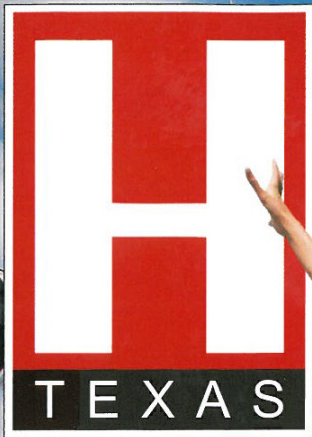


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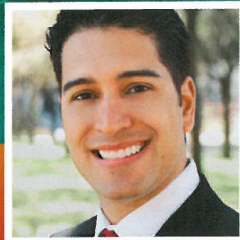
YOUR *Dream* VACATION GUIDE



LIKE
ARUBA!
(with a dashed arrow pointing to the sky)

INSIDE AND OUT: HOUSTON'S

TRIPS FOR THE
FAMILY OR JUST
THE TWO OF YOU
(NO MATTER
YOUR BUDGET!)



PLUS:
7 FEEL-GOOD
TRAVEL TIPS

25 MOST BEAUTIFUL

by Warner Roberts

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(continued)

THE CRYSTAL COAST, N. CAROLINA

CLEAR AS CRYSTAL

North Carolina's Southern Outer Banks is rich in history—and stunning sunsets and sunrises.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: WILD HORSES AT SHACKLEFORD BANKS GALLOP ALONG THE SHORELINES; THE DIAMOND LADY WATCHES OVER CAPE LOOKOUT AND ALSO PROVIDES INCREDIBLE VIEWS FROM THE TOP; AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE BEAUTIFUL CRYSTAL COAST

OPPOSITE PAGE: MY WIFE, BAMBI, WITH ME ON THE BIKE TOUR, EXPLORING THE HISTORIC SITES OFFERED IN BEAUFORT.



Imagine escaping back in time, to a place where a storied history meets pristine beaches and a beautiful emerald ocean. That vision becomes a reality when you visit North Carolina's Crystal Coast. With 85 miles of shoreline, stretching from Atlantic Beach and Morehead City to Beaufort and Cape Lookout, there's something special for everyone that evokes the spirit, heritage and culture of North Carolina's coastal villages.

The Crystal Coast has south-facing beaches, allowing you to witness both beautiful sunrises and sunsets, right over the water. It's also the only destination in the state with a national forest, national seashore and state park all in the same county.

COASTAL SIGHTS

One of the many can't-miss historical sites along the Crystal Coast is the 150-year-old Cape Lookout Lighthouse, located on Cape Lookout National Seashore. Nicknamed "The Diamond Lady," the lighthouse watches over the entire coast. From mid-May to mid-September, you can take a guided tour and climb all the way to the very top of the lighthouse; the views are absolutely unforgettable.

Cape Lookout National Seashore, a low, narrow ribbon of barrier sands running 56 miles from Ocracoke Inlet to Beaufort Inlet and covered in grasslands and highly dense vegetation, also offers several campsites where you can camp out amongst the stars. But there's more

to see than just twinkling lights. While there, my wife and I witnessed the wild horses of the Schackleford Banks running freely along the shorelines. These untamed, majestic animals swam to these barrier islands more than 400 years ago when Spanish ships were shipwrecked. Growing up in Houston, I was surrounded by horses, but to see them galloping along and knowing that they had done so for centuries, was truly remarkable.

Emerald Isle is known as the most prominent of the banks on the Crystal Coast. Named for the lush greenery that covers much of the area, Emerald Isle is located at the western end of the Bogue Banks. Accommodations dotting the coastline range from quaint beach cottages and condominiums to mammoth beach houses known locally as "sand castles." Visitors have the freedom to spend their days exploring uncrowded coastline, dining at casually elegant restaurants, shopping at fanciful boutiques filled with coastal treasures or setting sail on private chartered fishing excursions.

