minutes.)

Whal you'll spend: Beach rentals start at \$895 per week for a one-bedroom with two beds. Many of the coastal attractions, like tours, museum admissions, and ferry rides, cost \$10 and under.







Opposite page: The Crystal Coast features 85 miles of gorgeous beaches.
This page, top to bottom:
Beaufort was once home to pirate Blackbeard; the Cape Lookout Lighthouse is reachable only by boat; kayaks are a popular way to explore the area's inlets.