

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:

- Film production, nationwide, came to a halt in May 2023 following the Writer's Guild of America strike. In July 2023, SAG/AFTRA went on strike. At press time both unions were still on strike.
 - Prior to the strike Joshua Jackson was filming a new series at EUE/Screen Gems Studios that shut down after the strike. "The Summer I Turned Pretty" (Amazon TV) did not return to film season 3, due to the strikes.
 - Recent Releases: "The Summer I Turned Pretty" (Amazon, season 2): "Divine Renovation" (season 1); "Eric Larue" (indie film); "Breakwater" (indie film);
 - Upcoming Releases: "The Supremes at Earl's All You Can Eat" (feature, TBD); "The Georgetown Project" (feature, Dec. 2023); "Providence" (feature, TBD);
 - In July 2023 Dark Horse Studios broke ground for 2 new sound stages to expand its production facility.
 - Source: wilmingtonfilm.com wilmingtonfilm.com/current-productions darkhorsestudios.com
- Accolades:
 - *MovieMaker* magazine ranks Wilmington #2 among the 2023 "Best Places To Live and Work as a Movie Maker" in the Small Town category: Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, 2023.

SHOPPING & RETAIL

Wilmington

- The Forum (Military Cutoff Rd.) has been acquired by CenterSquare, a Pennsylvania-based real estate investment management company.
- Mayfaire Town Centre (CBL & Associates Properties): New retailers include: The Good Feet Store; Blakeley's Apparel & Gifts; Coastal Golf Academy (www.mayfaire.com)
- Long-term developments with retail moving forward:
 - CenterPoint (1531 Eastwood Rd., www.centerpointwilmington.com) is currently under construction; anticipated opening of phase 1 in 2024.
 - The Avenue (Military Cutoff, a Carroll Companies project with retail and Westin hotel/spa, timeline TBD; www.theavenuewilmington.com/the-avenue) [see also Accommodations: Long-range Lodging section]

Beaches

- Coming Soon (2024): The Proximity is a Carolina Beach mixed-use development by Cape Fear Commercial broke ground in July 2023 to build approximately 71,000 feet of commercial space for shops and restaurants, a 5,000 square foot fitness center, a pool, co-working office space and apartments at Lake Park Blvd. and St. Joseph streets: <https://theproximitycb.com/#about>

CRAFT BEER / DISTILLERY NEWS

Wilmington

- Breweries & Beer Gardens:
 - Bowstring Brewery, a Raleigh-based brewpub, recently opened in the Soda Pop District.
 - Catawba Brewing recently closed its Wilmington location.
- Coming soon:

- Durham-based Ponysaurus Brewing will open a pizzeria and beer garden in downtown Wilmington (Fall 2023).
- Oden Brewery, based in Greensboro, plans to open a brewery, tap room and private event space in Wilmington's Soda Pop District. <https://odenbrewing.com/wilmington-nc>
- Distillery News:
 - In August 2023, End of Days Distillery released Castillo 1815 Blue Agave Spirit, Wilmington's first agave spirit. This small-batch USA-made tequila creation captures the essence of the Blue Agave plant.
 - Momentum Distillery added gin, rye whiskey and rum to its offerings in 2023.

Beaches:

- Four Hounds Distilling (rum) in Carolina Beach recently released Queen's Share, its first barrel-aged rum. www.fourhoundsdistilling.com

Accolades – Beer / Spirits:

- Wilmington winners of the 2022 NC Brewers Cup Competition (multiple categories) include: Wilmington Brewing Co., Flying Machine Brewing Co., New Anthem Beer Project; Bill's Brewing Co., and Waterline Brewing Co. www.ncbeer.org

RESTAURANTS

Wilmington:

- Food/Restaurant Trends & News:
 - Wilmington rose to the top of two national foodie lists in 2022/2023: TripSavvy.com's "10 Places Food Lovers Should Visit in 2023" and Yelp's "Small Towns, Big Flavor: 2022 Foodie Cities."
 - Restaurant challenges continue with trained workforce shortages; inflation/rising costs of food/supplies; increased overhead (higher rent, wages). To address workforce challenges, the NCRLA Foundation recently launched a free hospitality training program for NC residents with courses and certifications for restaurant and lodging career tracks: <https://ncrla.training>.
 - CFCC created a new Culinary Fundamentals 16-week course to train students for a career in the culinary field. <https://cfcc.edu/job-training/hospitality/culinary-fundamentals>
 - Block EatZ is a new food hall incubator on CFCC's north campus (Blue Clay Rd.) that provides caterers, food truck operators, local chefs, etc., the opportunity to test the viability of their restaurant concepts.
 - Port City Taste will add Taco Week (Oct. 30-Nov. 5) to its growing list of events (Restaurant Week, Burger Week, Craft Cocktail Week).
- Dining Highlights:
 - Downtown:
 - New Eateries:
 - Olivero, serving Spanish-influenced New Orleans style cuisine by Raleigh chef Sunny Gerhart, a 2022 James Beard Foundation semifinalist "Best Chef Southeast" (522 S. Third St.)
 - Prost Biergarten, serving German cuisine (115 S. Front St.)
 - On Thyme Restaurant (Castle Street)
 - Fox's Hole in the Wall (Princess Street)
 - What's Changed:
 - Platypus & Gnome is moving from downtown to Grand View (Eastwood Rd.).
 - Bespoke Coffee and Dry Goods now offers breakfast items made by Savorez.

