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**Kure Beach**, recognized as one of *USA Today's* 10Best Readers' Choice "Best North Carolina Beaches," offers a naturally beautiful setting in a peaceful, small-town atmosphere. The coastal community allows visitors to fully relax while exploring nature's playground through outdoor attractions, including Fort Fisher State Historic Site and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. Kure Beach is just a 30-minute drive from Wilmington, named a *Good Housekeeping* 2026 Travel Awards winner in part thanks to the vibe of nearby Kure Beach.

**WHAT'S NEW AT KURE BEACH**

**Award-Winning History**

Fort Fisher State Historic Site continues to earn statewide recognition, recently being named North Carolina's 2025 Visitor Attraction of the Year by the North Carolina Travel Industry Association. One of the most significant Civil War sites in the South, Fort Fisher brings history to life through immersive exhibits and living-history programming. Last year, the attraction welcomed more than a million visitors to its new, state-of-the-art museum facility.

**Expanding Aquarium Experiences**

As the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher celebrates 50 years since opening in 1976, it is entering an exciting new chapter with plans for a multi-year expansion and renovation beginning in early 2026, which will make it the largest aquarium in the state. During construction, the aquarium will continue engaging visitors through a satellite location at Independence Mall in nearby Wilmington. Adding to the momentum, the aquarium recently welcomed three Asian small-clawed otter pups - genetically significant within the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Species Survival Plan - highlighting its ongoing leadership in conservation, education and community engagement.

**SAMPLE STORYLINES**

**Kid-Friendly**

Kure Beach is one of those magical places where kids can be kids. Thanks to kid-friendly finds from an award-winning aquarium and oceanfront park to a disc golf course, historic fishing pier and state historic site, families keep coming back year after year. Special events like the Boogie in the Park Concert Series, the Cape Fear Kite Festival and the nearby Island of Lights Christmas Flotilla deliver family fun without the overwhelming crowds and commercialism. Ocean Front Park and Pavilion hosts a variety of kid-friendly activities throughout the summer months, including weekly Turtle Talks hosted by the Pleasure Island Sea Turtle Project and Story Time by the Sea led by favorite fairytale friends. Take a break from the beach with a visit to Hi-Tech Arcade for classic family fun and games.

**Hidden Gems**

Escape to one of the few remaining undeveloped stretches of shoreline on the Southern coast at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, a popular state park for sunbathing, surf fishing, shelling and birding. Four-wheel-drive vehicles are allowed seasonally with required permits. Discover serene locations within the park, including the overlook deck found at the end of the Basin Trail, with views of the Cape Fear River Basin and Zeke's Island Reserve. Climb the hill overlooking Zeke's Island Reserve to find the Fort Fisher Mailbox, where you can leave a note or memory for future travelers. Located near the coast of Fort Fisher, Kure Beach's coquina rock formation is host to a very rare and distinctive mossy hard rock outcropping. Only visible during low tide, the rock is cemented together by seashells and coral with an estimated origin ranging from 12,000 to 80,000 years ago. Located on the banks of the Cape Fear River, Riverview Restaurant is a casual seasonal dining spot known for breathtaking sunset views.



### Eco-Tourism

Take a boat or guided kayak tour to Zeke's Island Reserve, a sanctuary for rare shorebirds and protected wildlife. The estuarine reserve, made up of a collection of isolated islands, is home to miles of pristine shoreline and several different habitats, including tidal flats, salt marshes, shrub thicket, maritime forest and sand dunes. Visitors can enjoy a variety of activities there such as kayaking, hiking, shelling, fishing and birdwatching. Kayak Carolina offers daily rentals and guided tours, including the Zeke's Island Family Adventure. Mahanaim Adventures in nearby Wilmington leads wildlife kayaking trips to Fort Fisher Basin and Zeke's Island Reserve.

### Affordable Adventures

Kure Beach offers a coastal getaway with endless ways to explore and enjoy without stretching your budget. Stroll along the shore or the Kure Beach Fishing Pier, open seasonally from early spring through late fall, and watch the sunrise over the water. Wander the trails at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area to discover the Fort Fisher Mailbox or step back in time at Fort Fisher State Historic Site to learn about the island's military past. Joe Eakes Park offers courts, fields and playgrounds for active fun, while Ocean Front Park provides a peaceful spot for a picnic or a leisurely walk by the water. Throughout the year, free seasonal events - from summer concerts and Story Time by the Sea to the Island of Lights holiday celebrations - showcase the island's unique spirit.

### One Green Planet

As an NC Green Travel Participant and Ocean Friendly Establishment, the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher is dedicated to protecting marine treasures through research, education and sustainable practices. The Aquarium's Green Team inspires appreciation for and conservation of aquatic environments through regular roadside cleanups, on-site recycling and various other sustainable initiatives, including Race for the Planet, a 5K and one-mile fun run - all of which are slated to continue during the aquarium renovations. Kure Beach's natural beauty is protected through the N.C. National Estuarine Research and Reserve program that helps safeguard habitats like Zeke's Island Reserve, an undisturbed shorebird habitat. The Pleasure Island Sea Turtle Project works to protect area sea turtles. On Monday evenings during the summer months, Ocean Front Park and Pavilion host Turtle Talks to educate visitors on how to protect the threatened and endangered species.

### Tides of History

Kure Beach is home to many fascinating sites that can be seen far below the surface, including North Carolina's First Heritage Dive Site - *The Condor*. The Civil War blockade runner is one of the best-preserved shipwrecks on the North Carolina coast and can be explored just off the southern tip of Kure Beach. Carolina Beach Scuba offers training, air/nitrox fills and daily dive charters to the area's favorite shipwrecks, artificial reefs, fossil ledges and coral reefs from the nearby Carolina Beach Municipal Dock.

### Pet-Friendly

Bring your four-legged friend on your next trip to Kure Beach. Leashed dogs are allowed on the strand from April 1 through Sept. 30 between 5 p.m. and 9 a.m. During the off-season (Oct. 1 through March 31), leashed dogs are allowed on the beach at any time. Leashed dogs are allowed year-round at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. Your furry friend can run and play off-leash at Joe Eakes Park's Gurney Hood Barking Lot. The area also offers several pet-friendly accommodations, including Seabirds Motel.

### Retiree Retreat

Kure Beach's peaceful atmosphere gives retirees a chance to rejuvenate and reconnect with memories of the beach towns they visited as a kid. Book an oceanfront stay at one of nine newly renovated luxury apartment suites at Kure Lighthouse Inn. The unspoiled landscape of Fort Fisher State Recreation Area features miles of pristine shoreline, perfect for leisurely strolls and beach combing. Visitors can explore a World War II-era concrete bunker along the Basin Trail, once inhabited by the legendary Fort Fisher Hermit. Cast a line off 711-foot Kure Beach Fishing Pier for a stress-free moment. With accessibility, affordability, great weather and a laid-back atmosphere, Kure Beach is ideal for rest and relaxation.

### Ocean Front Park

Ocean Front Park is Kure Beach's largest public green space. Located in the heart of Kure Beach's quaint business district near the town's iconic fishing pier, the park features a boardwalk, swings, oceanfront benches and public restrooms, along with a new playground for small children debuting this year. One of the biggest attractions at the park is an open-air pavilion with a stage area used for concerts, weddings, yoga classes and educational events.

