

TOURISM AND RELATED INDUSTRIES IN NEW HANOVER COUNTY

The following items represent changes in various sectors of the local tourism-related industries in recent and coming months.

FILM

Wilmington:

What's New:

- 2020/2021 productions include (status may change due to Covid-19): “USS Christmas” (Hallmark); “Parkside Alpha” (working title for “Scream 5!”); “Hightown” (season 2, Starz); others TBA. wilmingtonfilm.com/ and wilmingtonfilm.com/current-productions
www.wilmingtonbiz.com/film/2020/09/11/film_industry_officials_wilmington_can_handle_multiple_projects_even_with_covid_complications/20868
- Release dates for made-in-Wilmington productions: “Uncle Frank” (Nov. 26, 2020); “Words on Bathroom Walls” (Aug. 21, 2020); “Halloween Kills” (October 2021); “The Georgetown Project” (2021, TBD).
- Accolades:
 - *MovieMaker* magazine ranks Wilmington #9 among the 2020 “Best Places To Live and Work as a Movie Maker”: www.moviemaker.com/best-places-to-live-and-work-as-a-moviemaker-2020/9/
 - Universities.com lists UNCW as #3 among its list of Best Filmmaking Colleges in NC for 2020: www.universities.com/find/north-carolina/best/art-and-design/filmmaking

SHOPPING & RETAIL

- Independence Mall, located on Oleander Drive in midtown Wilmington, is transforming and rebranding the shopping complex as The Collection at Independence. A sweeping redevelopment is underway which will transform the mall from a fully enclosed space into a modern, open-air retail destination. The redesigned space will feature a power center, a completely updated enclosed mall corridor, a modern lifestyle streetscape of upscale dining and retail, and a multi-tenant building complex that houses a wide array of specialty service providers. Dick’s Sporting Goods, Ulta, Five Below, and Lidl are among the retail tenants: <http://rouseproperties.propertycapsule.com/properties/independencemall#overview>
- River Place, a new 13-story mixed-use building with condominiums, apartments, a parking deck, restaurant/bar and retail space overlooking the river, is nearing completion (Fall 2020). Commercial tenants include: Axis Fitness, Bank of America, Mellow Mushroom, the Nutrition Spot, and Dollar General-owned DGX. www.starnewsonline.com/news/20200810/downtown-wilmingtons-13-story-development-nears-grand-opening.
- Mayfaire Town Centre (CBL & Associates Properties) is losing retail tenants negatively affected by Covid-19 (Justice, Pier 1, NY& Co., Loft, Lane Bryant, Ann Taylor, Going Local). www.wilmingtonbiz.com/retail/2020/07/27/two_more_stores_set_to_close_at_mayfaire_town_center/20687
- Hanover Center, Wilmington’s oldest shopping center, is under new ownership/management. Upgrades and renovations are planned; tenant closures during Covid: Pier 1, Steinmart.
- Future mixed-use, long-term developments with retail that are moving forward include: The Avenue (Military Cutoff, mixed-use with a Westin hotel/spa, www.theavenuewilmington.com/the-avenue, Carroll Companies) and CenterPoint (1531 Eastwood Rd., 2022-2028, www.wilmingtonnc.gov/home/showdocument?id=11714). [see also Accommodations: Long-range Lodging section]

- Proposed: Castle Street Redevelopment Project (Hipp Architecture & Development PC) has submitted plans for the city-owned former WAVE Transit facility site (1110 Castle Street) as a mixed-use, multi-story project with residential units and 15 ground-floor commercial tenants. If approved by Council, the project could begin by spring 2021 with completion by spring 2022. www.wilmingtonbiz.com/government/2020/09/11/castle_street_redevelopment_project_gets_closer_to_agreement/20867
- On Hold: Northern Gateway Proposal (East West Partners) www.newsbreak.com/north-carolina/wilmington/news/1557350879619/city-puts-90m-northern-gateway-proposal-on-hold

ENTERTAINMENT/NIGHTLIFE

Wilmington:

- The City of Wilmington's North Waterfront Park, on 6.6 acres adjacent to Port City Marina, will feature a children's play area, splash plaza, green space, and Riverwalk connection. An outdoor performance space will accommodate nearly 7,000 people for outdoor events and concerts, becoming Wilmington's largest outdoor entertainment venue. Projected opening is summer 2021. www.starnewsonline.com/news/20200615/north-waterfront-park-gets-new-opening-date
- Indoor and outdoor entertainment venues, and theatres closed in mid-March 2020 (due to Covid-19) and will not reopen until the state transitions into an advanced phased recovery.
- Bars and lounges remain closed during Phase 2, however, some bars like Pravda and KGB, among others, reinvented and adapted to open as cafés. Craft breweries, distilleries and restaurants that serve alcohol are open at limited capacities.

CRAFT BEER / DISTILLERY NEWS

- Milestone: Front Street Brewery celebrates 25 years in 2020.
- Expansions: Bill's Brewing Company is adding a new 15-barrel brewing facility next to Capt'n Bill's sand volleyball courts with future plans to build a taproom beside it. Wilmington Brewing Company is also expanding production with plans to open an events center.
- End of Days (1815 Castle Street) opened in February 2020 as Wilmington's only distillery currently open to the public. EOD's small-batch, hand-distilled, corn-based vodka and gin, along with rum made with molasses and raw cane sugar, have already won awards. The distillery also makes hand sanitizer for sale in its gift shop. Tours currently by reservation. www.eoddistillery.com
- Mason Inlet Distillery, which specializes in flavored brandies, plans to open a taproom and offer tours later this year. <https://masoninlet.com>
- TRU Colors, a local for-profit group whose tagline is Brewing Peace Through Prosperity, is renovating the old Century Mills complex on Greenfield Street (Wilmington) for a brewery, restaurant, and educational/office space. Launch date is Spring 2021. <https://trucolors.co/beer>
- *Accolades*
 - *SmartAsset.com* includes Wilmington as #14 on its list of Best Cities for Beer Drinkers (2019): <https://smartasset.com/checking-account/best-cities-for-beer-drinkers-2019>
 - *Craftbeer.com* named Wilmington's Fermental bottle shop as North Carolina's winner in its 2020 Great American Beer Bars roundup: www.craftbeer.com/breweries/great-american-beer-bars#North%20Carolina
 - *Livability.com* includes Wilmington among its list of "5 Awesome NC Beer Cities That Aren't Asheville": <https://livability.com/nc/food-scenes/5-awesome-north-carolina-beer-cities-that-arent-asheville>
 - *Craftbeer.com* includes Good Hops Brewery in its roundup of "Beercation Destinations Where You Can Soak Up Vacation Vibes at Beach Town Craft

