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Recently named one of the “Best Small Cities in the U.S.” by *Condé Nast Traveler*, **Wilmington, NC, and Island Beaches** is a must-see Southern destination that constantly draws in new people and inspires fresh ideas, building on an authentic heritage and adding unexpected offerings. This is not your average coastal vacation. From the historic downtown river district to the modern facilities remaking the riverfront skyline, coastal culture and quintessential Carolina charm intersect in a refreshing, irresistible way. Wilmington is the portal to three island beaches, Carolina Beach, Kure Beach and Wrightsville Beach, each with its own distinct vibe and ways to expand vacation possibilities. Not all oceanside vacations are created equal, so experience the best of the Carolina coast all in one place.

WHAT’S NEW IN WILMINGTON**Tours and Experiences**

Discover diverse wildlife species and ecosystems on one of Wilmington Outdoor Adventures’ new eco-tour offerings. The Shark Tooth Hunting Tour takes visitors to a unique island filled with shark teeth, fossils and other treasures. Aboard the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, which is now fully open to the public following mast and hull repairs, explore new guided tours offering a behind-the-scenes look into life on the storied ship’s nine levels. The new Bike & Brew Tour takes exploring Wilmington to the next level with E-Bikes. Visit famous filming sites along the “One Tree Hill” Tour or dive into the area’s storied past with the History, Haunts and Breweries Tour. The Latimer House Museum’s new evening tour showcases Victorian-era domestic life.

New and Notable Dining

With an array of culinary delights, Wilmington’s dynamic foodie scene continues expanding. Beat Street, the latest creation from restaurateur Bobby Zimmerman, is a fast-casual Cargo District dining spot serving street food classics like tacos and kebabs. Chef Sunny Gerhart, a 2023 James Beard Foundation semifinalist for “Best Chef Southeast,” will open Olivero in downtown Wilmington this year, serving Spanish-influenced New Orleans-style cuisine. The vibrant Bonita Latin Fusion & Cocteleria is coming to the Riverwalk’s northern end with a unique menu celebrating Latin American culinary traditions. Rx

Chicken and Oysters will re-open in early 2023 with greater emphasis on seafood and a menu that includes oysters grown and lionfish speared by chef/owner, James Doss.

Toast to the Coast

What sets Wilmington’s coastal craft cocktail scene apart is the absence of big-city pretension – plus a strong focus on creativity and unique locations, including killer waterfront views. Cheers to good times on the coast at one of the area’s newest cocktail bars, The Underfront, which opened in early 2023 with a modern industrial vibe, occasional live music and plans for a summer tiki space. The family-owned boutique micro-distillery, Momentum Spirits, opened in the Cotton Exchange and plans to add a tasting room. Rx Chicken and Oysters plans to add a micro-distillery in 2023 to produce small-batch beer and spirits using locally sourced ingredients. A new German-American fusion restaurant, Prost Biergarten, will also feature a lively bar and outdoor beer garden.

Follow the Trails

With two state parks and more than a dozen parks and trails, Wilmington and its beaches are joining North Carolina’s 2023 Year of the Trail initiative to celebrate the state’s beautiful and diverse landscapes. As a Leave No Trace partner, the area boasts several scenic trails through Long Leaf Park, Halyburton Park, Greenfield Park and other outdoor spaces. Spot rare indigenous carnivorous plants along Carolina Beach State Park’s Flytrap Trail and view salt marsh wildlife along the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area’s Basin Trail. The Gary Shell Cross-City Trail and the River to Sea Bikeway allow cyclists to travel long distances across town, and the Blue Clay Bike Park offers an 8-mile trail system perfect for mountain biking. Visitors can also explore N.C. Birding Trail and N.C. Oyster Trail sites.

Airport Happenings

Wilmington International Airport (ILM) offers daily nonstop flights to Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas/Fort Worth, New Haven, New York City, Newark, Orlando, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., as well as seasonal flights to Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Fort Lauderdale and Minneapolis/St. Paul. New low-cost carriers include



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Avelo Airlines and Sun Country. ILM will complete its \$68 million expansion by summer 2023. The airport's terminal has expanded and now includes nine total gates, as well as a restaurant, concessions and more.

