

Southern Living®

This Beach Has The Clearest Water—And Whitest Sand—In North Carolina



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CRYSTAL COAST

Atlantic Coast beaches have a charm all their own, but they don't often get the same level of gushing admiration that their counterparts on the Gulf Coast are so accustomed to. While Florida beaches get praised for [looking like the Caribbean](#) and having [out-of-this-world blue waters](#), beaches in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia have to work a little harder to earn their fans.

However, there's one beach in North Carolina that has sand and surf to rival even the dreamiest of Gulf Coast beaches, and it's [Emerald Isle](#). Part of the 85-mile barrier island that's affectionately known as the Crystal Coast or the Southern Outer Banks, Emerald Isle is the kind of laidback family getaway that makes you want to return year after year. Its white sand and crystal-clear, emerald waters (hence its name) are a bit of a best-kept secret, but once you discover their beauty, you'll be devoted—hook, line, and sinker.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CRYSTAL COAST

What Makes Emerald Isle's Water And Sand Different?

While the water at beaches in other parts of the state are typically murky and appear dark blue or even brownish in color, the water off the coast of Emerald Isle is much clearer and takes on a signature blue-green hue. Last summer, North Carolina locals were astounded by a rare but entirely natural phenomenon that caused the ocean along the Crystal Coast to sparkle with a brilliant blue radiance that folks previously only associated with places like the Bahamas or Turks and Caicos.

The phenomenon, caused by an uncharacteristically low number of tropical storms and hurricanes coupled with unseasonably light offshore winds, allowed sediment to settle closer to the ocean floor and the water to exhibit its true vibrant turquoise color. During the middle of the day when the sun was brightest, visitors swore they had been transported to a faraway tropical island.

While Emerald Isle's sand can't claim the same sugar-white distinction that Florida's quartz sand beaches can, its stretches of shoreline do trend toward the light khaki and even off-white, which is a far cry from the mineral-heavy, graham cracker-colored sand found on other beaches in North Carolina.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CRYSTAL COAST

How To Experience Emerald Isle's Water

Spending consecutive days alternating between sunbathing in the soft sand, then taking a dip in the sea when it gets too hot, is a must. But once you've mastered the fine art of "beaching" in Emerald Isle, you may want to graduate to exploring the ocean from new angles. See the water from above by hanging ten with a surf lesson from [Hot Wax Surf Shop](#) or testing your balance on a stand-up paddle board. When you're ready to dive deeper, you can experience Emerald Isle from underwater by snorkeling or diving. The clear conditions and light-colored water make it easy to spot all kinds of fish and marine life, as well as remnants from long-ago shipwrecks in an area that's known as The Graveyard of the Atlantic.