# The Sweetest U.S. Small Towns to Visit This Fall

## Beaufort, North Carolina

This sleepy little pearl on the southern Outer Banks is home to only 4,391 people. It's the third-oldest town in North Carolina, nestled on the Crystal Coast halfway between Virginia Beach and Myrtle Beach. This fall, mark your calendar for the **Beaufort Brewin'** annual craft beer shindig (September 26–28) and a community-wide "jumble sale" at the **Beaufort Historic Site** (November 23). The weekly **Olde Beaufort Farmers' Market**, set up in front of the Carteret County Courthouse, runs through November 17; swing by on a Saturday morning for a fair-trade caffeine fix from **Green Truck Coffee** and a roasted pear-and-ginger scone from **The Accidental Bakery**.

With energy for the day, you can explore artifacts salvaged from the shipwrecked *Queen Anne's Revenge* at the **North Carolina Maritime Museums**, wander the crumbling tombstones in Beaufort's **oldest cemetery**, or go seashell hunting at the 2,315-acre **Rachel Carson Coastal Estuarine Reserve**, separated from downtown Beaufort by Taylor's Creek. There are two hiking trails within the reserve, but you can only walk the 1.1-mile Outer Loop trail at low tide; follow the markers from Town Marsh and look for piping plover, herons, and egrets.

To explore farther afield, the **Island Express Ferry Service** drops passengers off at the uninhabited **Shackleford Banks**, the southernmost barrier island in **Cape Lookout National Seashore**, known for its **wild horses** (more than 100 at last count). The **Cape Lookout Light Station**, with its unique black-and-white diamond-print exterior, is another popular stop, and the 207-step lighthouse is open for climbing through the third week in September. Planning to spend time island hopping? Book a deluxe suite at the **Pecan Tree Inn**, a peaceful B&B kitted out with two-person Jacuzzi tubs and Egyptian cotton towels. It's half a block from the boardwalk and yacht harbor.