

Visitors Guide



The Crystal Coast of North Carolina

The Crystal Coast is located along North Carolina's central shore. A 90-minute drive from I-95, approximately two hours from Raleigh and approximately five hours from Richmond, VA, the Crystal Coast is the ideal family oriented beach destination for your next getaway. Steeped in rich history that dates to the 1700s, Beaufort has been named "America's Favorite Town" by Travel + Leisure Magazine, "America's Coolest Small Town" by Budget Travel Magazine and the "Best Yachting Town" by Yachting Magazine! Also, Atlantic Beach has been named "Best Spring Break" by Outside Magazine and Morehead City was named in the top ten "Best Fishing Towns in America" by www.worldfishingnetwork.com.

Cape Lookout National Seashore is home to the Cape Lookout Lighthouse where visitors can climb to the top for the most breathtaking view east of the Mississippi! Wild horses, descendants of Spanish mustangs, swam ashore when their ships wrecked on the shoals of the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." These waters are home to the "Best Wreck Diving" along the East Coast, according to Scuba Diving Magazine.

Our beaches offer 85 miles of sandy shores, perfect for swimming, shelling, surfing, standup paddle boarding, and of course, some of the best inshore and offshore fishing offered anywhere. The Big

Rock Blue Marlin Tournament draws hundreds of entries for over 60 ways to win major cash, along with the bragging rights to winning the number one tournament on the East Coast. Surf fishing and pier fishing, both inshore and offshore, offer anglers the chance to reel in tuna, wahoo, mahi-mahi, king mackerel, snapper, flounder and trout.

Culinary travelers will fall in love with the "catch of the day" paired with fresh locally grown produce from area farms. Many of our restaurants offer local seafood that is part of the Carteret Catch program, guaranteeing the product is caught in local waters. Festivals and events are held throughout the year making the Crystal Coast the perfect location to indulge that urge for new experiences. Enjoy the North Carolina Seafood Festival in October, the Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend in December, the Emerald Isle St. Patrick's Festival in March or the 4th of July events that will keep you returning year after year.

If this is your first visit, see what you've been missing. If you've been here before, come home to YOUR beach, we're waiting to welcome you back!



Main Attractions

Beaufort Historic Site

The salty-sweet smells of an ancient maritime heritage wafting in from the Atlantic permeate the painstakingly preserved Federal Period buildings at the Beaufort Historic Site. Personal guided tours showcase the collection of 10 historic buildings, including a jail, courthouse, apothecary and doctor's office as well as three homes, all dating back to the 1700s and 1800s. In addition to the guided walking tours, explorations of the Historic District are available aboard a vintage 1948 English double-decker bus.

Cape Lookout National Seashore

A 56-mile strand of silken beaches makes up the coastal islands of eastern North Carolina, one of the few remaining natural barrier island chains in the world, accessible only by boat. Those seeking the freedom to experience complete solitude and an opportunity to discover endangered animals in their natural habitats can also explore the beach to find a multitude of large unbroken conch shells. Frequently dotting the beaches and woven in between the sand dunes are families and shore fishermen camping with tents pitched – fishing, hiking and delving into all that Mother Nature has to offer. History comes alive at the Cape Lookout Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters built in the mid-1800s to warn passing ships of the dangerous coastal waters. Standing at 163 feet tall, the lighthouse was painted with a distinctive black and white diamond pattern in order to distinguish it from other North Carolina lighthouses and is open to visitors to climb during the summer.

Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center

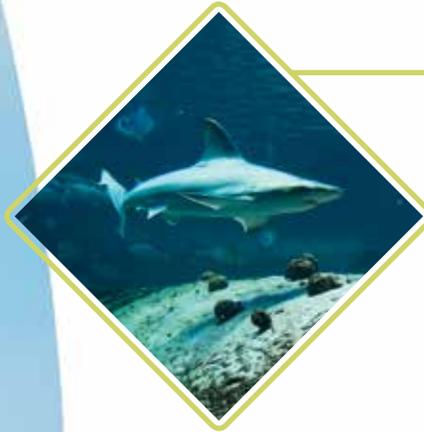
Built as a tribute to the history and heritage of the residents of Harkers Island and Down East, and to preserve the practice of decoy carving, the Core Sound

Waterfowl Museum relocated to a brand new facility in 2009. Decoy carving, a popular pastime of the area, involves skilled artisans carving a perfect replica of a duck from a block of wood. The ducks were used, quite literally, as decoys during duck hunting season. The museum frequently hosts live demonstrations from actual decoy carvers in their “decoy-carving workshop.”

