

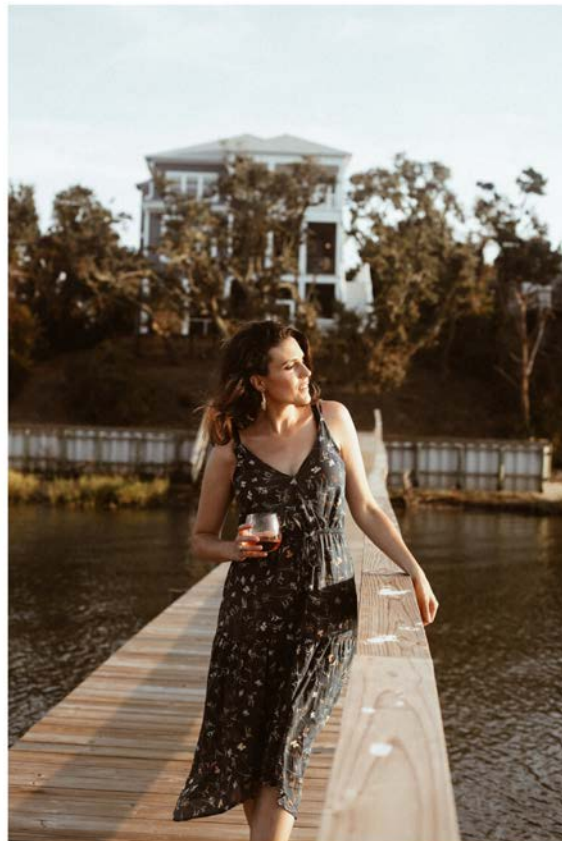
I ALWAYS REMEMBER THE VERY FIRST TIME I STEPPED FOOT ON THE COAST OF NORTH CAROLINA.

It was years ago, and yet I've never forgotten being completely mesmerized by the endless crystal clear waters and the pristine beaches that stretched in front of me for miles on end. It was peaceful, untouched, stunning, captivating. Suffice it to say, when I was invited back to **The Crystal Coast** region last month, I jumped at the chance.

Arriving back to the area, I was quickly reminded why it has the name that it does. The waters were just as crystal as ever. And the area, which is comprised of Beaufort (the famed setting for several Nicholas Sparks stories), Atlantic Beach, Emerald Isle (the area where we stayed), Pine Knoll Shores, Morehead City and Cape Lookout, hadn't lost its mesmerizing effect one bit.

Now, I know when people think beachside escape, North Carolina isn't always top of mind...which is exactly why you need to go. It's truly a hidden gem packed with stunning shorelines (Did you know this area is home to one of the few remaining natural barrier island systems in the world?), activities for everyone, delicious cuisine, lots of fresh seafood, the friendliest, most welcoming people and a peaceful, relaxing atmosphere that is hard to find elsewhere. I mean, what more could you ask for on a vacation?!

If that alone hasn't convinced you to hop on the next flight to the *Crystal Coast*, then you've got to keep reading, because I can guarantee that once you get through my 5 reasons to visit The Crystal Coast, your next Google search is 100% going to be "Flights to North Carolina".





1// THE PLACES TO STAY



BREEZY OAKS COTTAGE

810 Emerald Drive, Emerald Isle, NC 28594

One of the great things about this area is that it hasn't been over-run by big hotels. While there are of course some B&B options and a scattering of hotels (if that's more your thing), if you really want to settle in and feel at home, the best place to stay is at one of the gorgeous houses dotting the coastline.

