The city of Wilmington has long lured visitors to its historic streets and foot-friendly riverfront. A lively coastal area just a short drive away adds to this area’s allure. Everyone from Civil War buffs to surfers will thoroughly enjoy a stay here in any season.
**History**

English settlers came to Wilmington in the first third of the 18th century and incorporated the city in 1739. In the decades that followed, these settlers turned to Wilmington’s dense forests to build successful lumber and shipbuilding industries. Railroading also dominated commerce here in the 19th century. Today the top industry is tourism, as the Cape Fear area offers diverse and abundant forms of leisure, making it a perfect get-away choice for singles, couples, or families.

This historical city along the Cape Fear River is known for its antique houses and other buildings. The population, here in the seat of New Hanover County, is about 100,000. Cultural opportunities abound, as many historically significant houses and sites are open to the public; if you’re pressed for time at least head down Third Street, where there is a high concentration of historic sites. Of course, visitors also flock to the area for its nearly infinite recreational pursuits, especially the city’s mile-long Riverwalk and the nearby Carolina, Kure and Wrightsville beaches.

Wilmington was the Confederate States’ most crucial port in the Civil War. Fort Fisher, on the south end of Pleasure Island adjacent to Kure Beach, was the final fort to succumb to the forces of the North. It is now a recreational area and the site of regular events.

One of Wilmington proper’s most-visited attractions is the Battleship U.S.S. North Carolina, which has been moored there since 1961. The immense vessel is impressive enough, but you should feel even more awe when you look at how narrow the river is and think about what it must have taken to get the ship tucked in to its permanent location in a small basin on the west shore of the Cape Fear River.

**Weather**

The Wilmington area enjoys wonderful shoulder seasons of spring and especially fall, making these times ideal for most visitors. Spring is simply wonderful; as for fall, the summer humidity often lingers well into October and water temperatures remain high enough to suit most Atlantic swimmers. Wilmington’s winters are generally mild with temperatures averaging in the high 50s and low 60s. An occasional ice storm or snowfall is rare but not unheard of.

Summer is prime for beach vacations, and you can expect heat and humidity that can be stifling. Not to worry, though: you can work around that by staying off the beach and in air conditioning at the height of the sun. Hurricane season runs from June through October, so be aware that severe weather is a possibility. The good news is these storms move slowly, giving advance notice of their arrival.
Beaches

The place to be in the heat of summer is, of course, the beach and the Wilmington region offers three choices, each with its own fishing pier. Wrightsville Beach is an independent town with its own fire department and police department. The nearly five-mile-long barrier island features beautiful beach homes in a mostly residential atmosphere, but with ample lodging and dining opportunities suit vacationers.

Family-friendly Pleasure Island offers a bit more manmade amusement, as it encompasses Carolina Beach, Kure Beach, and Fort Fisher. The area’s ongoing entertainment includes free Sunday night movies outdoors at Carolina Beach Lake Park and free Thursday night fireworks on the beach from Memorial Day weekend through August. Both of these summer thrills take place after sunset on their respective evenings.

Shag dancing, a longtime tradition in both Carolinas, is popular throughout the area. Look for shag nights at clubs and beaches so you can watch the fun, or sign up for a lesson to learn the steps yourself.

Festivals & Annual Events

The Wilmington area’s mild weather means outdoor fun doesn’t have to wait until summer. The Pleasure Island Chowder Cook-Off takes place on a Saturday in mid-April, followed by the Kure Beach Annual Street Fair the following weekend. Keep your eyes open for events geared to more specific interests, such as car shows, fun runs, fishing tournaments, and auctions. Summer is of course the high season, with its signature event the Independence Day Fireworks, but spring, fall, and even winter offer happenings to lure visitors.

Azalea season is as short as it is colorful, therefore this lovely spring flower deserves a celebration of its own. Aside from those photogenic blooms, the North Carolina Azalea Festival offers music, tours of nearby homes and gardens, a parade and street vendors.

Plan your early-season vacation around the Pleasure Island Beach Music Festival, held the first Saturday in June. Fans of true Southern beach music look forward to this event, which features a shag dancing contest. If you music fans are ready for another vacation at summer’s end, keep in mind the Southern Coastal Bluegrass Festival, which is held at Fort Fisher on the last official weekend of summer. Columbus Day weekend brings the Seafood, Blues & Jazz Festival, where multiple cravings are satisfied.