SAMPLE STORYLINES

Fit for a Foodie

Wilmington recently rose to the top of two national foodie lists: TripSavvy.com's "10 Places Food Lovers Should Visit in 2023" and Yelp's "Small Towns, Big Flavor: 2022 Foodie Cities." PinPoint and manna ave. 123 are among the many restaurants creatively interpreting Southern fare. Visit Catch to sample signature Lowcountry dishes from chef/owner Keith Rhodes, a "Top Chef" participant and official Gullah culinarian. At Seabird, Chef Dean Neff serves an impressive menu celebrating the finest seasonal seafood and produce. Both Rhodes and Neff are semifinalists for the 2023 James Beard Foundation "Best Chef Southeast." Taste the delightful dishes and cocktails at Chef Bobby Zimmerman's True Blue Butcher and Barrel, an all-in-one restaurant, whiskey bar and butcher shop. The Green House offers vegan fine dining using house-made dairy-free cheeses, as well as herbs and vegetables from the restaurant's own greenhouse. Also in the fine dining category, Wilmington restaurateur Ash Aziz of Circa Restaurant Group opened Origins in Wilmington's Autumn Hall neighborhood. Renowned Triangle restaurateur Giorgios Bakatsias opened Kipos Hellenic Cuisine in Wilmington's Lumina Station. Embark on a tasting tour along the Wilmington Ale Trail or indulge in award-winning drinks and food with Port City Restaurant Week and Craft Cocktail Week.

Active Adventures and Wellness

Wilmington and its beaches are overflowing with ways to get active. Jog along the scenic Riverwalk, then rent a kayak to paddle around Greenfield Lake. Start your day with yoga on Wrightsville Beach's Crystal Pier or an energizing sunrise walk along The Loop, offering marsh and water views. Bike along the Gary Shell Cross City Trail, a 15-mile, off-road multi-use trail from Wilmington to the Intracoastal Waterway, or set out on the River to Sea Bikeway, an 11-mile on and off-road route. Challenge yourself to a surfing, sailing or standup paddleboarding (SUP) lesson on crystal blue waters. The area hosts world tour-qualifying watersport competitions, as well as 5k, 10k, marathon and triathlon races. Day spas, yoga studios, salt caves, health clubs, golf courses, tennis courts and hiking trails provide additional fitness options.

Eco-Adventures, Parks and Gardens

Wilmington and its island beaches claim ten sites on the N.C. Birding Trail. Nature tours and cruises explore maritime ecosystems, waterways, wildlife and flora. Carolina Beach State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area offer nature programs and guided hikes. Airlie Gardens showcases 67 beautiful acres of coastal botanical gardens, ponds and the venerable Airlie Oak. Greenfield Park features gardens, trails, moss-draped cypress trees, a fishing dock, kayak and paddleboat rentals and more.

Oakdale Cemetery is known for funerary art, flowers, shade trees and tours. At Wilmington's Halyburton Park, approximately 12,000 honeybees inhabit the 58-acre nature preserve's new public apiary, which consists of two hive boxes and is the first of its kind in the area.

Hollywood East

Dubbed "Hollywood East" and "Wilmywood" over the years, Wilmington serves as the backdrop for many popular movies and TV shows, including 2023 releases like season 2 of "The Summer I Turned Pretty" and the feature films "One True Loves" and "The Supremes at Earl's All You Can Eat." Spot memorable filming locations around town on a self-guided tour. Wilmington's 2023 film industry milestones include the 20th anniversary of "One Tree Hill" and the 25th anniversary of "Dawson's Creek." This year also marks 40 years since Dino De Laurentiis opened DEG Studios in Wilmington.

Unique Places to Stay

From romantic inns to boutique hotels, Wilmington offers a range of lodging options that will take your coastal getaway to the next level. ARRIVE Wilmington by Palisociety, offering a midcentury modern design and cozy courtyard bar, reopened following renovations and plans to open a second building this year. The Hive, a downtown boutique hotel, boasts stylish suites and amenities like a dedicated fitness room. Dreamers by DW is a vegan B&B in a historic home with invisible service that affords the experience of a vacation rental. Stay dockside with a vacation rental from The Strands Houseboat Community. Discover Southern comfort and charm with a sojourn at the Graystone Inn or The Verandas – both awarded the prestigious AAA Four Diamond rating. For a full-service experience, the riverfront Hotel Ballast celebrates the area's maritime past. Hotel LIVE Wilmington, a Hilton Tapestry Collection and Tru by Hilton Wilmington, will open in 2023.

Arts, Culture and Heritage

Immerse yourself in the new and ongoing mix of coastal sights, sounds and tastes in Wilmington and its beaches, where you'll find an array of festivals, museums, art galleries, craft fairs, performing arts events and historic sites all in one destination. Wilmington's Fourth Friday Gallery Night is held monthly at local galleries. Nearby stages include the historic Thalian Hall, renovated churches, outdoor amphitheaters and The Wilson Center, a 1,500-seat performing arts center. From its timeless Victorian and period architecture to the influential Cape Fear River port, Wilmington's history runs deep. Discover the region's storied past and rich cultural heritage through museums, historic sites, landmarks and guided tours that specialize in African American, WWII and Civil War history. Witness a history lesson by land when exploring one of the largest National Register Historic Districts in the Southeast, or by sea at the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA and Fort Fisher State Historic Site.

