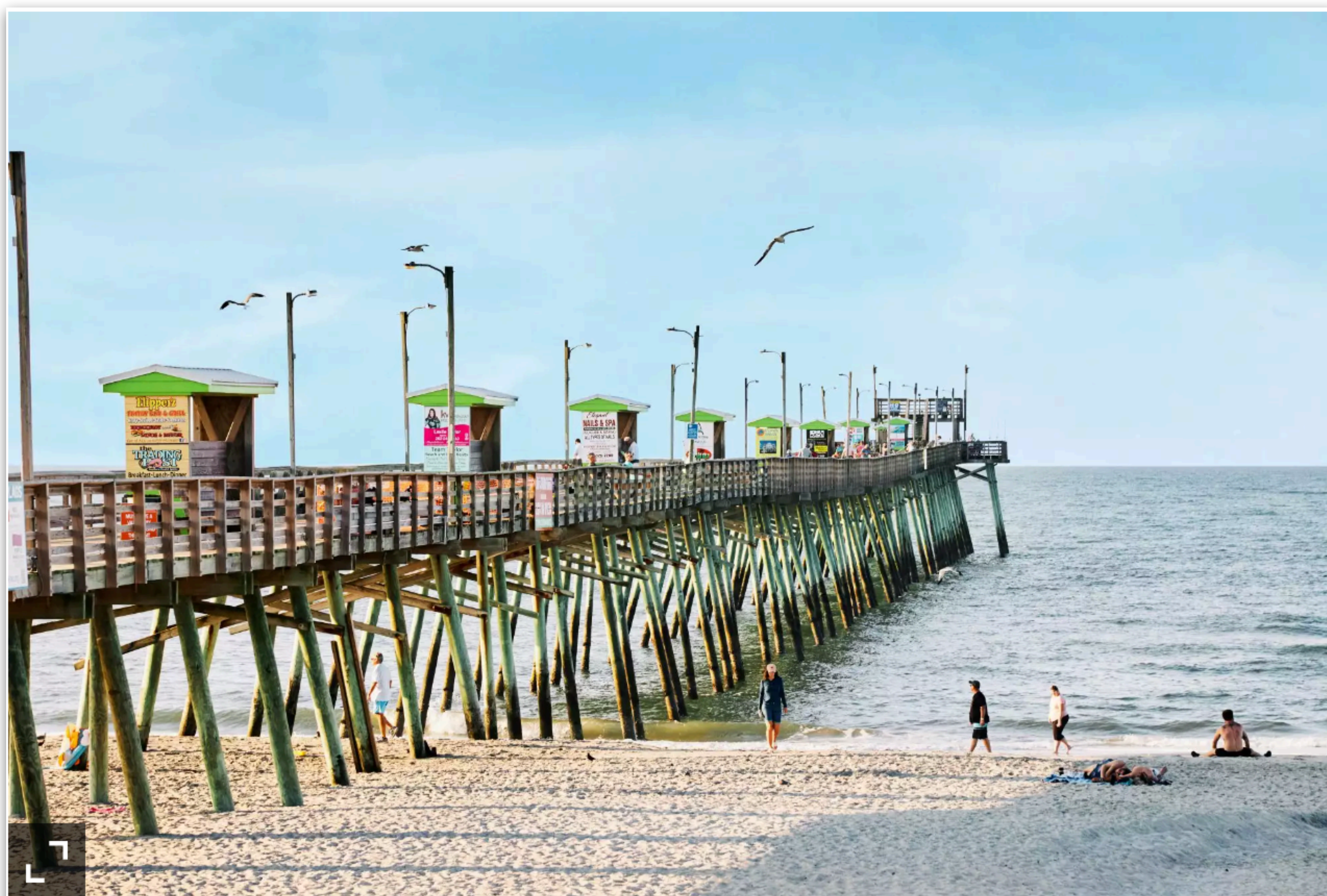


Emerald Isle Is the Tiny North Carolina Beach Town That Inspires a Slowdown

The gem on the Crystal Coast tailor-made for family time.



Enjoy seaside treats, including the view from Bogue Inlet Pier. | CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS

By [Mary Catherine McAnnally Scott](#) | May 20, 2022

Emerald Isle, North Carolina, confesses its obvious charms—brilliant blue-green waters, a verdant maritime forest, and lush marshes—in its name. From its place on the Crystal Coast, an 85-mile-long barrier island also known as the Southern Outer Banks, its beauty is apparent. But Emerald Isle's most enduring magic reveals itself a bit more slowly. The seaside spot first hooked Lane Harris, who has been a permanent resident for more than 25 years, because it was a haven for the whole family. She recalls seeing her parents taking beach walks, freezing ice cream with her mother on the dock, and watching her children go crabbing. "Right there, we had three generations all enjoying the day," says Harris.

Although it's a short drive from the mainland hustle, Emerald Isle is the kind of place that inspires a slowdown. Here, fat-tire bicycles seem to outnumber cars, hours are measured in sunscreen applications and tugs on fishing lines, and island nightlife belongs to nesting sea turtles. In other words, there's no place that's built for families quite like this gem on the Crystal Coast.



CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS

Vacation Like a Local

When it comes to experiencing the town like a year-round resident, renting a beach house is your top bet. For extended families committed to togetherness, area real estate companies (such as [Emerald Isle Realty](#) and [Bluewater Vacation Rentals and Real Estate](#)) plus websites like Airbnb and Vrbo offer hundreds of spacious beachfront houses—some with as many as 10 or 12 bedrooms and a pool. If you are traveling with a smaller crew, more modest cottages, duplexes, and condos are available. You can also find homes with elevators to help accommodate people with mobility challenges. There are pet-friendly properties too.

Play Outside

Emerald Isle's over 12 miles of beaches are the stars of the show. Even if you're not staying in an oceanfront rental, spending the day on the shore is easy because the area has more than 75 public beach accesses. Head to The Point on the westernmost tip of the island to bask in wide banks of warm sand; it's the ideal spot for shelling, walking, and watching the sunset.

You can leave the car parked in your driveway and cruise around town on two wheels. Bring your own bicycles, or rent them from family-owned [Hwy 58 Bikes](#), which will deliver them right to your doorstep. Set out to cycle along the 11-mile paved bike path that runs from the small town of Indian Beach to The Point.



Left: CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS



Right: CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS

Send the fishers in your group down to Bogue Inlet Pier, where they can buy bait and tackle on-site, or you can treat them to a chartered ocean trip with [Emerald Isle Adventures](#). If you're looking for something that's a little more peaceful, try yoga on the water with [Emerald Isle Paddle Tours](#).

Fill Up on Fresh Catches

Seafood is king here, and you will find so many ways to savor it. Meet on the pier for a family meal at Surf's Up Grill & Bar. (Don't miss out on the grouper sandwich.) For date night, start with a cocktail from Kathryn's Bistro & Martini Bar, which serves more than 30 variations on the classic drink. Then pop down the street to Caribsea for dinner; the fish is local and sustainably sourced.



Left: Order a Caribsea Collins | CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS



Right: There is plenty to choose from at Caribsea | CREDIT: PETER FRANK EDWARDS

If you're in town on a summer Thursday, head to the weekly outdoor concert series, EmeraldFest, for live music. Afterward, wander over to Flipperz Family Bar & Grill to order oysters and apps plus a cold beer.

In Emerald Isle, worries wash out with the tides and hospitality always includes making room for one more fishing pole on the pier. It's a place where you can invite the whole family knowing that all of them—cousins, toddlers, grandparents, and everyone in between—will fit right in.