

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:

- North Carolina offers a 25% rebate on qualifying expenses and purchases made by productions while in-state as its film incentive. The rebate is funded through the N.C. Film and Entertainment Grant, which currently is allocated \$31 million per fiscal year (Jul 1-Jun 30), with any unused funds carrying over from fiscal year to fiscal year. The rebate funding is now labeled recurring in the state budget and the program's sunset date was recently eliminated in an effort to make a long-term commitment to the film and entertainment industry. (*source: filmnc.com/25-rebate.html*).
- In 2018, the iconic made-in-Wilmington television series “Dawson’s Creek” celebrates 20 years since it first aired; “One Tree Hill” celebrates 15 years since it first aired.
- 2018/2019 productions include: “Words on A Bathroom Wall” (independent film, wrapped); Pre-production: “Reprisal” (Hulu series to air) and DC Comic’s “Swamp Thing” (series) (*source: wilmingtonfilm.com/*)

SHOPPING & RETAIL

- South Front II, located at 22 Greenfield Street, is a Tribute Properties development of shops and restaurants in a former industrial area, some of which are located in trendy shipping containers. New retailers and restaurants continue to open during 2018-2019.
- The Pointe at Barclay continues to add shops and restaurants (S. 17th St. & Independence Blvd./Midtown).
- Independence Mall, located on Oleander Drive in midtown Wilmington, is transforming and rebranding the shopping complex as The Collection at Independence. Sections of the mall’s interior will be removed during the coming months to modernize and revitalize the property.
- River Place, a new 13-story mixed-use building with condominiums, apartments and a parking deck, along with nearly 32,000 square feet of retail space overlooking the river, is now under construction with a projected completion date of late 2019.
- Other future mixed-use developments with retail include: The Avenue (Military Cutoff, mixed-use with a Westin hotel); Project Grace (Downtown); Galleria (Airlie at Wrightsville Sound); and CenterPoint (1531 Eastwood Rd. delayed until 2020).

ENTERTAINMENT/NIGHTLIFE

Wilmington:

- The City of Wilmington’s North Waterfront Park, adjacent to the Port City Marina, will feature a children's play area, splash plaza, beer gardens, extensive open lawn space, an inland boardwalk and connection to the Riverwalk. An outdoor performance space will host outdoor events and concerts, becoming Wilmington’s largest outdoor entertainment venue. Park construction completed by late 2019.

CRAFT BEER/ RESTAURANTS

- Several breweries opened in late 2017 and in 2018, continuing the recent craft beer trend and further establishing Wilmington & Beaches as a Craft Beer destination: Mad Mole (Boathouse Road/Midtown) and Skytown Beer Company (Racine Drive/Midtown). (*source: [Wilmington Ale Trail](#)*)

- Craft breweries expected to open in 2018/2019 include: Flying Machine Brewing Company (3130 Randall Pkwy./Midtown) and Tidewater Brewing (Princess Street/Soda Pop district near downtown). (*sources: Wilmington Ale Trail & Downtown Wilmington, Inc.*)
- Wilmington Brewing Company and New Anthem Beer Project will expand in 2018.

RESTAURANTS

Wilmington:

- Benny’s Big Time Pizzeria, a gourmet pizzeria owned by celebrity chef/Kinston restaurateur Vivian Howard (star of PBS “A Chef’s Life”) opened in late 2017, making it a destination restaurant for fans of her show. It is located in the up-and-coming South Front district.
- Restaurant Accolades:
 - Manna restaurant received its fourth consecutive AAA Four-Diamond rating; the only restaurant in Wilmington with this distinction.
 - Bitty & Beau’s Coffee owner and founder Amy Wright was named the 2017 CNN Hero of the Year for her efforts employing workers with disabilities.
 - Celebrity chef Guy Fieri visited Wilmington during the spring for a charter school fundraiser and while in town his crew filmed multiple episodes of The Food Network show “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives” at several area restaurants (Sweet & Savory, Cast Iron Kitchen, Something Fishy, Copper Penny, Ceviches).
 - PinPoint Restaurant’s catfish and grits dish was featured on Food Network show “Best Thing I Ever Ate.”
 - *The Bourbon Review* includes Front Street Brewery in its list of America's 99 Best Bourbon Bars (South). (*source: gobourbon.com/best-bourbon-bars-south-2018/*)

