

Built in 1872, the Bodie Island Lighthouse is 48 metres tall and is climbable.



# Pirates of the Carolinas

Four days of history, beauty and adventure touring south from the Outer Banks to Beaufort, SC

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**T**he view from the sand dunes at Jockey's Ridge State Park is one you don't want to miss.

A vast panorama spreads out from the top of the tallest natural dune on the east coast. The long arc of shifting sand that is the Outer Banks of North Carolina are laid out in a living map — small coastal villages, lighthouses, the long beaches, the glittering Atlantic.

The adventure begins with a turn off a busy interstate and onto the smaller routes tracing the coastline of the Carolinas. We have four days with nothing to do but slow down and touch the history, food, landmarks and people of small community life along the shoreline.

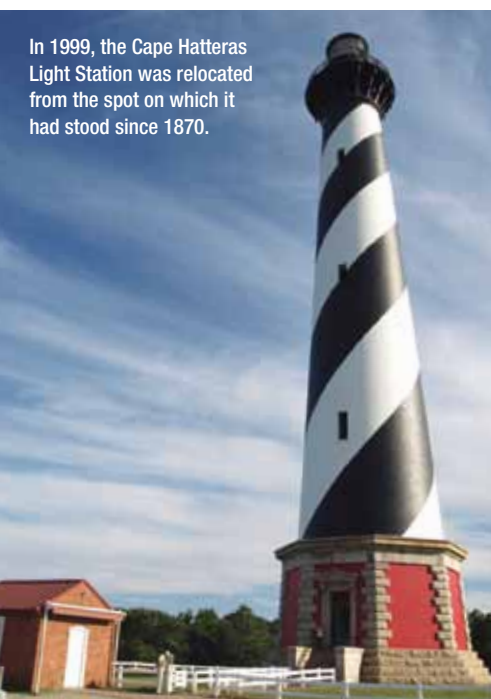


There's easy beach access across the dunes at Jockey's Ridge State Park.

Climb every lighthouse you can; the views make it well worth the effort.



In 1999, the Cape Hatteras Light Station was relocated from the spot on which it had stood since 1870.



“Colonial Spanish Mustangs” were brought to the Outer Banks nearly 500 years ago.



## DAY 1

### Outer Banks

Nicknamed the Graveyard of the Atlantic, the waters off the Outer Banks are littered with hundreds of shipwrecks, and the curved barrier islands are pinpointed with dozens of lifesaving stations and lighthouses. It was not always so. In villages like early 19<sup>th</sup> century Nags Head the local shipwrecks could be a lucrative business. They tied lanterns to the necks of nags and walked them up and down the beach. The ship captains would see the moving lights and think the way was clear.

Crashing into the treacherous shoals sealed the fate of many a vessel. In the 1870s, a series of towering lighthouses was built to warn of the coastline's danger. In the village of Corolla, the red brick **Currituck Beach Light Station** ([currituckbeachlight.com](http://currituckbeachlight.com); late March through November; free) emits a reliable flash, piercing the darkness at the northern reach of the Outer Banks. A 220-step climb to the observation

Boles, a park ranger at the **Wright Brothers National Memorial** ([nps.gov/wrbr](http://nps.gov/wrbr); adults US\$4). "They were looking for wind but they were also looking for privacy — they were developing proprietary material."

Inside the visitor centre are reproductions of the Wright Brothers' flying machines, the wind tunnel used to measure lift, and grainy archival video and photos. Orville and Wilbur were bicycle builders and understood the mechanics of moving parts and forces like propulsion. "A soaking wet Wright Brother weighed about 150 pounds," Boles said. "They broke out the slide rule and calculated that if they made the wing four inches longer, the craft would be stable."

On December 17, 1903 their calculations struck aviation gold. The world's first successful heavier-than-air powered flight along a remote, sandy beach changed world history.

## DAY 2

### Ocracoke Island

The ferry from Hatteras Inlet to Ocracoke Island gently slipped into the dock after an hour's sail effectively snapping our connection to the north and nudging the relaxation dial up a notch. In describing the remote nature of their home, Ocracoke islanders like to say, "If the world ended tomorrow, Ocracoke wouldn't know for a week."

What is now out-of-the-way haven for seekers of fishing, beachcombing, birding and solitude with a thriving art community was once a revolutionary-era route to the rich, major inland ports.

"It's never been a fishing village although people think of it that way," explained Al Scarborough, a volunteer at the **Ocracoke Preservation Society Museum** ([site.ocracokepreservation.org](http://site.ocracokepreservation.org); open seasonally). "The first settlers in the 1700s were the pilots who guided schooners through the inlet. They were the lifeblood of this community."

When modern amenities like electricity, a reverse osmosis water system and regular ferry service came along, the tourists followed to find their little slice of nirvana.