Fort Macon State Park

Originally designed to guard Beaufort Inlet and Beaufort Harbor, Fort Macon has been the site of wartime tragedies and triumphs. During the Civil War the fort changed hands several times between Union and Confederate forces, eventually fell into disrepair and was finally restored as a part of the state park system in 1934. The fort was taken over by the federal government once again during World War II and used to protect a number of important nearby facilities. Now the state park is home to a protected beach, complete with seaside bathhouse, sunny nature trails, family-friendly picnic facilities and a rich supply of fish. Visitors take spirited ghost tours highlighting the eccentric past the fort has experienced. The fort underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation, restoring the 26 casemates, or vaulted rooms, used as shelter, kitchen space and as prison cells for soldiers.





North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores

Visitors to the aquarium will be awe-struck by the more than 3,000 specimens of North Carolina's most colorful aquatic life, making it the largest saltwater aquarium in the state of North Carolina. The aquarium concentrates on ecosystems all native to North Carolina with different exhibits emphasizing various marine habitats. The "Living Shipwreck" features a life-sized replica of a German U-352 submarine and Blackbeard's infamous ship, the Queen Anne's Revenge, with a 60-foot viewing window. Other attractions include: stingray touch-tank, a river otter exhibit, mountain trout pool, jellyfish gallery and sport fishing gallery. The aquarium itself resides in its own native North Carolina habitat, the 300-acre Roosevelt Maritime Forest.



North Carolina Maritime Museum

A haven for the unconventional history of the Crystal Coast, the museum is the official repository for all of the artifacts discovered on the Queen Anne's Revenge, the ship captained by the infamous pirate, Blackbeard. Learn more about this historic underwater excavation just off the Beaufort coastline and view cannons, grenades, belt buckles and more from the storied ship. The museum is also home to an interesting contraption known as the "Life Car," a mini submarine used to rescue mariners stranded at sea. Just across the street from the museum is the Watercraft Center where volunteers actively build and restore boats in an effort to preserve the Crystal Coast's tradition of "backyard boat-building." The Watercraft Center also is home to the "Boat in a Day" program, an opportunity for families to build and take home a 6-foot boat, known locally as a Harkers Island skiff.



Shackleford Banks

For more than 400 years the wild horses of Shackleford Banks have taken care of their young, frolicked on pristine deserted beaches and foraged for food with not a saddle or fence in sight. The horses have enjoyed the protections afforded by Cape Lookout National Seashore in cooperation with the Foundation for Shackleford Horses, dedicated to maintaining the animals' way of life. Scientists, historians and nature lovers alike have speculated on the origins of the Shackleford horses, or "Banker ponies" – the most popular theory being that the horses swam ashore after a Spanish ship exploring the New World met with a tragic fate off of North Carolina's shores. Visitors make their way to the island on one of the ferries running from Harkers Island and Beaufort.



Annual Events

Winter:

American Music Festival Series
Morehead City & Beaufort
americanmusicfestival.org

Art From the Heart
Morehead City
(252) 726-9156

Candlelight Homes Tour
Beaufort Historic Site
(252) 728-5225
beauforthistoricsite.org

Carolina Chocolate Festival
Crystal Coast Civic Center
Morehead City
(252) 393-2011
carolinachocolatefestival.com

Coastal Home & Garden Show
Crystal Coast Civic Center
Morehead City
(252) 247-3883

Core Sound Decoy Festival
Harkers Island
(252) 838-8818
decoyguild.com

Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend
Core Sound Waterfowl Museum
Harkers Island
(252) 728-1500
coresound.com

Crystal Coast Christmas Flotilla
Morehead City & Beaufort
Waterfronts
(252) 728-1638
maritimefriends.org

Crystal Coast Destination Bridal Fair
Crystal Coast Civic Center
Morehead City
(252) 240-3256
crystalcoastbridalfair.com

International Film Series & Dinner
Carteret Community College
Morehead City
(252) 222-6262
cccfoundation.org

Spring:

Atlantic Beach Beach Music Festival
The Circle
(252) 726-2121
atlanticbeach-nc.com

Beaufort Music Festival
Gallants Channel
beaufortmusicfestival.com

Beaufort Wine & Food Weekend
(252) 515-0708
beaufortwineandfood.org

Crystal Coast Boat Show
Morehead City Waterfront
(252) 808-0440
crystalcoastboatshow.com

