

RALEIGH, N.C. (June 21, 2023) — For travelers tuned in to the call of the water, Visit North Carolina rolls out [Dream Big in Small Town NC](#) on the Inner Banks, a region shaped by a far-reaching river and a history-making sound. The initiative arrives with a [sweepstakes](#) that showcases hurry-free destinations with wide-open beauty, water-based adventure and unexpected experiences.

“Now is the perfect time to discover destinations along the Albemarle Sound and the Roanoke River,” said Wit Tuttell, executive director of Visit NC. “For travelers visiting towns on the Albemarle, this summer’s launch of [Harbor Towns Cruises](#) will enhance the experience with tours and between-town trips. And 2023’s [Year of the Trail](#) celebration draws attention to the newly designated [Roanoke River State Trail](#) and its connect-the-dots [River Towns](#).”

Dream Big in Small Town NC, created by the General Assembly as the Rural Tourism Recovery Pilot Program, targets 16 counties at risk for population loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative aims to boost local economies with an infusion of visitor spending plus an introduction to the quality of life in under-the-radar locations. The initiative targets [Chowan](#), [Gates](#), [Hertford](#), [Martin](#), [Perquimans](#), [Tyrrell](#) and [Washington](#) counties for the Inner Banks following previous promotions of designated counties in the Scenic Mountains and Northeast Lakes & Rivers region.

Travelers who want to explore the Inner Banks destinations might start by entering the [sweepstakes](#) for a chance to win:

- A \$1,000 voucher from program partner [Airbnb](#).
- Three \$100 gift cards for a choice of restaurants, shops and activities including [Harbor Town Cruises](#), [Native Girl Kayaking](#), [Beechwood Country Club](#) and [Old Colony Smokehouse](#).
- A \$500 gift card from Visit NC to assist with travel expenses.

Scenic beauty, singular attractions and intriguing histories shape the Inner Banks towns that have blossomed in the homeland of the Meherrin, Chowanoke and other Native American tribes. Traveling among the destinations, nature lovers can find opportunities to spot black bears, Tundra swans and alligators while history aficionados can immerse themselves in a host of stories, ranging from the feats of Edenton socialite [Penelope Barker](#), the first American woman to organize political action, to Hertford’s [Jim “Catfish” Hunter](#), the Baseball Hall of Famer.

“Anytime I go to Hertford, I stop at the [Catfish Hunter Memorial](#) and then head to [Captain Bob’s](#) for barbecue,” said Tuttell, a die-hard baseball fan and barbecue aficionado. He also notes that Williamston has a [city park](#) named for its hometown hero, Hall of Famer Gaylord Perry.

Harbor Towns Cruises, launching this summer with a pair of custom-built Hysucats (hydrofoil-supported catamarans), will make good use of the placid Albemarle Sound with tours and ferry trips that include the Dream Big communities of [Hertford](#), [Edenton](#), [Plymouth](#) and [Columbia](#). The destinations brim with local character that complements the expansive beauty of the sound, the largest freshwater lagoon in North America.

“Travelers fall in love with Edenton and other Inner Banks destinations,” said Erienne Mizell, Visit Edenton’s tourism director. “Beyond the romance of the water, people connect with our stories and often want to become part of the places that have seen so much history built amid such beauty. Our free parking and complimentary two-night boat docking speaks to the hospitality that defines our community. It is that same spirit that flows into our passion for preservation, which in Edenton includes everything from our welcome center at the [Penelope Barker House](#) to the restored 17th-century ice house that is now [The Herringbone on the Waterfront](#).”

Like Hertford, Edenton enjoys a place on both the Harbor Towns lineup and as a designated river town on the Roanoke River State Trail, which was officially designated in November 2021. At 410 miles, the Roanoke is North Carolina's longest river, loved by locals and visitors alike for fishing, paddling and platform camping. [Roanoke River Partners](#), which is based in a former [Rosenwald School](#) in Hamilton, helps adventure seekers connect with [Native Girl Kayaking](#), [Frog Hollow Outfitters](#), and other rental and guide services.

State parks, museums and singular attractions convey the region's special sense of place. In Gatesville, old-growth cypress trees draped in moss make [Merchants Millpond State Park](#) an enchanted forest, and it's the American alligator's northernmost habitat. Between Plymouth and Columbia, [Pettigrew State Park](#) displays centuries-old dugout canoes dredged up from Phelps Lake. Nearby [Somerset Place State Historic Site](#) presents a comprehensive and realistic view of 19th-century life on a large North Carolina plantation.

In Murfreesboro, the [Brady C. Jefcoat Museum of Americana](#) features a mind-blowing collection with everything from an RCA Dog and a sofa from "Gone with the Wind" to butter churns and a dog-powered washing machine. Native American artifacts are also on view. Plymouth's [NC Black Bear Discovery Center](#) offers a lesson in the region's black bear population, the densest in the world. A five-minute walk leads to the [Port O'Plymouth Museum](#), which tells the story of the CSS Albemarle, the Confederacy's most effective ironclad ram, and its sinking in a daring nighttime raid. [Pocosin Arts School of Fine Craft](#) in Columbia is a makers mecca with classes, events and a fine craft gallery on the Scuppernon River.

"With all the dreamers who have made this region special, there's much to inspire today's travelers," Tuttell said. "These destinations are ready to welcome them."

Dream Big's latest chapter

The arrival of the Dream Big initiative in the Inner Banks region includes the sweepstakes plus a July 7 satellite media tour in Edenton. Representatives from national, regional and in-state outlets have been invited to join this virtual tour and Q&A session.

Dream Big comes with a two-facet approach to economic development: a tourism promotion to infuse revenue into local economies plus appeal to people interested in relocation. As a unit of the [Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina](#), Visit NC is coordinating Dream Big with the [N.C. Department of Commerce](#) and other private and public entities involved in growing the state's first-in-talent workforce.

Funded with \$1.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act, the initiative has a dedicated presence on [VisitNC.com](#), complete with links for job postings in the Scenic Mountains ([Graham](#), [Haywood](#), [Madison](#), [Mitchell](#) and [Yancey](#)) and Northeast Lakes & Rivers ([Edgecombe](#), [Halifax](#), [Vance](#) and [Warren](#)) as well as the Inner Banks. The Dream Big homepage also links to the Airbnb website with content to help travelers plan trips and find short-term rental properties in each region.

Beyond the exposure from the satellite media tour and sweepstakes, Dream Big will reach the traveling public via @VisitNC's social media channels. A digital content creator campaign will bring selected tastemakers to the destinations to engage followers in the local culture and lifestyle appeal for people interested in a long-term change of scenery. Program partner Airbnb, which is also promoting the campaign on its social media channels, will use its inventory of short-term rental properties to host the content creators.

"Travelers inspired by Dream Big will have an immediate positive impact on the places they go," Tuttell said. "They'll find it easy to connect with businesses that benefit from the money they spend and envision the strengthening of communities with the infusion of tax revenues. The desire for this kind of impact and an immersion in local culture emerges in research from [American Express](#) and [Booking.com](#), which underscores the alignment between the goals of Dream Big with what travelers are seeking. And when they come, they can find reasons to stay."

Note: Find photos from Dream Big destinations [here](#).

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