

EPICUREAN TRAVELER

The Crystal Coast: The Catch of the Day

A few years ago when [Betsy Cartier](#) was looking for a new place to settle, she told her husband, “I will know it when I see it.” Then, she discovered the [Crystal Coast. \(Map\)](#) Within weeks, they were packed up and on their way to [Beaufort, North Carolina](#). Now, Betsy says, “Any day in [Beaufort](#) is a good day!”



The Beaufort Boardwalk and Hungry Town Tours Bicycles

The same thing happened to [Michael Schrems](#) of [Blown Kiteboarding](#). He came to visit friends and soon returned to stay. Michael feels blessed because he is, “Surrounded by beauty, always!”



Others had moved away from the Crystal Coast located on the Southern Outer Banks of North Carolina. Soon, however, they returned. One restaurateur whose family had been on the Coast for generations, said, “I realized everything I really needed is here.”

The author [Nicolas Sparks](#) agreed when he set his novels, *A Walk to Remember* and *The Choice in Beaufort on the Crystal Coast*. A president's family made their home in Pine Knoll Shores. Every year, pleasure-seekers, birdwatchers, deep-sea anglers, divers, photographers, historians, kayakers, brides and grooms, and families flock to this coastal treasure.



Beaufort Boardwalk

What they all have discovered is [Carteret County](#), North Carolina, and its 85 miles of coastline, including one of the few natural barrier islands on the eastern seaboard. With the Crystal Coast's unique east-west orientation, you can watch both the sunrise and the sunset without moving your beach blanket.

Offering delicious cuisine, abundant natural beauty, wide choices in accommodations, and engaging activities, the Crystal Coast has a true gift for hospitality. She invites us to explore, enjoy, and then beckons us to return.

The Carteret Catch: The Recipe for Fine Dining



Front Street Grill, Beaufort, N.C

One of the major draws to the Crystal Coast is the remarkable quality of her cuisine. While watching sailboats glide by and listening to waves lap against the decks of open-air restaurants, you can dine on delicacies caught fresh hours earlier. This bounty is not exclusive, but is accessible to all and at modest prices. This is because of the [Carteret Catch](#), Carteret County's close partnership between the fishing industry and many of the 85 local restaurants.



*Seared Yellowfin Tuna at Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen, Atlantic Beach
(Photo by Leah Wynalek)*

The daily interaction of the fishermen, restaurateurs, and imaginative chefs results in a regional pride for their fine food. At each restaurant, we heard:

“Everything here is made from scratch.”

“We decide the day’s special by what is caught this morning.”

“Before anything gets shipped up North, we get first pick.”

You will taste the truth of this in every bite of oyster, scallop, shrimp, and pink seared tuna served by [Carteret Catch](#) chefs.

Some Delicious Choices



Oysters at Amos Mosquito's, Atlantic Beach

Amos Mosquito's :

A great date-night place. Festive decor and fun atmosphere. Catch of the Day items include swordfish and terrific oysters.

If you can't decide between chocolate crème brûlée and s'mores, have both. ([Atlantic Beach](#))



Amos Mosquito's, Atlantic Beach



Swordfish, Cilantro, Black Lentils at Amos Mosquito's, Atlantic Beach



Carrot Cake, Island Grille, Atlantic Beach

The Island Grille: For Sunday brunch, try the mimosas, crab cake Benedict, and moist carrot cake. Grits and Gouda, a tasty combination. ([Atlantic Beach](#))



Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen: A new restaurant on the Boardwalk in [Atlantic Beach](#), Pescara is perfect. With Italian seaside cuisine and a rich wine list, guests can dine simply with tapas-style small plates or have a traditional multi-course meal.

Thyme and Brown Butter Seared Scallops Photo by Leah Wynalek

The creative culinary team is Chef Andy Hopper and Chef Creighton Mc Neil. At the Chef's Table experience, Chef Hopper treated diners to dishes such as thyme and brown butter seared scallops with truffle mascarpone polenta, duck confit salad, and current oatmeal bread pudding with orange honey and sweet ginger crème Anglais.



Spinach & Duck Confit Salad at Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen, Atlantic Beach (Photo by Leah Wynalek)

Lee, our wine host, complemented each dish with wines including **Terlan Chardonnay of Alto Adige**, **Raimat Rose** from Spain, **Piedmont's Recit Arneis**, and **Bottega Vinaia Pinot Noir, Trentino**. He advised us to, "Take a sip between tastes to clear the pallet, and then take the next fork full."

