

Our State home

PLUS!
25
DREAM
DESTINATIONS

**RETIRE
RELOCATE
RELAX**

- OCEAN ISLE'S COZY COTTAGES
- LUXE LOFTS IN ASHEVILLE
- DREAM HOME IN PINEHURST

dream destinations

25 PLACES *to*
RETIRE • RELOCATE • RELAX

written by KAIA FINDLAY

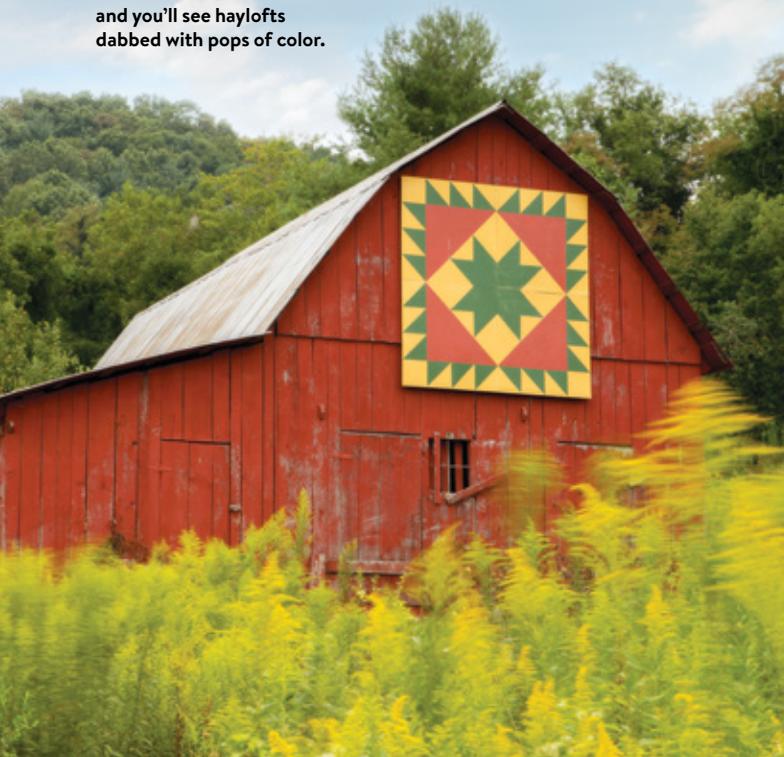
LAKE LURE

The Blue Ridge Mountains rise up around the town of Lake Lure, and the green-blue fingers of its namesake stretch out in four directions across Rutherford County. Home to just 1,200 people, Lake Lure is the perfect place to get back to nature. Grab a fishing pole, go for a scenic ride on a pontoon boat, or take a stroll across the Flowering Bridge. Built over the Rocky Broad River in 1925, it now serves as a garden with views of the water and Chimney Rock. And about those beautiful views? They convinced the makers of *Dirty Dancing* to film much of the 1980s blockbuster here. Both quaint and spectacular, this magnetic mountain town's beauty pulls people in and holds on.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMILY CHAPLIN

As you take in the beauty of Lake Lure, it's easy to forget its existence is very intentional: One man's dream (and a dam) brought it to life in 1926.

Drive the country roads around West Jefferson and you'll see haylofts dabbled with pops of color.



WEST JEFFERSON

As soon as you spot the first brightly painted quilt square on the broad side of a weathered barn, you get a taste of this Ashe County town's artistic flair. West Jefferson has a history of quilt-making and fresco painting, and that creative spirit is alive in the large murals that cover the sides of downtown buildings. The Florence Thomas Art School hones the skills of the next generation of West Jefferson artists, an education enriched by local craft shops and the 18 art galleries packed into eight blocks of this small downtown.

LEFT: JON ECKARD, TIM ROBISON; RIGHT: ANDREW KORNYLAK, EMILY CHAPLIN



The Skillet Donut stout at Burial Brewing Company in Asheville is served with a skewered doughnut hole on top.

ASHEVILLE

Asheville wasn't named Beer City, USA, four years in a row for nothing: This mountain town has the most breweries per capita in the nation, each with its own distinct personality. There are big names — New Belgium, Sierra Nevada, Wicked Weed — but also plenty of smaller brewers that stand out even among the big shots. The city hosts more than 15 beer-themed festivals throughout the year, from Sour Fest to a nine-day Beer Week. Foodies, too, find plenty to get excited about in the city's eclectic restaurant scene. The friendly, free-spirited community, raved-about food ... and excellent beer.