- Preston Restaurant at Graystone Inn is closed temporarily due to repairs from fire damage)
- Coming Soon:
 - Tequila Comida & Cantina plans to open a second location during Fall 2023 in the riverfront space adjacent to Marina Grill.
 - Reopening: Rx (Castle Street) will reopen in October 2023 as Rx Chicken & Oysters with a focus on seafood and fresh oysters from the owners' new mariculture farm. They will also serve lionfish, an invasive species that they catch by spearfishing: www.facebook.com/rxwilmington/
 - Bonita Latin Fusion & Cocteleria plans to open a Latin fusion restaurant and cocktail bar in 2023, located at Pier 33 apartments along the Riverwalk's northern end.
- Midtown:
 - New Eateries:
 - Covey Restaurant (Independence Blvd. area)
 - Epicurean Bistro (French, Lumina Commons, Eastwood Rd.)
 - Ida Thai (Beau Rivage Marketplace, Carolina Beach Rd.)
 - Brunches opened a third location (The Pointe at Barclay)
 - Beat Street (Cargo District)
 - Vochos Urban Mexican Kitchen (Mayfaire)
 - The Timeless Table (a tearoom on Carolina Beach Rd.)
 - Chef Keith Rhodes—Owner of CATCH—has partnered with UNCW Campus Dining to bring Tackle Box Kitchen to UNCW through Aramark Collegiate Hospitality's Local Restaurant Row Program, featuring locally sourced, sustainable seafood creations.
 - What's Changed:
 - Mess Hall moved to Wrightsville Avenue, next to Ruff Draft
 - Closed: Grand Cru Restaurant & Wine Bar; Catawba Brewery & Restaurant; Hops Supply Co.; Epic Food Co.; Elizabeth's Pizza
 - Coming Soon:
 - Triangle restaurateur Giorgios Bakatsias plans to open a luxury steakhouse (name TBD) on Eastwood Road in the space formerly occupied by Port City Chop House.
 - Platypus & Gnome is moving from downtown to Grand View (Eastwood Rd.)
- Culinary Accolades & Milestones:
 - Two Wilmington chefs are semi-finalists for the title of 2023 James Beard Foundation Best Chef Southeast: Chef Keith Rhodes (CATCH) and Chef Dean Neff (Seabird).
 - Wilmington, NC (#5) is included among TripSavvy.com's list of "[10 Places Food Lovers Should Visit in 2023](#)". (9/19/22)
 - manna 123 restaurant received its ninth consecutive AAA Four-Diamond rating (since 2014); the only restaurant in Wilmington with this distinction
 - *Wine Spectator* magazine's prestigious 2023 Award of Excellence winners: Ruth's Chris Steakhouse (since 2013), The Fortunate Glass (since 2020); 3315 Cut & Pour (since 2022) www.winespectator.com/restaurants
 - *Yelp!* cited Savorez as "Best Brunch in North Carolina" (9/19/22) and ranked it as #9 on "Top 100 Brunch Spots for Mother's Day" (5/4/23): <https://blog.yelp.com/community/top-reviewed-brunch-spot-in-every-state> & <https://blog.yelp.com/community/yelp-names-top-100-brunch-spots-to-celebrate-this-mothers-day>
 - Casey's Buffet ranks #2 in *USA Today's* 10Best Readers' Choice for Best Buffet Restaurant: www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-buffet-restaurant-2023

Beaches:

- Carolina Beach:
 - Accolades:
 - Island Burgers & Bites was ranked by Yelp! as N.C.'s pick for "Top Cheeseburger in Every State" (August 2022) <https://blog.yelp.com/community/top-cheeseburger-in-every-state>
 - Closed: Ida Thai; Fork 'n Cork
 - New Eateries:
 - The Sandspur, a restaurant/bar, features a 70s vibe with vintage art and decor
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - Changes:
 - King Neptune remodeled and reopened (fall 2022) under new management
 - Flying Machine Brewery is changing its name to Flying Machine Oyster Bar
 - Coming in 2024:
 - The Commodore Club at Wrightsville Yacht Club, a 2-story floating dock-and-dine restaurant overlooking the ICW, will open in 2024 with public and private dining areas. Restaurateur Giorgios Bakatsias of Giorgios Hospitality Group has been selected to lead the Commodore Club's food and beverage program featuring fresh ingredients. wrightsvillecommodore.com

ATTRACTIONS, TOURS, CRUISES

Wilmington:

- Wilmington Accolades & Milestones:
 - *Travel + Leisure* ranks Wilmington #4 on its list of "25 Best Weekend Getaways in the South": www.travelandleisure.com/weekend-getaways-in-the-south-7098671 (1/25/23)
 - The star of Wilmington's revitalized riverfront, the Wilmington Riverwalk, remains in the top 10 in *USA Today* 10Best Readers' Choice 2023 Best Riverwalks (#7)
 - Stacker.com ranks Wilmington as #9 among its "25 Best Beach Towns to Live In on the East Coast": <https://stacker.com/real-estate/best-east-coast-beach-towns-live> (6/15/23)
 - Conde Nast Traveler 2022 Readers' Choice Best Cities in the U.S. awards ranked Wilmington #10 in the Small Cities category: www.cntraveler.com/gallery/best-cities-us (10/4/22)
 - Wilmington, NC (#5) is included among TripSavvy.com's list of "10 Places Food Lovers Should Visit in 2023" (9/19/22)
 - *Meetings Today* includes Wilmington and Beaches among its list of "4 U.S. Beach Destinations for Meetings and Events that Deliver": www.meetingstoday.com/articles/143920/us-beach-destinations-meetings-events (5/15/23)
- Wilmington Attractions:
 - Airlie Gardens:
 - New: Monthly guided history tours and tree walks (select days)
 - 2023 outdoor art exhibit: Turtley Awesome! Fiberglass turtles on display July 14-Dec. 31: <https://airliegardens.org/exhibits>
 - Battleship NORTH CAROLINA:
 - Guided tours with advance reservations are now available (select dates): <https://battleshipnc.com/vip-tours>
 - Bellamy Mansion Museum's fall exhibit is "Storied Waters" by James Horton (Sept. 13-Oct.2023)

