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Weekend Getaway: Beaufort, North Carolina

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Near the end of the summer, my family had gotten quite stir crazy and needed a change of scenery. We decided a weekend getaway to Beaufort, North Carolina, was the perfect solution. *(We took all the necessary pandemic precautions, following travel guidelines provided by the CDC.)*

Beaufort is pronounced “Bow fert” — not “Bew fert” like the coastal town in South Carolina with the same name. It’s part of North Carolina’s Southern Outer Banks, known as the Crystal Coast. It’s also North Carolina’s third oldest town. 



Grounds of Beaufort Hotel

Waterfront Stay

We rolled into town in the afternoon and quickly settled into our room at [Beaufort Hotel](#), an [Ascend Hotel Collection](#) Member. The waterfront property is situated on the site of a former menhaden fish plant. Menhaden was a thriving fishery in Beaufort. Four plants in the town employed generations of workers — boat captains and boat pilots, fish bailers, factory foremen, electricians, and others.

Choose from one of 133 rooms, all of which face south, boasting stunning vistas — particularly at sunrise and sunset. Our room looked out over the [Rachel Carson National Estuarine Research Reserve](#). It’s named for the world-renowned marine biologist, environmentalist and author. Her book *Silent Spring* and other writings prompted the advancement of the global environmental movement. The 2,315-acre nature reserve is comprised of small islands that include Town Marsh, Carrot Island, Bird Shoal and Horse Island. It’s home to varied species of flora and fauna, including more than 200 species of birds and several species of wild horses. Enjoying quiet time on our balcony looking for horses across the water was a favorite morning pastime for us.



Guest room at Beaufort Hotel

Our room provided plenty of space for the four of us and the bed was extremely comfortable. The décor reflected an upscale coastal vibe with blue and gray hues – such a relaxing atmosphere. Amenities included a flat screen TV, spacious shower, plush bathrobes, Tommy Bahama bath products and other items. **AAA Members save 10 percent on their stay at Beaufort Hotel.**

One night of our stay we enjoyed dinner at the hotel at 34° North Restaurant. I ordered the grilled cauliflower steak, served with red quinoa, seasonal vegetables and dressed with a soy vinaigrette. It was hands down the best grilled cauliflower steak I've eaten (and I order it often!). The caramelized Brussels sprouts and roasted mushrooms were also delicious. Other dishes on the menu included shrimp and grits with tasso ham red eye gravy, heritage pork chop served with Havarti potato soufflé, braised collards and bourbon glaze.

Bicycle Tour

Our first activity on our Beaufort itinerary was a bicycle tour of the town with Hungry Town Tours. Owner Betsy Cartier gave us a wonderful overview of the history of Beaufort. We peddled through and learned more about the historic district, which earned a spot on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Betsy pointed out restaurants and other points of interest. One stop was the Old Burying Ground, located in the town's historic district. It's Beaufort's oldest cemetery, established in 1724. The cemetery holds more than 200 headstones dating back to before the Civil War, as well as some 150 monuments dating between 1865 to 1900. The northwest corner is the oldest section. The oldest graves are marked with brick, shell

wooden slabs because stone was too hard to come by. Make a point to visit the final resting place of the girl in the rum barrel. She died at sea when she and her father were returning to Beaufort from England. The father had promised his mother she would bring her back home, but the custom in those days was if anyone died on a ship they were to be buried at sea. The only thing on board that could preserve a body was rum. The mother was heartbroken. Not wanting to upset her further, he arranged for his daughter to be buried in the barrel of rum she was brought home in. **AAA Members receive a 10 percent discount on their Hidden Beaufort and Historic Beaufort Walking tours.**



Cape Lookout National Seashore and lighthouse

Things to Do

One afternoon we enjoyed a dolphin cruise with [Lookout Cruises](#). They also offer sunset sails, moonlight cruises and Cape Lookout cruises. We sailed up the Newport River in search of dolphin. Along the way, our captain shared the area's history and pointed out landmarks to add to our "go see" list. Passengers were well spaced out, hand sanitizer was provided and we were comfortable with the health and safety precautions taken.

Make sure to add a visit to the 56-mile long [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#) to your Beaufort itinerary. A quick ferry ride will take you over. You can take a large passenger ferry or opt for a small passenger ferry. Find the list of operators on the [National Park Service website](#). It's easy to spend a full day here. Lounge on the beach, watch horses and look for shells. The lighthouse is currently closed as a COVID-19 precaution. Other public buildings like the Keepers' Quarters Museum, restrooms at the lighthouse and other areas are currently closed for the season, but should reopen in March. Although we didn't have time

explore Shackleford Banks, it's one of the top things on my list to do when I return to Beaufort, North Carolina. It's part of Lookout National Seashore. It's home to a bevy of feral Banker Ponies that are believed to have descended from Spanish mustangs shipwrecked in the 1500s.



Shackleford Banks

I also recommend a visit to [Fort Macon State Park](#). Opened in 1936, the park welcomes about 1.3 million people a year, making it North Carolina's second most visited state park. You'll find a restored Civil War-era fort, as well as a well-curated coastal education center. The fort overlooks the shoreline, which is ideal for soaking up the sun, beachcombing or fishing. Because our visit to Fort Macon occurred during the pandemic, exhibits were closed and guided tours were not available. We enjoyed walking around the outside of the fort, though. The gift shop was open, too, so we were able to snag some souvenirs.

More Diversions

When my daughters and I travel together, we always carve time out to check out the area's thrift stores. Here are a few to consider:

- [Loaves and Fishes](#), 1700 Live Oak Street (Beaufort)
- [Hope Mission Thrift Store](#), 1205 Arendell Street (Morehead City)

- [Salvation Army Carteret County](#) 2800 Bridges Street (Morehead)



Where We Ate

For such a brief visit, we managed to sample a good variety of Beaufort's restaurant offerings (and enjoyed them all!).

- [Mezcalito Grill](#) – 521 Front Street: All of us enjoyed our meals here. Tables were well spaced out to accommodate distancing, too. I tucked into a vegetarian taco (sans cheese) and it was one of the best I've had. My family ordered quesadillas and fish tacos and they loved both. Also on the menu: Mexican style hot dogs, fajitas, enchiladas, chic wings, bowls and a ton of other yummy things. Their margaritas are on point, too.
- [Aqua](#) – 144 Middle Lane: Small plates, tapas, salads and desserts – there are a lot of items on their menu here and all delicious. I loved the atmosphere and our service was top notch. Don't miss the cast iron seared crab cake, Wag beef sliders, tomato tart or shrimp and country ham pasta.
- [Black Sheep](#) – 510 Front Street. One night we decided to order takeout and chill in the room, so we ordered pizza. A roasted vegetable pizza was to die for. More brick oven pizza options on the menu: margherita, four cheese, charcuterie pie, pulled pork and others. They also serve up sandwiches (Cuban, Beaufort cheesesteak and a house-made pita) and salads (roasted golden beets and Caesar).

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