Brevard

In Brevard, music is set free. Enjoy impromptu performances, or attend a classical concert at the 180-acre Brevard Music Center, where some of the best young musicians spend their summers. Corkscrew along the Pisgah Highway, past the thundering Looking Glass Falls, past giddy kids spilling out of minivans at Sliding Rock, past the chorus of tree frogs, to the woodland amphitheater at the Cradle of Forestry. Here, musicians play the old-time music that was born in these mountains. No less inspired by landscape and seasons than classical music, this, too, is Brevard music. Here, whether it comes from a mandolin picker in the park or a classical flutist on the BMC lawn, music brings people together.



HENDERSONVILLE

When fall arrives in Henderson County, there's a bite to the air that calls for layers of clothing — and hot cider. The nippy weather brings out Hendersonville's low-key charm and its much-loved fall bounty: apples. Driving down the highway is a stop-and-go affair as cars pull into orchard parking lots, carrying families ready for their fix of cider, doughnuts, corn mazes, and, of course, local apples. But the slow drive is perfect for leaf-peepers, and for those looking for a calm escape from the city.



At The Old Edwards Inn in Highlands, each corridor seems to lead to something elegant, like Madison's Restaurant and Wine Garden.

HIGHLANDS

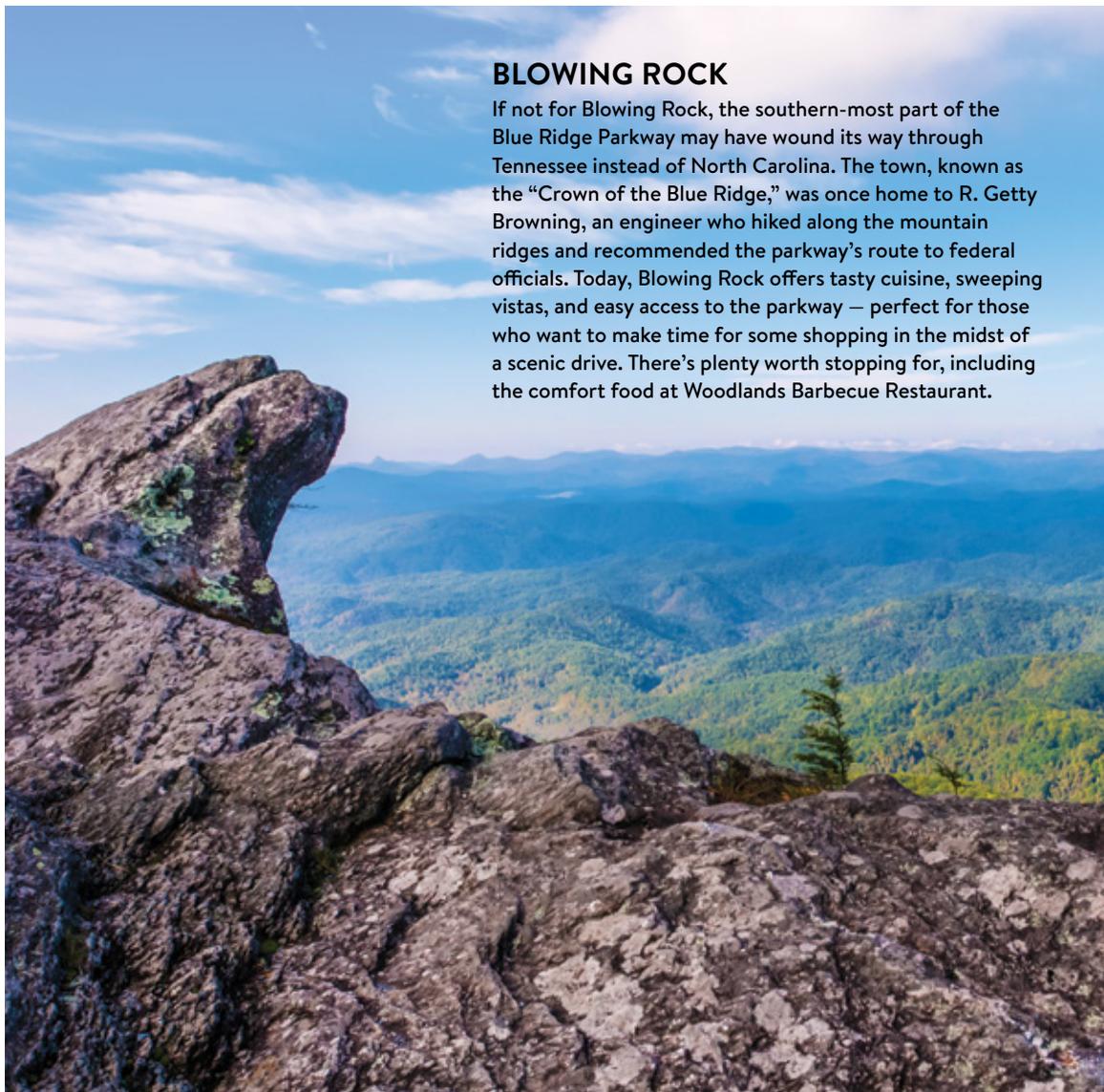
The red-brick sidewalks of downtown Highlands are filled with strolling shoppers perusing the elegant storefronts and filling their bags with everything from luxury linens bought at High Cotton to locally made pottery from Smitten. In between the shops, a restaurant offers personal “wine navigators” to their casual-yet-elegant diners, who are chatting and enjoying tasty farm-to-table cuisine. And yet, located in Macon County within the Nantahala National Forest, this is still very much a mountain town: The Blue Ridge rambles along the horizon, and it isn't uncommon to spot a bear wandering by. Who says a waterfall doesn't pair well with shopping?



