

CHAPTER 5

Cape Hatteras National Seashore



Driving along Hatteras and Ocracoke islands on a narrow strip of sand with the ocean close on both sides, you may think that the Outer Banks are a geographic miracle. Why should this razor-thin rim of sand persist far out in the sea? How wild it seems, a land of windy beach with no end, always in motion, always vulnerable to the next, slightly larger wave. There's so much here to see and learn, and so much solitude to enjoy. You're like a passenger on an enormous ship, and unpredictable nature is the captain.

Oddly, many people don't see Cape Hatteras this way. When they think of the Outer Banks, they think of Nags Head or Kill Devil Hills, towns where tourist development has pushed right up to the edge of the sea and, in many places, gotten really ugly. Most visitors to the national seashore come only for the weekend, and just from the nearest states, to escape the damp heat of the Southern summer. On the Outer Banks, the wind almost always blows, so it feels cooler than inland. But people should come from all over the United States, because the parts of the Outer Banks protected by the

national seashore and other nature preserves are wild and beautiful. Being here, it's easy to imagine what it was like when the first English colonists landed more than 400 years ago, or when the Wright brothers flew the first airplane over a century ago. Both events are well interpreted at their sites. The area is fascinating ecologically, too. Here, north and south meet, the mix of ocean currents, climate, fresh and salt water, and geography creating a fabulous diversity of bird and plant life at places like the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (p. 124) and Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve (p. 124). In this sense, the area is much like Point Reyes, its counterpart on the West Coast, covered in chapter 21, "Point Reyes National Seashore." And for children, the national seashore is a huge sandbox. We saw more children having a great time here than anywhere else we went.

BEST THINGS TO DO

- Pick a place to be alone on a hot, sunny beach, where you can find crabs and shells and swim in warm surf.
- Visit Wright Brothers National Memorial, where the first flight occurred in 1903, and

OUTER BANKS ADDRESS BOOK

Outer Banks National Park Service Group Headquarters. Mailing address for all area national park units: 1401 National Park Dr., Manteo, NC 27954.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore. ☎ 252/473-2111. www.nps.gov/caha.

Wright Brothers National Memorial. ☎ 252/441-7430. www.nps.gov/wrbr.

Fort Raleigh National Historic site. ☎ 252/473-5772. www.nps.gov/fora.

Eastern National (for books and maps). 470 Maryland Dr., Suite 2, Ft. Washington, PA 19034. ☎ 877/NAT-PARK. Fax 215/591-0903. www.eparks.com.

North Carolina Ferry System. 113 Arendell St., Morehead City, NC 28557. ☎ 800/BY-FERRY (eastern U.S. only) or 252/726-6446. Ocracoke ☎ 800/345-1665 or 252/928-3841; Hatteras ☎ 800/368-8949 or 252/986-2353; Cedar Island ☎ 800/856-0343 or 252/225-3551; Swan Quarter ☎ 800/773-1094 or 252/926-1111. www.ncferry.org.

Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. 1 Visitors Center Circle, Manteo, NC 27954. ☎ 877/298-4373 or 252/473-2138. www.outerbanks.org.

Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce. P.O. Box 1757, Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948. ☎ 252/441-8144. www.outerbankschamber.com.

Ocracoke Civic and Business Association. P.O. Box 456, Ocracoke, NC 27960. ☎ 252/928-6711. www.ocracokevillage.com.

- Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, where the first English colony in the New World was built and disappeared in the 1580s.
 - Climb one of the nation's highest lighthouses, visit the aquarium, and climb aboard a 16th-century ship replica.
 - Hike a wetlands trail and look for interesting birds.
 - Go fishing, sailing, or sea kayaking, or wade into shallow sound waters to catch crabs.
- See "Activities" (p. 127).