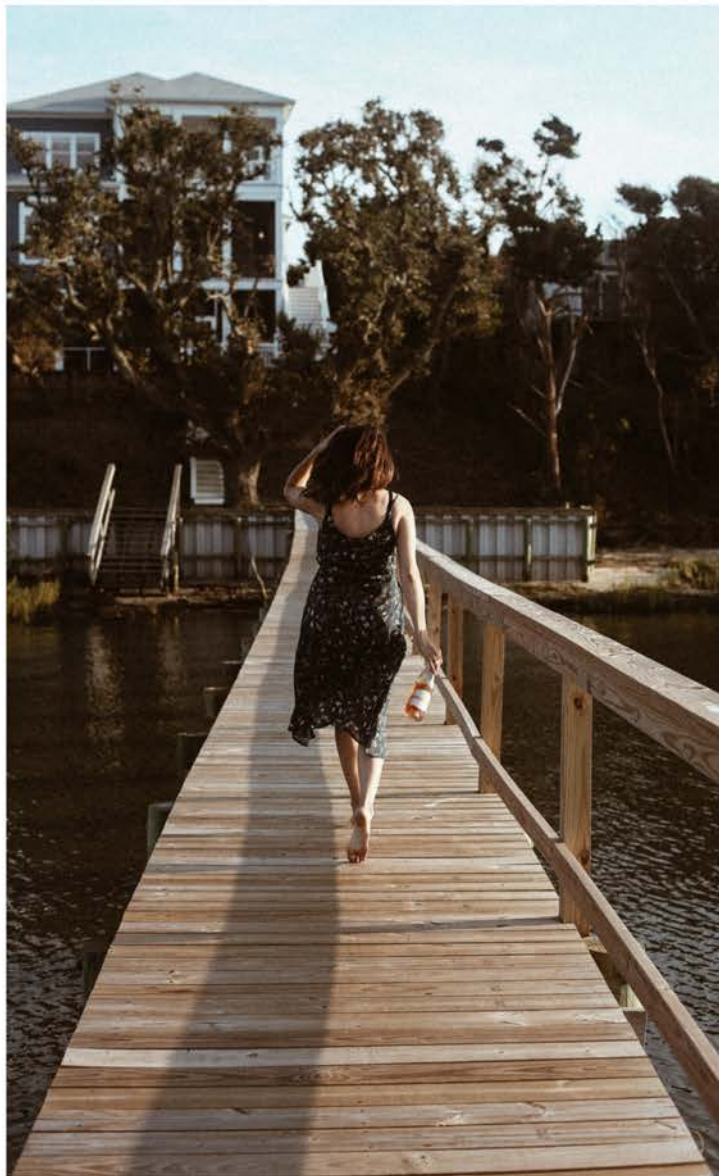
We stayed at **Breezy Oaks Cottage**, one of the beautiful properties in the Emerald Isle Realty portfolio. When I say this house had everything, I really do mean everything. From 6 spacious bedrooms, each with their own private bathroom, to a massive gourmet kitchen (perfect for gathering around and cooking up a feast with friends or family) to multiple living rooms and a wet bar to a huge deck and a hot tub to a grill, a kayak and a huge garage, this place is the perfect set-up for vacation rest, relaxation and fun. Oh, and let's not forget the elevator. Yup, an elevator. Because who wants to lug a suitcase up three flights of stairs after traveling? Gonna go ahead and say no one. On a more serious note, though, it's such a nice feature to have, especially if you're traveling in a group with older people (Hi grandparents!) or someone who might have a disability. The elevator ensures you don't have to worry about them getting around the house and fully enjoying every wonderful floor of the property just like everyone else in your group.

Besides the massive and stunning interior, my favorite thing about the property was the long deck out back. It was the perfect spot to enjoy an early morning cup of coffee, a mid-afternoon sun bathing sesh (while watching the fish jump out of the water for some solid entertainment!) and/or a sunset glass of rosé.

Whether you're coming with a group of girlfriends, going on a couples trip or traveling with family, this spacious waterfront property is the perfect home base for your time in The Crystal Coast.