Hardy travelers and those who aren’t fond of crowds, know the pleasures of the off-season, from breathing room to lower rates in the hotels that stay open. The day after Thanksgiving, the Island of Lights – Light Up the Lake Celebration at the Carolina Beach Lake Park kicks off the Christmas season. The festive fun continues the following weekend with the Island of Lights Christmas Parade on Friday and the Island of Lights Flotilla on Saturday.
Festivals & Annual Events

January
January 1: New Year’s Noon at Children’s Museum of Wilmington
January 29-30: 2011 Home EXPO & Remodeling Show, Cape Fear C.C. Schwartz Center

February
February 6: Wilmington Chocolate Fantasy
February 7: University of North Carolina, Wilmington Intercultural Festival
February 17: 31st Annual NC Jazz Festival
February 25-27: Wilmington Spring Home Show

March
March 5-6: 4th Annual Scales & Tails, NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Kure Beach
March 12: Guinness Saint Patrick’s Day Festival
March 12: Guinness Saint Patrick’s Day Festival
March 18-21: Cape Fear Wildlife Expo, Wilmington Convention Center
March 19-20: 32nd Annual Coastal Living Show, Cape Fear C.C. Schwartz Center
March 26-27: Herb & Garden Fair @ Poplar Grove Plantation (Poplar Grove Plantation) April
April 6-10: 64th Annual North Carolina Azalea Festival
April 6: Yesterday and Today: The Interactive Beatles Experience, Thalian Hall Main Stage
April 17: Earth Day 2011 Celebratio, Hugh MacRae Park (College & Oleander Drive)
April 22: Battleship Easter Egg Carnival
April 24: 5th Annual Street Festival, Kure Beach
April TBA: 14th Annual Pleasure Island Chowder Cook-Off
April TBA: Cape Fear Independent Film Festival, City Stage (21 N. Front St.)

May
May 14: Battleship, NC - 50th Anniversary: Steaming, Signaling, and Secret Codes
May 14-16: 18th Annual Greek Festival, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church (608 S. College Rd.)
May 30: Battleship, NC - 46th Annual Memorial Day Observance
May TBA: Orange Street Arts Festival 2011

June
June 4-6: Shakespeare on the Green Festival
June 4-5: 26th Annual Beach Music Festival
June TBA: North Carolina Country Music Festival, Fort Fisher, Kure Beach

July
July 3: Independence Day Fireworks, End of Cape Fear Blvd., Carolina Beach
July 4: 4th of July Riverfront Celebration, Water Street
July 4: 14th Annual Battleship Blast, U.S.S. North Carolina
July TBA: 13th Annual Wooden Boat Festival, Cape Fear Community College (Water St.)

August
August TBA: 13th Annual Castles & Scoops
August TBA: Red Stripe Roots & Reggae Festival, Riverfront Park

September
September 9-11: 35th Annual Wooden Boat Festival
September TBA: 10th Annual Art & Antique Walk, Front St.
September TBA: Southern Coastal Bluegrass Festival

October
October 1-3: Riverfest 2011, Water St.
October 8-9: 5th Annual Pleasure Island Surf Challenge
October 8-30: Haunted Ghost Ship, U.S. S. North Carolina
October 4-23: 31st Annual Halloween Festival, Poplar Grove
October 15-16: Lighthouse International Beer Festival, Hugh MacRae Park
October TBA: Oktoberfest, Independence Mall (3500 Oleander Dr.)
October TBA: 3rd Annual Salty Paws Festival
October TBA: Batty Battleship’s Pumpkin Patch & Haunted Ghost Ship U.S.S. North Carolina
October TBA: Trick or Treat Under the Sea, Fort Fisher Aquarium, Kure Beach

November
November TBA: Downtown Holiday Tree Lighting, Riverfront Park (Water St.)
November 26: Island of Lights—Light Up the Lake, Carolina Beach Lake Park
November 26 - December 27: Christmas by the Sea, Carolina Beach Board Walk
November 27: Festival in the Park, Wrightsville Beach Park
November 27: 28th Annual North Carolina Holiday Flotilla, Wrightsville Beach

December
December: Caroling by Horse-drawn Carriage or Trolley, Water & Market Streets
December: Colonial Christmas to December
December 31: Island of Lights New Year’s Eve Countdown, Carolina Beach Boardwalk

Check the latest Wilmington events @ www.wilmington.net/events/
Attractions

Battleship North Carolina
81 Battleship Rd
910-251-5797
Located just across the river from the heart of downtown, this formidable vessel attracts scores of proud visitors all year long. Keep your eyes open for Old Charlie, an alligator often seen sunning himself near the ship.

Cape Fear Serpentarium
20 Orange St.
910-762-1669
Got snakes? The Cape Fear Serpentarium sure does, and you can learn all about these fascinating creatures as you observe them up close right in downtown Wilmington.

North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher
900 Loggerhead Rd.
Kure Beach
910-458-8257
Enjoy indoor and outdoor exhibits highlighting the inhabitants of the Cape Fear region's various bodies of fresh and salt water, plus an Exotic Aquatics exhibit of non-native species. The facility offers an ongoing array of events and special activities.

Poplar Grove Historic Plantation
10200 US Hwy. 17 North
910-686-9518
Six generations of the Foy family grew peanuts here before it became a museum in 1980. From the mansion to the grounds, there's plenty to delight anyone who appreciates history and aesthetics.

