

# Southern Living

## This Underrated Port Town Is One Of The Best-Kept Secrets On The Carolina Coast



Morehead City has always been about its prime location on the water. Named for the North Carolina governor who helped develop its port, the city's streets were laid out in grid fashion along the Bogue Sound with a rail running right through town. The bridges came later, connecting this breezy port city with [Beaufort](#) to the east and [Atlantic Beach](#) to the south. Since then, Morehead City has become a laidback landing spot for tourists looking to explore the waters and beaches of the Crystal Coast.

The main street, Arendell, is lined with shops, seafood restaurants, and a string of fishing charters ready to take you out for a sublime day on the water. Fishing is such serious sport here that one of the biggest tournaments in the country, the [Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament](#), attracts anglers from all over the world every June.

Whether you like to spend your time eating the day's fresh catch, cruising for dolphins, or paddling around creeks and islands, a trip to Morehead City is going to involve the water. There's lots of fun for families on land as well. Here are the best things to do in Morehead City.

# What To Do On The Water



Credit: Courtesy of North Carolina's Crystal Coast

## Go On An Ecotour

Book a trip with [Crystal Coast](http://www.crystalcoastecotours.com) Ecotours to explore the area's sounds, marshes, and the islands of the Cape Lookout National Seashore. Depending on your interests, you can search for dolphins, wild horses, and waterbirds, or find some of the best shelling on the coast.

[www.crystalcoastecotours.com](http://www.crystalcoastecotours.com); 252-808-3354 or 252-241-6909

## Take The Ferry To Sand Dollar Island

Morehead City Ferry Service will drop you and your family off at Sand Dollar Island for two fun hours of wading in the shallows and hunting for sand dollars. Kids can swim and snorkel in the tidal pools, and there's plenty of room to bring beach chairs and small coolers on the boat.

[www.moreheadcityferryservice.com](http://www.moreheadcityferryservice.com); 709 Shepard St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## **Paddle The Rivers And Marshes**

Spend a day paddling up the Newport River or dart over to Sugarloaf Island, an uninhabited island across from downtown with a floating dock, boardwalk, and nature trail. You can rent kayaks, stand-up paddle boards, and small sailboats from Trusty Sail & Paddle on the waterfront.

[www.trustysailandpaddle.com](http://www.trustysailandpaddle.com); 815 Shepard St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## **Cast A Line**

Wander along the waterfront and you'll find around 20 fishing charters to choose from (we told you fishing is serious business here). Catch speckled trout, flounder, and striped bass inshore or head offshore to hunt for bluefin tuna, marlin, mahi, wahoo, dolphin, and more.

[crystalcoastnc.org](http://crystalcoastnc.org)

## **Dive At A Shipwreck**

Otherwise known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic, the [North Carolina coastline](#) is dotted with 2,000 shipwrecks and many artificial reefs. Experienced scuba divers can book a tour with Olympus Dive Center and check out the marine life inhabiting tugs, freighters, Navy ships, and a German U-boat.

[olympusdiving.com](http://olympusdiving.com); 713 Shepard St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## **Head To The Beach**

Head to the beach on a whim and get there in 10 minutes or less. Drive down the causeway to reach Atlantic Beach or drive east to the public beach access on Radio Island, where local boaters like to anchor for a few hours. History lovers should also make a stop at Fort Macon State Park on Atlantic Beach.

<https://atlanticbeach-nc.com/play/beach-access/>

[www.morehead.com/radio-island.html](http://www.morehead.com/radio-island.html); 501 Marine Dr., Beaufort, NC 28516

[www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/fort-macon-state-park](http://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/fort-macon-state-park); 2303 E. Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, NC 28512

# What To Do On Land



Credit: Courtesy of North Carolina's Crystal Coast

## Look For Old Treasures

Spend a few hours hunting for treasures at Morehead City's antique and consignment stores. Trash & Treasures Antique Mall, Seahorse Cove, and Seaport Antiques all carry large selections of vintage finds and furniture.

[www.facebook.com/trashandtreasuresantiquemall/](https://www.facebook.com/trashandtreasuresantiquemall/); 5458 Highway 70W, Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.instagram.com/the\\_seahorse\\_cove/](https://www.instagram.com/the_seahorse_cove/); 4636 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.facebook.com/SeaportAntiques/](https://www.facebook.com/SeaportAntiques/); 509 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## Learn About Local History

The Carteret County History Museum documents the lives and history of the area from the era of piracy to the world wars and more. The museum is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, and admission is free.

[carterethistory.org](http://carterethistory.org); 1008 US-70, Morehead City, NC 28557

# Where To Eat And Drink



## Start Your Day At The Play Cafe

On rainy days, families with young children can grab coffee and a pastry at Kidz at Play Family Cafe. The kids can climb and slide in the indoor playground while you peacefully sip your iced Bogue cappuccino with white chocolate mocha syrup and coconut flakes.

[kidzatplayfamilycafe.com](http://kidzatplayfamilycafe.com); 1513 Bridges St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## Grab A Casual Meal

The Banks Grill serves breakfast and lunch the island way, topping plates with rum bananas, crab, and shrimp. Fresh beignets and cinnamon rolls are available all day. For hot dogs, fried pickle chips, and a [unique burger menu](#), drop in at Morehead Burger Company. If you come across the Dank Burrito food truck or restaurant, be sure to try a Cajun Fried Catch or Pork Belly burrito.

[www.facebook.com/TheBanksGrill](http://www.facebook.com/TheBanksGrill); 2900 Arendell St, Ste 3 Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.facebook.com/Moreheadburgerco](http://www.facebook.com/Moreheadburgerco); 278-L Highway 24, Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.dankburrito.com](http://www.dankburrito.com); 4135 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557



Credit: Courtesy of North Carolina's Crystal Coast

## Take In The View

At Jack's on the Waterfront, you can belly up to the bar and listen to live music or sit outdoors to enjoy a slice of wood-fired pizza. Munch on specialty sandwiches and wraps and sip cocktails at Sugarloaf Island Deli and Yellowfin Pub. Family-friendly Red Fish Grill offers an expansive seafood menu and baskets for the kids.

[www.jacksonthewaterfront.com](http://www.jacksonthewaterfront.com); 513 Evans St., Morehead City, NC 28557

[yellowfinpub.com](http://yellowfinpub.com); 501 Evans St., Morehead City, NC 28557

[redfishgrillandbar.com](http://redfishgrillandbar.com); 711 Evans St., Morehead City, NC 28557

## Savor A Special Occasion Dinner

Plan a special dinner at one of Morehead City's many upscale restaurants. Circa 81 serves up beautiful plates of Spanish-style tapas and local seafood. Sample seasonal surf and turf dishes in a historic home at Parrott's on Eleventh. For a classic white-tablecloth experience, book a table at Prime Bistro and Wine Bar. You'll find a more eclectic setting and a smattering of seafood, Asian dishes, and wood-fired pizzas at Full Circle Cafe.

[www.circa-81.com](http://www.circa-81.com); 4650-C Arendell St, Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com); 105 S 11th St., Morehead City, NC 28557

[fullcirclecafe.biz](http://fullcirclecafe.biz); 708 Evans St., Morehead City, NC 28557

[www.eatprimebistro.com](http://www.eatprimebistro.com); 4031 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557



You'll find plenty of chain hotels and rentals in Morehead City. Stay at Bask Hotel @ Big Rock Landing for the quiet waterfront location. Families can book a two-room suite with kitchen, and many rooms feature balconies for watching boats sail by.