THE ZIMMERMAN AGENCY

(continued)





2// THE DIVERSE FOOD

THE FOOD IN CRYSTAL COAST DOES NOT DISAPPOINT! WHILE THERE IS PLENTY OF FRESH SEAFOOD TO BE HAD AND SOUTHERN FLAVORS AROUND, YOU'LL ALSO BE SURPRISED AT THE RANGE OF DIVERSE CUISINES THROUGHOUT THE AREA. JUST BE PREPARED TO FOR NON-STOP EATING BECAUSE NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF FOOD IT IS, IT'S ALL DELICIOUS!



CIRCA 81

4650 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC 28557

dinner

We kicked off our trip with dinner at this tapas spot. We were here for a good 2 hours and had 7 courses so it's safe to say I tried most of the menu. It's also safe to say that you really can't go wrong with anything you order here. There are a lot of unique options and twists, a variety of local items, and a wide range of cuisines. It was all phenomenal but I especially am a sucker for any softshell crab (this one was cajun fried served over smoked gouda grits), crispy Brussels sprouts, the sweet potato quesadilla was unique and comforting and I absolutely loved their cheeseboard that was loved with local cheese, hams and pickled vegetables.

MOONRAKERS

326 Front Street, Beaufort, NC 28516

lunch, dinner, rooftop drinks

A newer spot right in downtown Beaufort; their whipped feta is not to be missed nor are any of their fresh seafood dishes. Also, I highly recommend sitting on their roof deck for amazing views of the water {and dolphins, if you're lucky}.

BEAUFORT GROCERY

117 Queen Street, Beaufort, NC 28516

dinner

We happened to be in town for the 4th Annual Beaufort Wine and Food Craft Beer Dinner, which was held in the charming backyard space of Beaufort Grocery. So, while I didn't technically eat inside the restaurant, from the delicious food they served at the beer dinner, I can safely recommend this restaurant as a great spot to eat.



Bonus points if you just so happen to be in town for their next craft beer dinner...highly recommend going, especially if you love trying local beers and supporting a good cause (the dinner helps raise funds to support hurricane disaster relief throughout North Carolina).

34 DEGREES NORTH

2440 Lennoxville Road, Beaufort, NC 28516

lunch, dinner, drinks, weekend brunch

We stopped by this spot, located in the beautiful Beaufort Hotel, for lunch post-kayaking. The space is bright, there's live jazz playing on the deck during weekend brunch, the cocktails do not disappoint (They were some of my favorite of our whole trip! Try the 34 Degrees of Separation...even if you don't like bourbon, you'll love this drink!) and they have a huge menu with tons of great options (The club sandwich was delish!).

LA PERLA

305 Front St, Beaufort, NC 28516

dinner

We ended our trip with dinner at this charming and delectable Spanish-meets-Southern restaurant. From the drinks (Get the hibiscus margarita!) all the way to dessert (Hello divinely delicious chocolate cake!), everything was perfect. Definitely don't miss the grilled octopus to start, the gnome's caps are also yummy and I loved trying the local trigger fish (It was served in such a unique way.)

CRU

120 Turner St, Beaufort, NC 28516

coffee, wine, small bites

I got a delicious iced dirty chai at this spot which serves as both a coffee shop and wine bar. You can also grab smaller items (think pastries, sandwiches, etc.) for breakfast or lunch.



3// THE VINTAGE SHOPPING

BEAUFORT ANTIQUES (121 Turner St #2138, Beaufort, NC 28516) is an actual gold mine of treasures. This little gem of a shop is packed with all kinds of pieces all at reasonable prices (I got several pairs of vintage gold earrings for under \$30! Aka a legit miracle that would never happen in NYC or LA!). If you like vintage items, from jewelry to home goods, do not miss this place. My only regret- that I didn't bring an extra suitcase with me so I could buy alllll the goods. Don't be like me, bring an extra bag!

And if vintage shopping isn't quite your thing, don't worry, there are plenty of other cute shops around town. Check out **BEAUFORT LINEN CO.** (331 Front St., Beaufort, NC 28516) for all cute things home and fashion (I got some fun bamboo hoop earrings!) and don't miss the most adorable flower shop, **BEAUFORT IN BLOOM** (901 Ann St, Beaufort, NC 28516)!