Breweries”: www.craftbeer.com/beercation-destination/sip-in-sunshine-at-beach-town-craft-breweries

- International Consumer Tasting SIP Awards were awarded to End of Days. The new small-batch distillery’s Port of Entry rum and gin each took Double Gold awards and its Port of Entry vodka won Silver honors.
 - *The Bourbon Review* includes Front Street Brewery in its list of America's 99 Best [Bourbon](http://www.gobourbon.com/bestbourbonbars19) Bars (South): www.gobourbon.com/bestbourbonbars19
 - NC Brewers Cup 2020 competition winners include 11 beers from 4 Wilmington breweries:
 - **Mad Mole Brewing:** Silver-International Pilsner (Ledermolesen); Silver-Belgian & French Ale (Marilyn MonMole); Bronze-American Amber & Brown Ale (Mole Dancer)
 - **Bill’s Brewing Company:** Gold-New England/Hazy IPA (Party in the Back); Bronze-Dark European Lager (Merganser); Bronze-American IPA, (Wave Break)
 - **Wilmington Brewing Company:** Silver-American Pale Ale (Palm Tree Island); Silver-New England/Hazy IPA (Label Fiasco)
 - **New Anthem Beer Project:** Gold, Double IPA (Clapback); Silver-Brett, Mixed & Wild Ale (She Just Danced Away); Bronze-Specialty IPA (The Vapors)
- Source: www.ncbeer.org/docs/2020_Winners_FINAL_winners.pdf

RESTAURANTS

- *Wilmington:*
 - In the wake of Covid-19, many restaurants struggle to maintain at a limited indoor dining capacity, along with additional outdoor seating, and takeout/delivery options. While most restaurants remain open during summer, others have limited hours and some have permanently closed (Stalk & Vine, South College Sandwich & Deli, Great Harvest Bread Co.). Conversely, some restaurants have opened during the pandemic and the number of food trucks has increased.
 - Downtown Alive! As an effort to help struggling downtown restaurants and shops during the pandemic, the Downtown Business Alliance and Wilmington Downtown, Inc. initiated a new program that expands outdoor dining into the street 4 days a week through October 18, 2020. Downtown streets turn into an open-air pedestrian walk featuring a variety of sidewalk cafés and retail shops to safely serve customers and allow diners to enjoy our restaurants responsibly. Four blocks of downtown Wilmington are closed to vehicular traffic four days a week on Thursday and Friday between 6:30 – 10 p.m., Saturday, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m., and Sunday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. through October 18.
 - New in 2020 (partial list):
 - Quanto Basta Wilmington (107 N. 2nd St.), an Italian eatery & wine bar. www.quantobastanc.com/wilmington
 - Michael’s on the Waterfront (5 S. Water St.), a gastropub with 30 craft beers on tap. www.michaelsonthewaterfront.com/
 - Floriana (2 Market St.), famous in Washington DC since 1979, Floriana Wilmington opened in 2020 (pasta, steak, chops). <http://wilmington.florianarestaurant.com/>
 - Tackle Box Kitchen (7219 Market St.) is chef Keith Rhodes’ newest restaurant located inside Seven Mile Post bar in Ogden. www.facebook.com/Tackle-Box-Kitchen-104201427787251/

- CAM Café welcomes Le Cordon Bleu-trained chef Jeff Gray, with 15 years of experience in fine-dining and farm-to-table restaurants, as executive chef.
 - Indochine will open its second location in the fall (a takeout only restaurant) on Carolina Beach Road.
 - Sweet D's Cuisine (2321 S. 17th St.) bakery café
 - Molly Pitcher's American Grill (4001 Wrightsville Ave.)
- Coming in 2021:
- SEABIRD: More than a year after leaving PinPoint Restaurant, James Beard Semi-finalist chef Dean Neff will open a new restaurant concept called Seabird (1 South Front Street, Wilmington). Seabird's menus will revolve around locally sourced seafood that is in season and available, complemented by the occasional meat dish and fresh, seasonal local produce. Desserts will be prepared by pastry chef Lydia Clopton of Love, Lydia Bakery. Originally slated for a spring 2020 opening, the pandemic delayed Seabird's opening until January 2021. Seabird will be open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, with indoor and outdoor dining options, as well as takeout. <https://chefdeanneff.com/seabird>
 - First Watch, a Florida-based restaurant chain will open restaurants at The Collection at Independence and Mayfaire Town Center.
 - Walk-On's Bistreaux & Bar, co-owned by NFL quarterback Drew Bree, is planning to open at 3710 Oleander Drive over a parking lot near Independence Mall.
 - Jersey Mike's Subs and Blaze Pizza are planning to open locations at The Collection at Independence. www.wilmingtonbiz.com/real_estate_-_commercial/2020/06/05/major_projects_move_forward/20470
- Culinary Accolades & Milestones:
- *Southern Living* magazine included Bitty & Beau's Coffee in 2019 South's Best Coffee Shops. www.bittyandbeauscoffee.com/the-souths-best-coffee-shops/2019
 - Manna restaurant received its sixth consecutive AAA Four-Diamond rating; the only restaurant in Wilmington with this distinction.
 - *Wine Spectator* magazine's prestigious 2020 Award of Excellence winners: Grand Cru Food & Wine, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, and The Fortunate Glass. www.winespectator.com/restaurants
 - *Reader's Digest* (Nov. 2019) named Casey's Buffet the Best All-You-Can-Eat Buffet in NC. www.rd.com/list/best-all-you-can-eat-buffet-in-every-state
 - The Cooking Channel show "Best Thing I Ever Ate" featured Winnie's Tavern's "Trailer Park burger" in January 2020.
 - 2020 Milestones: Port City Java celebrates 25 years; Indochine celebrates 20.