TOUR THE TURF

To fully appreciate the rich heritage of the area, take a guided tour. We were surprised to learn of the many cultures who left their mark: Spanish explorers in the 1500s; the West Indian and Bahamian people, whose architectural influences can still be seen today; and Blackbeard the Pirate in the 1700s. It was also exciting to see the very spots where Civil War battles were fought. Everything is



well-preserved by such places as The Maritime Museum in Beaufort, Fort Macon State Park and the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

We went on a bike tour while in the historic waterfront town of Beaufort. Founded in 1709, it's the third-oldest city in North Carolina. The tour, led by Betsy and David Cartier of Hungry Town Bike Tours, allowed us to pedal our way through the beautiful city. (They led us to some pretty tasty grub—more on that in a bit!) Beaufort also offers fun double-decker bus tours, along with historic building tours and an old burying ground tour.

SEEK OUT THE SURF

If it's water adventures you're looking for, you'll find them on The Crystal Coast. From the tip of Emerald Isle to the beautiful stretch of narrow, untouched barriers of Cape Lookout, the area is a fisherman's paradise. Giant blue fin tuna, king mackerel and marlin dominate; it's renowned by game fisherman for the best blue marlin tournament on the eastern coastline.

For scuba divers, the place is known as the "Graveyard of the Atlantic"—it boasts hundreds of freighters, tankers and many other sea crafts that have been resting on the bottom of the ocean, some for centuries.

We were also able to enjoy a different pace of water adventures,

and chose to experience kayaking and paddle boarding, both of which I'm still young and fit enough to enjoy.

GET YOUR GRUB ON

Beaufort has the best food on the Coast, hands down. Betsy and David Cartier of Hungry Town Bike Tours took us to several restaurants along the waterfront. The best lunch places highlighted seafood, naturally. Finz Grill, with their Spicy Crab Fritters, and Front Street Grill at Stillwater, serving up Blackened Tuna and Mahi Tacos, were such a treat.

An evening stop brought us to Circa 81 Tapas & Cocktaieria, owned and operated by Chef Clarke Merrell. We dined on delectable tapas and sampled his specialty extra-virgin olive oils from his retail shop, the Beaufort

Olive Oil Company.

The last stop on the tour brought us to Ms. Barbara Ward, owner of the Old Salt Restaurant & Oyster Bar. Her pound cake was the best I've ever had! One of Old Salt's house specialties, the rich, moist cake is glazed with sweet vanilla bean and topped with fresh whipped cream and berries.

Set your mind on a new adventure and come enjoy what The Crystal Coast has to offer. The serene, picturesque destination will keep you busy but relaxed between its coastal sunrises and sunsets. I know we left feeling a little sunnier than when we arrived.

**I know we
left feeling a
little sunnier
than when we
arrived.**

TRAVEL TROUBLE #5: CRANKINESS

Chances are, your body is already operating at a higher than normal level of stress as you rush to get ready for your trip. Drops in blood sugar due to hunger and fatigue can send you straight to mood-meltdown central.

THE FIX: Turning to nutritional and hydrating options, instead of short-term junk food fixes, can help you avoid the sugar crashes that create even more internal stress for your body. Franci Cohen, a nutritionist, exercise physiologist and fitness instructor, recommends eating before you leave for the airport, as well as loading your carry-on with fruits, veggies and granola bars.

TRAVEL TROUBLE #6: WEIGHT GAIN

Tempting snacks are lurking everywhere from the airport food court to the free eats on the plane.

THE FIX: Snack smart, says nutritionist Leslie Dantchik, author of the health blog www.alphabitesnyc.com. "Depending on your daily caloric intake, aim for about 100 to 200 calories per snack. My go-to portable snacks include: protein bars (Kashi GoLean, Soy Joy), instant all-natural oatmeal, sliced vegetables (carrots, peppers), fruits (apples, oranges), lean meat sandwiches on whole-grain bread, or trail mix with unsalted nuts. I love walnuts or almonds mixed with raisins (add whole grain cereal for extra fiber and protein). Have a sweet tooth? Throw in some heart-healthy dark chocolate."

ESSENTIALS:

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