HISTORY: ISLANDS IN TIME

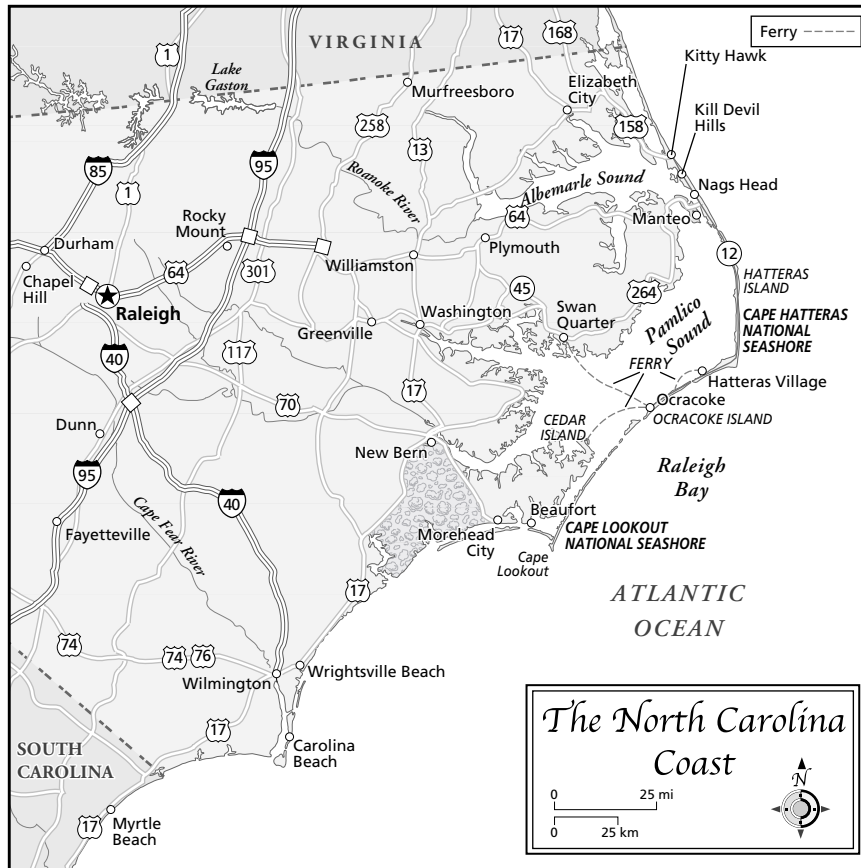
As you drive south along the Outer Banks from Nags Head, heading down Hatteras Island and crossing to Ocracoke on a ferry, you might feel as if you're driving backward in history toward a more isolated, more natural time. The drive starts where the seasonal shopping centers and rows of beachfront houses in the Nags Head area crowd the ocean. Farther south, the highway enters the national seashore, with its miles of wild, windy dunes and empty sand where breakers roll in, mostly unnoticed, day and night. On Ocracoke Island the quiet town of Ocracoke sits among the trees in the wider part of the island, while the

beachfront along the highway remains pretty much wild.

History set these patterns. Over hundreds of years, people decided which places to fill or leave open based on the jobs they had, the roads and bridges they built, and what they wanted to save for the future.

After Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony disappeared in the 1580s (see chapter 2, "Moving Water, Moving Land"), several generations passed without Europeans on the Outer Banks. The islands were too remote and sandy for most people. Just getting there was difficult. On the stormy outer shore, surf constantly beat



