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**Wilmington, North Carolina and its island beaches** is a year-round destination that transcends coastal visitor experiences. Take a stroll on the scenic Riverwalk or through historic downtown, and you'll find yourself surrounded by breweries, music, unique eats, local culture and unrivaled adventures around every corner. It's just a short drive from the award-winning riverfront to the oceanfront through Wilmington's thriving midtown, where you'll find parks, gardens, museums, a water park and city amenities. Carolina, Kure and Wrightsville Beaches are well known for their beloved coastlines, but there is much more to be discovered there from farm- and sea-to-table dining to nightlife to live music. Named one of TripAdvisor's 2018 Travelers' Choice "Top Destinations on the Rise," Wilmington and Island Beaches is the perfect place to stray off course for a coastal experience like no other in the city, at the beach and beyond.

**WHAT'S NEW IN WILMINGTON**

**Getting Around**

Wilmington International Airport (ILM) started offering non-stop flights to Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth and Washington, D.C. in 2018 joining other major cities including Atlanta, Charlotte, Philadelphia and New York.

**Riverfront Development**

Visitors will find additional downtown shopping options at the mixed-use River Place when it opens in late 2019. Located adjacent to Port City Marina, plans are well underway for North Waterfront Park. Features will include a children's play area, splash plaza, beer gardens, extensive open lawn space, an inland boardwalk and connection to the Riverwalk. Concerts and performances will be managed by Live Nation.

**Home Away from Home**

ARRIVE Wilmington, formerly the Wilmingtonian Inn, opened in June with modern rooms and a new café and bar. The Aloft Coastline Hotel is under construction in the heart of the River District in downtown, with an anticipated opening in 2020. For a one-of-a-kind stay, Between the Covers Literary B&B offers guests a historic look at famous writers from North Carolina and their literary works.

**Get Educated**

During WWII, the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA participated in every major naval offensive in the Pacific. Before or after your tour, take in spectacular river views while walking the new, half-mile SECU Memorial Walkway surrounding the ship. For history or science lovers, the Cape Fear Museum recently announced its official designation as a Smithsonian Affiliate. The Museum also recently unveiled its new mobile Science Cycle program, which inspires kids to be curious, think big and experiment by bringing science and hands-on activities to them in outdoor settings.

**Beaches Abuzz**

The Town of Carolina Beach hosts guided tours of the historic Carolina Beach Boardwalk June through August. Explore Carolina Beach on foot or on two wheels along the newly opened 1.2-mile paved Island Greenway Project, or give your legs a workout on the water with Sea Legs Pedal Pub. At Kure Beach, the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher recently welcomed a new Nature Play area where children and families can climb, build, swing, jump and imagine, or learn about the three lighthouses that used to guide mariners into the New Inlet at the new Federal Point Lighthouse exhibit at Fort Fisher State Historic Site. Two of Wrightsville Beach's beloved accommodations reopened this spring with full renovations - the Blockade Runner Beach Resort and Shell Island Resort - as well as the new and improved Oceanic Restaurant and South Beach Grill. Wrightsville Beach is also kicking off development of East Salisbury Street Oceanfront Park, set to open in 2020.

**SAMPLE STORYLINES**

**Fit for a Foodie**

Wilmington and its island beaches are in the midst of a dining renaissance with new and unique eateries from river to sea. Make reservations at one of the plethora of farm-to-table restaurants that offer unique Southern fare while putting fresh ingredients first including Rx and PinPoint in Wilmington, Surf House at Carolina Beach or EAST Oceanfront and Shark Bar & Kitchen at Wrightsville Beach. In Wilmington, celebrity chefs Keith Rhodes of Bravo's "Top Chef" and Vivian Howard



of PBS' "A Chef's Life" opened their doors on the coast with Catch and Benny's Big Time Pizzeria while Jessica Cabo of Fox's "Hell's Kitchen" fame is the executive chef of EAST Oceanfront Dining in Wrightsville Beach.

### **Brew and Spirits**

What sets Wilmington's coastal craft cocktail scene apart is its lack of big-city pretension, strong focus on creativity and unique locations, including killer waterfront views. Embark on a tasting tour along the Wilmington Ale Trail featuring 15 local breweries or get a guided tour aboard the Port City Brew Bus. Sip on unique takes of classic cocktails at The Blind Elephant, a 1920's Prohibition speakeasy tucked away in a hidden alley. Indulge in award-winning drinks by mixologists, food and ambiance at manna ave. 123 or soak up the sun and waterfront views at Ocean Grill and Tiki Bar and Oceanic Restaurant at two of Wilmington's nearby beaches.