Crystal Coast Half Booty Triathlon
crystalcoasttri.com

Crystal Kai SUP Cup
Beaufort
(252) 726-8148
crystalkaisupcup.com

Emerald Isle Marathon, Half
Marathon & 5K
(252) 354-3424
emeraldislerun.com

Newport Pig Cookin' Contest
Newport Community Park
(252) 223-3112
newportpigcooking.com

Publick Day
Beaufort Historic Site
(252) 728-5225
beauforthistoricsite.org

Emerald Isle St. Patrick's Day Festival
Emerald Plantation Shopping Center
(252) 354-3424
emeraldisle-nc.org

Wooden Boat Show
NC Maritime Museum Beaufort
(252) 504-7740
beaufortwoodenboatshow.com

Summer:

Barta Boys & Girls Club Billfish
Classic
Beaufort
(252) 639-1093
billfishclassic.com

Beaufort Old Homes & Gardens Tour
Beaufort Historic Site
(252) 728-5225
beauforthistoricsite.org

Beaufort Pirate Invasion
Beaufort Waterfront
(252) 241-9049
beaufortpirateinvasion.com

Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament
Morehead City Waterfront
(252) 247-3575
thebigrock.com

Buddy Pelletier Memorial Longboard
Classic
Atlantic Beach
(252) 723-7747
buddypelletier.com

Fourth of July Fireworks Celebrations
Emerald Isle, Atlantic Beach,
Morehead City & Beaufort

Historic Beaufort Road Race
(252) 241-4954
beaufortoletownerotary.com

Kayak for the Warriors Kayak Race
Pine Knoll Shores
(252) 247-4353
k4tw.org

NC Ducks Unlimited Band the
Billfish Tournament
Morehead City
(910) 358-5080
ncdubillfish.com

Fall:

Beaufort's Brewin' Craft Beer Festival
(252) 515-0708
beaufortwineandfood.org

Beaufort Wine & Food's Oyster Roast
(252) 515-0708
beaufortwineandfood.org

Carolina Kite Festival
Atlantic Beach
(252) 247-7011
birdsandkites.com

Community Thanksgiving Feast
Beaufort Historic Site
(252) 728-5225
beauforthistoricsite.org

Crystal Coast Oyster Festival
Morehead City Waterfront
(252) 773-0641
ccoysterfest.org

Emerald Isle Beach Music Festival
(252) 354-3424
emeraldisle-nc.org

North Carolina Seafood Festival
Morehead City Waterfront
(252) 726-6273
ncseafoodfestival.org

Shuck, Rattle & Roll
Carteret Community College
Morehead City
(252) 222-6262
cccfoundation.org

Tuna Run 200
Atlantic Beach
tunarun200.com





Atlantic Beach

Named one of Coastal Living Magazine's "21 Best Beaches," Atlantic Beach is a classic beach town that features wide sandy beaches, a Boardwalk and a commercial district with plenty of dining and shopping options. As the oldest of the five resort towns on the island of Bogue Banks, Atlantic Beach has been North Carolina's "go to" beach since the 1930s. Visitors can choose from an array of accommodations including mom-and-pop motels, national chain hotels, condominiums, classic beach bungalows and luxurious oceanfront homes. Atlantic Beach is also home to Fort Macon State Park, an historic Civil War fort, which is the most visited state park in North Carolina. The small-town setting of Atlantic Beach ensures that activities such as boating, fishing and surfing are an easy walk or bike ride away.







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Town of
Atlantic BEACH





Beaufort

North Carolina's third oldest town, Beaufort offers tours through colonial homes and buildings dating to the 1700s. Beaufort's location on Taylor's Creek makes outdoor activities a natural fit. Stroll the docks and watch glorious sunsets. Perfect for kayaking, standup paddle boarding, bicycling and sailing – adventure is just around the corner! Blackbeard, the legendary pirate, sailed these waters and left one of his ships sunken just off the Beaufort Inlet. The artifacts are being recovered and are available for viewing at the North Carolina Maritime Museum. Harbor tours and nature tours get you up close and personal with dolphins frolicking in the water, wild horses on Rachel Carson Reserve and a variety of birds and other wildlife. In the spring, the Beaufort Wine & Food Weekend is enjoyed by locals and visitors alike, as the town welcomes celebrity chefs, winemakers and sommeliers to share their talents and expertise. A first visit to Beaufort will certainly not be your last!