Beaches:

- Carolina Beach:
 - Carolina Beach’s dining scene is expanding with new restaurants, including: Soul Flavor Kitchen & Bar, The Southerly Biscuit & Pie, Carolina Smokehouse, Charlie Graingers, Jack’s Retreat Beer Garden and Dog House, Nollie’s Taco Joint, and more.
 - Thrillist.com names Ocean Grille & Tiki Bar as one of the 21 Best Beach Bars in North America (July 2017).
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - Shark Bar & Grille opened near Johnnie Mercer’s Fishing Pier.

ATTRACTIONS, TOURS, CRUISES

Wilmington:

- Wilmington Accolades:
 - Wilmington, N.C. was selected as one of TripAdvisor’s 2018 Travelers’ Choice “Top Destinations on the Rise – United States.” The vibrant riverfront city, also home to three nearby island beaches, ranked #3 out of 10 on the coveted TripAdvisor list that reveals the top trending spots in 2018. Wilmington was the only NC destination included in this list.
 - CNNtravel.com (August 2017) ranks Wilmington #9 among “15 charming cities in the American South you may have overlooked.”
 - Expedia.com named Wilmington one of “America’s 13 Hottest Up-and-Coming Coffee Cultures” (Oct. 2017).
 - Runners World includes Wilmington among its roundup of “Great Summer Escapes” (Sept. 2017)
 - Flipkey.com named Wilmington as one of the “15 Best Girls’ Weekend Getaways Across America” and one of the “25 Best Pet-friendly Vacations in America.”

- Battleship NORTH CAROLINA ranks #2 “Best North Carolina Attraction” (*USA Today* 10Best Voters’ Choice).
- Airlie Gardens is NC’s pick in Orbitz.com’s 2018 roundup of “Best Place to Get Married in all 50 States.”
- Wilmington City Council recently added regulations for horse-drawn carriages to address who can operate them, where they can park, and health of the horses. (*source: starnewsonline.com/news/20180821/wilmington-adopts-new-horse-drawn-carriage-rules*)
- Children’s Museum of Wilmington new exhibits include: Science of You and Toothasaurus.
- Battleship NORTH CAROLINA opened its SECU Memorial Walkway, a half-mile long, 10-foot wide timber walkway around the ship that is above the water line but below the main deck, allowing full view of the entire hull.
- Burgwin-Wright House held a grand re-opening and ribbon cutting in May to celebrate a complete interior restoration to transform the museum house (c. 1770).
- Wilmington Riverfront continues to transform with exciting new additions, including new restaurants, a 125-room Aloft Hotel, and a park scheduled to break ground in 2018 and open in 2019.

Carolina Beach/Kure Beach:

- Carolina Beach Boardwalk Tours: Federal Point History Center began offering guided tours of the historic Carolina Beach Boardwalk on Tuesdays at 10am, mid-June through mid-August.
- Carolina Beach approved commercial pedal pubs, with limit of two permits total and only one permit per company.
- N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher recently opened a new Nature Play Area. The popular Weeki Wachee Mermaids will return in Spring 2019.
- Accolades:
 - TripAdvisor.com lists Carolina/Kure Beaches among its roundup of “20 Best All-American Vacations Your Kids Will Love” (July 2017).
 - Carolina Beach and Kure Beach rank among the Top 10 in USA Today’s 10Best Readers’ Choice awards for “Best North Carolina Beach.”
 - TravelChannel.com lists the Carolina Beach Music Festival #5 among its top picks for 10 Terrific U.S. Beach Festivals to Check Out This Season (spring 2018)
 - 24/7 Wall St. (2018) declared Wake ‘n Bake Doughnuts (original location is in Carolina Beach) as the “Best Doughnut Shop in North Carolina,” citing specialty flavors such as a ghost pepper-infused chocolate glaze, candied jalapeno and chocolate cherry whip filling.
 - TravelChannel.com named the Carolina Beach Music Festival one of “10 Terrific U.S. Beach Festivals to Check Out This Season” (March 2018).
 - MSN.com lists Kure Beach among its picks in “17 Best Beaches for a Budget Vacation in 2017” (July 2017).
 - VacationIdea.com lists the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher among its list of “25 Best Aquariums in the U.S.” (Nov. 2017).

