

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Top 15 Weekend Getaways in North Carolina According to Locals

From quaint towns in the Blue Ridge Mountains to relaxed beaches and bustling cities, these are the best destinations for a quick trip.



Sometimes, a short mountain retreat, a couple of days at the beach, or a whirlwind city escape is all you need to scratch a travel itch. The Tar Heel State is home to a wide range of destinations perfect for a weekend trip.

“North Carolina is a really interesting, diverse state with sub-locations that are almost entities in and of themselves,” says Tiffany M. Griffin, co-founder of the Durham-based candle company [Bright Black](#). “The mountain ranges are some of the best on the East Coast (and in the country), the Outer Banks have some of the best beaches in the country, the cities are walkable—and all [have] their own vibe—and the food rivals some of the best in the country.”

Coastal towns like [Beaufort](#) and Emerald Isle offer a healthy mix of relaxation and adventure, while mountain destinations like Highlands appeal to hikers. Read on for the best weekend getaways in North Carolina, according to Griffin and other locals.



Julia Wax, a North Carolina native and the owner of [Emerald Isle Realty](#), may call this beach town home, but she also thinks of Emerald Isle as a great weekend getaway. “Its naturally slower pace of life and ... stunning crystal-clear ocean waters never cease to captivate me, even after many years of living here,” she says.

The area particularly suits travelers seeking peace and quiet. “Our beaches are never crowded, and the serenity is complemented by the ocean’s glistening, vibrant emerald-green hues,” says Wax. Those looking for adventure will find “world-class kitesurfing, deep-sea fishing, and surfing.”



Don't confuse Beaufort with the [South Carolina town of the same name](#). The North Carolina destination is not only pronounced differently—"bow-fert," not "bew-fert"—but also has its own personality and reasons to visit.

"Walking the historic streets of Beaufort is like stepping back in time," says Wax. "My day typically begins with a visit to the local coffee bar, [Cru](#), a cherished morning tradition among Beaufort residents. At night, the coffee shop becomes a lively wine bar." Stroll down the block to the waterfront, where you can "admire the 100-foot yachts and sailboats lining the shore, all while enjoying a refreshing beverage at one of my favorite watering holes, the [Rhumbur](#)," she adds.



“I’d strongly advise dedicating some of your time to the enchanting Down East Carteret County, a well-kept secret nestled on the Crystal Coast,” Wax says. Down East refers to several waterfront communities in the county—including Bettie, Straits, Harkers Island, Gloucester, and Smyrna—that embrace a slower way of life. “You’ll immerse yourself in the enduring spirit of village life, a living legacy of generations sustained by the art of commercial fishing,” explains Wax. “For a deeper connection to our regional heritage, a visit to the [Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center](#) is a must; it’s an authentic portal to our history.”



Don't confuse Beaufort with the [South Carolina town of the same name](#). The North Carolina destination is not only pronounced differently—"bow-fert," not "bew-fert"—but also has its own personality and reasons to visit.

"Walking the historic streets of Beaufort is like stepping back in time," says Wax. "My day typically begins with a visit to the local coffee bar, [Cru](#), a cherished morning tradition among Beaufort residents. At night, the coffee shop becomes a lively wine bar." Stroll down the block to the waterfront, where you can "admire the 100-foot yachts and sailboats lining the shore, all while enjoying a refreshing beverage at one of my favorite watering holes, the [Rhumbur](#)," she adds.