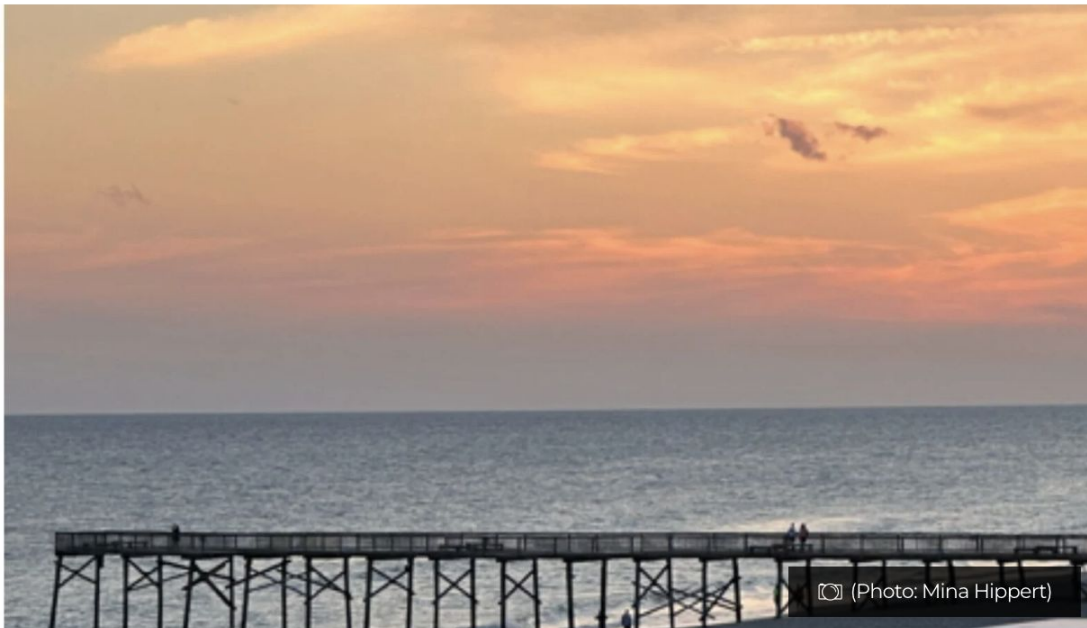




Kid-Friendly Pirate Invasion: A Crystal Coast Weekend Itinerary

Here are my favorite things to do and places to eat on North Carolina's Crystal Coast.



Beaufort, North Carolina has a rich history of ocean battles and many stories of pirate invasions, including that of a notorious pirate, Blackbeard. And every fall, Beaufort and the rest of North Carolina's Crystal Coast steps back to 1747 to reenact what it was like for the town to defend against a pirate invasion. I visited in September and got to soak up the beach town vibes and immerse myself in Beaufort's annual pirate invasion.

Though I was drawn to The Crystal Coast for Pirate Days, on my visit I realized just how much this stretch of the North Carolina coast is a perfect year-round family vacation destination. It has plenty of fun things to do, 85 miles of beaches, historic beachfront homes, and some great restaurants.

Here's my three-day itinerary to make the most of a stay on The Crystal Coast.

Day 1: Kayaking and Aquarium



📷 A kayak tour offers a different view of Beaufort (Photo: Mina Hippert)

I recommend starting the day strong with a breakfast stop at [Turner Street Market](#), a casual spot that offers breakfast sandwiches, biscuits and gravy, bagels, and more. After breakfast, make the most of your beautiful surroundings with a kayaking tour with [Beaufort Paddle](#). This small, family-owned business will provide everything you need to explore the Rachel Carson Reserve, right down to the water shoes and dry bags. Be on the lookout for wild horses as there are about 30 living on the reserve. You can typically catch them standing in the grass out for a snack.

Paddling works up an appetite, and I loved my lunch stop at the, [Front Street Grill](#). This historic restaurant uses organic, sustainable ingredients from local sources in its Southern-style cuisine. I recommend the house-made pimento cheese and chili-lime shrimp tacos.