Long-range:

- Fort Fisher State Historic Site : Plans are underway to develop a new two-story 20,000 sq. ft. visitor center that will include expanded permanent exhibits, a changing exhibit gallery, an expanded auditorium, an educational classroom, rental facilities, an expanded gift shop and additional office space. The interpretive center will be nearly four times the size of the current facility. The site also hopes to reconstruct the land face earthworks that were destroyed by airstrip construction during World War II. Construction timeline of the new visitor center and museum TBD. (*Source: friendsoffortfisher.com/photos/museumfundingannounced.html*)

- N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher will host the popular Weeki Wachee Mermaids in the spring for their third North Carolina appearance. (*source: ncaquariums.com/fort-fisher-exhibits*)
- Long-range: The N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher is gearing up for a planned \$10 million expansion and renovation project which will include updates to and renovations of existing exhibits and infrastructure to make the aquarium more modern and relevant. An observation deck and wayfinding signs are also being considered, as well as a small gallery and exhibit space on the back side of the facility. All improvements will be made with the goal of enhancing the visitor experience. Construction could begin by 2019 or 2020.

Wrightsville Beach:

Accolades:

- CoastalLiving.com and Travel+Leisure rank Wrightsville Beach among its list of “Small Beach Towns to Visit This Summer” (July 2018)
 - Southern Living readers voted Wrightsville Beach as one of the “South’s Best Beaches”, describing it as “a beach lover’s heaven—lots of sand and surf, outdoor adventure, bike-friendly byways, fresh seafood, and perfect spots to relax and watch the sunset.” (March 2018)
 - Wrightsville Beach ranks among the Top 10 in *USA Today*’s 10Best Readers’ Choice awards for “Best North Carolina Beach.”
 - US News & World Report includes Wrightsville Beach as one of “30 Best Small Beach Towns That Should Be on Your Radar” (May 2018).
- Wrightsville Beach Museum relocated the Bordeaux Cottage (c. 1924), a historical landmark, to the town’s historic square, where it will be restored and then serve as a second building for the museum’s expansion.
 - The beach access near Johnnie Mercer’s Fishing Pier is getting a facelift. Plans include a new oceanfront park, as well as landscaping, a playground, additional restrooms and changing facilities.

RECREATION AND OUTDOOR SPORTS

Wilmington:

- Empie Park/Althea Gibson Tennis Center is currently renovating its original courts and adding five lighted courts, to be completed in Fall 2018.
- Inland Greens, a City-owned 9-hole par-3 golf course on 33 acres, is completely renovated and reopened during summer 2018.

Coming Soon:

- Wilmington’s North Waterfront Park is comprised of 6.63 acres of riverfront property located between Port City Marina and the Isabel Holmes Bridge. The park is expected to open in 2019. The City’s master plan for the park is online: wilmingtonnc.gov/home/showdocument?id=596

FISHING/BOATING

- Wilmington Boat Show returns for its 3rd annual event at the Wilmington Convention Center and Port City Marina on September 8-1, 2017 with expanded offerings to include more vendors and a Fishing Expo with live music and family fun at Battleship Park. (*source: wilmingtonboatshow.com/*)

- 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.