Museums

Bellamy Mansion Museum & Gardens
503 Market St.
910-251-3700
Tour the mansion, slave quarters, and formal garden on this antebellum property highlighted by awe-inspiring magnolia trees. You can buy a combination ticket that includes admission to two other historic Wilmington houses, the Latimer House and the Burgwin-Wright House.

Burgwin-Wright Museum House & Gardens
224 Market St.
910-762-0570
Southeastern North Carolina's oldest exhibited house will take your breath with its grand front porches and terraced grounds. In the true style of privilege, the home's kitchen was housed in a separate building behind the main home, keeping the toil and heat of cooking away from the privileged residents. Special events are held, including a Colonial Christmas, and a discounted three-house tour ticket may be purchased.

Cameron Art Museum
3201 S. 17th St.
910-395-5999
The southern North Carolina coast's sole art museum holds a wide variety of works from local and international artists, both contemporary and historic. Lectures, film series, and other events are held regularly.

Cape Fear Museum of History & Science
814 Market St.
910-798-4250
A group of Wilmington women interested in Civil War preservation started this museum, the city's oldest, in 1898. Today it showcases photographs, artifacts, and natural treasures related to the area's history, culture, and heritage.

The Children's Museum of Wilmington
116 Orange Street
910-254-3534
The museum features mostly interactive exhibits where little ones can use their hands to experience, learn, and enjoy. Highlights include pirate-themed exhibits and an art room.

Latimer House Museum
126 S. Third St.
910-762-4929
This 14-room Italianate Victorian treasure houses the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society and is open for tours (a three-house combination ticket is available). Don't forget to stroll through its lovely gardens as well.

Wilmington Railroad Museum
505 Nutt St.
910-763-2634
A spacious 1880s railroad freight warehouse houses this collection of rail-related artifacts, original rail cars, model trains, and a hands-on area for children.
Golf

Cape Fear’s kind climate invites golfers to tee off year-round at its many courses. Even wintertime golf is pleasant, but spring and fall are most ideal. Early tee times work best as summer peaks, especially when humidity is high. Make your reservations as early as possible to beat the crowd.

Wilmington has an 18-hole public course, the City of Wilmington Municipal Golf Course, where greens fees are quite low. Other courses open to the public include Beau Rivage Resort & Golf Club, Porter’s Neck Country Club, and Inland Greens Golf Course.

Lodging

Fans of bed-and-breakfasts really appreciate Wilmington, as a lot of its well-preserved old homes are open for lodging. Most of these grand homes have large porches and other outdoor space and common areas, letting guests enjoy something more memorable than the standard hotel experience. Inns are similar in style and personal service, but they don’t necessarily include breakfast. Of course, the city and surrounding area have plenty of chain hotels as well as smaller, private hotels for travelers who prefer them.

All of the beach communities offer diverse choices for your vacation stay. In Wrightsville Beach you can rent a cottage for a home-away-from-home feeling, or stay at a full-service resort, such as the popular Holiday Inn SunSpree. Carolina Beach offers a good mix of family-friendly rental homes both on and off the beach, and hotels—both chain and independent, high-rise and small-scale—in a wide price range. The oceanfront Atlantic Towers, for example, has 11 stories of condominium suites for rent, with access to the complex’s indoor and outdoor pools, on-site arcade, and other features. Kure Beach’s lodging choices range from no-frills motel rooms to large rental homes to well-appointed boutique hotels, including Darlings by the Sea, where the amenities are geared toward couples. Many hotels and motels have kitchen facilities—a great feature for travelers who prefer not to eat every meal out.

Dining

One of the joys of a vacation is trying new restaurants, and there is no shortage in Wilmington and the nearby beach communities. Then again, some folks want the comfort of familiarity on the road and will be happy to see that greater Wilmington certainly has its share of national chains. You’ll find seafood in every direction and barbecue fans will want to try the traditional Eastern North Carolina style made with a vinegar-based sauce. No matter what your choice of cuisine, be sure to have at least one meal out on the deck of a waterfront eatery where watching boats and people pass by is part of the fun.
Getting to Wilmington

This bustling but visitor-friendly city is easy to get to via various modes. Major highways into Wilmington include Routes 74 (Eastwood Road) and 76, which connects the city with Wrightsville Beach; the route's alternate names include Andrew Jackson Highway and Oleander Drive. Rt. 421, also known as Carolina Beach Road, runs between Wilmington and Pleasure Island. If you're driving in from points southwest of the area via Rt. 17, you can continue on Rt. 17 (Ocean Highway) northeast toward the city, or head to Southport on Rt. 211 and take the North Carolina state ferry to the south end of Pleasure Island, near Fort Fisher and Kure Beach.

Wilmington International Airport serves the area with frequent flights on major world carriers. If you're arriving by private boat, you'll find the Cape Fear area has a lot of docking facilities, but you should still make reservations as soon as your travel plans are firm.
Maps

Downtown Wilmington, NC

Wrightsville Beach, NC
Maps

Kure Beach, NC

Carolina Beach, NC