Beaches:

- Carolina Beach:
 - When state executive orders eased in May to allow indoor dining at half-capacity, the Town of Carolina Beach amended its emergency declaration with special allowances for restaurants to create additional seating by using up to 25% of their parking area for additional outdoor dining. www.carolinabeach.org/Home/Components/News/News/170/16
 - Culinary Accolades:
 - *Taste of Home* ranks Carolina Beach as #9 on its list of "Best East Coast Road Trip Destinations For Foodies," citing SeaWitch restaurant's Firecracker Shrimp: www.tasteofhome.com/collection/east-coast-road-trip/

- Today.com includes Squigley’s Ice Cream & Treats among its list of “The Absolute Best Ice Cream Shops in America”: www.today.com/food/these-are-absolute-best-ice-cream-shops-america-t158900
 - New Eateries:
 - Cross-Eyed Crab Bar & Grill (11 Boardwalk) <https://crosseyedcrabcb.com/>
 - Malama Café (108 Cape Fear Blvd.) www.facebook.com/Malamacafe
 - Fentoni’s Pizzeria (Boardwalk) <https://fentonispizza.com/>
 - The Spot Bar & Kitchen (1006 S. Lake Park Blvd.) www.thespotcb.com
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - 22 North reimaged its chalkboard daily menu with the best of traditional Lower Cape Fear cuisine, with classical French and rustic Creole fare. <https://22north.net>

ATTRACTIONS, TOURS, CRUISES

Wilmington:

- Designations: Wilmington, NC designated as the nation’s first “World War II Heritage City.” On Sept. 2, 2020, to commemorate 75 years since the war ended, Wilmington became the first city in the country to be designated as a “World War II Heritage City” by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The designation celebrates contributions by Wilmington to the World War II home-front war effort. www.wilmingtonnc.gov/WWII
- Wilmington Accolades:
 - Wilmington was voted one of the "[South's Best Cities](#)" (#12) in *Southern Living* magazine's 2020 South's Best readers' choice awards. www.southernliving.com/souths-best/cities
 - Wilmington is included in Travel + Leisure’s “9 Best Places to Travel” in June roundup: www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/best-places-travel-june
 - *Outside* magazine includes Wilmington among its list of “Affordable Adventure Trips in North America” www.outsideonline.com/2399717/affordable-trips-north-america
 - Wilmington ranks #28 in *Country Living* magazine’s roundup of “30 Under the Radar Southern Cities for Girlfriend Getaways”: www.countryliving.com/life/travel/g4002/under-the-radar-southern-cities-for-girlfriend-getaways
 - Wilmington’s island beaches made *National Geographic*’s list of “Most Accessible Wheelchair-Friendly Beaches” (Carolina/Kure/Wrightsville): www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/lists/most-accessible-wheelchair-friendly-beaches/#close
- Wilmington Attractions:
 - Indoor attractions were closed by state executive order during phases 1 and 2 of Covid-19 recovery. Museums and indoor attractions reopened to visitors at 50% capacity in early September 2020. Outdoor attractions remained open through most of phases 1 and 2. Indoor gyms and fitness facilities reopened during phase 2.5 at 30% capacity. Indoor/outdoor entertainment venues and amusements remain closed through phases 1 and 2. Events during the pandemic were canceled, rescheduled, or shifted to virtual platforms.
 - Airlie Gardens summer outdoor art exhibit is SQUIRRELS! on display Aug. 22-Nov. 30: <https://airliegardens.org/exhibits/>. Airlie Gardens offered online educational programs during the pandemic.

- Battleship NORTH CAROLINA:
 - The Battleship's new Legacy Gallery is dedicated to the recognition and interpretation of all of the ships named in North Carolina, it includes some of the Battleship museum's most prized artifacts and the Window on Wilmington, a new view of historic downtown Wilmington not found elsewhere. www.battleshipnc.com/about-the-ship/history/all-ships
 - The Battleship is one of 75 institutions in the U.S. selected to participate in the Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program: www.culturalheritage.org/resources/collections-care/cap
 - Hull repairs began in June 2020 but will not impact ship visitation. www.battleshipnc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Hull-repair-contract.pdf
- Bellamy Mansion Museum created a new self-guided Audio Tour to allow for social distancing: www.bellamymansion.org/audio-tour.html
- Burgwin-Wright House Museum celebrates 250 years of history in 2020 and created a virtual tour for armchair visitors: www.burgwinwriighthouse.com/virtual-tours
- Cameron Art Museum:
 - The U.S. Colored Troops Sculpture Project is postponed until Nov. 2021. This dynamic sculpture by Durham-based artist Stephen Hayes, will commemorate and illuminate the little-known story of 1,600 African American soldiers who fought for the Union Army to preserve their country and their freedom. and the freedom of their families. <https://cameronartmuseum.org/index.php?c=program&s=current>
 - 2020/2021 CAM exhibits:
 - She Persists (through March 2021)
 - The Face of Lincoln (bronze casting)
 - The Lived-In Body: Celebrating Women over 65, Paintings by Virginia Wright-Frierson
 - Illumination 2020 (Nov. 20, 2020 - Jan. 10, 2021)
 - Virtual exhibitions: www.cameronartmuseum.org/index.php?c=current
- Cape Fear Museum of History & Science:
 - Online 1898 History Resource: In a joint collaboration, New Hanover County's Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, Public Library and Information Technology Department have created a map and timeline documenting the events of 1898 in Wilmington. This comprehensive resource evolved out of a project to digitize three late 19th century and early 20th century city directories. These directories were transcribed, mapped, and made searchable to provide a way to view the city's population at the time. The new map and timeline allow the public to explore the context and history of Wilmington's 1898 massacre and coup. www.capefearmuseum.com/new-hanover-county-creates-online-1898-history-resource/
 - 2020 CFM exhibits:
 - Hometown Teams (Sept. 8, 2020 – January 3, 2021)
 - Fighting for the Right to Fight (Sept. 8, 2020 – January 8, 2021)
 - Collection Selections: Sports (Feb.18, 2020 – Feb. 18, 2021)
- Thalian Hall Center for Performing Arts:
 - Happy Hour Tours (5pm, Wed. & Fri.): Executive & Artistic Director Tony Rivenbark leads multimedia tours that meet in the theatre's 1858 lobby with historic

discussions, stories, a complimentary beverage, and a tour of the theatre's hidden gems and new projects. Advance reservations. www.thalianhall.org.

