

The Charlotte Observer

9 Reasons to Vacation on The Crystal Coast

Spanning 85-miles of North Carolina's beautiful coastline, The Crystal Coast connects historic Beaufort to lovely Emerald Isle. Here you will find beautiful beaches, an historic coastal town, a lighthouse to climb, and plenty of outdoor fun to make The Crystal Coast your family's next vacation destination.

1. Seeing the Wild Horses



For over 400 years, pony-sized horses have lived on a string of barrier islands just off Beaufort. The centuries-old herd of around 115 wild horses can be found on the shores of Shackleford Banks and likely are descended from Spanish horses. Pack some water and a picnic lunch and then take the ferry over to observe these beautiful animals. Low tide is the best time to see large groups of the wild horses.

2. Climbing Cape Lookout Lighthouse



Known as The Diamond Lady, exploring Cape Lookout Lighthouse is a spectacular experience. To get there, you have to take a ferry over to the Cape Lookout National Seashore. On the ride over, the captain gives a brief history of the area. Once there, you can scale the 216 steps to the top, learn a bit of history at Keepers' Quarters Museum, and walk around one of the top US national park beaches.

3. Bike Riding on a Hungry Town Tour



Hop on a colorful beach cruiser with a very personable husband and wife team who love sharing all the wonderful offerings of their beautiful town, Beaufort. From culinary highlights to a Nicholas Spark's inspired ride, there are a variety of bike tours. You can customize a tour just for your family. Call to arrange a personalized tour and check in with equipment needs. Depending on the age and height of your children, you might need to bring along their own bike and helmet to go on a tour. Beaufort is a flat terrain, so it should be suited for everyone's abilities.

4. Taking in North Carolina Maritime Museum



At this free admission museum, your kids can view artifacts from Blackbeard's Queen Anne's Revenge ship such as cannons, fragments of weapons, and ammunition along with a ship's bell. On Conservation Wednesdays visitors can watch lab technicians examine and clean artifacts from Blackbeard's ship. Kids can go on a scavenger hunt throughout the museum, see a sperm whale skeleton along with its heart, and learn about the history of North Carolina surfing.

5. Trying Out a Salt Water Activity



To explore a new water sport or gain some experience in new waters, book your adventure with Beaufort Paddle. Get a standup paddleboard lesson for a more challenging experience or slip into a kayak for a relaxed adventure. The owner, Rod is a great guy with a laidback disposition – the perfect combination of a beach-owned business.

6. Roaming Around Fort Macon



At this free admission attraction, your family can explore an historic fort that was used in the War Between the States and World War II. Restored quarters offer a look into the lives of officers and soldiers. Guided tours are available.

7. Dining at Delicious Restaurants



Book a reservation at Pescara Wood Oven Kitchen, a Tuscan Italian restaurant with a huge emphasize on serving up homemade dishes using local seafood. Dine at Front Street Grill where the chef truly embraces the dock to dish concept by using 90% local seafood. They add a unique twist by incorporating Caribbean flavors to many of their menu items. Enjoy delicious tapas and crafted cocktails at Circa 81 where the passionate owner has been cooking, since he was a boy.

8. Checking Out the North Carolina Aquarium



Watch sharks along with a variety of sea life swim around a sunken submarine in the Living Shipwreck exhibit. You'll also see a rare white sea turtle and observe playful river otters. Enhance our visit with the Free daily programs, animal encounters, and talking with divers in the Living Shipwreck exhibit.

9. Booking Your Stay with Emerald Isle Realty



You will be working with a small family-owned business that has over 700 rentals choices and a team who truly care about their guests.

For more, go to crystalcoastnc.org.

Sara Kendall has traveled halfway across the globe with her kids and lived to tell about it. Stay tuned to hear about family destinations around Charlotte and beyond. Check out more of Sara's travel at her website www.latitudecrossing.com or email her at kendallwritings@gmail.com.