SPECTATOR & AMATEUR SPORTS

- PPD IRONMAN 70.3 North Carolina returns on October 13.
(Source: ironman.com/triathlon/events/americas/ironman-70.3/north-carolina.aspx)
- Cape Fear Community College's Schwartz Center is undergoing extensive renovations to include new locker rooms, resilient wood strip flooring, a new bleacher system and scoreboard, roof, heating/ac system and a team/multi-purpose room, adding 6,200 square feet to the facility.

ARTS & CULTURE

Wilmington:

- North Front Theatre (formerly City Stage at Level 5) opened in 2018 with a theatre and rooftop bar.
- Cucalorus Festival rebranded and expanded to include Film + Stage + Connect (tech) components.

SPECIAL EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Wilmington:

- Event Accolades:
 - *MovieMaker* magazine (April 2018) includes Cucalorus Film Festival in its list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee 2018. (source: moviemaker.com/archives/best_of/50-film-festivals-worth-the-entry-fee-in-2018/14)
 - *Islands.com* lists Wilmington's July 4th Celebration among its list of "10 Best Places to Celebrate the 4th of July"
- Inaugural events in 2018/2019 include:
 - The inaugural Beach, Bacon & Beer Festival was held in April.

TRANSPORTATION

- Wilmington International Airport (ILM):
 - American Airlines expanded service in 2018, with non-stop service between ILM and Washington-National as well as seasonal service between ILM and Chicago O'Hare as well as ILM and Dallas Fort Worth.
 - In April 2018 United Airlines began service between ILM and Chicago, as well as ILM and Washington-Dulles.
 - Passenger air service currently provided by Delta, United and American Airlines to 8 non-stop destinations, including 7 hubs and 6 international gateways: ATL, CLT, LGA, PHL, ORD, Washington-DCA and Washington-IAD. New destinations in 2018 include Chicago, Washington-IAD and seasonal/holiday non-stop service to Dallas-Fort Worth. (source: flyilm.com)
 - According to an ILM press release, total passengers rose in 2017 to 836,589. (source: flyilm.com/ilm-soars-achieve-new-passenger-record)
- Wave Transit's Downtown Trolley Route will test a modified route during the month of September. The route will include stops at Castle Street, Brooklyn Arts and South FrontStreet districts, as well as Bellamy Mansion and Cape Fear Museum. Upon review, the new route could go into effect on October 1. (source: portcitydaily.com/local-news/2018/08/07/big-changes-ahead-for-waves-downtown-trolley-including-new-look-route-and-fares/)

- Cape Fear Memorial Bridge is undergoing a major renovation to replace the grid deck, as well as parking areas, replace existing median barrier, and more.

Coming Soon:

- Carolina Beach:
 - The Town of Carolina Beach is nearing completion of the Island Greenway project as proposed in the Bicycle Multi-Use Transportation Plan. Anticipated completion by late 2018. (sources: carolinabeach.org/projects/plans_and_drawings_islandgreen.php & carolinabeach.org/Master_Plan_2017%204-12-17.pdf)

Long-range:

- High construction bids have stalled construction for Wilmington's Multimodal Transportation Center (3rd & Campbell streets). The project will create a transportation hub for Wave Transit's downtown transfer facility and its free downtown trolley service. (source: wilmingtonbiz.com.)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Wilmington:

- Downtown/River District:
 - A privately owned, 186-room full-service Embassy Suites by Hilton Wilmington Riverfront Hotel opened in January 2018 beside the Wilmington Convention Center. Amenities include a full-service restaurant, rooftop bar and 6,600 square feet of meeting space.
 - Hotel Ballast, Tapestry Collection by Hilton opened in April 2018. Formerly the Hilton Wilmington Riverside, the hotel reopened as Hotel Ballast following a multimillion-dollar renovation which includes complete guestroom and bath upgrades, as well as the addition of a bridal suite, guest corridor refresh and renovations to all public areas. Lobby renovations include a library and art gallery featuring student art from the Savannah College of Art & Design. The outdoor pool area was transformed and includes an expanded dining area, private cabanas and a fire pit. All ballrooms and meeting space were rejuvenated. Restaurant concepts include Board and Barrel, a 3-meal restaurant with locally inspired menu, as well as a lobby café and bar.