- Diversity Wall: Thalian Hall commissioned local artist Fritz Huber to create a diversity piece using show banners from the past 30 years. The Diversity Wall, on display backstage, can be seen during theatre tours by advance reservation. (Mon. @2pm; Wed. & Fri. @5pm). www.thalianhall.org/book-a-tour

- **Wilmington Riverfront:**

- Construction of a 125-room Aloft Coastline Hotel is underway; rooms projected to open in June 2021. (see Accommodations section)
- North Waterfront Park scheduled to open in summer 2021 (see Recreation & Outdoor Sports section).
- RiverPlace, a multi-story mixed-use development that includes parking, residential and retail space will open in Fall 2020. (see Retail section)
- Water Street Improvement Project:
 - The City of Wilmington, in conjunction with the US Coast Guard and the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority, continues a major overhaul of Riverfront Park and Water Street with underground repairs and above-ground repairs to the Riverwalk, streetscape improvements, and renovation of Riverfront Park:
www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/major-construction-projects/riverfront-park-project

- **Cruises and Tours:**

- Cape Fear Riverboats new *Henrietta* riverboat offers narrated scenic cruises.
- Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tours:
 - Prior to the pandemic, Taste Carolina reimaged its three tours and added new restaurants. During phase 2 the Wilmington Downtown Tasting Tour is operating at limited capacity, however, the Farmer's Market Tour & Cooking Class and the Bars, Bites & Sites tours are on temporary hiatus.
 - To support local restaurants during Covid, Taste Wilmington city boxes are for sale, filled with food samples from 6 tour stops. Virtual artisan classes and chef demonstrations are also available. www.facebook.com/TasteCarolinaTours/
- Wilmington Water Tours "3 Bridges Cruise" interprets the area's history and ecology, fun facts, and historical anecdotes.
- Wilmington Tours recently added an African American History tour, available via app & guided tour by reservation.
- Hollywood Location Walk tour is currently on hiatus.

Carolina Beach/Kure Beach:

- **N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher:**

- The Aquarium began welcoming guests back on Monday, Sept. 14, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. However, unlike the past, all tickets must be purchased online, in advance. No tickets are currently being sold at the door. In addition, tickets are reserved for a specific time and each time slot has a limited capacity. Aquarium members need to also reserve there spots online. www.ncaquariums.com/fort-fisher
- There are no dive programs, public feedings, in person behind the scenes tours or camps at this time.
- The roof repairs and fire suppression system repairs are complete and the conservatory is open.

- Construction is nearing completion on the new Asian small-clawed otter habitat “Otters on the Edge” at the entrance of the aquarium’s conservatory. No official opening date has been determined yet. Anticipated completion by fall 2020.
 - Maverick, the rescued bald eagle, is settling in to his new outdoor habitat in the Aquarium’s garden. He still acclimating to the new space and may not always be out at this time.
- Fort Fisher State Historic Site’s newest exhibit “From Slave to Soldier: the African American Experience at Fort Fisher,” highlights African Americans’ role in Fort Fisher’s story.
 - Carolina Beach Boardwalk’s seasonal amusement park did not return in spring/summer 2020 due to state executive orders that closed amusement parks during the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent years, the amusement park space has been reduced by new construction.
 - Accolades:
 - Homes.com includes Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Kure Beach in its list of “11 Secret Beaches Perfect for Social Distancing on the East Coast”: www.homes.com/blog/2020/06/eleven-secret-east-coast-beaches/?cmp=hdc-jspr-062020
 - TripSavvy.com includes Carolina Beach and Kure Beach (#16) among its picks for the Best Family Beach Vacations in the Southeast: www.tripsavvy.com/best-family-vacations-southeast-us-3267721
 - SouthernLiving.com ranked Carolina Beach as #12 in its list of “The Best Beach Towns in NC” www.southernliving.com/travel/north-carolina/the-best-beach-towns-in-north-carolina
 - Wilmington’s island beaches (including Carolina & Kure) made *National Geographic*’s list of “Most Accessible Wheelchair-Friendly Beaches”: www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/lists/most-accessible-wheelchair-friendly-beaches/#close
 - Thrillist.com includes Carolina Beach in its list of Best Beaches in North Carolina: www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/best-beaches-in-north-carolina
 - VacationIdea.com ranks the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher #21 among its list of “25 Best Aquariums in the U.S.” <https://vacationidea.com/attractions/best-aquarium-in-the-united-states.html>

Long-range Plans:

- Fort Fisher State Historic Site: Future plans are to develop a new two-story 20,000 sq. ft. visitor center and museum that will include new exhibits, a multi-purpose classroom, event space and a platform for offloading buses. The site also hopes to reconstruct three earthwork mounds that were destroyed by erosion and airstrip construction during World War II. Pending funding. Date TBD. <https://friendsoffortfisher.com/visitors-center/>

Wrightsville Beach:

- Accolades:
 - Wrightsville Beach (#8) is among the [South's Best Beach Towns](http://www.southernliving.com/souths-best/beach-towns) (2020), as voted by readers of *Southern Living* magazine. www.southernliving.com/souths-best/beach-towns
 - SouthernLiving.com ranks Wrightsville Beach as #8 among “Best Beach Towns in NC”: www.southernliving.com/travel/north-carolina/the-best-beach-towns-in-north-carolina
 - Wilmington’s island beaches (including Wrightsville) made *National Geographic*’s list of Most Accessible Wheelchair-Friendly Beaches:

www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/lists/most-accessible-wheelchair-friendly-beaches/#close

