

This North Carolina Fishing Village Makes The Most Idyllic Weekend Escape

Fair warning: One weekend in Beaufort may convince you to retire here.

An aerial photograph of Beaufort, North Carolina, showing the Neuse River winding through the town. The water is a deep blue, and the surrounding land is lush with green trees. In the distance, the Atlantic Ocean is visible under a clear sky. The text "Beaufort, North Carolina, is a charming, historic fishing village." is overlaid on the bottom half of the image in a white, serif font, framed by two thin red horizontal lines.

Beaufort, North Carolina, is a charming, historic fishing village.

Situated on the southern edge of North Carolina's southernmost hook, which curls around the Neuse River and stretches towards the Atlantic, Beaufort is a historic fishing village that leans into its storied and salty charms. With its walkable downtown, local-ingredient-focused restaurants, and access to the water, it's an easy place to while away a weekend—or the rest of your life. Here's what to do, where to eat, and where to stay in Beaufort, North Carolina. And don't say we didn't warn you: You may love it so much that you end up there for good.

What To Do In Beaufort, North Carolina



Discover Its History

Start with a stroll around Beaufort's 12-block historic district, where centuries-old homes, marked by gingerbread latticework and painted plaques denoting their original owners, serve as welcoming lessons in both curb appeal and architecture. For a schooling in the area's seafaring history, visit the [North Carolina Maritime Museum on Front Street](#). Exhibits cover everything from the town's seafood industry to life-saving stations, plus a peek at its pirate-filled past, with artifacts from Blackbeard's wrecked ship, the Queen Anne's Revenge. Across the street, view in-progress vessels at the [Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center](#), where boat-building classes are offered throughout the year.

Play Outside

Given its maritime roots, it's little wonder that water-centric activities are a major draw here. For a wild experience close to town, rent a kayak from [Beaufort Paddle](#) and make the roughly 20-minute trip across Taylor Creek to [Rachel Carson Estuarine Reserve](#). There, you can hike primitive trails; birdwatch for more than 200 species, like ibises, herons, and egrets; spot horses that were brought over by a local citizen in the 1940s and have since become wild; or go shelling for treasures—just don't bring home any inhabited ones!

Explore Nearby Lands

Board the [Island Express Ferry](#) for a 45-minute ride out to [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#), where you'll spend a little over two hours. Pass the time shelling on its pristine beaches or swimming in the sparkling waters. The lighthouse there is currently closed for climbing, but it's still a sight to behold. For a trip with a smaller time commitment (only a 25-minute ride each way), take the ferry to Shackleford Banks' west end, where you can go fishing or birding. Keep your eyes peeled for the [famous herd of Banker horses](#), thought to be descended from those that survived Spanish shipwrecks 500 years ago.



Go Shopping

Front Street is home to a number of stores perfect for window shopping or perusing. With penny candy, fudge, and an assortment of T-shirts and knick knacks, [Beaufort's General Store](#) hits all the nostalgic high notes for a souvenir stop on a coastal getaway. Treat yourself to a hand-dipped scoop, which you can enjoy on the welcoming front porch. Barely two blocks away, shop high-end home goods, luxe bath and beauty products, and breezy clothing at [Beaufort Linen Co.](#) The boutique is owned by husband-and-wife team Christina and Richie Cuninghame, who moved to town after falling in love with Beaufort during weekend trips and summer escapes.

Where To Eat In Beaufort, North Carolina

Rise And Shine For Breakfast

Start your morning with coffee and a bite to eat from [Turner Street Market and Cafe](#), which is open for breakfast, brunch, and lunch seven days a week. Whether you want to go light with a homemade muffin or prefer something more substantial like an overstuffed breakfast burrito or rich pork sausage gravy over biscuits, Turner Street's menu has you covered. Biscuit French toast and Turkish eggs give an unexpected flair to the otherwise traditional offerings.

Grab A Local Favorite For Lunch

For lunch, there's no more beloved spot than [Beaufort Grocery](#), a local establishment that's been peddling picnic-ready sandwiches and fresh seafood since 1991. Don't miss the BeauGro pimiento cheese (part of Beaufort Cheese and Fruit Board) or Sumpin's Jumpin' fish sandwich, which changes daily. Come back at dinnertime for more sophisticated fare like pan-seared duck breast and roasted rack of lamb.

Grab Dinner And Drinks With A View

Before sunset, head to [Moonrakers](#) on Front Street for pre-dinner drinks and a dazzling view on their expansive rooftop deck. Head downstairs to take advantage of their full, seafood-centric menu, or for a more casual experience, make the short walk to [Black Sheep](#) for brick-oven pizza served dockside.

Where To Stay In Beaufort, North Carolina

Book A Boutique Experience

Built in 1866 and renovated in 2022, the [Inn on Turner](#) provides bed-and-breakfast-worthy hospitality without any of the stuffiness. Owners, innkeepers, and chefs Kim Bell and Jonathan Haas source their complimentary "field to fork" breakfast from area farms and host happy hour wine service each afternoon. Best of all, the stay is just two blocks from the waterfront.

Rent A Home

Beyond downtown's other hotel and inn offerings, like the quaint [Pecan Street Inn](#) and the modern, waterfront [Beaufort Hotel](#), the town is also home to a number of vacation rentals via VRBO and Airbnb that may be friendlier to large groups or those traveling with pets or small children.

Why Beaufort, North Carolina, Is A Great Place To Retire

Beyond Beaufort's obvious appeal (access to the water, an easygoing pace of life, and plenty of shops and restaurants), there are practical reasons to retire to the North Carolina town, as well: The state doesn't tax Social Security retirement benefits, and it's just 5 miles from Morehead City, one of [RetireNC's Certified Retirement Communities](#). The designation recognizes that a place offers "the amenities, services and opportunities retirees need to enjoy active and productive lives, determined through strict assessment against measurable criteria [outlined by the North Carolina General Assembly]."