Down East & Harkers Island

Cross the North River Bridge just past Beaufort and you enter one of the most storied and authentic areas of our county, the heritage area known as Down East. Here is the beginning of the Outer Banks National Scenic Byway that meanders north through small seafaring villages and towns. Along with the scenic beauty of salt marsh overlooks, much of the area makes its living as it has for centuries from commercial fishermen and fish houses, our famous wooden boat building industry, even traditional net mending and decoy carving. It is also home to the Cedar Island Ferry that links the Crystal Coast to the more northern islands that comprise the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Harkers Island is home to the Cape Lookout National Seashore headquarters and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center. The National Park Service offers visitors a glimpse of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse and surrounding buildings. Experience Shackleford Banks and its wild horses along with great shelling, bird watching and saltwater fishing while visiting the National Seashore. Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center is home to outstanding exhibits that preserve the traditions and lifestyle of the folks Down East. Visitors to the museum will find our rich maritime culture and waterfowl heritage celebrated at events held throughout the year, culminating in the Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend and Decoy Festival that draws thousands to experience this annual tradition the first weekend in December.











Emerald Isle

The village of Emerald Isle is found at the most western half of the island of Bogue Banks culminating in The Point, a spectacular vista for sunsets. Town fathers back in 1954 named their town for the lush green of the maritime forest that surrounded Emerald Isle then and now. This friendly Southern beach village offers the Crystal Coast's largest selection of vacation rental homes ranging from quaint cottages, low-density condominiums or elegant sandcastle homes perfect for beach weddings and multigenerational family gatherings. Families enjoy miles of walking, jogging and bike paths and several nature trails that allow you to enjoy the natural pristine environment with a variety of birds, waterfowl and families of white tail deer. The sandy beaches on both the ocean side and the sound side attract sunbathers, swimmers and fishermen, as well as surfers, kayakers and standup paddle boarders. A very family friendly destination that has been a vacation tradition for families since the 1960s, Emerald Isle also hosts one of the largest St. Patrick's Festivals in North Carolina!









Morehead City

The largest town on the Crystal Coast, Morehead City has a vibrant waterfront with fishing charter boats that unload their catches every afternoon. Charming shops and restaurants feature views overlooking the water and Sugarloaf Island. The internationally acclaimed Big Rock Blue Marlin Fishing Tournament is held annually with over one hundred boats competing for hundreds of thousands of dollars while enjoying the many social events held during tournament week. Crowds at the weigh station enjoy watching blue marlin, tuna, dolphin and wahoo weighed in daily, as well as enjoying tastes of fresh seafood and entertainment. Morehead City is also home to the most popular festival in North Carolina — the North Carolina Seafood Festival, held every year the first weekend in October. Vendors line the waterfront with all types of seafood and arts and crafts, along with kids' rides and activities! Families can also enjoy watching the Morehead City Marlins play baseball as the wood bat team takes on rivals for the championship.





COLLECT
STEPHEN DRAUGHON





Pine Knoll Shores

Located near the Theodore Roosevelt Natural Area, Pine Knoll Shores has oceanfront accommodations including hotels, motels and cottages. The wide beaches and soundside access makes it easy to swim, go shelling, clamming or kayaking along this beautiful stretch of island. The North Carolina Aquarium is located in Pine Knoll Shores and offers a look at life under the sea. Large tanks offer a variety of marine species including fish, crabs, seahorses, lionfish and sharks. A sea turtle nursery is also featured along with a rare white sea turtle named Nimbus! Nature trails offer a walk above a tidal marsh where marine creatures live and shore birds wade looking for food, a tranquil way to spend the afternoon.









Salter Path & Indian Beach

Salter Path and Indian Beach are located in the middle of the island of Bogue Banks at its narrowest part, with easy beach and sound-side access for recreation activities. The village of Salter Path is home to many families who were the original residents of Bogue Banks and just like our Down East folks, still make their living from the sea bringing their catch directly to the fish house markets. Salter Path and Indian Beach are famous for their soundside restaurants and especially for the fish house seafood markets where the freshest catch is available to take home to prepare in your beach cottage or condominium. In Indian Beach, visiting families also enjoy a miniature golf and bumper boats park along with Jet Ski and kayak rentals.











For a complete list of accommodations, dining and attractions visit our website or call 252-726-8148.

CrystalCoastNC.org

#MyCrystalCoast