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They Ditched Their Jobs To Live In Their Dream Destination

Ever since they met in hospitality management school at the University of New Hampshire, Betsy and David Cartier spent years living where their work took them. They went from one hotel or hospitality establishment to another. At one point, they moved seven times over a ten year period. “Most of our life we were told where to live,” says David who has been married to Betsy for 42 years. “In the hotel business they would say, ‘this is where you’re going.’”



Yet after the events of 9/11 and they lost people they knew, the Cartiers were ready to make a change, an epic change. “We looked at each other and said, ‘We are not guaranteed tomorrow. We’re not guaranteed retirement,’” said Betsy. “Let’s live life.”

They set out to find the ideal place to establish roots. They had three non-negotiable requirements for their locale: It needed to be on the water, had “tasteful” tourism and operated all year long (versus seasonally).

In 2013, they were living in Portsmouth, Virginia when David came home from visiting a friend in North Carolina. At the time the Cartiers owned Starboards Coffee, a spot beloved by

locals which was known for the Cartier's coffee ice cube creations. "Close the coffee shop for the weekend and pack your bags," said David to Betsy. "You have got to see this place."

The place was Beaufort.



The third oldest town in North Carolina, Beaufort is steeped in maritime history. A laidback enclave tucked away beside Taylors Creek, the Atlantic Ocean is minutes away by car. Beaufort, (population: 4,053), is part of the Crystal Coast. Considered an undiscovered North Carolina gem, the Crystal Coast contains more than 85 miles of coastline. The area consists of 11 distinct regions teeming with nature reserves, empty beaches and culinary treasures with over 100 locally owned restaurants. Called the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" there are more than 2,000 sunken vessels in its waters and two different herds of wild horses roaming islands there.



Betsy always said that when she found the perfect place for them to set down roots, she would know within five minutes. She remembers arriving on Front Street, the heart of Beaufort's historic downtown. A promenade along Taylors Creek, Front Street is a hub where everyone walks, bikes or stops to linger at Carrot Island 350 yards across the creek. The pristine isle contains long stretches of beach, wild horses, salt marshes and hundreds of bird species.

"This is it," said Betsy within two minutes.

"The water was right there. People were out walking and riding bikes," said Betsy. The town wasn't touristy. There were small independently owned boutiques. She noticed all the shades of green. Plus it was a year round destination. "My childhood flashed right before my eyes," adds Betsy who grew up in Fair Haven, New Jersey. "I felt it in my soul."

45 days later they moved to Beaufort. They had no jobs, nor medical insurance, but they were convinced they had made the right move. Ever resourceful, David worked for some local restaurants building their websites. One day he stumbled upon a Face Book page for Hungry Town Bike Tours. It turned out the business was available to purchase.

They were able to buy the business, changed the name to Hungry Town Tours and added walking, history and culinary tours, in addition to cycling. Betsy unpacks 300 years of Beaufort history as guests meander through quiet streets lined with fetching homes with giant porches and fascinating plaques for which the region is known. "The tours are a combination of folklore, researched facts and local knowledge," says Betsy who conducts the bike tours on retro-style single speed cruisers.

One of their many tours, Bike, Brunch & Bubbles, marries food and culture. There's a stop for decadent Sunday brunch at Beaufort Grocery Company. The area's beloved long-time restaurant is a Beaufort mainstay with signature dishes like Kasseri cheese flamed in brandy with BeauGro bread. It is served as waiters say "opa!" They also created A Ride to Remember tour based on Nicholas Sparks' books *The Choice* and *A Walk to Remember*, which takes place in Beaufort. In fact, their tour was approved by Sparks himself. His autographed books are available for purchase with 100 percent of the proceeds from the books going to the Nicholas Sparks Foundation.



Since Betsy and David moved to Beaufort they have become sort of unofficial ambassadors of the town. When the state law, known as the “Brunch Bill” was passed, David organized local restaurants to sign a petition to get town approval to serve alcohol on Sundays after 10 a.m. Even eateries that didn't serve brunch signed to show their solidarity. In fact, the restaurants are devoted to the region. Many are members of Carteret Catch which helps sustain the livelihood and heritage of the Carteret County fishing industry as they identify fresh, local seafood landed by resident commercial fishermen.

In addition to Hungry Town Tours David also works with Beaufort’s newest hotel, Beaufort Hotel. The intimate waterfront hotel which opened this past April, lies before Taylors Creek and contains plenty of outdoor nooks, a full marina, a fine restaurant, outdoor pool and is one of the few hotels recognized by the NC GreenTravel Initiative.

Betsy and David’s passion for Beaufort hasn’t wavered. Shortly after they moved there Betsy was walking along Font street during sunset. Both sunrise and sunset can be experienced from the south-facing street. “As I was walking dolphins were swimming in pods right along the creek. Then I looked up and saw horses galloping along the shoreline. I felt like I was in a movie set,” she recalls. “Even now Beaufort still feels like the first day I came here. We're not moving. This is our last stop. And it gets better and better.”

Here are some other gems of the Crystal Coast.

Kayak to the Rachel Carson Reserve and experience wild horses and miles of uninhabited beaches with Beaufort Paddle. Owner Rod Howell, a beloved Beaufort local with a wealth of knowledge, has top notch guides. Many are graduates of nearby Duke University Marine Laboratory and are passionate about sharing their expertise.

Chef and owner Clarke Merrell and his team at Circa 81 in nearby Morehead City work closely with the local fishermen and farmers to source the region's best bounty. The upscale eatery, known for their tapas, also has a vast cocktaileria menu inspired by Clarke's time in Spain. The Medjool dates with bacon and goat cheese are a revelation. So are the charred Brussel sprouts.



Take a ferry with Island Express Ferry Service right from Front Street to Cape Lookout National Seashore. The isle is home to a herd of more than 110 wild horses and contains 56 miles of protected coastline and Cape Lookout lighthouse which dates back to 1859.

Every few days the menu at La Perla slightly changes. But what remains constant are owners Jessica Murphy and Kevin Davis' devotion to quality, innovation and layered flavors. The Spanish/Latin inspired restaurant, which is set in a romantic home dating back to 1768, has

touches of Southern influences and is considered a culinary treasure. La Perla is committed to serving sustainable seafood, caught fresh in local waters. Their meats are locally sourced and humanely raised. Most of the wines come from Chile, Spain, Argentina and Portugal.

Head to 340 North for a waterfront sunset feast. One of Beaufort's newest restaurants, they specialize in fresh local seafood and seasonal ingredients from local farms. The crab cakes are top notch and so is the view from the outdoor patio.

For great beaches, a bit of history and free parking, go to Fort Macon. The 389 acre park is an oasis of inlet views and sand dunes.

Don't miss sunset from the rooftop at Moonrakers which has sweeping views of the region which includes the Shackleford Banks and Carrot Island. The whipped feta with roasted grapes, oregano, honey, cracked black pepper and grilled pita bread is a must.