- Burgwin-Wright House Museum now offers Outlander-theme walking tours and river cruises (select dates).
- Cameron Art Museum:
 - Heather Wilson was named Director in 2023 following Anne Brennan's retirement.
 - In November 2023, the museum will host its inaugural USCT Descendants' Reunion and community day celebration.
 - CAM recently received an Institute of Museum of Library Services Museums for America grant for a new accessibility plan to expand access to the museum for people with disabilities, particularly those living with visual, hearing, and cognitive differences.
 - The CAM recently collaborated with the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, VA on ACWM's multi-media exhibit "Beyond Valor: USCT and the Fight for Freedom."
 - 2023/2024 CAM exhibits:
 - Love (through October 8, 2023)
 - Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros (through January 14, 2024)
 - Traer a Luz/Bring to Light (through November 12, 2023)
 - Illumination 2023 (Dec. 1, 2023 - Jan. 14, 2024)
 - Others TBA: https://cameronartmuseum.org/index.php?c=future_exhibitions
- Cape Fear Museum of History & Science:
 - 2023 CFM exhibits:
 - Fire! (through Nov. 26, 2023)
 - Reflections in Black & White (through January 21, 2024)
 - Collection Selections: Sleep (through March 24, 2024)
- Children's Museum of Wilmington:
 - Jessie Goodwin is CMOW's new executive director.
 - Exhibits and programs:
 - New exhibits: Little Beakers Lab and Bodies in Motion
 - Renovated exhibits: Toddler Treehouse; KidZone; Courtyard
 - New daily programs: Exhibit Explorers and Sea Stars
 - CMOW continues to expand its accessibility programs, tools and resources, including dual language signage, books and materials; Sensory Sundays.
www.playwilmington.org/accessibility
 - Coming Soon: Therapeutic Play Guide
- Latimer House Museum has reduced its hours of operation to 10am-2pm, Tuesday through Saturday. Night tours on first and third Saturdays: www.lcfhs.org/night-tours.html.
- New Hanover County Arboretum earned the 2023 Sustainability Award presented by American Public Gardens Association's Award Committee. The Sustainability Award recognizes public gardens for its commitment to promoting and using sustainable practices in addition to showing innovation in programming that educates the public on sustainability.
- Poplar Grove Plantation: 65 acres of the Abbey Nature Preserve adjacent to Popular Grove has been sold to Mungo Homes, which will reduce the acreage that's accessible to the public, much of which is tied to Gullah Geechee heritage.
- Wilmington Railroad Museum installed a new Wtrak modular wooden train layout.
- Wilmington Riverfront / Riverwalk:

- The City of Wilmington is purchasing the former US Coast Guard landing (201 N. Water Street) with plans to integrate it into Riverfront Park and Wilmington's Riverwalk.
- The City of Wilmington has purchased the former ThermoFisher/PPD building (929 N. Front Street) with plans to move City administrative offices to this location and rent to other tenants. The property purchase also includes an adjacent parking deck that the City can use to ease additional parking needs during Riverfront Park concerts and other downtown events.
- A section of the northern Riverwalk, between the Wilmington Convention Center and Marina Grill, is slated for repair to address flooding issues.
- Riverwalk Assessment Study: The Wilmington and Beaches CVB in partnership with the City of Wilmington conducted a Riverwalk Assessment Study with the goal of enhancing the Riverwalk experience to elevate it to a top attraction. The study identified 10 suggestions to strengthen the appeal and experience of the Riverwalk. During the coming months the plan will be evaluated and segmented into short- and long-term goals.
- Cruises and Tours:
 - New Tours:
 - Wilmington True History Tours led by historians <https://wilmingtontruehistory.com>
 - US Ghost Adventures, based in Williamsburg, VA, began offering nightly guided ghost walks in spring 2023 that depart from Thalian Hall.
 - Change: WilmingtonNCcolor Tours remain by advance appointment, however, the minimum group size is now 5 people (previously 7). Availability is now Thursday-Saturday 9-5pm (Jan-May); Tuesday-Sunday (June-November); closed for maintenance during December.
 - New Management:
 - Cape Fear Riverboats sold to new owner Robert Scribner in 2023; New website: <https://capefearriverboats.com>
 - Springbrook Farms Horse Drawn Carriage Tours sold to new owners in 2023
- What's Next:
 - Future relocation of Cape Fear Museum: Project Grace, a proposed redevelopment project planned for downtown Wilmington, could include residential and commercial space along with a 95,000-square-foot 3-story facility that will house the Cape Fear Museum of History & Science and the main branch of the NHC public library. Plans for the museum (facing Third Street) include a planetarium. Pending final approval; a timeline is not yet available. (New Hanover County & Cape Fear Development)

Beaches

Carolina Beach:

- Accolades:
 - *Southern Living* included Carolina Beach (#8) among its picks for Best Family Beach Vacations in the South: www.southernliving.com/best-southern-beach-family-vacations-7483482 (4/24/23)
 - *Southern Living* includes Carolina Beach (#2) in its list of Best Little Beach Towns to Visit This Summer: www.southernliving.com/travel/best-beach-towns-visit-summer (6/24/23)
 - *Southern Living* includes Carolina Beach (#14) in its list of Prettiest Beach Towns in Every State: www.southernliving.com/travel/prettiest-beach-town-every-state-usa
 - Timeout.com includes Carolina Beach (#6) in its roundup of Best East Coast Beach Towns: www.timeout.com/usa/travel/best-east-coast-beach-towns (4/6/23)
 - VacationIdea.com includes Carolina Beach (#2) in its roundup of 25 Best N.C. Day Trips: <https://vacationidea.com/north-carolina/best-north-carolina-day-trips.html> (7/9/23)
- Recent Film Credits:

- The Amazon Prime series “The Summer I Turned Pretty” filmed scenes at Carolina Beach Boardwalk and arcade, Fat Pelican and SeaWitch Inn. NBC’s Today Show recently aired a segment featuring the show’s Carolina Beach locations.
- Carolina Beach State Park:
 - KayakGuru.com included CBSP (#5) in its list of Top Tar Heel Kayak Locations: <https://kayakguru.com/kayaking-north-carolina> (6/25/23)
 - A new bog garden is open behind the park visitor center to better promote, showcase, and educate park visitors on the Venus flytrap and other carnivorous plants that grow in the wild at CBSP.
 - CBSP is celebrating North Carolina Year of the Trail in 2023.
 - Longtime CBSP Superintendent Chris Helms and Ranger Jeff Davis retired in 2023. Ranger Jesse Anderson is Acting Superintendent.
- Carolina Beach Boardwalk Amusement Rides returned during summer 2023:
 - Expanded midway and new rides in 2023; featured attraction is a permanent 10-story lighted Gondola Wheel, 100-feet high that overlooks the ocean and accommodates up to 150 people.
 - Open year-round: Daily during summer months; Thursday through Sunday during most off-peak months <https://cbboardwalk.com/>
- Coming soon:
 - Putter Pub, a miniature golf course and bar, is under construction (801 St. Joseph St.) with plans to open in late 2023 www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100090172221696
- New tours / cruises:
 - Tasting History Tours recently added a Carolina Beach Mural Tour.
 - Carolina Beach Mural Project now includes 17 murals: <https://carolina-beach.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/things-to-do/trip-ideas/murals/>
 - Capt. Charlie’s Adventures recently added a second boat <https://captcharliesadventures.com>

Kure Beach / Fort Fisher:

- Accolades:
 - *Southern Living* included Kure Beach (#8) among its picks for Best Family Beach Vacations in the South: www.southernliving.com/best-southern-beach-family-vacations-7483482 (4/24/23)
 - *Garden & Gun* named Kure Beach as a favorite spot to surf in the South: <https://gardenandgun.com/articles/where-to-surf-in-the-south> (9/13/22)
 - The North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher is on TravelAwait.com’s list of 12 Best Aquariums to Visit in U.S (2023): www.travelawaits.com/2857603/best-aquariums-in-the-us
- Recent Film Credits:
 - The Amazon Prime series “The Summer I Turned Pretty” filmed scenes at Fort Fisher State Historic Site and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.
- Milestone: Kure Beach Fishing Pier celebrated 100 years in 2023.
- Name change: Fort Fisher Air Force Recreation Area has been re-named Blakeslee Air Force Recreation Area.
- Fort Fisher State Recreation Area:
 - FFSRA is celebrating North Carolina Year of the Trail in 2023.

- N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher:
 - The Aquarium welcomed 500,000 visitors during 2022-23, setting a new attendance record.
 - Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) since 1996, NCAFF was recently awarded AZA accreditation through 2027.
 - New & Expanded:
 - The aquarium expanded its “Otters on the Edge” habitat to accommodate three new otter pups (2 male/1 female) that were born at the NCAFF earlier this year, expanding the otter family from 5 to 8. The otter habitat is open daily from 9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. www.ncaquariums.com/fort-fisher-exhibits.
 - Caribbean Corals, the aquarium’s newest exhibit, is now open.
 - Rescued Loggerhead sea turtles, Pip and Scout, are new members of the aquarium family.
 - Long-range: A \$55 million Expansion plan is in the planning and fundraising stages with construction on the 20,000-square-foot expansion to begin in early 2025. Expansion will also include an education wing and a rooftop deck. Completion of the project will coincide with the aquarium’s 50th anniversary in July 2026.
- Fort Fisher State Historic Site
 - Coming in 2024:
 - Site and division staff and the exhibits team are collaborating on new permanent exhibit materials including text, images and artifacts; installation is scheduled for March 2024.
 - Phase 2 construction (the earthworks portion) is still evolving with a goal of better interpretation of the fort’s gun emplacements, bombproofs, and tunnel system at three new traverses, all of which will be accessible to the public.
 - Renovations are underway to upgrade and expand the visitors center. Upgrades to the center include a new 24,000-square-foot building featuring a multi-purpose room, new auditorium and additional exhibit space. The new visitors center is slated to open June 2024. The original visitors center, site grounds and restrooms remain open and accessible during the expansion. The Underwater Archaeology Branch of North Carolina, which is located on the premises, will also get a new conservation lab with state-of-the-art equipment and amenities. During construction, parking is temporarily relocated.

Wrightsville Beach:

- Accolades:
 - Wrightsville Beach Ocean Rescue took 1st Place honors in the 2023 USLA National Lifeguard Competition.
 - *Southern Living* includes Wrightsville Beach (#25) in its list of 25 Favorite Fall Beach Destinations: www.southernliving.com/travel/fall-beach-destinations (7/16/23)
 - *Southern Living* includes Wrightsville Beach (#9) in its list of 30 Festive Small Towns in the South for a Charming Christmas Getaway: www.southernliving.com/holidays-occasions/christmas/southern-small-town-christmas (8/3/23)
 - *Travel + Leisure* includes Wrightsville Beach in its roundup of 25 Best Beaches in the U.S. (5/19/23): www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/beach-vacations/best-beaches-in-the-us
 - VacationIdea.com includes WB among its 25 Best North Carolina Day Trips (7/9/23): <https://vacationidea.com/north-carolina/best-north-carolina-day-trips.html>
 - *Southern Living*’s 2023 Best Beach Resorts in the Carolinas includes Shell Island Resort and Blockade Runner Resort. www.southernliving.com/best-beach-resorts-carolinas-7107603

- Cruises and Tours:
 - Soundside Adventures recently acquired a 44 ft. catamaran, *Bella*. This addition to their fleet will be used for private charters and more. <https://soundside-wb.com>
- Milestone: Wrightsville Beach Museum of History celebrates 25 years in 2023.