The atmosphere of Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen is dressy casual. Do not miss this restaurant. ([Atlantic Beach](#))



Currant & Oatmeal Bread Pudding with Caramel Fig Sauce at Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen, Atlantic Beach(Photo by Leah Wynalek)

Finz Grill: Casual hangout, dockside, with “Down East Seafood.” Try the spicy crab fritter sliders with Dijon remoulade. Little, but mighty! (Beaufort, on [Hungry Town Culinary Tour](#))



Front Street Grill Shrimp Tacos

Front Street Grill at Stillwater: In a renovated boathouse on the Beaufort waterfront. Includes the popular Rhum Bar. Combines a Southern spirit with Caribbean spices. Local favorites are the shrimp tacos and pimento cheese spread. Taste matches the attractive presentation. (Beaufort, on [Hungry Town Culinary Tour](#))

The Spouter Inn Restaurant and Bakery: Lovely setting, dockside, with white tablecloths. Focus on locally grown vegetables and partnership with Carteret Catch. Our dessert destination, Spouter Inn has a wide selection of creamy pies, including French silk and peanut butter. You can also order éclairs and other delights from the bakery. (Beaufort, on [Hungry Town Culinary Tour](#))

The Natural Gifts of the Coast



The Crystal Coast is also known for her mild climate and environmental treasures. Warmed by flow from the southern Atlantic, the area teems with wildlife. You have a choice of many protected areas to visit, including: [Cape Lookout Lighthouse and National Seashore](#), [Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge](#), [The Rachel Carson Reserve](#), and the [Croatan National Forest](#). Some, including Cape Lookout's 56 miles of undeveloped beaches, are accessible only by ferry, kayak, and small craft.

Bring your binoculars because the Crystal Coast is on the [Atlantic Flyway](#) where over 200 bird species have been spotted. ([Bird list](#)) The habitat also supports loggerhead sea turtles, bottlenose dolphins, gray foxes, and wild horses. Whether sailing, diving, hiking, or strolling the beaches, you will celebrate North Carolina's biodiversity.

Accommodations for that “Toes in the Sand” Experience

Between huge stretches of open beaches, small towns dot the coastline and barrier island of the Crystal Coast. Since the prime industries are fishing and tourism, [accommodations](#) are varied and plentiful, especially along the waterfront.



Morehead City is the largest town with the historic **Beaufort** across the river. Bridges connect them to the barrier island, Bogue Banks. Running west to east on the narrow ribbon of island are the towns of **Emerald Isle**, **Indian Beach**, **Salter Path**, **Pine Knoll Shores** and **Atlantic Beach**.



View from Boat House, Emerald Isle

Although several hotels are available, the Crystal Coast is known for family **vacation rentals**. From elegant “Sand Castles” with pools and hot tubs to simple condos, they are completely furnished, down to silverware and bedding. Extended families can house multi-generational gatherings in one setting with privacy and shore-front access. In two Sand Castles offered by **Emerald Isle Realty**, (**The Boat House** and **Nonno’s Dream**) there are so many bedrooms, sitting areas, decks, and bathrooms, that you might have trouble finding all your relatives. (Don’t play Hide and Seek!)

If you prefer to avoid cooking, restaurants are plentiful and only minutes away from the beaches. (See above.)

Catch the Sights on Land and Sea



Bogue Sound

You have many choices of interesting places and activities on the Crystal Coast, especially if you are physically active. Although the older, smaller buildings and beach setting do pose some difficulties if you have mobility issues, most areas are accessible and well worth the visit. Whether you are fascinated by land and history or yearn for water and the open sea, there is something here for you.

On the Land

Beaufort is an old seaport, founded on the mainland in colonial 1709. Beaufort has a beautiful boardwalk along the harbor, historic homes, and oak lines



Historic Boarding House, Beaufort N.C.

A moderate walk, trolley, or easy biking tour will take you through Beaufort. Her old-style downtown includes small shops, museums, and restaurants with dock-side dining. You can walk or ride past the ancient boarding house, original churches, ghost sites, hanging trees, and the Old Burying Grounds with the grave of the Rum Girl.



Rum Girl, Old Burying Ground, Beaufort

According to Betsy Cartier of [Hungry Town Guided Tours](#), the legend is that a sea-captain took his young daughter to England, despite the protests of her mother. He vowed he would bring her back. When the girl died at sea, he preserved her body in rum so he could fulfill his promise to his wife. If you wish, you may leave a present on her grave.

(If you are in Beaufort, try the Hungry Town culinary/biking tour. Betsy and Dave Cartier, recipients of the [TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence for 2015](#), are gracious and engaging hosts. The bike ride is easy, the history and stories interesting, and the food selections are delicious.)