- Cruises and Tours:
 - *Carolina Runner* is a new 40-passenger boat docked across from the Blockade Runner Beach Resort (275 Waynick Blvd.), offering sunset cruises, private charters, cocktail cruises, and shuttles to Masonboro Island. <https://blockade-runner.com/coastal-adventures-2/scenic-boat-tours/>
 - Wrightsville Beach Scenic Tours is now docked behind Motts Channel Seafood (120 Short Street). New summer cruises include a Restaurant Tour and Island Luau. <https://wrightsvillebeachscenictours.com/>
- Oceanfront Park: East Salisbury Street Oceanfront Park near Johnnie Mercer Fishing Pier is now open, featuring a rebuilt “ocean access park,” showers and bathrooms, new landscaping, improved sidewalks and new streetscaping for the parking area.
- Wrightsville Beach Museum of History: Restorations to the historic Bordeaux Cottage (c. 1924), which was relocated in January 2018 to the Town’s historic square adjacent to the museum, were completed in Spring 2020. The cottage will provide additional space for educational programs, hands-on activities, moveable displays, a new Lumina exhibit and a trolley exhibit.

RECREATION AND OUTDOOR SPORTS

Wilmington:

- Hugh MacRae Park has been renamed Long Leaf Park.
 - Porter’s Neck Golf & Country Club has been acquired by Raleigh-based McConnell Golf.
 - Wilmington Municipal Golf Course recently made cart path repairs and planted new trees. In response to Covid-19, First Tee of Wilmington offered online golf instruction in the spring.
 - Conlon Pier, located behind Best Western Coastline Inn, has been refurbished with wooden platforms replacing cofferdams. It’s the only spot where fishing is allowed on the Riverwalk.
 - Coming Soon: Construction is underway on North Waterfront Park, a planned urban green space that will take advantage of views of the Cape Fear River, connected by the Wilmington Riverwalk and two marinas. A playground with splash pad, shade trees and lush gardens are among the amenities that will allow visitors to enjoy respite among the active downtown urban landscape. The park will also include a large open-air music venue managed by Live Nation. Anticipated completion date: Summer 2021. www.starnewsonline.com/news/20200615/north-waterfront-park-gets-new-opening-date
- Long-range:
 - Cape Fear Regional Soccer Park plans to provide additional field space to serve local youth soccer teams and attract bigger tournaments. The development of 30 acres at the existing soccer complex will add 617,148 square feet of sport field area, doubling its fields from seven to 14 or more. Some of the fields will serve multiple sports like soccer, lacrosse, football, ultimate frisbee, and more. Construction is set for 2021. www.wwaytv3.com/2019/10/09/public-gives-input-on-new-wilmington-sports-complex/
 - Wilmington Rail Trail: A master plan is being developed for the first phase of the proposed Wilmington Rail Trail, an urban walking-biking trail that would revitalize and transform the former Wilmington-Weldon rail line between N. Third and McRae streets into a linear park, providing a direct pedestrian path on the northern side of downtown. Friends of the Wilmington Rail Trail plan to reactivate the unused railroad space in the

northside community of Downtown Wilmington, NC to connect arts and cultural assets, including public art and outdoor events. Project is on hold due to pandemic: TBD.

www.wilmingtonrailtrail.com/

- Battle Park is a 42.5-acre property along Carolina Beach Road that is in the design phase of becoming a passive park. The proposed play and discovery areas use elements and textures from the earth to provide children opportunities to play, explore, imagine and be challenged by the natural environment. <https://parks.nhcgov.com/battlepark>

Beaches

- Carolina Beach:
 - The Town of Carolina Beach recently received a \$2.1 million grant from Golden LEAF Foundation to make needed repairs to the town's public marina. www.islandgazette.net/news-18/index.php/top-stories/item/9261-carolina-beach-receives-2-1-million-dollar-grant-for-marina-repairs
 - Ocean Cure is currently facing opposition from state wildlife officials to the seasonal wheelchair access mat at Carolina Beach, due to the potential negative impacts to nesting sea turtles. NC DEQ sent a letter to Ocean Cure and the Town of Carolina Beach ordering them to remove the wheelchair access mat: <https://portcitydaily.com/local-news/2020/09/07/inside-states-order-to-remove-popular-carolina-beach-wheelchair-accessmat>
 - Tony Silvagni Surf School moved to its permanent location on Charlotte Avenue, offering surf and stand-up paddleboard group or private lessons, and rentals including bikes, kayaks, beach chairs with umbrellas, and more.
 - Carolina Beach Parks & Recreation continues to add more beach wheelchairs that are free to users with advance reservations.
 - Long-range: Phase 1 of a new park, Joseph Ryder Lewis Jr. Park, located on a 12-acre tract of land just north of the Federal Point Shopping Center. The park, which is will preserve the site which is part of the Sugar Loaf Civil War earthworks built across the Federal Point Peninsula in late 1864, to provide communication and a backup line of defense in the event that Fort Fisher should fall. The park site plan includes trails, a pedestrian bridge, and other park features, as well as interpretive signage. Completion date TBD. www.carolinabeach.org/home/showdocument?id=1124
www.carolinabeach.org/government/departments/parks-recreation/parks-and-trails/joseph-ryder-lewis-jr-park
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - The Town's new 10-year Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan (2020-2030): www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com/DocumentCenter/View/3595/2020---2030-Parks-Recreation-and-Open-Space-Master-Plan
 - Blockade Runner Resort's Adventure Program now offers inshore fishing excursions to Masonboro Island, along with round-trip shuttle to the uninhabited island reserve and everything you'll need (bait, tackle, rod, reel, ice, and license to fish): <https://blockade-runner.com/coastal-adventures-2/fishing/>
 - Jimmy's at Red Dogs now rents electric bicycles. www.wilmingtonbiz.com/coronavirus/2020/08/21/hoping_for_the_next_phase/20775

CRUISE SHIPS

- American Cruise Lines small cruise ships regularly visit Wilmington during the spring (April/May) and fall (November), docking along the riverfront at Port City Marina. Spring cruises were canceled in 2020 due to Covid-19; status of fall 2020 & spring 2021 cruises TBD.