RECREATION AND OUTDOOR SPORTS

Wilmington:

- City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation:
 - Greenfield Park hired a park ranger last year; a park Master Plan is in development.
 - Wilmington Municipal Golf Course recently renovated its clubhouse.
 - Empie Park Tennis Court Reconstruction is underway; completion in 2023.
 - Coming soon: A grant is needed for Phase II amenities at Olsen Park that include 2 multipurpose fields, pickleball courts, an accessible walking trail and more parking.
 - In November 2022, the City of Wilmington unveiled its 10-year Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan that will guide planning for parks, recreation, programs, and facilities:
www.wilmingtonnc.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/15882/638063720211430000
 - New Hanover County Parks projects with sports components:
 - 1.7-mile multi-purpose path at Northern Regional Park completed in February 2023
 - Coming soon: Hanover Pines Nature Park is a 42.5-acre property along Carolina Beach Road is scheduled to open in October 2023 as a passive park. The 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/hanoverpines/>
- New Bike Maps: Updated maps are now available for download for the River to the Sea Bikeway and the Gary Shell Cross City Trail wmpo.org/maps
- Under Construction:
 - nCino Sports Park (which includes Cape Fear Regional Soccer Park) is expected to hold 11 fields, including an artificial turf field, and outdoor lighting, among other amenities. Seven fields already exist as part of the Cape Fear Regional Soccer Park, which will be incorporated into nCino Sports Park. The new park is on 65 acres at 205 Sutton Steam Plant Road. Some of the fields will serve multiple sports like soccer, lacrosse, football, ultimate frisbee, rugby, and more. Park construction broke ground in February 2023; anticipated completion is August 2024: www.wilmingtonnc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/2016-parks-bond/soccer-and-multipurpose-fields

Beaches

- Carolina Beach:
 - Marina repairs and improvements continue; completion in 2024.
 - Maintenance and repair work to anchorage equipment in the Carolina Beach mooring field is complete. Moorings have been reopened and boaters may reserve a site online at <https://bit.ly/3HRmkIT>.
 - The Town of Carolina Beach has been awarded approximately \$4 million dollars from the NC Land and Water Fund for the preservation of over 300 acres of Freeman Park to help preserve the natural coastal habitat for future generations to enjoy for educational and leisurely purposes. Freeman Park is a pristine coastal environment area and is also the site

of the former Sea Breeze Beach Resort, one of only a very few recreational beaches open to African Americans during segregation in the southeast.

- Kure Beach:
 - Kure Beach Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan (May 2022):
www.townofkurebeach.org/sites/default/files/uploads/kure_beach_bike_ped_plan_may_2022_final_draft.pdf
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will commence with beach nourishment in November 2023 with completion expected by the end of March 2024, to include dredging, screening, and placing beach-quality sand on the beach for Coastal Storm Risk Management. www.wect.com/2023/09/01/us-army-corps-engineers-awarded-over-13-million-wrightsville-beach-renourishment
 - The Town's 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

CRUISE SHIPS

- American Cruise Lines [ACL] small cruise ships (*Independence* and *American Star*) regularly visit Wilmington during the spring (April/May) and fall (October/November), docking along the riverfront as a port-of-call along of the East Coast Inland Passage Cruise.
- According to the ACL website, this fall marks the inaugural cruise season for *American Glory* (guest capacity 100) which will set sail on a Complete Southeast Cruise on November 28, 2023. The itinerary includes a stop in Wilmington on Day 4:
www.americancruiselines.com/cruises/southeast-us-cruises

SPECTATOR & AMATEUR SPORTS

- New Event: The USA Weightlifting 2023 North American Open Finals will be held at the Wilmington Convention Center December 7-10, 2023.
www.usaweightinglifting.org/resources/qualifying-totals/2023-north-american-open-finals
- Accolade: IRONMAN 70.3 North Carolina was voted the #1 2022 Swim Course by Athletes' Choice Awards: www.ironman.com/athletes-choice-ironman-703
- New Venues in 2024:
 - A new pickleball complex will break ground in the Castle Hayne area later this year. Tidewater Pickleball Park will build a 23-court facility that will feature a restaurant, pro shop, locker rooms and more. Anticipated completion by fall 2024.
www.wilmingtonbiz.com
- "USL To Wilmington" has been granted rights by the United Soccer League to form a professional franchise; play will begin in 2024 as part of USL League One. www.usltowilmington.com

ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT

Wilmington:

- Theatre/Music:
 - Live Oak Bank Pavilion at Riverfront Park (managed by Live Nation) increased the number of concerts in 2023.
 - Stacie Smith is the new director of the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center.
 - Big Dawg Productions recently announced the launch of its inaugural series: First Stop, Wilmington: The Off-Broadway Express. In exclusive partnership with MarMaxMedia, Big

Dawg will bring new, Off-Broadway productions straight to Wilmington before they go on tour anywhere else.

- Art Galleries:
 - Coming in 2024: The Pointe at Barclay sold one of its parcels to a client who plans to build a large complex that will house a hearing center, a fine art gallery and sculpture garden.

MAJOR EVENTS & FESTIVALS

- New Events:
 - 3 Chambers Festival is a new diverse and innovative event produced and organized by Speller Street Films LLC showcasing hip-hop, martial arts, and anime culture through a variety of live music performances, immersive art, and innovative film experiences. The festival will take place at UNCW's Kenan Auditorium (October 13 & 14, 2023). www.3chambers.com
 - USCT Descendants' Homecoming Celebration at Cameron Art Museum (November 11, 2023).
 - Cape Fear Latinos Festival Parade, Downtown Wilmington (Sept. 23, 2023).
 - Cape Fear Kite Festival (Kure Beach) added a Night with Kites event (Carolina Beach) in 2022 with plans to make it an annual nighttime event to kick off the festival (1st weekend in Nov.)
 - Port City Taste Taco Week, destination-wide (Oct. 30-Nov. 5, 2023)
 - Port City Fear Factory Chapel of Horrors, Wilmington (select dates Sept. 29-Oct. 31, 2023)
- Event Accolades:
 - *MovieMaker* includes Cucalorus Film Festival in its annual list of "50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee." www.moviemaker.com/50-film-festival-worth-entry-fee-2023
 - TripsToDiscover.com includes Wilmington Riverfest among Best Fall Festivals to Visit in NC (8/22/23): www.tripstodiscover.com/best-fall-festivals-to-visit-in-north-carolina/
- Event Changes:
 - The N.C. Azalea Festival Street Fair returned to Front Street in 2023.
 - Cape Fear Latinos Festival (Sept. 23, 2023) will be held at Live Oak Bank Pavilion (previously held at the Arboretum of New Hanover County) and will kick off with a parade
 - Canceled: Double Sprint at Carolina Beach; Halloween movies at Bellamy
 - The 20in23 One Tree Hill 20th anniversary fundraising event has been postponed from September to November, pending the status of the SAG/AFTRA/writer's strike.
 - N.C. Jazz Festival's new president is Angelo Galeotti.

