

GAFF

a coastal lifestyle, angling & destination publication

GAFF's 2015

Destinations ISSUE



seychelles
by the seashore

GIFTS FROM
CHRISTMAS ISLAND

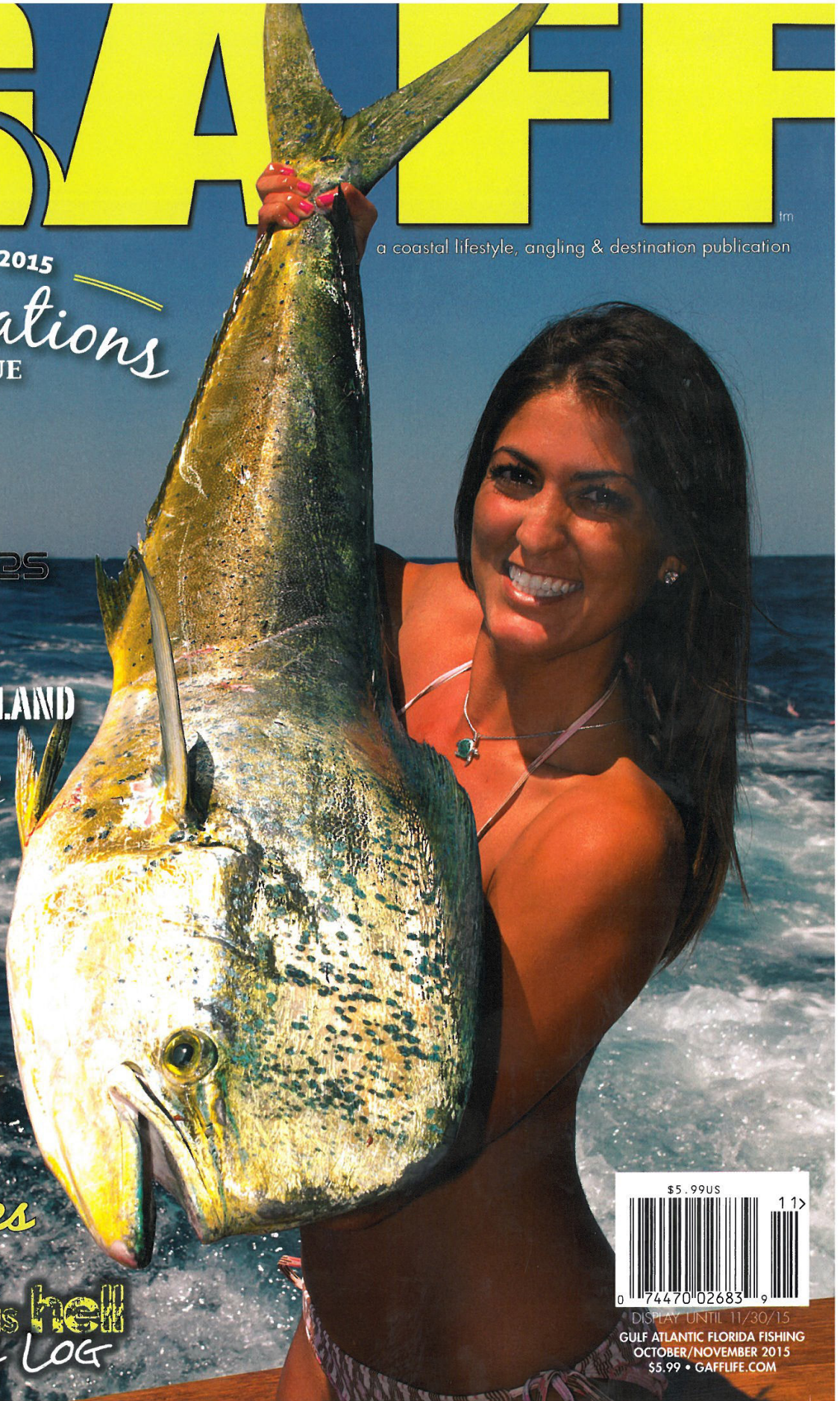
Breathe In
Belize

+ GAFF's
Most
Memorable
COVER SHOTS

the
Crystal Coast
of North Carolina

Pacific
adventures

BARTIA'S
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TRAVEL LOG



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the Crystal Coast of North Carolina