4// THE WILD HORSES

As a child, some of my favorite books were those by Marguerite Henry. Since I grew up riding horses, I was especially fascinated by the ones where the narrative revolved around wild horses, books such as *Misty of Chincoteague* and *Stormy, Misty's Foal*. Despite my fascination with the books, I had somehow never made it to actually see horses in the wild. So, when I found out they could be spotted in The Crystal Coast area, I was beyond ecstatic. While I know it's not the same place setting as Marguerite's books, wild horses are wild horses and I'm just so thrilled I was finally able to see them with my own eyes.

You can typically spot **the wild horses of the Crystal Coast** on Shackleford Banks or the Rachel Carson Preserve, which is where we spotted them while we were kayaking in the area {hence why I didn't have my camera and the only picture I have of the horses is an iPhone shot}. Guided tours to view them are also available. However you choose to see them, just make sure you see them. It truly is so special to view such majestic animals in the wild.



THE GREAT THING ABOUT THIS AREA IS THAT THERE ARE TRULY ARE THINGS FOR EVERYONE TO DO AND ENJOY. FROM ACTIVE THINGS, TO ONES THAT ARE MORE RELAXING, TO ONES FILLED WITH HISTORY, I GUARANTEE THAT YOU WILL BE ANYTHING BUT BORED WHEN YOU'RE IN THE CRYSTAL COAST.

BIKE TOURS

If you're looking for a great way to see Beaufort (and get in a little exercise while you're at it) book a **Hungry Town Bike Tour**. We did the Nicholas Sparks themed one, A Ride to Remember, which I personally was ecstatic about since *A Walk to Remember* is one of my all-time favorite books and movies. On the tour, you not only get to see the town, but you also get to see specific spots that either inspired scenes in the story, or where scenes in the movie were filmed. Such a fun activity, especially if you are on a girls' trip!

WATER SPORTS

Get out on the water and enjoy exploring the Crystal Coast from a different perspective. **Beaufort Paddle** offers kayaking and paddle boarding rentals as well as a variety of tours (great for groups). It was so fun kayaking out to the Rachel Carson Preserve, seeing dolphins along the way, and then looking back at the charming waterfront of Beaufort. A few notes- do plan several hours for a touring make sure you wear things that you don't mind getting wet (aka old tennis shoes and a swimsuit).

THE BEACHES

With over 85 miles of shoreline in the area, there is no shortage of beaches to be found. I loved the one right by our house as well as the pristine ones on the Rachel Carson Preserve that we stopped at while kayaking. Go for a sunrise or sunset walk or run or pack a picnic and post up for the day and don't definitely don't forget to grab a few of the pretty seashells as a souvenir.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

If you hop on the **Island Express Ferry**, you can head over to **Cape Lookout National Seashore** and see the lighthouse along with the beautiful beaches. This is also a great spot to get a glimpse of the wild horses.



A FEW LAST NOTES...

THE BEST TIME TO VISIT // While summer is the obvious choice for a beach getaway, late September, when I was there, was perfect. It was still hot enough that it felt like summer, but hurricane season is at its tail end and there aren't tons of tourists or visitors so everything is more accessible. Highly recommend a fall escape to the area!

WHAT TO PACK // It's a very laid-back, casual area so you don't need anything overly fancy. I suggest plenty of maxi dresses, shorts, t-shirts and definitely don't forget swimsuits. Also, you can bring heels, but they definitely aren't necessary and you can easily get away with sandals, flip flops and sneakers.

HOW TO GET HERE // Fly into Charlotte (It's a quick flight from the NYC area), then hop on a quick flight to the Coastal Carolina Regional Airport in New Bern. From there, it is about an hour drive, depending on where you're staying, and, while you can get a taxi or car service, I'd recommend renting a car so you can easily get around the area for the duration of your stay.

