

Carolina Beach • Kure Beach • Wrightsville Beach

Wilmington.C.

River District & Island Beaches

Media Contact:

Connie Nelson
866.266.9690

cvbpr@wilmingtonandbeaches.com

Named as the 2024 South's Best City on the Rise by Southern Living, **Wilmington, NC, and Island Beaches** is a must-see Southern destination that constantly draws in new people, building on an authentic heritage and adding unexpected offerings. 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. 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

Embark on an adventure through the area's waterways and explore diverse wildlife species with new guided kayak tours from Wilmington Outdoor Adventures. The Wrightsville Beach Waterloop eco-tour winds through the waterways surrounding Wrightsville Beach. Meanwhile, Wilmington Water Tours is bringing back its popular Outlander in Cape Fear Cruise in 2024. On land, the Burgwin Wright House Museum hosts a special Outlander in Cape Fear walking tour, delving into the area's Scottish heritage. Additionally, discover fascinating pirate legends and lore with a new walking tour in downtown Wilmington: The family-friendly Wilmington Pirate Walk unveils hidden hideouts and ghost stories, led by a costumed character Jaq Sparrow guide.

Fresh Local Flavors

Wilmington's dynamic food and drink scene continues to expand. G Prime Steak and Cellar is the latest creation from acclaimed restaurateur Giorgios Bakatsias, offering high-quality cuts of meat complemented by an elegant mid-century dining room. Recently reimagined, Rx Chicken and Oysters has a fresh dining concept, now harvesting its own oysters and spearfishing for lobster and the invasive lionfish. Tequila Comida and Cantina opened a second location near the marina, with a ground-floor dining room and upstairs lounge area. Showcasing the city's vibrant culinary scene, Feast Wilmington hosted its inaugural festival in 2024 with plans to return in 2025 with more renowned chefs, mixologists and immersive culinary experiences.

Nightlife and Entertainment

An innovative hi-fi cocktail lounge and coffee bar, The Ibis, has opened in the Soda Pop District, featuring live music. Soon to open in the Castle Street Arts District, The Velvet Room Cinema and Bar is a community-based microcinema with plans to showcase film screenings and include The Hide-a-Way lounge, a vintage speakeasy. Rally Point, a new arcade and bar, recently opened, with a second-floor retro lounge set to open later this year.

SAMPLE STORYLINES

Fit for a Foodie

Featured on TripSavvy.com's "10 Places Food Lovers Should Visit in 2023," Wilmington has become a hotspot for standout chefs and innovative cuisine. PinPoint and manna ave. 123 are among the many restaurants creatively interpreting Southern fare. Visit Catch, named one of the best restaurants in the U.S. by USA Today, 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. Neff was recognized as a semifinalist for the 2024 James Beard Foundation Award for "Outstanding Chef Nationwide." 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. James Beard semifinalist for "Best Chef Southeast," Chef Sunny Gerhart recently opened Olivero, blending the robust flavors of Spanish and Italian cuisine. With a fresh approach to coastal cuisine in a relaxed indoor and outdoor bar atmosphere, Perla Raw Bar offers a colorful take on a traditional oyster bar from famed restaurateur Ash Aziz. Embark on a Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tour to discover foodie destinations throughout downtown Wilmington or indulge in award-winning drinks and food with Port City Taste Restaurant 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.

African American Experiences

Engage with Wilmington's African American heritage to discover the resilience, contributions and achievements of the community. The Cape Fear Museum of History's "Cape Fear Stories" exhibit traces the region's African American history from the 1700s to the 20th century. Honoring descendants of enslaved West Africans, the National Park Service's Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor in Wilmington and extends throughout the coastal Carolinas, stopping at local historic sites including Poplar Grove Plantation and the Bellamy Mansion Museum of History and Design Arts. The Cameron Art Museum honors the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) who fought in the final stages of the Civil War with the USCT Park, which serves as a quiet place for reflection and remembrance. Within the park, "Boundless" is a life-size sculpture that honors troops on the same grounds as the battle. Several self-guided tours, including "A Guide to Wilmington's African American Heritage," highlight significant religious, educational, social and cultural sites. The guided WilmingtonColor Heritage Tour travels through the area highlighting African American achievements, along with Journey Wilmington's African American History Tour, a guided walking experience.

Hollywood East

Dubbed "Wilmywood" over the years, Wilmington has become a hub for set-jetting, the popular travel trend of visiting the real-life locations from popular movies and TV shows. The destination serves as the backdrop for many popular shows, including "The Summer I Turned Pretty" and "Outer Banks," along with upcoming feature films like "The Supremes at Earl's All You Can Eat." From a seaside state park to picturesque Southern gardens, local landmarks have been transformed into the settings of classic productions. With over 400 projects to its credit, Wilmington's film industry celebrates several milestones in 2024, including the debut of Wilmington's DEG studio's first film, "Firestarter," based on the Stephen King novel, which premiered 40 years ago, and the 30th anniversary of Cucalorus Festival, a non-juried independent film festival that takes place in November.

Second Act Travel

As a historic riverfront city with three island beaches nearby, Wilmington offers an inviting blend of vacation experiences for retirees to discover. Explore Wilmington's National Register

Historic District, spanning over 230 blocks of moss-draped oaks and historic houses such as the Burgwin-Wright House, Latimer House and Bellamy Mansion. Airlie Gardens offers 67-acres of tranquil Southern gardens, sculptures and more. Wilmington's scenic Riverwalk is a nearly 2-mile walkway with an array of restaurants, bars and independent shops overlooking the Cape Fear River. Get a taste of Wilmington's culinary scene with creations by award-winning chefs or embark on a guided foodie tour to savor downtown's diverse flavors and local craft breweries on the Wilmington Ale Trail.

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, a stylish boutique hotel offering a midcentury modern design and cozy courtyard bar, has plans to expand and add more than 50 new rooms 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 houseboat vacation rental from The Cove Riverwalk Villas. Discover Southern comfort and charm with a sojourn at the C.W. Worth House Bed and Breakfast, voted as the No. 1 "Bed and Breakfasts the Offer an Unforgettable Stay" by USA Today, or The Verandas. For a full-service experience, the riverfront Hotel Ballast celebrates the area's maritime past.

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 arts, culture and heritage 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 amphitheatres and The Wilson Center, a 1,500-seat performing arts center. 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.

Nearby Island Beaches

Discover three island beaches located just a short drive from the riverfront and the heart of Wilmington, offering endless vacation experiences. Carolina Beach, Kure Beach and Wrightsville Beach each boast unique personalities and attractions, all while being USLA Lifeguard-protected Memorial Day through Labor Day and committed to ocean safety programs. Just 8.5 miles east of Wilmington, Wrightsville Beach is a vibrant community where quality and wellness converge. Experience world-class watersports, crystal blue waters and miles of pristine beach. Carolina Beach and Kure Beach are classic seaside towns with landmark attractions, including the Carolina Beach Boardwalk, Fort Fisher State Historic Site and the North Carolina Aquarium.