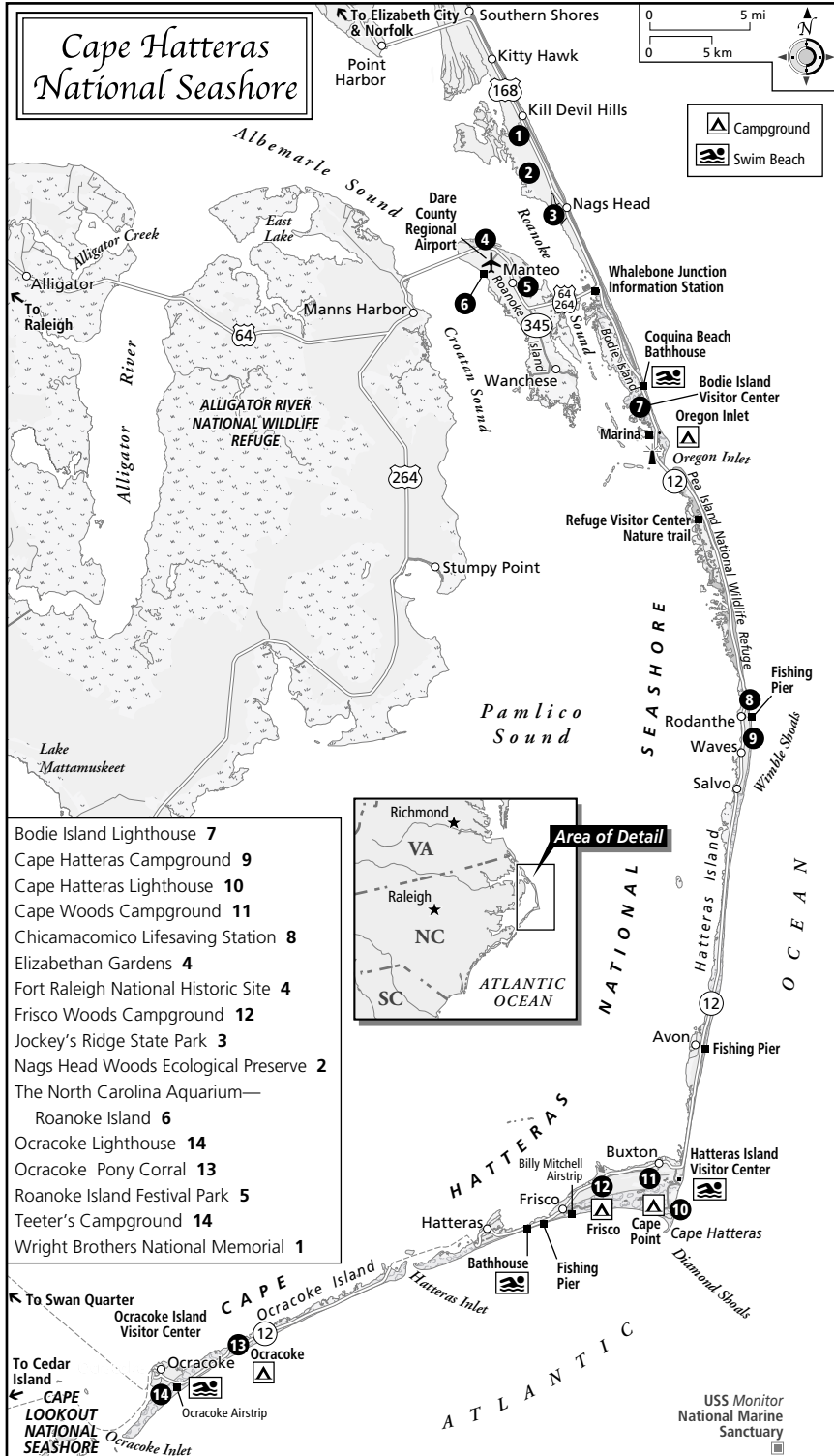


the beaches, making this a dangerous place to sail and an impossible place to land a ship. On the calm, sound-side shore, the water was too shallow for all but small boats, and only experienced sea pilots could find the way through channels that constantly shifted in the sand. These conditions were perfect, however, for one group of residents: people who didn't want anyone to find them. The Outer Banks became a hideout for pirates and other fugitives.

During wars, European kings and queens would allow private ship captains to attack any vessel from an enemy nation and keep whatever they could take. This was called privateering. But when the War of the Spanish Succession ended in 1713, many of the privateers kept right on attacking and robbing other ships. With no war for an excuse, this was just

plain piracy—and if you got caught, the punishment was death. In 1718, in a battle near Ocracoke, the British navy killed the most notorious pirate, Blackbeard, and the age of piracy ended (see “Read Aloud: Blackbeard’s Ghost,” p. 116). His treasure was never found.

The village of Ocracoke became a home for pilots who knew the shipping channels well enough to safely guide vessels through Ocracoke Inlet and across Pamlico Sound to larger towns on the North Carolina mainland. Just as pilots still do in many parts of the world, an Ocracoke pilot would take a small boat out to meet a ship, steer the ship through the channels, and then travel home in the small boat. As the town was settled and built by pilots and their families, others settled there, too. People lived by piloting, fishing, carrying cargo in



boats, grazing cattle and sheep on the beach grass, growing food in their gardens, and gathering valuables that washed up on the beach from shipwrecks.