SPECTATOR & AMATEUR SPORTS

- Numerous sports events, including youth sports tournaments, marathons, triathlons and others scheduled for 2020 were canceled due to state executive orders to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
- Milestones: In 2020 the Carolina Cup would have celebrated 10 years; the O'Neill/Sweetwater Pro-Am Surf Fest would have celebrated 15 years. These milestone events will shift to 2021.

ARTS & CULTURE

Wilmington:

- During the pandemic, numerous theatrical, musical and dance performances were canceled and venues were forced to close to prevent the spread of Covid-19 are lifted. The Wilmington arts community is adapting with virtual theatrical performances, concerts, exhibitions and tours via online platforms. Here's a sampling of what arts travel partners are offering:
 - Thalian Hall Center for the Performing Arts and the Wilson Center will offer a new series of Skyline Drive-in Movies beginning in September on the top level of the Hanover Street Student Parking deck on the Downtown Campus of CFCC beginning in September. The series will feature made-in-Wilmington films such as The Conjuring, Blue Velvet, Firestarter, and more.
 - UNCW, Curalorus, StarNews, and WHQR Public Media collaborated to bring drive-in movies back to Wilmington during the pandemic, screening a film every Friday night (July-Sept.) in the Kenan Auditorium parking lot. The series will resume in May 2021.
<https://uncw.edu/arts/curbsidecinema/>
 - The Wilson Center and the Arts Council of Wilmington and New Hanover County partnered to present the Ghostlight Series of online concerts by local and regional musicians to support local artists during the pandemic. The virtual concert series is archived online:
<https://wilsoncentertickets.com/Ghostlight/> A drive-in concert series was held on CFCC's North Campus at 4500 Blue Clay Road, featuring regional bands such as The Embers.
 - Cameron Art Museum presents ongoing virtual adult and youth art classes, concerts, online exhibitions, wellness programs, artist demonstrations, and concerts featuring local musicians during this period of social distancing.
www.cameronartmuseum.org/index.php?c=museum_school&s=index.
 - Thalian Hall Center for Performing Arts presents past productions online, including Pied Piper Theatre performances, that air on government cable channels. Thalian is also partnering with WHQR to offered virtual Cinematique screenings during the pandemic.
 - Theatre Companies: Thalian Association <https://thalian.org/show-me-a-show-tune/> staged a virtual Broadway Sing-off and a summer arts camp for kids. Opera House Theatre Company developed a "Tell Me Something Good" virtual arts page featuring podcasts, movies, books, and they will soon offer backyard/house performances.
www.operahousetheatrecompany.org/tellmesomethinggood
 - Art galleries offering virtual exhibitions, by-appointment gallery tours, and online shopping.
- The Arts Council of Wilmington & New Hanover County and Wilmington International Airport are once again collaborating to bring local art into the airport terminal. The airport, in partnership with the Arts Council of Wilmington/NHC, requested proposals for three public art commissions as part of ILM's terminal expansion. <https://flyilm.com/wilmington-international-airport-and-the-arts-council-of-wilmington-new-hanover-county-request-proposals-for-public-art-commissions/>

- Outdoor Art Installations:
 - A “Black Lives Do Matter – End Racism Now” art installation mural, approved by City Council, will be installed along 3rd Street at Jervay Memorial Park near the 1898 Memorial. The mural will consist of 18 freestanding signs, consisting of the characters, “BLACK LIVES DO MATTER” (4ft. x 8ft.). According to the call for artists, the artwork will speak vibrantly of African American culture, represent Wilmington’s African American history, and/or illustrate Black contributions to the world.
 - The sculpture *Harmony* by Wilmington artist Hiroshi Sueyoshi has been relocated from The Forum shopping center to the Cameron Art Museum’s Pyramid Park.
 - The Brigade Boys & Girls Club recently unveiled a “unity mural” (2759 Vance St.)

Beaches

- Carolina Beach: The Carolina Beach Mural Project is a new initiative that will provide local artists paid commissions for 4 murals that celebrate the eclectic history, inspire the beach community, welcome & engage visitors, and to make the town a destination of “Art for wALL” through murals that depict life in Carolina Beach. The first mural will be a version of a vintage postcard with updates to represent the island’s diversity. The murals, displayed at various locations throughout Carolina Beach, will be revealed to the public at the end of October: www.facebook.com/cbmurals/
- Wrightsville Beach: Performance Club theatre is a kids’ theatrical program that teaches all aspects of performing. Fall Outdoor Children’s Theater in the Park classes will be safely held twice a week on Wrightsville Beach Park’s outdoor stage. www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com/468/Programs-for-Kids

MAJOR EVENTS & FESTIVALS

- Event Accolades & Milestones:
 - *MovieMaker* magazine (April 2020) includes Cucalorus Film Festival (for the 10th year!) among its list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee 2020: www.moviemaker.com/50-film-festivals-worth-the-entry-fee-in-2020-presented-by-filmfreeway/3/
 - *Better Homes & Gardens* ranks the NC Azalea Festival as #3 among “9 Must-See Spring Garden Festivals in the U.S.”: www.bhg.com/news/spring-garden-festivals
 - STS Top 20 Event winners in 2020 (note: all events were canceled due to Covid-19): Cape Fear Garden Club Azalea Garden Tour; N.C. Azalea Festival; CFCC Annual Wooden Boat Show; Orange Street Arts Fest; Wilmington NC Marathon; Poplar Grove Plantation Herb & Garden Fair.
 - Milestone: Carolina Beach Music Festival would have celebrated 35 years in 2020. Due to Covid-related cancelation, the milestone event shifts to 2021.
- Venues:
 - Wilmington Convention Center adapts to Covid-19 restrictions with virtual hybrid settings, limited gatherings, outdoor spaces: www.wilmingtonbiz.com/coronavirus/2020/09/10/wilmington_convention_center_working_through_pandemic/20853
 - Brooklyn Arts Center new owners are event professionals Jay & Tara Tatum: www.wilmingtonbiz.com/real_estate_-_commercial/2020/08/27/event_business_owners_buy_brooklyn_arts_center_property/20808
 - New: Station No. 2, located in the historic firehouse at 5th & Castle streets, is an event space for intimate, social distanced gatherings with 1700sf interior space. The 1500sf courtyard has a flagstone patio, heritage plantings, a sound system and ambient lighting. There’s also an upstairs suite. <https://www.facebook.com/Station2nc>