NIGHTLIFE

Wilmington

- New Bar Highlights:
 - Ruff Draft is Wilmington's only membership-based dog park attached to a full-service bar serving local beer and specialty house cocktails (Container District) <https://ruffdraftilm.com>
 - The Underfront & C Street Lounge (Cotton Exchange)
 - Mocksie Craft Mocktails (Soda Pop District)
 - Eagle's Dare (N. Third St.)
 - G.L.Y.C. (Greenfield Lake Yacht Club) on Carolina Beach Rd
- Coming soon:
 - A new speakeasy will soon open in the basement of Brooklyn Arts Center's annex.
- Nightlife Changes:
 - Manna restaurant opened manna provisions (bottle shop/provisions), a couple of doors down on Princess Street

Beaches

- New Bar Highlights:

- The Vault Coffee & Pour House in Carolina Beach

TRANSPORTATION

Wilmington:

- Wilmington International Airport (ILM):
 - ILM exceeded pre-pandemic passenger numbers in 2022 and set a new passenger record for the year, serving 1,086,245 passengers.
 - Wilmington International Airport ranks #1 in N.C. and #3 in U.S. for growth.
 - Passenger air service is currently provided by Delta, United, American Airlines, Avelo and Sun Country to 17 non-stop destinations: ATL, CLT, LGA, Newark, PHL, DFW, Washington DC, New Haven, Orlando, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale. Seasonal routes: BOS, Chicago/O'Hare, Baltimore/Washington, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Wilmington DE/Philadelphia. <https://flyilm.com/airlines-at-ilm>
 - Sun Country launched service to ILM beginning summer 2023, with direct flights to Minneapolis-St. Paul.
 - In 2023 Avelo Airlines added nonstop service to Tampa, West Palm Beach, and exclusive new nonstop service to the Wilmington, DE / Philadelphia Region.
 - American Airlines announce service between ILM and Miami (Saturdays, starting Nov. 11)
 - ILM's \$68 million terminal expansion project is now complete, allowing the airport to serve up to 50 percent more travelers.
 - ILM's Vision Plan outlines strategic objectives for 2023-2027. https://flyilm.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ILM-Vision-Planning-summary-handout-Final_web.pdf
- Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO):
 - The Walk Wilmington plan is a guide for prioritizing safe, healthy, and equitable pedestrian infrastructure improvements and policies in Wilmington. www.walkwilmington.com
 - The City's North Front Street Streetscape Improvements are now complete.
 - WMPO Bike Ped Projects: www.wmpo.org/projects-programs/bikeped-projects
 - WMPO Roadway Projects: www.wmpo.org/projects-programs/roadway-projects
 - Cape Fear Moving Forward 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2020-2045): www.wmpo.org/mtp
 - WMPO is kicking off a long-range transportation plan: Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050. This plan will be used by federal, state, and local governments to guide transportation projects in our region over the next 25 years. The plan will prioritize projects for six different kinds of transportation: aviation, bicycle and pedestrian, ferry and water, rail, public transportation, and roadway.
 - Long-range:
 - Wilmington Rail Trail is a proposed urban greenway to improve walkability and cycling for downtown's Northside, and to connect Northside residents to amenities at the northern waterfront. Wilmington Rail Trail Master Plan: www.wmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Wilmington-Rail-Trail-Master-Plan_Nov-2020-DRAFT_Spreads.pdf
 - Wilmington Multimodal Transportation Center Phase 1B: This vacant City-owned building is being rehabilitated and is identified as the Wilmington Multimodal Transportation Center Phase 1B.
 - Wilmington Downtown Trail phases 2 and 3 will eventually connect the River to Sea Bikeway to the future Multimodal Transportation Center, Cape Fear Community College, and the Riverwalk. In between these locations, the trail will provide a recreational facility for several communities in proximity to the downtown. The project currently consists of three phases. The first phase, from 3rd Street to Archie

Blue Park, is in the preliminary engineering phase. Anticipated by summer 2024. Map: www.wmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Downtown-Trail-Map-Revised.png