Many ships sank on the Outer Banks and off Cape Hatteras. Sometimes ships wrecked trying to get through the dangerous inlets. Sometimes they wrecked just trying to get around the Cape. Look at a map: Cape Hatteras forms a turning point for ships traveling up and down the East Coast. If the wind was blowing the wrong way for a sailing ship to get around the corner, the captain would have to wait for the wind to change, sailing back and forth until it did. If he sailed too far out, he might get caught in a current that carried his ship the wrong way. But if he made a mistake sailing in the shallow water near shore, especially if a storm blew in that direction, the ship could hit the bottom and get stuck. Once stuck in the surf, the ship would be smashed to pieces by the waves. This could happen miles offshore or right on the beach, and either way, the sailors often drowned in the breakers. Ocracokers and other Bankers (as year-round residents of the islands were called) would help those sailors lucky enough to wash up on the beach alive—but that didn't stop them from gathering the valuable cargo that also washed up, and using or selling it.

The dangerous waters helped towns grow on the Outer Banks. The first Cape Hatteras Light was built in 1802 to guide ships past the hazards. The lighthouse that stands in the village of Ocracoke today was finished in 1823; it's the oldest still standing in the area. Over the next 50 years, more great lighthouses were built on the islands. The current Cape Hatteras Light, the second, was finished in 1870. It's the tallest brick lighthouse in the United States, and probably the most famous. The Bodie Island Lighthouse was knocked down by Confederate soldiers during the Civil War—the Outer Banks were the site of furious sea battles—and was rebuilt after the war.

In the 1870s, the U.S. Life-Saving Service built stations along the islands to rescue sailors

and passengers from shipwrecks. When a wreck was spotted, horses pulled a boat down the beach, and if the waves weren't too rough, lifesavers rowed to the grounded ship. Sometimes the lifesavers themselves drowned. When the waves were too big to even try rowing out, rescuers fired a cannon that shot a brass ball with a rope attached. With that line fastened to the ship, the sailors could slide across to safety on shore one at a time. (See "Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station," p. 127.)

Even after steamships began to replace sailing ships, many people died on the Outer Banks when they made mistakes in navigation, lost engine power, or suffered storm damage to their vessels. In the world wars, the German navy took advantage of this "Torpedo Junction," the best spot on the East Coast to attack American shipping by submarine. In the first half of 1942, while the U.S. Navy concentrated on fighting in the Pacific Ocean and left Cape Hatteras almost undefended, German U-boats sank some 80 ships within sight of the Outer Banks. Wreckage, oil, and bodies littered the beaches. The British sent ships to defend against the submarines, and on May 11, 1942, a British ship went down with all hands in a torpedo attack. Four British sailors washed up on Ocracoke and were buried by the islanders, who dedicated their little plot to England forever. You can see it on a walking tour of the village; it's an emotionally moving place.

The Outer Banks had a part in many wars. During the American Revolution, the Ocracoke pilots captured a British ship in their harbor and helped supply General Washington at Valley Forge by guiding ships of supplies. When the first U.S. Census was taken in 1790, 25 families were listed on Ocracoke and Portsmouth islands. Among Ocracokers, the names are all still familiar, for the same families live there today. Over more than 200 years, they developed their own ways of doing things, and even their own accent and words that were spoken nowhere else. When babies were born, a local midwife attended, and when people

died they were buried in family plots next to their homes. As you walk around the village, you can see the tiny cemeteries all around.

On the Outer Banks, where towns have come and gone and the population explodes every summer weekend, the permanent community of Ocracoke is rather special. Nags Head is more typical. There, summer visitors built the town, starting in the 1830s. The North Carolina mainland nearby is swampy, and at that time people believed that it gave off a poison gas called “miasma” in summer, causing malaria. The deadly fever killed many people, but it seemed that if they went to the Outer Banks, breathed the salty air, and spent a lot of time in the ocean, the miasma wouldn’t make them sick. The truth was that malaria is caused by tiny parasites in blood carried from person to person by mosquitoes. Malaria wasn’t a problem on the Outer Banks because mosquitoes can’t fly in windy places. Miasma doesn’t exist.

The Outer Banks began to wash away soon after the summer visitors arrived. Grazing animals ate and trampled beach grass that helps

hold the sand in place. As the sand moved, it buried woods and flattened the barrier dunes that keep the waves back. By the 1930s, the wind had flattened the dunes so much that with each hurricane, waves swept across large areas all along the Outer Banks. Some areas were just bare beach all the way across.