- Event changes:
 - Due to Covid-19, most events and festivals were canceled during 2020. Spring events such as the NC Azalea Festival and Orange Street Artsfest rescheduled events for fall but had to cancel those, in addition to fall signature events like Riverfest and Wilmington Art Walk, were canceled as well. Status of holiday and 2021 events will depend upon the virus and state executive orders that limit gatherings.
 - Due to construction along Wilmington’s riverfront and additional space/parking needs due to social distancing, the Riverfront Farmer’s Market temporarily relocated to Waterline Brewery on Surry Street. The Wilmington Farmer’s Market at Tidal Creek also relocated to Seagate Baptist Church, across the street from Wrightsville Beach Brewery, for the same reasons.
 - Southeast Tourism Society Top 20 Events nominations are now accepted only twice per year. Submission deadlines for 2021 events: July 17, 2020 (events Jan.-June 2021) & January 29, 2021 (events July 2021-Dec. 2021). www.southeasttourism.org

TRANSPORTATION

Wilmington:

- Wilmington International Airport (ILM):
 - Passenger air service is currently provided by Delta, United and American Airlines to 9 non-stop destinations, including 7 hubs and 6 international gateways: ATL, BOS (seasonal), CLT, LGA, PHL, ORD, Washington-DCA (seasonal) and Washington-IAD. flyilm.com
 - Total ILM passengers rose in 2019 to 1,075,963, setting a record with a 15% increase over prior year. <https://flyilm.com/ilm-reaches-a-major-milestone>
 - In January, American added seasonal service between ILM and BOS (Boston Logan).
 - Covid-19’s impacts have devastated air travel, worldwide, during 2020.
 - Terminal Expansion: The \$60 million Terminal Expansion Project that began in 2018 continues in 3 phases—ahead of schedule due to the drop in air traffic due to Covid-19. Phase 3 is expected to begin in fall 2020 and anticipated to conclude by January 2023. Once complete the terminal will grow by 75%, expanding to 162,800 square feet with four additional gates, a new concourse with larger TSA checkpoint, and other amenities. <https://airportimprovement.com/article/traffic-down-wilmington-int-l-advances-expansion-project>; <https://flyilm.com/terminal-expansion/>
- Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO):
 - WMPO Bike Ped Projects: www.wmpo.org/projects-programs/bikeped-projects/
- WAVE Transit News:
 - The Wilmington Multimodal Transportation Center, Laura W. Padgett Station (520 N. 3rd St.) opened in early 2020. The facility is an adaptive reuse project preserving a 1938 building. The site is now home to downtown bus transfers.
 - The Brunswick Connector route is no longer in service.
- NC Department of Transportation:

Wilmington:

- NCDOT will replace the 50+-year-old Cape Fear Memorial Bridge with a new bridge just south of the existing four-lane steel bridge that is nearing the end of its lifespan. The study identified four options, each with six lanes, a generous median and shoulders, as well as a

separated path for bicycles and pedestrians. www.starnewsonline.com/news/20200514/4-options-chosen-for-wilmington-bridge-replacement

- NCDOT halts the Cape Fear Crossing project due to funding deficits. www.ncdot.gov/projects/cape-fear-crossing/Pages/default.aspx
- NCDOT U.S. 17 Hampstead Bypass & Military Cutoff Extension (2020-2023): www.ncdot.gov/projects/us-17-hampstead-bypass/Pages/default.aspx

Beaches:

- Kure Beach/Fort Fisher: During COVID-19 the NC Ferry System adopts alternate schedules: www.ncdot.gov/divisions/ferry/Documents/temporary-ferry-schedule.pdf
- Carolina Beach: Island Greenway Brochure is available online. www.carolinabeach.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=1252
- Wrightsville Beach: NCDOT feasibility studies and public hearings underway to evaluate replacing Drawbridge No. 12 (C. Heide Trask Memorial Bridge). TBD. www.ncdot.gov/news/public-meetings/Pages/FS-1703A-2019-05-21.aspx

ACCOMMODATIONS

What's New:

Wilmington:

- Downtown/River District:
 - The Hive (505 North Second Street), a hybrid small inn/vacation rental with 14 apartment-style suites, held a ribbon cutting in February. Future plans include adding a café/coffee shop/bar. www.thehivewilmington.com
 - Dreamers Welcome - The Inn Downtown is a vegan boutique inn with four bedrooms and suites in a historic home, offering the amenities of a boutique hotel and the independence of a vacation rental. Complimentary vegan breakfasts are prepared by the host. <https://www.dreamerswelcome.com/downtown>
- Midtown:
 - Medical Center Drive (839 Medical Center Drive): A four-story, 109-room Holiday Inn Express & Suites Wilmington West - Medical Park, located near New Hanover Regional Medical Center, celebrated its grand opening in January 2020 (Kismet Wilmington LLC).
 - Sunset Park neighborhood: Dreamers Welcome – The Drift Away is a new vacation rental property inside a 3-bedroom home in Sunset Park. www.dreamerswelcome.com/sunsetpark
- Sixteen lodging properties (12 hotels & 4 B&Bs) in Wilmington have been awarded the AAA Inspectors Best of Housekeeping Award, meaning that they fall within the top 25% of all hotels based on cleanliness and condition. This program highlights AAA Diamond designated properties that are the top tier in housekeeping. <https://go.carolinas.aaa.com/expert-advice/aaa-inspectors-best-of-housekeeping/>

What's Changed:

Wilmington

- City-wide Short-term Lodging (homestay & whole house lodging): www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/planning-development-and-transportation/short-term-lodging
- Downtown/River District:
 - Riverview Suites Wilmington (106 N. Water Street), formerly managed by Hotel Ballast, is under new management as vacation rentals by TurnkeyVR.
 - The Verandas Bed and Breakfast is newly renovated and restored. The 8,500 square foot Victorian Italianate mansion is consistently awarded the AAA 4-Diamond Award.