- WAVE Transit News:
 - The free Port City Trolley route service includes 25 designated trolley stops covering five downtown districts. Passengers can get off at any location along the established route. Revised map: <https://www.wavetransit.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/203-DT-Trolley-7-22-web-1.pdf>
 - WAVE Fixed Route Bus Schedules (all): www.wavetransit.com/fixed-route-bus-schedule/
- NC Department of Transportation:
Wilmington:
 - NCDOT will make much-needed repairs to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge beginning in January 2024 and continue for 3-to-4 months, with a goal of completion in April 2024. While repairs will require a short detour for travelers arriving via US 74 during the winter months, construction is scheduled to finish in advance of peak tourist season.
 - NCDOT plans to 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 project is currently unfunded for construction or right-of-way acquisition. NCDOT is conducting a Traffic and Revenue Study that will be completed in 2024 to help determine what a potential toll rate could be, and how a toll-bridge would affect traffic patterns in the Wilmington area. NCDOT will present its findings to the WMPO Board. www.ncdot.gov/projects/cape-fear-bridge-replacement-study/Pages/default.aspx
 - Wilmington Downtown Trail – Phases 2 & 3. This study will assess the feasibility of a 10'-12' multi-use path facility for phases 2 and 3 of the Wilmington Downtown Trail to connect the River to the Sea Bikeway to the future Multimodal Transportation Center, CFCC, and the Riverwalk. In between these locations, the trail will provide a recreational facility for several communities in proximity to downtown. Phase 1 (3rd Street to Archie Blue Park is in the engineering phase). Phases 2 and 3 are anticipated by Summer 2024. www.wmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Downtown-Trail-Map-Revised.png
 - Passenger Rail Service (long-range):
 - A 2021 NCDOT feasibility study, as well as subsequent studies, found interest in passenger rail service to and from Wilmington. The studies recommended implementing passenger rail service from Raleigh to Wilmington via Fayetteville and Goldsboro in phases as funding becomes available. www.ncdot.gov/divisions/rail/projects/Pages/future-service.aspx
 - The need for passenger rail service between Raleigh and Wilmington has been a topic of discussion for state and community leaders since the 1990s. The concept is moving forward, thanks to the new federal Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program, a comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development program that helps guide intercity passenger rail development throughout the country and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation. <https://railroads.dot.gov/corridor-ID-program>
 - In May 2023, Wilmington City Council approved a resolution Tuesday supporting the NCDOT's federal submission to identify Raleigh to Wilmington as a future passenger rail corridor.
 - The WMPO is renovating 525 N. Fourth St. as a multi-modal center and its new home offices. Once complete (TBD), the building will serve as the city's transportation hub, with improved facilities and convenience for public transportation users, combining Wave Transit, the downtown trolley and inter-city buses, as well as future passenger rail. <https://portcitydaily.com/latest->

Beaches:

- Kure Beach:
 - The WMPO Board and KB Town Council adopted the Kure Beach Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan in 2022: https://www.wmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Kure-Beach-Bike-Ped-Plan_May-2022-FINAL-DRAFT.pdf
 - The Town of Kure Beach is in the early stages of a proposed “Island Greenway to Fort Fisher Feasibility Study” that would establish a 4.8-mile greenway route and implementation plan for the corridor connecting the southern end of the Carolina Beach Greenway to the Fort Fisher-Southport Ferry Terminal. If completed, this segment will be part of both the East Coast Greenway State Trail route and the Great Trails State Network.
 - N.C. Ferry System: NCDOT recently launched a new Ferry Information Notification System (FINS). Passengers can register online to receive route-specific alerts when there are ferry route interruptions. www.ncdot.gov/fins
- Carolina Beach:
 - The Town of Carolina Beach has received funding to create a sidewalk along U.S. 421 (Lake Park Blvd.) from north of Lake Drive to south of Carolina Sands Drive. The new sidewalk replaces a defined path along the grass that pedestrians have been walking without existing pedestrian facilities. This project will provide a safer travel experience for those to reach their destination by further separating pedestrians from the roadway and providing a solid, level path.
- Wrightsville Beach:
 - Wrightsville Beach Park now has four Level 2 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.
 - The Town of Wrightsville Beach plans to incorporate 7-foot bicycle lanes on both sides of Causeway Drive.
 - According to NCDOT, work to prolong the life of the 50-year-old South Banks Channel Bridge in Wrightsville Beach is taking longer than expected and will continue into Fall 2023. The bridge is scheduled for replacement within the next decade.
 - NCDOT has identified funding and is in the planning and design stages to replace three Wrightsville Beach bridges, beginning in 2028. The three bridges will be replaced one at a time. Bridge designs may also include bike lanes and multi-use paths. A public community meeting will be held in September 2023 for further information and feedback. <https://portcitydaily.com/latest-news/2023/08/28/ncdot-funds-70m-for-3-wrightsville-beach-bridge-replacements-starting-2028>

ACCOMMODATIONS / LODGING

What's New:

Wilmington:

- Downtown/Convention District:
 - ARRIVE by PaliSociety re-opened in spring 2023 following a long renovation.
 - The Cove is an expanding houseboat community at Port City Marina (Dock A). At present, 33 of the 40 houseboats are available as boutique vacation rentals: www.CoveWilmington.com
 - Front Street Suites is a new cluster of four vacation rental apartments.
 - Wilmington Vacation Homes is a new vacation rental company.
- Accolades:

- C.W. Worth House, Wilmington's longest operating B&B, took the #1 spot in USA Today's 10Best 2023 Readers' Choice Award as the nation's Best Bed and Breakfast Inn: www.10best.com/awards/travel/best-bed-and-breakfast-2023 (8/18/23).
- Dreamers by DW boutique hotel was featured in *Southern Living* as a 'traveler's dream': www.southernliving.com/dreamers-boutique-hotel-wilmington-nc-7509028 (6/7/23)

What's Changed:

Wilmington

- Downtown/River District:
 - The Graystone Inn, a AAA 4-Diamond B&B, reopened in 2023 following a 2.5-year renovation that included Preston Restaurant. Just a few months after reopening, an electrical fire destroyed the house. The inn is currently closed and under construction to restore the Graystone Inn to its former glory.
 - Dreamers Welcome Inn changed its name to Dreamers by DW.
 - The Top Shelf Literary Loft is temporarily closed.
- Midtown:
 - Days Inn (Market Street) is closed and being transformed into studio apartments.
 - Carolinian Inn (Market St.) is closed.
 - Flag changes:
 - WoodSpring Suites is now Extended Stay America Select Suites – Wilmington West (Carolina Beach Rd.)

Beaches:

- Wrightsville Beach:
 - Accolade:
 - *Southern Living's* 2023 Best Beach Resorts in the Carolinas includes Shell Island Resort and Blockade Runner Resort. www.southernliving.com/best-beach-resorts-carolinas-7107603
 - The Blockade Runner Resort was sold in January 2023 to NYC-based development firm Castle Peak Holdings. The iconic beach resort is being renovated in phases.
 - Carolina Retreats now manages Waterway Lodge Vacation Rentals.
- Carolina Beach:
 - New: The Starlite Inn, a colorful, retro boutique inn www.thestarliteinn.com
 - Renovation: Golden Sands Motel has a fresh new look and feel with newly renovated rooms and colorful curb appeal.
 - Closed:
 - Oceaneer Motel closed in late 2022 for demolition.
 - Smith Cottages is now a residential property.
- Kure Beach:
 - Hidden Treasure Inn is now managed by Bryant Real Estate.

