

Cape Hatteras

National Seashore
North Carolina
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Touring the Islands

Cape Hatteras stretches north to south across three islands—Bodie, Hatteras, and Ocracoke. The islands are linked by State Highway 12—a narrow, paved road—and Hatteras Inlet ferry. Some of the special natural and historical features that you can visit along the way are described briefly below. The highway also passes through eight villages that reflect the nearly 300-year-old history and culture of the Outer Banks. The villages are not part of the park. For more information, stop at the Whalebone Junction Information Center near the park's northern entrance, or at any of the park visitor centers. Park brochures and activity schedules are available. For places to camp, fish, swim, and hike, see the map below.

Coquina Beach The ruins of the shipwrecked *Laura A. Barnes* lie here, not far from where she went aground in high seas in 1921. Park naturalists give history and natural history programs here in the summer.

Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge Many species of waterfowl and other birds live in this protected area or stop here during migrations. You can see them from observation platforms or from walking trails.

Ocracoke Island This isolated island and its small harbor village have retained much of their charm and character. Ocracoke has served as a home for fishermen, and as a hiding place for pirates. Blackbeard often escaped his pursuers by fleeing to shallow waters near Ocracoke Inlet. The remains of a horse herd that once roamed free on the island can still be found here.

Camping

There are five campgrounds in the park. Oregon Inlet, Cape Point, and Ocracoke campgrounds are usually open mid-April to mid-October; Salvo and Frisco campgrounds are usually open mid-June to late August. Campsites may be reserved in the summer through Ticketron. At other times, sites are offered first-come, first-served. Camping fees are charged year-round. Camping is allowed only in designated campgrounds. All campgrounds have cold showers, drinking water, tables, fire grills, and modern restrooms. No utility hookups are provided. Dumping stations are located near Oregon Inlet, Cape Point, and Ocracoke campgrounds. Sand and wind conditions require longer-than-normal tent stakes. Shade awnings and netting for insect protection will make camping more enjoyable.

Lighthouses and Lifesaving Stations

Each island has its own lighthouse, each unique in its design and history. Cape Hatteras Lighthouse (left), built in 1870, is the tallest in the United States (83 meters/270 feet). It is open to the public, but the balcony is closed. Ocracoke Lighthouse (center), built in 1823, and Bodie Island Lighthouse (right), built in 1872, are closed to the public.



Historic U.S. Life Saving Service stations are located in Rodanthe and just north of Avon. In the summer reenactments of early rescue drills are performed weekly at the Chicamacomico Station in Rodanthe.



How to Reach the Islands

Motorists can reach the park from the north via U.S. 17 and 158 or from the east via U.S. 64 and 264. Two toll ferries travel from the mainland to Ocracoke. One leaves from Swanquarter, N.C., which is reached via U.S. 264. The other leaves from Cedar Island, N.C., reached via U.S. 70. From Swanquarter the ferry trip takes 2½ hours; from Cedar Island, 2½ hours. Reservations are recommended. In Ocracoke call (919) 928-3841; Cedar Island, (919) 225-3551; Swanquarter, (919) 928-1111.

Visiting Nearby Parks

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, 13 kilometers (8 miles) west of Whalebone Junction, commemorates the "Lost Colony," the first English attempt to settle the New World in the 1580s. Wright Brothers National Memorial, 15 kilometers (9 miles) north of Whalebone Junction, commemorates the first heavier-than-air, powered airplane flight there by Wilbur and Orville Wright in 1903.

Information

For more information, write: Superintendent, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Route 1, Box 675, Manteo, NC 27954; or telephone (919) 473-2111.

Safety Today

Lighthouses and lifesaving stations on the Cape are symbols of a long history of concern for people in distress. In that tradition, please observe these safety tips so your visit will be a pleasant one. If you have any questions, please ask a park ranger; they are here to make your trip safe and enjoyable.

Be aware of strong littoral currents, rip currents, and shifting sand, which can make swimming dangerous. Tidal currents near inlets are hazardous. Winds can quickly blow air mattresses and other flotation devices out to sea. Swim only where lifeguards are on duty. Ocean swimming is not like swimming in a pool or lake. If this is your first ocean visit, please contact a lifeguard or ranger for more information.

Sunburn can be very painful! It can even ruin your vacation. The combination of bright sun, water, and sand can cause a burn quickly, so short periods of exposure and the use of protective waterproof lotions are recommended.

Hurricanes are rare but may occur from June to October. Winter storms, or nor'easters, should not be taken lightly. Efforts will be made to warn you in time to leave areas if a storm threatens.

Be sure to walk—never drive—across barrier dunes to sand beaches. Park your car only in designated areas to avoid getting stuck in soft sands. Access ramps are provided at many locations for vehicles properly equipped to drive on soft sand. Check with rangers or at visitor centers for regulations on off-road vehicle travel. Bicyclists should use extreme caution because there are no established bike trails in the park.