- Temporarily closed during Covid-19: Blue Heaven B&B
- Midtown:
 - AmeriStay Inn (5001 Market St.), formerly Ramada Conference Center, is currently closed. Renovations underway with plans to rebrand as a Tru & Tapestry Hotel (Seraj Enterprises). http://protrak.wilmingtonnc.gov/PTDocuments/Uploads/Comments/Projects/SWP2019049-TruTapestry_8_21_19.pdf
 - Owners of Budgetel now also own a Motel 6 property at the same address (4903 Market Street). The building is separated into two different branded properties. The Budgetel faces Market Street and Motel 6 faces the back parking lot area.
 - www.motel6.com/en/motels.nc.wilmington.9104.html
 - www.budgetel.com/hotel-details/bi-wilmington-al
 - Flag changes:
 - Baymont by Wyndham (formerly Quality Inn, 4926 Market Street) www.wyndhamhotels.com/hotels/wilmington-north-carolina?brand_id=BU
 - Quality Inn (formerly Jameson Inn, 5102 Dunlea Ct.) www.choicehotels.com/north-carolina/wilmington/quality-inn-hotels/nc881
 - AmeriVu Inn (formerly America's Best Value Inn, 2828 Market Street) www.amerivuinnc.com/wilmington

Beaches:

- Wrightsville Beach:
 - New GM: Holiday Inn Resort welcomes Steve Varieur as its new General Manager. Varieur has held the GM role at several different branded hotels, as well as the title of InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Brand Support Manager for over 45 IHG properties in Louisiana and east Texas. Most recently, Steve served as Regional Director of Operations for a hotel property management company in Alabama.
 - Four lodging properties in Wrightsville Beach have been awarded the AAA Inspectors Best of Housekeeping Award 2020, meaning that they fall within the top 25% of all hotels based on cleanliness and condition. This program highlights AAA Diamond designated properties that are the top tier in housekeeping: Blockade Runner Beach Resort, Holiday Inn Resort Wrightsville Beach, Shell Island Resort and Summer Sands Suites
 - Accolades:
 - 365AtlantaTraveler.com's list of 24 Resorts in NC That Will Have You Packing Your Bags Tonight include Blockade Runner Resort and Shell Island Resort: <https://365atlantatraveler.com/resorts-in-north-carolina/>
- Carolina Beach:
 - The Town of Carolina Beach is considering amendments to the town's zoning ordinance regarding short-term rental regulations. www.wect.com/2020/07/15/carolina-beach-holds-off-short-term-rental-regulations-now/
 - Two lodging properties in Carolina Beach have been awarded the AAA Inspectors Best of Housekeeping Award 2020, meaning that they fall within the top 25% of all hotels based on cleanliness and condition. This program highlights AAA Diamond designated properties that are the top tier in housekeeping: Hampton Inn & Suites Oceanfront Carolina Beach and Courtyard Marriott Carolina Beach.
 - Long-range: No update on redevelopment of the site where Surfside Lodge once stood; new development may include a new hotel (TBD).

What's Next:

Wilmington:

- Downtown/Convention District:

- A 125-room Aloft Coastline Hotel (501 Nutt Street, Poteat Hospitality Associates LLC) is under construction. The boutique hotel property will incorporate the existing historic Coastline Conference & Event Center into the building design. Anticipated opening: Rooms available by June 2021; meeting space and restaurant may open sooner.
- Midtown:
 - Market Street corridor: The Generations Companies of Raleigh is building a Home2 Suites by Hilton, a 125-room extended-stay property, at 5518 Market Street. Anticipated opening is late 2020/early 2021. www.wilmingtonbiz.com/real_estate_-_commercial/2020/02/07/more_hotels_on_the_way/19927
 - Porters Neck: A four-story, 116-room Holiday Inn Express (168 Porter's Neck Rd.) is under construction (Crown Hotel & Management). Anticipated opening: February 2021. (*source*: www.crownhotel.com/Properties/hie-porters-neck-wilmington-nc)
 - The Pointe at Barclay: Pooler, GA-based Ideal Hospitality is moving forward with plans for a 4-story, 108-room Home2 Suites by Hilton. Projected ground-breaking of the limited service extended-stay property is January 2021. <http://idealhospitality.com/portfolio.php>

Long-range Lodging Projects:

- Midtown
 - Military Cutoff: The Avenue. The Carroll Companies, a Greensboro-based developer, is moving forward with plans to develop The Avenue (349 Military Cutoff Rd.), a planned mixed-use development that would be anchored by a Westin hotel and conference center. Timeline TBD. www.theavenuewilmington.com/westin-wilmington
 - Military Cutoff/Eastwood: Wilmington-based Swain & Associates plans to develop CenterPoint, a mixed-use project, in the 1500 block of Eastwood Road with retail, hospitality, office, residential, and a 220-room luxury hotel. Timeline & hotel brand TBD (2022-2028). www.wilmingtonbiz.com/real_estate_-_commercial/2020/03/06/change_of_plans_developer_releases_latest_centerpoint_rendering/20041
 - Eastwood: Phase 2 of Autumn Hall, a master-planned community, will include retail, a 150-room hotel, conference center, restaurants, offices and apartments. Cape Fear Commercial and Trask Land Co. are developers. Hotel timeline TBA. www.wilmingtonbiz.com/real_estate_-_commercial/2020/06/05/major_projects_move_forward/20470
 - ILM Business Park: Based on a 2019 study and analysis by Strategic Performance Group LLC, Wilmington International Airport (ILM) may consider attracting a 100-room, full-service flagship hotel (TBD). <https://flyilm.com/airport-history/>
- Convention District/Downtown:
 - A 120-room hotel at 1 Hanover Street is still listed on the USA InvestCo. website as a long-range plan for the northern riverfront property. Timeline-TBD. <http://usainvestco.com/projects/northern-riverfront-development/future-hotel>
- The Ideal Hospitality website lists plans to build a La Quinta in Wilmington (Location/Timeline: TBD). <http://idealhospitality.com/portfolio.php>

Updated: Sept. 14, 2020

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