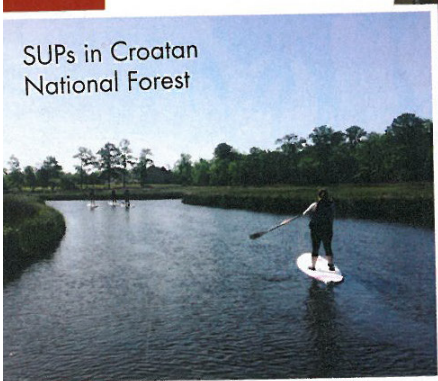
By: Matt Draper

I've always said, if I could live anywhere else in this country other than Florida, North Carolina would be on my short list – my very short list, in fact. I've ridden both road and mountain bikes in its mountains over the years—NC has some of the tallest on the East Coast—and even surfed Cape Hatteras back when I was in my 20s and much more nimble. Coming from the hot, flat state of Florida, I always appreciated Carolina's weather with its distinct seasons and the incredible views provided by different elevations.

In recent years, having GAFF's home office in Raleigh has meant more frequent visits and the opportunity to tackle some of the world-class fishing just off North Carolina's 300-mile

coastline. As is the case for many of you, the Outer Banks was on my bucket list of fishing destinations ever since I heard my first stories about it. And because fishing is taken so seriously there, I drew the conclusion long ago that the area was an outdoors sports mecca for hardcore athletes and adrenaline junkies. While this can be true to some degree, it by no means paints the full picture.

A few months ago I was invited to tour a popular, yet still pristine, section of North Carolina's shoreline called the Crystal Coast. It's an 85-mile stretch that runs from the New River up to Cape Lookout National Seashore. The visit became my introduction to a side of the state I had overlooked. A side with



SUPs in Croatan National Forest



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a family friendly atmosphere, a rich and fascinating history, stellar cuisine, and exciting activities the entire family can participate in. My previous perception was fine as a thrill-seeking young man, but as a family man who takes a few less risks nowadays, the Crystal Coast lifestyle looked pretty close to perfect.

I launched my adventure by flying into Coastal Carolina Regional Airport in New Bern, NC and then heading southeast for a short while to the Emerald Coast - our country's first national seashore. My hosts graciously arranged for me to stay in a magnificent beach house called "Tickled Pink" on Ocean Drive. This oceanfront mini-mansion was absolutely loaded: eight bedrooms, an elevator, a beachfront gazebo with swimming pool and hot tub, a theatre room, a huge gourmet kitchen... The house was so well appointed, it even had it's own putting green.

After exploring my new accommodations and taking a quick stroll down to the surf, I made my way over to a wonderful little establishment called Idle Hour Biergarten for a tasty craft beer right on the beach. The servers were extremely brew savvy and the owner even came over and shared his story with me.

Although Idle Hour's menu looked delicious, I moved on to another well-known restaurant famous to the area called Amos Mosquito's Restaurant & Bar. Oddly, mosquitos are the theme at this popular joint, with Spanish moss décor and all sorts of mosquito art on the walls. They prepare southern American meals specializing in seafood, including sushi. Karaoke is the big draw on Thursdays, and wouldn't you know, I showed up just in time. Fortunately, I wasn't drinking, or I might have tried my hand at it, too.

Nothing's better for the body after a day of traveling than a little exercise, so the following morning I made my way to Hot Wax Surf Shop for a lesson in stand-up paddleboarding. Coming from a surfing background, I was really looking forward to this part of the trip, and walking into the shop, seeing all of the boards and smelling the freshly sanded fiberglass took me back to a special time in my life.