[The North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort](#), features another local celebrity,

Blackbeard the Pirate. His ship, *Queen Anne's Revenge* ran aground nearby in 1718. The wreck, the property of North Carolina, is being carefully excavated and studied.



Scrimshaw, North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort

You can see artifacts from the shipwreck and learn about the beheaded pirate, the inspiration for Jack Sparrow and the Pirates of the Caribbean. You can also see models of ships, a huge seashell collection, and learn about the Crystal Coast's maritime history. Admission is free. (It is primarily run by volunteers and open hours are irregular, so be sure to check the schedule.)

Ft. Macon State Park, is the most visited park in North Carolina.



Central Courtyard Ft. Macon State Park

You can hike, camp, fish, or spend the day touring the old fort. Started just after the War of 1812, Ft. Macon was built to defend North Carolina's only deep water seaport. It was in Confederate hands for one year before being re-occupied by Union forces.

It is a popular site for reenactments and offers musket firing demonstrations. You can get detailed history from the volunteer guides or self-tour past animatronic displays in one section and abandoned eerie rooms in another.

An interesting focus is on food and food production, including a recreation of the old mess hall.



Outer Wall Corridor, Ft. Macon State Park



Mess Hall, Ft. Macon State Park

[Cape Lookout Lighthouse](#), nicknamed The Diamond Lady, is the crown of the Cape Lookout National Seashore. From May to September, if you are hearty, you can [climb](#) the lighthouse's 207 steps to the top. There is no elevator or handicapped access to the lighthouse, but the Keeper's House and displays are available. You can reach Cape Lookout only by small craft or by one of the many ferries that depart from towns in the area. Cape Lookout is purposely undeveloped, but you can bring a picnic and enjoy the day.

North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores



Octopus, North Carolina Aquarium, Pine Knoll Shores

The descendants of President Teddy Roosevelt lived in Pine Knoll Shores and donated land in his honor. On this site is the [North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores](#). The aquarium is an attractive facility with an impressive collection of sea creatures from upside down jellyfish to an albino sea turtle named Nimbus. The aquarium offers guided paddle-boarding excursions, behind the scene programs with sea turtle hatchlings, and walking trails into the marshes and the [Theodore Roosevelt Natural Area](#).

On the Water

If you have always dreamed of that big fish, you may catch it off the Crystal Coast. Because of its warm waters, the Crystal Coast has one of the longest deep sea fishing seasons on the Atlantic. It is the home of

many festivals and tournaments such as the professional Big Rock Blue Marlin Fishing Tournament in Morehead City. You can take part by joining a fishing cruise for a day or charter a deep sea craft and crew. If all you want to do is to sun on the deck, that is fine, too.



Crystal Coast, Seaside

The seas off the Crystal Coast had so many shipwrecks that the area is called, “The Graveyard of the Atlantic.” That makes it a popular site for scuba diving and deep-sea photography. Whether you need scuba diving lessons and equipment, a diving excursion day trip, or a photography clinic, you can find it nearby.

You also might want to try [kite-boarding](#), upright paddle-boarding, canoeing, and kayaking. Because so much of the natural bounty of the Crystal Coast is closed to cars and large craft, these more individual sports are popular. Besides, you can get a terrific workout! If you want to try a sport for the first time, Bogue Sound is an excellent site to



Bogue Sound from the Boat House

Much of Bogue Sound is waist-deep and there is little or no boat traffic. It is generally calm and a safe place to practice before you head into more challenging waters. [\(Video\)](#) Kite-boarding trainer, Michael Sherms has good advice for his students, “Never kite farther than you can swim back.”

For a more relaxed trip, consider one of the many touring cruises. Our cruise with Captain Peggy of [Water Bug Tours](#) took us along the river channels around Harker’s Island and Shackleford Banks. If you are lucky, you might see the wild horses grazing on the marsh grass with waterfowl roosting nearby. With docks and homes on one side and nature areas on the other, the view is beautiful, especially at sunset.



Captain Peggy of Water Bug Tours



Why You Should Come Here

The Crystal Coast has so much. Natural beauty. Lovely places to stay. So much to see. Delicious food. However, you will be surprised by something not found on the websites or menus. When strolling down the streets or walking into a restaurant, you will notice that time has slowed. Whether it is the fresh sea air or the sound of gentle waves, it is

everywhere and real. There is a graciousness and ease to this place and to the people of the Crystal Coast. As you leave, listen and you will hear them call out, "You're welcome...and come back!"



Libby and Jack Cox of Carteret Catch, Chef Andy Hopper, and A. B. "Trace" Cooper, III at Pescara (Atlantic Beach)