For a little shelter from the sunshine after a morning out on the water, [North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores](#) is a great spot for both kids and adults. Walk through the exhibits on your own or, for something special, opt for a behind-the-scenes tour. This unique experience allows you to see how the tanks are operated as well as get a closer look into the conservation process.

End the day at [Full Circle Cafe](#), an Asian-inspired restaurant with a cozy and warm vibe. The curry-fried fresh oysters served with Thai sweet chili sauce are a must-try. If you're a night owl, head to the [Arendell Room](#) for a cocktail after dinner.

Day 2: Water Sports and History



📷 The North Carolina Maritime Museum tells a big part of the local history of pirates
(Photo: Mina Hippert)

Another morning means another chance to eat breakfast, and you can't go wrong at [Mug Shot](#). This cafe and lounge is known for tasty biscuits and gravy and a variety of housemade coffee syrups.

From there, head over to [Island Water Sports](#) for a day out on the water. Since 1988, Island Water Sports has offered services including jet ski rentals, dolphin and jet ski tours, paddle board rentals, and banana boat rides. I was impressed with the amount of designated space provided for riding, the largest on the Crystal Coast, allowing for a fun and safe experience. For those adventurous and fearless little ones, Island Water Sports allows passengers as young as four years old to ride along with an adult, as long as all riders are able to swim.

Grab lunch at [Black Sheep](#) for a selection of brick-oven pizzas, appetizers, and sandwiches. (the baked pimento cheese is my personal favorite).

To learn more about the history of the town and spot historic homes and buildings, get a ticket for a double-decker bus tour with the [Beaufort Historical Association](#). Along the way, you'll visit Blackbeard's house, an old cemetery, and dive into the history of many other old homes and shops that made an impact on the town.

To prepare for the upcoming pirate festivities, visit the [North Carolina Maritime Museum](#). Here you'll get a chance to learn about marine life, the seafood industry, lighthouses, and more. This museum also houses artifacts found from Blackbeard's ship, the amazingly named Queen Anne's Revenge.

To close out the day, head to [The Beaufort Hotel](#) for dinner. During Beaufort's pirate invasion, this is where the pirate festivities will kick off, starting with an attack on Beaufort Hotel itself. Kids often dress in their best pirate gear to fully immerse themselves in the invasion. Be sure to check the [Beaufort Pirate Invasion Schedule](#) for the events of the weekend and other attack destinations.

Day 3: A Ferry Boat Ride and Ghost Walk



📷 During the Beaufort Pirate Invasion, pirates stage performances on land and sea
(Photo: Jonathan Edwards)

On your last vacation day, zoom out for great views of Cape Lookout National Seashore with [Island Express Ferry Boat Services](#). This 50-minute round-trip ferry boat ride takes you to Cape Lookout, where you have a chance to spot sea turtles, dolphins, and wild horses (I love this combination). You'll also get great views of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse and many beaches. Take your time exploring what the Lookout has to offer. If you're an adrenaline junkie, Island Express Ferry Boat Services also provides UTV rentals for you to further explore the island.

For lunch and dinner, make the theme local seafood with meals at [Fish Hut Grill](#), which offers local seafood and American classics; and [Catch 109](#), Morehead City's newest oyster bar.

For a spooky end to the weekend, learn more about the town's history on a ghost walk with [Beaufort Ghost Walk](#). This family-friendly tour brings history to life with a haunted guide who will share their personal story of their time during the Golden Age of Piracy, Colonial and Civil War eras, or the early 1900s. You'll hear town legends and visit many haunted sites where you may get the chance to witness a ghost wandering around.

Where to Stay

Beaufort and the surrounding towns have [hotels in all price ranges](#). Or, if you're visiting with a group or a family, consider a vacation rental. [Emerald Isle Realty](#) has a good selection of beachfront rentals.