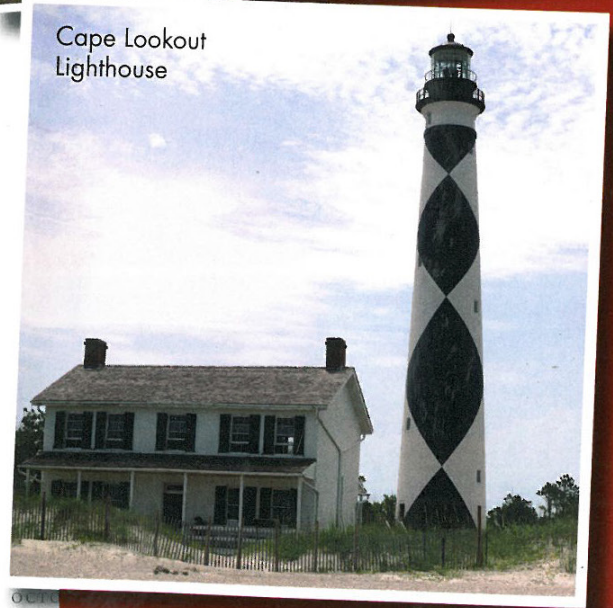
The shop has the largest selection of surfboards, SUPs, and kayaks on Emerald Isle, with everything you could need to get your family out on the water. They also rent just about every kind of aquatic sports equipment and provide guided kayak fishing and eco tours, as well.

My class launched our SUPs in a calm tributary in the Croatan National Forest. Two experts coached the seven of us, so it was apparent we were in good hands. I expected to be a natural at it, but times have changed (me) and I was a bit wobbly at the start.

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Fort Macon



Cape Lookout Lighthouse

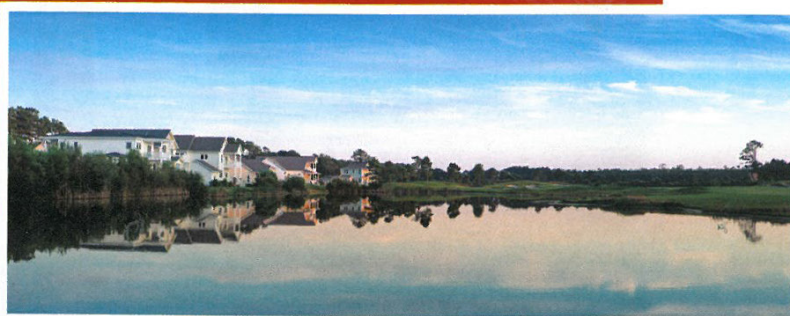


North River golf club

Come play at North River, a resort community designed for FUN! Located in historic Beaufort, NC, the North River Golf Club stands as the centerpiece of the North River Resort community. North River is a world-class, top ranked 18-hole Bob Moore-designed championship golf course offering memberships and daily fee play. The golf course layout is one of the best in the Carolinas and features five sets of tees and the area's top practice range.

The beautiful NEW golf clubhouse opened in July 2015 and includes a pro shop, locker room, meeting rooms, bar and lounge, kitchen and full veranda for relaxing with friends. The North River Golf Club is the perfect place to host your next golf tournament, whether it is a charity or corporate outing, or just a group of friends putting something together for a group tournament. They also offer private lessons to improve your game.

Come enjoy spectacular views, fantastic facilities, a challenging course and good old southern hospitality. Visit NorthRiverResort.com to learn more or book a tee time.



Soon, though, like my eager classmates, I was exploring the expansive marsh and chasing stingrays and mullet up the creeks.

The remainder of the day was set aside for exercising the ole brain, so I jumped on a trolley and headed into "America's coolest small town," known as Beaufort. There, I took a guided tour of the old seaside community on a double-decker bus and learned about its charming history. The highlight, however, was attending an interactive guided seminar with wine, bread, and cheese experts. It was held on the water in the Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center, an old boat-building barn that acts as both a museum and a place to teach the craft of traditional boat building. The seminar was top notch and its experts were exceptionally knowledgeable, opening my eyes to the complex relationships between many different

wines, cheeses, and breads.