Mosquitoes and other insect pests can make your trip an ordeal if you don't have an effective repellent and mosquito netting for camping.

Light clothing in summer should be adequate to protect you from the sun and keep you comfortable in the evening. You should wear shoes when walking on the beach and dunes, or in campgrounds. Warm, wind-resistant clothing is needed in winter when high humidity and northerly winds make the weather much colder than temperatures indicate. Limited medical services are available in Ocracoke, Hatteras, Manteo, and Nags Head.

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William Bate

A thin broken strand of islands curves out into the Atlantic Ocean and then back again in a sheltering embrace of North Carolina's mainland coast and its offshore sounds. These are the Outer Banks of North Carolina. For thousands of years these barrier islands have survived the onslaught of wind and sea. Today their long stretches of beach, sand dunes, marshes, and woodlands are set aside as Cape Hatteras National Seashore. It can be a lonely place; you may walk along the beach unseen except by shore birds searching for a

meal. It can be a place of discovery; you may climb the 1870 Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, one of many monuments to man's encounter with the sea. It can be a wild place; you may be buffeted by an approaching gale or surprised by the honking of large flocks of migrating geese. And it can be an exciting place, where you may explore many opportunities for recreation: surf fishing, sunbathing, swimming, beachcombing, canoeing, sailing, surfing, snorkeling. Part land, part sea, Cape Hatteras offers rewards from each.



William Bate



Glenn Van Nimwegen (also: Cape Hatteras lighthouse, below, center)



Glenn Van Nimwegen



David Harvey



Glenn Van Nimwegen



William Bate



Where Land and Sea Merge

Cape Hatteras is at the ocean's edge. But no well-defined boundary marks where the sea ends and the land begins. Here land and sea work together in an uneasy alliance. They share many valuable resources. But the sea rules the barrier islands and there are few places that escape its influence. On your visit take a moment to discover this seaside kingdom.

Dwarfed, odd-shaped trees may catch your eye. Severely pruned by salt-laden winds, these trees are just one example of how the sea affects living things. Closer to the sea, shore birds patrolling the beach for food are interesting to watch. Some catch small fish or crabs carried by waves, while others probe the sand or search under shells for

clams, worms, and insects. On a hike through the maritime forests you will leave the sea behind briefly. These woodlands of oak, cedar, and yaupon holly grow on the islands' higher, broader, somewhat protected parts.

Bright red holly berries and wildflowers offer a brush of color that enlivens the mostly green, brown, and blue landscape. It is a landscape that is usually peaceful—but not always. Storms sometimes batter the islands with fierce winds and waves. Over the years you can witness the retreat of the shoreline from these violent attacks. For the tiny ghost crab, living on the beach in a wave-washed underground burrow, survival is a matter of adaptation, adjusting to meet the demands of the land and sea.

In the protected waters west of the islands you can find excellent opportunities for crabbing and clamming. The ocean also harbors a bounty of life, which includes channel bass, pompano, sea trout, bluefish, and other sport fish. Wintering snow geese, Canada geese, ducks, and many other kinds of birds populate the islands. The best times for observing birdlife are during fall and spring migrations and in the winter. Salt marshes are a source of food for birds and other animals year-round. Here sound waters meet the marsh twice each day as tides come and go, exchanging and replenishing nutrients. At the ocean's edge, you are always on the threshold of a new experience.

Graveyard of the Atlantic

The treacherous waters that lie off the coast of the Outer Banks bear the name Graveyard of the Atlantic. It is a grim, but fitting, epithet, for here more than 800 ships have wrecked, victims of shallow shoals, storms, and war. Diamond Shoals, a bank of shifting sand ridges hidden beneath a turbulent sea off Cape Hatteras, has never promised safe passage for any ship. But seafarers often risked the shoals to take advantage of north or south flowing currents that passed nearby. Many never reached their destination. Fierce winter nor'easters and tropical-born hurricanes drove many ships aground, including the schooner *G.A. Kohler* (shown at right) in 1933. Other ships were lost in wars. During World War II German submarines sank so

many Allied tankers and cargo ships here that these waters earned a second sobering name—Torpedo Junction. In the past 400 years the graveyard has claimed many lives. But many were saved by island villagers. As early as the 1870s villagers served as members of the U.S. Life Saving Service. Others manned lighthouses built to guide mariners. Later, when the U.S. Coast Guard became the guardian of the nation's shores, many residents joined its ranks. When rescue attempts failed, villagers buried the dead and salvaged shipwreck remains. Today few ships wreck, but storms still uncover the ruins of old wrecks that lie along the beaches of the Outer Banks.



Nineteenth century island rescue crews returned shipwreck survivors to safety in small oar-powered boats. Today the U.S. Coast

Guard patrols the Outer Banks with helicopters and other modern equipment. The Gold Lifesaving Medal, the highest peacetime

honor for saving a life, has been awarded to many Hatteras rescuers for their extraordinary heroic deeds.

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