Perhaps the island's most infamous visitor was the pirate Blackbeard. Ocracoke is where he met his demise in 1718 while anchored at nearby Teach's Hole. Local guide and captain of the schooner **Windfall II** ([schoonerwindfall.com](http://schoonerwindfall.com); April to October; sunset cruise US\$40) Rob Temple is an authority on the buccaneer. "Nobody's sure what his real name was or where he came from. The colonists of North Carolina were concerned that Blackbeard was comfortable hanging out at the outlet." When the pirate was finally cornered by the Royal Navy, he led them on a chase through shallow waters before being killed by five bullet and 20 sword wounds. Legend has it that the pirate's



The Wright brothers launched the first powered aircraft at Kitty Hawk in 1903.

platform gives sweeping views over marshland, dunes, the sound and the Atlantic coastline. To the north, a 20-kilometre stretch of beach and dune is protected as part of the Currituck National Wildlife Refuge. To the south, the black-and-white striped **Bodie Island Lighthouse** and **Cape Hatteras Lighthouse** ([nps.gov/caha](http://nps.gov/caha); late April through early October; adults US\$8) still blink as beacons of protection along the shoreline. Both are historic parts of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The spiral staircase that winds inside the Cape Hatteras station is a breathtaking 12-storey climb up the nation's tallest brick lighthouse, with views to match.

The Outer Banks — Kitty Hawk in particular — claims bragging rights as the Birthplace of Aviation. "In 1900 the brothers wrote the weather bureau asking for the windiest spot in the country," explained Josh

headless body swam seven times around the ship. Locals doubt it could have managed more than two!

## DAY 3

### Beaufort, North Carolina and the Down East communities

To this day, Blackbeard's tales of piracy echo up and down the North Carolina coastline. For pirates and privateers, the merchant ships following the north-south current of the Gulf Stream were easy pickings, creating a golden opportunity for looting.

In the historic mainland town of Beaufort, the **North Carolina Maritime Museum** ([ncmaritimemuseums.com](http://ncmaritimemuseums.com); free) shows how coastal villages provided a demand for the types of black market goods the pirates could supply. The passing merchant ships and needs of the colonists created the perfect storm for an era marked by piracy.

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In colonial times, there was a push to attract residents to new communities up and down the coastline. "Hungry Town is a historic name for Beaufort," explained David Cartier who operates **Hungry Town Tours** ([hungrytowntours.com](http://hungrytowntours.com); from US\$20). "They were not hungry for food but hungry for settlers."

David and his wife Betsy lead pedalling and walking tours through the Beaufort Historic District, a part of town liberally peppered with sweet 18<sup>th</sup>-century coastal cottages and grand West Indian-style homes built by shipbuilders to withstand punishing storms.

"Beaufort has been isolated, so it's kept its charm," David said. The main thoroughfare — Front Street — is lined with independent shops, small eateries and artisan studios.

A half-hour drive east of town, staying true to the coastline, is the region called Down East — a collection of small maritime villages tied to the history and traditions of the seafaring life: boat building, whaling, fishing and the craft of decoy carving.

On Harkers Island, at the **Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center** ([coresound.com](http://coresound.com); US\$5),

a local group of skilled carvers partner with the museum to revive the art of carving duck decoys. They work in a wood shop on the main floor of the museum — a building designed to resemble a hybrid between a hunting lodge and a traditional coastal lifesaving station.

World-renowned carver Walter "Brother" Gaskill sat surrounded by blocks of tupelo, cork and juniper as well as an arsenal of tools for chopping, carving and shaping. "We start out with a square block and make patterns," he explained in the brogue characteristic of Down East. "Then, what don't look like a duck, you whittle off."

## DAY 4

### Beaufort, South Carolina and Gullah culture

Into South Carolina, the oceanfront roadways seem swallowed by the saltwater marshes, dunes and tidal creeks known as the Low Country. Before the building of causeways, some 150 tiny sea islands were isolated, insulating the unique Gullah culture along with the traditions and linguistic patterns rooted in the rich African heritage of slave communities.

By 1810, plantation slaves made up almost 90 percent of the parish population, leaving a cultural mark that is still survives. Their history is preserved at the **Penn Center** ([penncenter.com](http://penncenter.com)), the first school in the nation to teach freed African slaves. Now a National Historic Landmark District, the school celebrates a place of transition — freedom from slavery and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century fight for civil rights and social justice.

Standing sentinel to the Sea Islands, the Beaufort is known for its antebellum homes (it escaped the shelling of the Civil War), art galleries, boutiques and well-preserved waterfront. It's a smaller, more walkable version of its big sister city, Charleston.

The architecture of the 300-year-old town has been irresistible bait for film scouts; its laneways, gracious mansions and oceanfront are the backdrop for many well known Hollywood films including *Forrest Gump*, *The Big Chill* and *The Prince of Tides*.

Named Best Small Southern Town by *Southern Living*, a Top 25 Small City Arts Destination by *American Style*, and a Top 50 Adventure Town by *National Geographic Adventure*, South Carolina's second-oldest city is custom made for strolling. The streets of The Point neighbourhood are lined with opulent architecture sheltered among Spanish moss-draped oaks — some so large and old that thick branches bend to touch the ground.

In Beaufort, the coastline journey came to an end. Sometimes, like this time, a turn off the busy highway is well worth taking. ■





TOP ROW: Laid-back Ocracoke Island is the perfect place to do as the natives do: fish and bird-watch.



The Carolina coast is one of the best regions on the Atlantic for "just-caught" seafood.



A ferry takes passengers across Hatteras Inlet to Ocracoke Island.



Expect opulent architecture sheltered among Spanish moss-draped oaks in Beaufort, SC.



Local artists have revived the art of carving duck decoys on Harkers Island.