If that weren't enough, that evening I attended the Grand Reserve Tasting and Auction at Front Street Village where they had celebrity guest chefs and a live jazz band. The atmosphere was electric; the crowd was a Who's Who of the well to do, and I did a lot of tasting. My big bed at Tickled Pink never looked better.

Day three was also planned out to educate and entertain. It began with a trip to Fort Macon Park, home to a massive Civil War fort on the coast with an adjacent museum full of Civil War memorabilia and artifacts. This immense structure is a must-see for children leaning about American history. Visitors have free roam of the grounds, including the cannon turrets and dungeons. Fort Macon also offers public access to the inviting sandy beaches and surf. It's located at the eastern end of Bogue Banks, one of a series of barrier islands along the North Carolina coast, so it's surrounded on three sides by water - the Atlantic Ocean, Beaufort Inlet, and Bogue Sound.

Next, I was off to see the famous Cape Lookout Lighthouse. The classic-style lighthouse shines over the Southern Outer Banks and is visible from up to 19 miles away. Visitors can climb the 207 steps to the top of the 163-foot tower, but it's often hot and dim inside, and too strenuous for some. Bad weather discouraged my group from making the climb, but we were treated to another delight on the boat ride over: the famous wild horses of Shackleford Banks.

The wild Shackleford mustangs are isolated on a nine-mile long barrier island between Beaufort Inlet and Cape Lookout. They are the descendants of Spanish mustangs and have free run of the island, which has no human habitation. They've survived in isolation on Shackleford and other coastal barrier islands away from the mainland for nearly half a millennium. Shackleford Banks has never been suitable for any significant human population, so it remains pristine to this day with more than 110 horses thriving on it. I witnessed a dozen or so of the majestic steeds grazing as we motored past, but the weather had deteriorated too much for our Island Express Ferry captain to land on the island for a closer look.

After drying out and enjoying an amazing lunch at the City Kitchen in Beaufort (which, by the way,

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The wild mustangs of Shackleford Banks



serves Truffle Chips that will have you seeing God), I made my way to the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

I'm a huge fan of aquariums, as they are wonderful places for children to begin a lifelong appreciation for aquatic life and marine ecosystems, and this one didn't disappoint. Vast assortments of live fish and indigenous animals and reptiles were on display, along with interactive wildlife tutorials and even a nature trail with boardwalks traversing the nearby salt marsh. Definitely a super place to bring the little ones.

My final evening at the beachfront mini mansion was especially surprising, as Carlton's Catering Company with Chef Patrick Hogan stopped by to prepare several of his latest elegant and mouthwatering dishes. Each unique flavor was exquisite, bringing my Crystal Coast adventure to a delicious and relaxing end.

From historic signature attractions like Fort Macon and the wild mustangs of Shackleford Banks, to fine dining, museums, aquatic sports and golf, this coastal destination has something special to offer everyone. So bring your heavy rods and reels, but bring your spouse and kids, as well, because the Crystal Coast is strewn with remarkable treasures to thrill the entire clan. Next time, I'm bringing mine. 🐾

NEED TO KNOW

WHAT TO DO

North Carolina Aquarium:
1 Roosevelt Blvd.,
Pine Knoll Shores, NC
Phone: (252) 247-4003

Hot Wax Surf Shop:
200 Mallard Street
Emerald Isle, NC
www.hotwaxsurf.com

Fort Macon:
2303 E Fort Macon Rd,
Atlantic Beach, NC
Phone: (252) 726-3775

WHERE THE LOCALS HANG

Idle Hour Biergarten:
121 Atlantic Blvd,
Morehead City, NC
www.idlehourbiergarten.com

Amos Mosquito's Restaurant
& Bar: 703 E Fort Macon Rd
Atlantic Beach, NC
Phone: (252) 247-6222
www.amosmosquitos.com

PLACE TO LAY YOUR HEAD

Tickled Pink:
Emerald Isle Realty
Phone: (866) 935-6256

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