



Crystal Coast Hideaway

History, natural beauty and water-sports, all tied up in a “bow”

Those who have experienced the pleasure and pain of traveling along the great American canal known as the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) know there are some absolute gems sprinkled along this 3,000-mile route. About midway up the Eastern Seaboard, on the “Crystal Coast” between the Newport River and the North River, Beaufort, North Carolina, is one of those gems. Home to 3,770 people, Beaufort (pronounced “bow-fort”) lies protected from the sea behind Bird Shoal and Shackleford Banks.

Dating back to 1709, this cruiser-friendly waterfront town is steeped in history and has much to offer the transient mariners who put in to port to explore its seafaring heritage and natural beauty. One early and frequent visitor was Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard the Pirate. Local lore has it that Blackbeard would drop anchor in the inner creek, row ashore and spend time enjoying the “pleasures” of the Hammock House while his crew labored to re-supply his ship, *Queen*

Anne’s Revenge. Legends of pirate treasure (and worse) buried in the yard at Hammock House, now a private residence, persist, although no treasure (or bones) have been discovered.

Another reported favorite hangout of Blackbeard’s was the Bight at Cape Lookout. With access from the Beaufort Inlet or from seaward, today the Bight is a favorite anchorage of locals and savvy cruisers alike. Its spectacular views of Cape Lookout Light and the barrier islands make it one of the most beautiful spots on the nation’s seashore to drop the hook and enjoy.

Approaching Beaufort from the ICW or from seaward, you will find the channels well marked. You’re more than likely to catch a view of wild horses on the bank as you cruise into the harbor. Beaufort Docks Marina, located on Front Street in the center of town, is a great choice for transients. Accommodating vessels up to 200 feet in length, it offers cruisers all the amenities,

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JIM RAYCROFT

This page and opposite: Beaufort's Front Street is lined with historic waterfront homes.

SOURCES

BEAUFORT DOCKS MARINA

On Taylor Creek at 500 Front Street in Beaufort's historic district, it has berths for vessels up to 200 feet.
Phone: 252-728-2503
E-mail: refugeone@embarkmail.com

TOWN CREEK MARINA

On Town Creek off Gallants Channel, it accommodates boats from 30 to 55 feet in slips and up to 180 feet on the face dock.
Phone: 877-347-4869
towncreekmarina.com

CORE CREEK MARINE

Up on the protected North River, it offers full-service maintenance and storage facilities.
Phone: 252-728-7358
corecreekmarine.com

MOREHEAD CITY YACHT BASIN

Located just south of Beaufort, it handles vessels to 200 feet.
Phone: 252-726-6862
mcyachtbasin.com

LOCAL YOKEL FERRY

bestferrytocapelookout.com

OLYMPUS DIVE CENTER

olympusdiving.com

BEAUFORT TOURISM WEBSITES:

beaufortnc.org; tourbeaufort.com
ncbeaches.com/CrystalCoast/Beaufort

Carolina Maritime Museum and adjacent waterfront Boat Shop with its active boat-building programs are a must. The museum is packed with the history and artifacts of the area and a private reference library that contains over 5,500 volumes.

A walking tour of town will take you along the picturesque waterfront past many unique shops, and restaurants, occupying a mix of historic buildings that give clues to an era less pressured and rushed. Walking inland past the Old Burying Ground offers the best view of the wealth of period architecture that is being restored and lovingly preserved on these historic streets, including the infamous Hammock House. And when it's time for a break, the Beaufort Grocery Company on 115 Queen Street, between Front and Ann Streets, is a favorite local spot for lunch, dinner, unique deserts and much more. Executive Chef Charles and Pastry Chef Wendy Park, a husband-and-wife team, serve up daily creations in an atmosphere, which they claim, "...brings a subtle grace and charm reminiscent of a French country Bistro to the local scene." True enough.