What's Next:

Wilmington:

- Downtown/Convention District:
 - ARRIVE by PaliSociety will add a 4-story, period-style building with 55 rooms located in the 100 block of 2nd Street, across the street from the hotel. Construction is expected to begin in late 2023/early 2024; projected opening TBD.

- Midtown:
 - Market Street:
 - Tru by Hilton Wilmington's (5001 Market St.) grand opening has been delayed until mid-November 2023. The 107-room property will include a pool, a 24-hour fitness center, bar, business center, restaurant and more. The hotel will connect with Hotel LELA Wilmington, Tapestry Collection by Hilton.
 - Hotel LELA Wilmington, Tapestry Collection by Hilton (5001 Market St.) opening has been delayed until March 2024. The hotel will connect with Tru by Hilton Wilmington.
 - The Pointe at Barclay:
 - Pooler, GA-based Ideal Hospitality broke ground in June 2022 for a 4-story, 108-room Home2 Suites by Hilton. Construction continues with projected opening of the limited service extended-stay property TBD: <http://idealhospitality.com/portfolio.php>
 - Military Cutoff/Eastwood:
 - Mayfaire: CBL Properties and Chattanooga-based Vision Hospitality Group plans to develop an 83,000 square-foot, 139-room Element by Westin hotel at Mayfaire Town Center. Anticipated opening is Spring 2024. www.vhghotels.com/hotels/?s=north-carolina
 - Military Cutoff: Parks Hospitality Group broke ground at 1010 Ashes Drive, the site of its future Tru by Hilton hotel. Operated by Parks Hospitality Group, the 101-room property will be centrally located between downtown Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach. Construction, led by SKA Construction and The RBA Group, is expected to be completed by June 2024. <https://parkshotels.com/portfolios/tru-by-hilton-wilmington>

Beaches

- Carolina Beach:
 - In 2022, Cove House LLC purchased the former Welcome Inn and an adjacent residence in Carolina Beach and announced plans to redevelop the property to accommodate a 4-story, 42-room (with 15 suites) hotel with a restaurant, pool, garden area, and rooftop bar. Located along North Lake Park Blvd. and Harper Ave., the hotel will include space for bike racks and golf carts. Due to the untimely death of one of the principal owners, plans to re-develop the property are on pause; revised timeline has not been released.
 - Owners of The Oceaneer plan to build a new lodging property where the former motel stood before its demolition. Details and timeline TBD.

Long-range Lodging Projects/Proposals:

- Midtown
 - Construction is underway for Center Point, a mixed-use project by Wilmington-based Swain & Associates, in the 1500 block of Eastwood Road with retail, office, residential, and plans for a hotel. Phase 1 (retail) will open in 2024. Phase 2 will include a 220-room branded hotel (timeline TBD).
 - Eastwood Road: The next phase of Autumn Hall, a master-planned community, is expected to include a hotel. The extension of Autumn Hall Drive construction is anticipated to start in late 2023, which will open up Autumn Hall's remaining undeveloped 90 acres. According to the *Greater Wilmington Business Journal* (4/7/23), this parcel could hold a 250-room boutique hotel with a spa and entertainment venue overlooking an 8-acre lake, 250,000 square feet of retail space and 40 acres of park space, as well as more office space and luxury apartments. (Cape Fear Commercial-Mike Brown)

- Military Cutoff: The Avenue. The Carroll Companies, a Greensboro-based developer, is in the approval process for The Avenue (349 Military Cutoff Rd.), a planned mixed-use development that will be anchored by a luxury Westin Hotel. Designs are complete and the developer is hoping to break ground by the end of 2023. According to their website, “Westin on The Avenue” will feature an upscale, unique spa. The hotel will also provide extensive, premium conference space for the Wilmington area. Timeline TBD.
www.theavenuewilmington.com/westin-wilmington
- ILM Business Park: On July 25, 2023, ILM made public its intent to enter into a 35-year lease (4.71 acres) with ILM Airport Hotel Partners. Developers plan to work alongside IHG Hotels & Resorts to build a 6-story, 150-room Crowne Plaza Wilmington International Airport. Amenities will include flexible, all-day dining across its restaurant, lounge and rooftop bar, and 5,000 square feet of event space, including 3,500 square feet of meeting space, and parking. Timeline TBD: <https://flyilm.com/notice-of-opportunity-for-a-public-hearing-and-notice-of-availability-for-public-commentfor-proposed-improvements-at-wilmington-international-airport-new-hanover-county-north-carolina> & <https://flyilm.com/ilm-airport-hotel-partners-signs-lease-at-ilm-business-park-plans-to-develop-an-upscale-crowne-plaza-hotel/>
- Downtown:
 - The Gateway Project (a public-private partnership between the City of Wilmington and East West Partners) is moving forward again, following a 4-year hiatus. Plans are being revised for the three-block mixed-use gateway development in Wilmington’s Convention District. Bordered by Third and Front streets, Gateway’s development plans include a 300-key hotel component (possibly 2 flags), as well as 25,000 square feet of retail space, parking, and residential units. Anticipated groundbreaking is 4th quarter 2024 with anticipated completion of hotel (northern block) in 2027. Retail & residential (southern block) anticipated completion date is 2026: <https://portcitydaily.com/deep-dives/2023/08/01/gateway-project-to-exceed-110m-plans-altered-after-citys-thermo-fisher-purchase>
 - Project Grace (see Attractions-Wilmington/What’s Next) is currently awaiting approval for its redevelopment of the N. Third Street block where the NHC public library and parking deck are located. It is unclear if there will be a hotel component.
- On Hold or Canceled:
 - On Hold: 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 not established.
<http://usainvestco.com/projects/northern-riverfront-development/future-hotel>

Updated: September 8, 2023

[END]