Beaches:

- Carolina Beach:
 - The Courtyard by Marriott Carolina Beach completed a major renovation and refresh of guest rooms, meeting/conference rooms, restaurant, lobby and all public spaces (Spring 2018).

Coming Soon:

Wilmington:

- Downtown/River District:
 - Following a construction delay, Poteat Hospitality Associates LLC (Laurinburg, N.C.) and Big Dawg LLC (Wilmington) expect to break ground soon on a 125-room Aloft Hotel that would incorporate the existing historic Coastline Conference & Event Center into the building design. Groundbreaking is anticipated in fall 2018 and will take approximately 18 months to build; opening TBA. (source: wilmingtonbiz.com, 6/21/18)
 - ARRIVE Wilmington (formerly The Wilmingtonian) is a 36-room boutique hotel at the corner of Dock & Second streets. With an eye toward maintaining and enhancing the historic character of the neighborhood, restoration and renovation of the buildings began in January 2018. ARRIVE hotels are built for the neighborhood. Each property is a crossroads for locals and travelers that celebrates the surrounding style, food, drinks and culture. All guest room suites will emphasize comfort and functionality as part of their clean, modern design, with a singular focus on the hotel's role as a temporary home for its guests. Immersing guests in local design and tastes, ARRIVE will serve as a lively social

hub featuring a neighborhood restaurants and bar. The hotel is expected to open in late 2018. (source: arriveenterprises.com/arrive-wilmington)

Midtown Wilmington:

- Midtown/Medical Center Drive: Kismet Wilmington LLC broke ground in May 2018 for a 4-story, 109-room Holiday Inn Express & Suites at the corner of Medical Center Drive and Silver Stream Lane. Hotel developers expect the project to take approximately 18 months with anticipated opening in Fall 2019. (source: wilmingtonbiz.com, 5/11/18).

Long-range:

- Midtown/Military Cutoff: The Avenue. The Carroll Companies, a Greensboro-based developer, purchased nearly 11 acres at 349 Military Cutoff Road. Plans are approved to develop The Avenue, a planned mixed-use development that would be anchored by a Westin hotel and conference center. Timeline not yet determined. (source: wilmingtonbiz.com/real-estate-commercial/2018/06/06/up-next-for-the-avenue-design-and-more-review/17589, 6/6/18)
- Midtown/Military Cutoff/Eastwood: Wilmington City Council approved plans for the proposed CenterPoint development. Wilmington-based Swain & Associates plans to develop a mixed-use project, CenterPoint in the 1500 block of Eastwood Road as a retail, hospitality, office and residential with street frontage on both Military Cutoff and Eastwood roads. A proposed flagship luxury hotel (TBA) with 200 rooms would be part of the project. Developers anticipate breaking ground in about two years (2020). (source: portcitydaily.com/local-news/2018/07/18/wilmington-city-council-approves-1-million-square-foot-centerpoint-development-on-military-cutoff-road, 7/18/18)
- Convention District/Downtown: Plans for the Hotel Indigo at 1 Hanover Street have changed. While the project is currently listed as 'inactive' with City planners, USA InvestCo still plans to open a hotel at the site, under a different flag with a possible groundbreaking date in late 2018. (source: *Star News*, 6/20/18)
- Porters Neck: A four-story, 116-room hotel is proposed for the Porter's Neck area, near Lowe's Home Improvement store. The hotel name has not yet been announced. (source: *Star News*, 2/6/18)
- A yet unnamed, mixed-use project is proposed for 615 N. Front Street in the Convention Center District and may include a hotel. No timeline is set.