Find beautiful pottery at Hamilton Williams Gallery.

Morganton

It took a village to make Morganton the artistic and cultural hub it is today, and the transformation came from a deep investment in knowing the true sense of the word “local.” Here, local pride comes not only from physical location, but also from using ingredients grown in Burke County soil. At Fonta Flora Brewery, beers feature seasonal produce — ingredients that also show up in downtown restaurants, like root & vine, a local favorite. In the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the town also attracts artists. These creative people — weavers, jewelers, and red clay-loving potters — found a place where they could put down roots. And just like the restaurateurs and brewers, they took inspiration from Morganton itself.



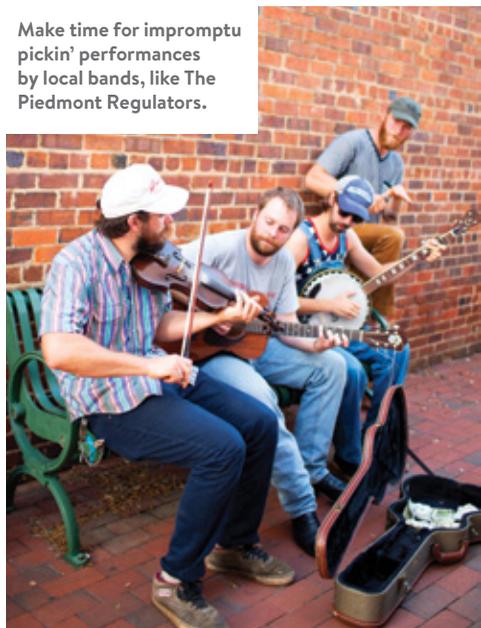
BLOWING ROCK

If not for Blowing Rock, the southern-most part of the Blue Ridge Parkway may have wound its way through Tennessee instead of North Carolina. The town, known as the “Crown of the Blue Ridge,” was once home to R. Getty Browning, an engineer who hiked along the mountain ridges and recommended the parkway’s route to federal officials. Today, Blowing Rock offers tasty cuisine, sweeping vistas, and easy access to the parkway — perfect for those who want to make time for some shopping in the midst of a scenic drive. There’s plenty worth stopping for, including the comfort food at Woodlands Barbecue Restaurant.

HILLSBOROUGH

Few small towns are packed with as many novelists, poets, and nonfiction writers as Hillsborough. At Purple Crow Books downtown, two bookcases are devoted to the works of local writers, which include best-sellers and award-winners like Allan Gurganus, Jill McCorkle, Frances Mayes, Lee Smith, and David Payne. Readers and writers alike come to Hillsborough to be inspired by gardens of peonies and azaleas, historic sites, and a charming, small-town feel. On Last Fridays, the bookstores and galleries stay open late, welcoming people strolling along Churton Street to top off a good meal with an even better book — a perfect nightcap in the “Little Literary Town.”