An afternoon would be well spent on a jaunt to nearby Harkers Island and a visit to J.A. (James Allen) Rose, master model boat builder and lifelong Harkers Island resident. His small red house serves as gallery and showroom for his art – finely crafted models of the full-size vessels he once built for local fishermen. If you go, plan to sit and talk awhile – James is an interesting character and his handcrafted models are worth every penny.

A visit to Cape Lookout Light is only half the fun. Catching a ride on the Local Yokel Ferry to get there is the other half. Expertly piloted through the shallows by Capt Ellis, this ferry is

including 30-100 amp shore power, WiFi and TV.

Visitors to the Beaufort Docks will find Jeb Brearey, aka "Jeb the Dock Master", to be a wealth of local knowledge and assistance. He will even loan you a courtesy car for a run to provision at the nearby Piggly Wiggly or Food Lion, and he's likely to hand you a couple of wooden tokens redeemable to help quench that afternoon thirst. Once secure alongside, you'll find the mood friendly and the beer cold at the Dock House restaurant, where waiter Shaun Ellison greets visitors with a smile and great service.

The town's friendly, welcoming attitude is also embodied by Valerie Smith. A familiar figure around the marina, Valerie performs yacht maintenance by the day or by the project. I caught up to her carefully brushing a fresh coat of varnish on the trim of the handsome sloop *Bodacious*.

There's a lot to see and do in Beaufort and much of it is easily accessible on foot from the Front Street docks location. The North



Beaufort Docks Marina on Front Street is a popular choice for cruisers who want to explore the downtown district on foot.



Above, from left: Dock House drink tokens from Jeb the Dock Master; medals awarded during Beaufort's annual Wine & Food Weekend, held in late April; a wooden dory project underway at the North Carolina Maritime Museum; lunchtime at Beaufort Grocery Company. At left: Captain Ellis drives us out to Cape Lookout on Local Yokel 1.

a flat-bottomed, outboard-powered Carolina Skiff named *Local Yokel 1* that dances around the sand bars, mud flats, and small islands that dot the waterway. Wild Shackleford horses, undisturbed by the roar of the big Evinrude passing only a few yards away, keep to their business of grazing on sea grass, their ruddy coats and shaggy manes hanging like oversized brown robes. They have adapted to this sparse environment over the 400 years since the first 80 to 100 of them were abandoned by a failed colony. More horses were marooned years later when another Spanish ship was wrecked on Shackleford Banks. Today, in addition to the wild horses, the Banks play host to a variety of human pastimes including beachcombing, picnicking, fishing,

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A scale model of the tugboat Menhaden at the maritime museum, above. At right: expert varnisher Valerie Smith at Beaufort Docks Marina; J.A. Rose, the master model boat builder of Harkers Island.



nature photography, camping, dolphin-spotting, shell collecting, and just plain relaxing.

Over the last several hundred years, this section of the Carolina coast has earned a reputation as “The Graveyard of The Atlantic” and for good reason. Since record-keeping began in the mid-1500’s, more than 1,200 ships have been lost here together with an unknown number of passengers and crew. One of the more celebrated wrecks is the the German U-Boat U-352, discovered in 1975. To get up close and personal to this sub and a number of other shipwrecks dives, check

in with Olympus Dive Center in neighboring Morehead City. Olympus will arrange dive trips and packages. Its full-service shop also contains interesting artifacts from the U-352 and other treasures from the deep.

The scuttled wreck of Blackbeard’s fearsome vessel was discovered in 1996 at the bottom of the Beaufort Inlet off Fort Macon in only 20 feet of water. Although the site is protected and recreational diving to *Queen Anne’s Revenge* is restricted by the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Branch, pirate enthusiasts can visit the Blackbeard exhibit at the North Carolina Maritime Museum.

Great food, friendly people, historic architecture, and unparalleled views of the natural beauty of the Banks create an impressive variety of sights and activities, all packed into the exciting little package called Beaufort. 🍷

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