### **Active Lifestyle and Wellness**

It's easy to remain active with a jog along Wilmington's Riverwalk, around Greenfield Lake, through two state parks or on our white sandy beaches. The Gary Shell Cross City Trail is a 15-mile, off-road multi-use trail that runs from Wilmington to the Intracoastal Waterway. Throughout the year there are 5k, 10k, marathon and triathlon races. Day spas, yoga studios, salt caves, health clubs, golf courses, outfitters, skate parks, disc golf, tennis courts and hiking trails provide a variety of fitness options across the area. You'll find surf and standup paddleboard (SUP) schools, sailing, kayaking, parasailing and world tour-qualifying watersport competitions at the nearby beaches.

### **Hidden Gems**

From the river to the sea, hidden sanctuaries are bountiful. The Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden is tucked away along the Gary Shell Cross City Trail while the whimsical Minnie Evans Glass Bottle House inspires at Airlie Gardens. Just beyond the "Welcome to Wrightsville Beach" sign is Harbor Way Garden, a serene botanical gem, while Masonboro Island, an undeveloped estuarine reserve accessible only by boat, is located just off the island's shore. The Basin Trail at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area leads to a WWII bunker where the legendary Fort Fisher Hermit once resided, while Carolina Beach State Park's Venus Flytrap Trail is one of the only places in the world the carnivorous plant grows naturally.

### **Eco-Adventure, Parks and Gardens**

Wilmington and its island beaches claim nine sites on the N.C. Birding Trail. Nature tours and cruises explore maritime eco-systems, waterways, wildlife and flora. Carolina Beach State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area offer nature programs and guided hikes. Airlie Gardens showcases 67 acres of coastal botanical gardens, ponds and the venerable Airlie Oak. Greenfield Lake Park features moss-draped cypress trees, gardens, walking trails, paddle boat and canoe rentals. Oakdale Cemetery is known for funerary art, flowers, shade trees and tours.

### **Live Music and Nightlife**

Spring, summer, winter or fall, live music is at the forefront of a welcoming social scene. From country legends like Willie Nelson to indie rock groups and symphonic tributes, the variety of musical acts and venues in the area is impressive. You'll find outdoor venues, concert halls, pubs with local acts and more, with music festivals to suit every taste held throughout the year. Nightlife includes funky beach bars, dance clubs, cocktail and cigar lounges, rooftop and tiki bars, outdoor piers, riverfront and boardwalk stages and intimate listening rooms.

### **Experiences on the Water**

From the Atlantic Ocean to the Intracoastal Waterway and the Cape Fear River - with lakes, creeks, marshes and sounds in between - there are many ways to experience the area's waterways. Anglers cast their lines from the surf, piers, fishing charters and head boats. River cruises and island boat excursions, kayak and canoe tours, sailing and fishing opportunities abound. Surf schools provide surfing and standup paddleboard lessons, and outfitters offer paddling and sailing instruction.

### **Arts, Culture and Heritage**

Visitors to Wilmington and its island beaches can enjoy an array of festivals, museums, art galleries, craft fairs, performing arts events and historic sites. Wilmington's Fourth Friday Gallery Night is held monthly at local galleries. Nearby stages include historic theatres such as Thalian Hall, university auditoriums, outdoor amphitheatres, renovated churches and The Wilson Center, a 1,500-seat performing arts center. From its timeless Victorian, antebellum architecture to the influential Cape Fear River port, Wilmington has deep, historic roots. The destination is known for its Historic District, beauty, charm, Southern hospitality and nautical legacy. Witness a history lesson by land when exploring one of the largest National Register Historic Districts in the Southeast, or by sea at the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA and Fort Fisher State Historic Site.

### **Neighborhood Discoveries**

Tour Wilmington's River District via narrated trolley, horse-drawn carriage or Segway tours, or hop aboard a brew bus or river cruise. Themed walking tours focus on history, food/restaurants, film/TV locations, haunted sites and pubs. Nearby, as Wilmington's River District continues to evolve and expand, other neighborhoods are being revived. The Brooklyn Arts District has two craft breweries, a bakery, ice creamery, bottle shop, and cafés. The Castle Street Arts & Antiques District boasts antique and consignment shops, a used music store, small theatre and eateries. The newest up-and-coming neighborhood is South Front District, a former industrial area with nightlife and live music at Satellite Bar, located next to celebrity chef Vivian Howard and husband Ben Knight's newest gourmet restaurant, Benny's Big Time Pizzeria. Other eateries include Love, Lydia bakery and Second Glass Wine Bar.