Make time for impromptu pickin’ performances by local bands, like The Piedmont Regulators.



CARY

Despite being known (jokingly or not) as the Containment Area for Relocated Yankees, Cary serves up plenty of Southern charm — and as a community full of newcomers, its residents know how to roll out the welcome mat. People who move to Cary find warmth and support, especially at the Cary Newcomers Club, which sparks lifelong friendships through its wine clubs, movie groups, and games of mah-jongg. A cozy stay at the Mayton Inn, with its colorful rooms and family atmosphere, or a jazz concert at the Cary Arts Center convince those who are still skeptical that Cary has something for everyone.



Pinehurst

Before the first golfer comes strolling up the fairway, clubs in tow, before the thwacking sound of tee shots sailing over world-class courses becomes background noise, before the shops and spa open, it's quiet, and early risers can take in the natural beauty of the Sandhills. Seasoned golfers know that a visit to Pinehurst isn't just about tee times at the legendary resort. The surrounding village offers rich history, charming shops, and fine flavors to fill a weekend on — and off — the greens.

Pinehurst is home to more than 40 golf courses, including ones designed by Donald Ross and Arnold Palmer.

SHELBY

What's better than bluegrass *and* barbecue? If you're coming to town to check out the Earl Scruggs Center — which honors the legendary banjo picker and Cleveland County native who revolutionized bluegrass — you'll have a pair of classic barbecue restaurants to choose from. Red Bridges Barbecue Lodge is known for its tangy-sauced pork shoulders, while Alston Bridges Barbecue has made a name for itself for its red slaw and coarse-chopped meat. Though the two Bridges families are unrelated, both have made their 'cue for more than 60 years. Even famous musicians like Ricky Skaggs, who come through town to perform gigs at the Don Gibson Theatre, can't get enough.

LEFT: CHARLES HARRIS; RIGHT: EMILY CHAPLIN & CHRIS COUNCIL; FAITH TEASLEY



SOUTHERN PINES

On a sandy one-lane road, after the pine forests have given way to the green farmland that lies on the outer edges of Southern Pines, drivers are likely to encounter a rider on horseback. A sign on the road reads, "Horses Have Right of Way." This sentiment rings true across Southern Pines, in the historic downtown that's home to a tack shop in addition to a bookshop, café, and ice cream parlor. Whether fox hunting through farmland or in the ring at equestrian training centers, horse culture offers the young and old a chance to experience the freedom of riding.



You can't go to Belmont without a detour to see the blooming beauty of Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden.

BELMONT

The ringing of bells on the grounds of Belmont Abbey provide the soundtrack to an otherwise quiet day in Belmont. The Benedictine monastery, founded in 1876, roots Belmont to its history and traditions even

as it looks out over a growing and thriving downtown. Once home to more than a dozen textile mills, now, a new generation of lively locals are making a home among those who still work at the remaining textile operations. Today, a stroll downtown might include the chiming of bells, but

you'll also hear the rising hum of conversation and the clinking of glasses on restaurant rooftops and on back patios. Head to Nellie's Southern Kitchen for shrimp and grits and a cocktail, or to Caravan Coffee & Dessert Bar for a chai latte and a slice of cake from Brenda's Cake Gallery next door.



MOUNT AIRY

In this music-loving community in the foothills, visitors find much more than Mayberry. Known to many as the hometown of Andy Griffith and the inspiration for his show's fictional town, Mount Airy has also made a name for itself as the home of mountain music. Music legends Tommy Jarrell and Benton Flippen got their start here, and an old-time radio show still plays bluegrass music out of the historic Earle Theatre. In the fall, the Autumn Leaves Festival showcases plenty of banjo picking and fiddling — and fresh doughnuts and collard green sandwiches, too. People often come searching for a time and neighborly feel that seems lost. In Mount Airy, they find that it's been right here all along.

Pittsboro

Ferrington Village in Pittsboro feels like a secret getaway from the fast pace of the Triangle. For two centuries, farmland covered much of the village's 1,500 acres, and the grassy pastures, wooden fences, and Belted Galloway cows keep the past alive among the homes, shops, and restaurants that have popped up here since the 1970s. Which is perfect for when you need wide-open spaces but still want all the



comforts of home. Stop by The Belted Goat for a buttery scone before a walk around the gardens, or pop into McIntyre's Books for something new for your nightstand. Splurge on a stay at The Ferrington House Inn, and indulge in local cuisine at the acclaimed Ferrington House Restaurant.



