

Ready to explore the North Carolina coast? Start with the facts below.

- North Carolina's Atlantic coastline runs 320 miles, second in length (behind Florida) among East Coast states.
- The Pamlico Sound, one of eight major North Carolina [sounds](#), is the largest lagoon along the East Coast at 80 miles long and 15 to 20 miles wide.
- Three capes (Hatteras, Lookout and Fear) extend from the barrier islands that line the state's Atlantic coast. Winds, waves and currents reshape the islands and inlets.
- Near each cape, underwater sandbars create hazards for ships. At Cape Hatteras, the north-flowing Gulf Stream and south-flowing Labrador Current meet at the infamous Diamond Shoals, which have claimed 2,000 ships and earned the designation "[Graveyard of the Atlantic](#)."
- Alexander Hamilton [advocated](#) for the original Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, which began service in 1803.
- [Jockey's Ridge](#) in Nags Head is the tallest living sand dune system on the East Coast. Depending on winds and weather, the dune can rise as high as 60 feet.
- Coastal winds brought [Orville and Wilbur Wright](#) to the Outer Banks, where they launched mankind's first powered flight on Dec. 17, 1903.
- Hatteras and Ocracoke were a single island until a violent gale created Hatteras Inlet in 1846. They've been separate islands ever since.
- The International Dark Sky Association certified Cape Lookout National Seashore as a [Dark Sky Park](#) in December 2021. Travelers can pitch their tents directly under the stars.
- The Cape Lookout Lighthouse has a diagonal-checked daymark whose pattern aligns with black diamonds when viewed north/south and white diamonds for east/west.
- From fall to spring, beachgoers can watch the sun rise and set from the same point on North Carolina's south-facing beaches on the [Crystal Coast](#) and the [Brunswick Islands](#).
- Cape Fear is the southernmost tip of North Carolina. Placed in the Smith Island Land Trust, it will never be developed.
- Old Baldy, as the Bald Head Island Lighthouse is fondly known, is North Carolina's oldest standing lighthouse. Completed in 1817, it was built to help ships avoid Frying Pan Shoals on their way to the Cape Fear River. It was decommissioned in 1935.

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