LAKE NORMAN

With 520 miles of shoreline in four different counties, Lake Norman is often called the "inland sea." Here, you'll find plenty of opportunities to wakeboard, row, fish, sail, swim, paddle, or simply cruise out to the middle of the lake and relax. Kings Point, one of several marinas on the lake, offers boat rentals to take full advantage of a beautiful day that doesn't have to stop at dinnertime: Lakeside restaurant Hello, Sailor has boat slips for diners. On dry land, vibrant communities surrounding the lake provide a mix of activities, including visits to the Carolina Raptor Center, rounds of mini golf, or a lakefront dinner that reveals the full grandeur of Lake Norman.

LEFT: TIM ROBISON; RIGHT: ADAM MOWERY, LISSA GOTWALS, BRIAN GOMSAK

Washington

Situated right where the Tar River ends and the Pamlico River begins, “Little” Washington was the first city to be named after the president. Yes, even before our country’s capital. In this Beaufort County town, the river provides a perfect environment for wildlife to thrive, as well as opportunities for human inhabitants to spend afternoons wandering the mile-long waterfront promenade or relaxing under the oak trees at the Town Commons, watching herons poke their way through cypress groves. But despite the wonders of the water — and the famous cheese biscuits served at Mom’s Grill — Washington remains as quiet and peaceful as the river on a still, sunny day.

EDENTON

On the edge of Albemarle Sound, historic Edenton is filled with colonial architecture and waterfront views. The Penelope Barker House, built in 1782, acts as a welcome center that introduces visitors to local spots, including the picturesque 1886 Roanoke River Lighthouse in Edenton Bay and the lush gardens of the Cupola House, built in 1758. Paddlers will find serenity on Queen Anne Creek, and diners will delight in the menu at The Table Restaurant. Once named one of America’s Prettiest Towns by *Forbes* magazine, Edenton has preserved its past in a way that offers plenty of present-day charm.



The Penelope Barker House keeps watch over Edenton Bay.

BEAUFORT

In Beaufort, all roads lead to the water — with plenty to see and taste along the way. Which makes a leisurely bike ride the ideal way to get to know the town. With 300 years of coastal history, traces of the past are everywhere here. Pedal past long stretches of white picket fence that enclose homes dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Wander through the Old Burying Grounds, a historic cemetery that holds secrets in its stones. On Front Street, visit the Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center, a tribute to the state’s rich history of wooden boatbuilding. And at sunset, park your bike for a waterfront meal at The Spouter Inn Restaurant. Across Taylor’s Creek, past the busy harbor, you’ll spot a collection of small islands known as the Rachel Carson Reserve. Everyone keeps an eye out for its most famous residents: wild horses.



MOREHEAD CITY

Salty air, oysters on the half-shell, cool bungalows shaded by cedar trees, and the warm current of the Gulf Stream have attracted generations of families seeking salt and sunshine to this Carteret County town. Tradition lies in the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament, a popular competition here since the 1950s, in the fried scallops at the iconic Sanitary Fish Market — one of the oldest waterfront restaurants in town — and in the charter boats that line the waterfront. Day after day, year after year, they take fishermen out to toss their lines into sparkling swells for a chance to catch dinner — or bragging rights.



LEFT: EMILY CHAPLIN & CHRIS COUNCIL; RIGHT: CHARLES HARRIS



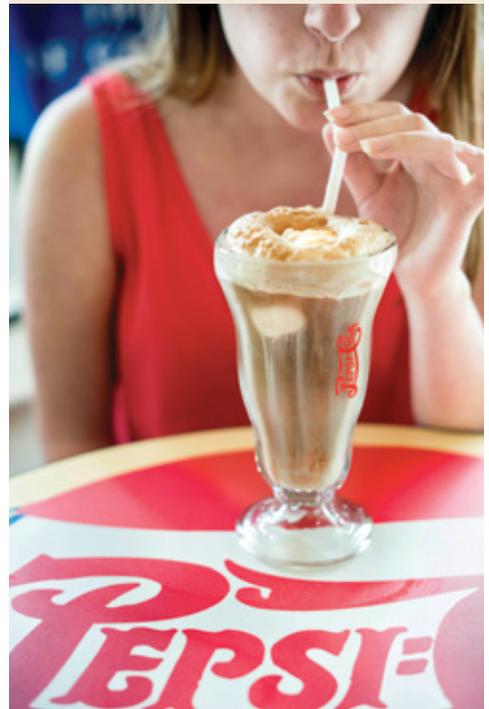
The Neoclassical Revival-style Wise House on Market Street in Wilmington was built in 1909.

WILMINGTON

Sure, you can see historic homes, tour the Battleship *North Carolina*, or take a stroll down the Wilmington Riverwalk, a mile-long scenic boardwalk lined with shops and galleries that hugs the Cape Fear River, but don't forget to take a trip to Airlie Gardens. Originally a private garden created in 1884 by Sarah Green, a leading Wilmington socialite who filled it with azaleas, camellias, lakes, and tree-lined paths, the 67-acre park now includes meticulously manicured landscapes, a butterfly house, and contemporary sculptures among the flowers of Sarah's time. The gardens are also home to the Airlie Oak, a nearly 500-year-old oak tree.

NEW BERN

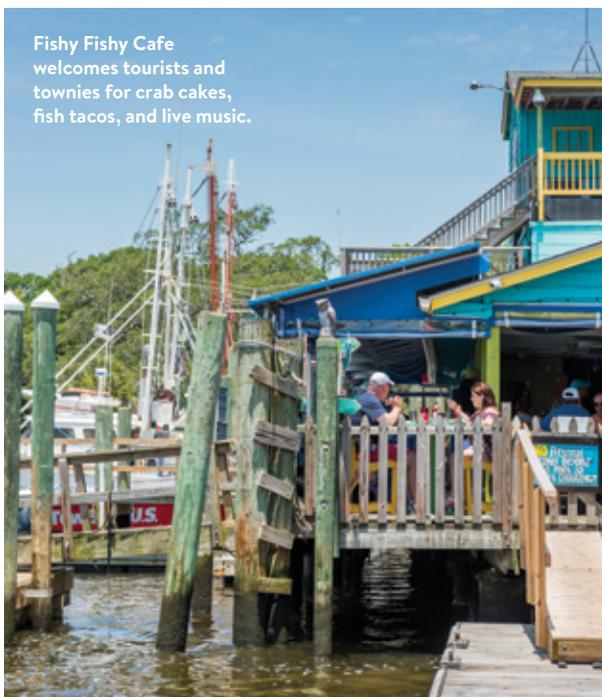
Turn a stroll around New Bern into a scavenger hunt. First, brush up on history at the old drugstore — now a shop — where pharmacist Caleb Bradham invented Pepsi-Cola in 1867. Next, walk in the footsteps of Union soldiers at the historic Benjamin Ellis House Bed and Breakfast, whose foundation dates back to 1853. Later, wander downtown to find a host of splendidly decorated fiberglass bears that show off local artistry. They're a nod to New Bern's origin — its founder was from Bern, Switzerland, whose coat of arms features a bear. Finally, keep a lookout for the ghosts who have been rumored to haunt this 300-year-old city, the second oldest in the state.





MANTEO

This Dare County town sits on the northeast end of Roanoke Island, sandwiched between Croatan and Roanoke sounds, and has survived numerous hurricanes — the names of major storms that hit the island in the last 30 years are carved into a wooden sign in the hallway of Poor Richard's Sandwich Shop. Here, locals take pride in preserving their history. Watch it come to life at the nation's longest-running outdoor drama *The Lost Colony*, take a walk through time at the Elizabethan Gardens, and explore Roanoke Island Festival Park (above), where you can see the *Elizabeth II* anchored in the bay.



Fishy Fishy Cafe welcomes tourists and townies for crab cakes, fish tacos, and live music.

Southport

The easiest way to get to Southport is by boat. The town lies at the convergence of three waterways — the Cape Fear River, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Intracoastal Waterway — and has long been frequented by devoted shrimpers and fishermen, ferrymen and river pilots. But it also welcomes newcomers, who come to Southport for fresh seafood with a view of the water at iconic restaurants like Provision Co. and Fishy Fishy Cafe. And while three waterways lead into town and two roadways lead out, few people who come here ever find reason to leave. It doesn't take long to fall in love with the shrimpburgers, the salty air, and the sound of waves gently lapping at the dock.