At the suggestion of a newspaper editorial, people started talking about a way to save the Outer Banks from washing away. They proposed a park for the areas that hadn’t yet been developed, and a program to rebuild the dunes and to plant beach grass. The changes came fast. The Wright Brothers and Fort Raleigh sites were set aside, and in 1937 Congress authorized the creation of the national seashore by buying up land along the Outer Banks south of Nags Head, except places that were already towns. It was done, and the national seashore started, in 1952. That was when change stopped on most of the Outer Banks south of Nags Head. That is why we can drive back in time today, back to the village lanes of Ocracoke.

ORIENTATION

THE NATIONAL SEASHORE

Cape Hatteras National Seashore is 75 miles long and as narrow as a few hundred feet wide in some spots. It’s made up of barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina. The protected seashore begins on the southern end of **Bodie Island** and includes most of **Hatteras** and **Ocracoke islands**, although small towns pop up along the way. Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge takes up the northern part of Hatteras Island. The water inside the barrier islands is comprised of wide, shallow **Pamlico Sound** near Hatteras and Ocracoke islands, and fresh-water **Albemarle Sound** inside Bodie Island. The sound water is fairly calm, good for crabbing and for wading toddlers; the ocean side has great beaches and big surf. **Roanoke Island** lies between Albemarle and Pamlico sounds, protected by Bodie Island on the ocean side; it’s where the Lost Colony was, and where you’ll

find **Fort Raleigh National Historic Site**. **Wright Brothers National Memorial** is north of the national seashore, on Bodie Island. **Cape Lookout National Seashore** starts at the next island south of Ocracoke, protecting rugged barrier islands without visitor development.

THE TOWNS

Kitty Hawk, **Kill Devil Hills**, and **Nags Head** make up the generally unattractive tourist development that runs together along the road immediately north of the national seashore. There are some interesting places to visit in the area, however, plus large grocery stores and other services, and many motels and rental houses.

Manteo is a pleasant, year-round town on Roanoke Island with a variety of services, a nicely redeveloped waterfront, major historic sites, and an aquarium.

Heading south through the national seashore, the towns get progressively more attractive as you go away from Nags Head. **Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo**, a trio of tourist towns on the northern part of Hatteras Island, show the wear of years. **Avon** is a bit more upscale, but still mostly just a strip of beach houses. **Buxton**, at the corner where the island turns west, is a larger town on a wider piece of island, with houses back in the woods. The small village of **Hatteras**, at the south end of the island, has a harbor and some newer hotels.

The village of **Ocracoke**, on an island you can reach only by ferry, is the one town on the Outer Banks with real charm. Cut off from the rest of the world for hundreds of years out on this strip of sand, the people, called Ocracokers, developed their own island ways and unique form of English. The differences are fading with time, but Ocracoke still feels like an island.

ROADS & FERRIES

It would be pretty tough to get lost here. Two-lane North Carolina **Highway 12** runs the length of the national seashore, meeting **U.S. 64** at an intersection known as **Whalebone Junction**, on Bodie Island at the north end of the national seashore. U.S. 64 connects the region to points west. Whalebone Junction is a major landmark, and mileage along the Cape is often counted from there. To the north, Highway 12 runs parallel with **U.S. 158**,

CHALLENGES FROM ISABEL

As my researchers and I completed research on this edition, Hurricane Isabel caused major damage on the Outer Banks. Not only were some motels and houses destroyed, but the storm even altered the geography of the islands, opening an inlet nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide between Buxton and Hatteras on southern Hatteras Island. The new island was quickly named Little Hatteras. As I write this, 4 weeks after the storm, state workers plan to fill the new inlet with sand, but success is not assured, and communication and travel remain difficult or impossible (see "Inlets in Barrier Islands," in chapter 2, "Moving Water, Moving Land"). With all this uncertainty, I have to add an extra warning to readers to check on current conditions and lodging opportunities using the resources listed on p. 106, under "Outer Banks Address Book."

which leaves the island above Kitty Hawk—that's the main way north.

To the south, Highway 12 leads to the **ferry** at the south end of Hatteras Island, where frequent free service runs to the north end of Ocracoke Island (assuming the success of the current hurricane recovery). Highway 12 then runs to Ocracoke village, on the south end of that island. Ferries also run from the village to the mainland. For more on the ferries, see p. 106.

MAKING THE ARRANGEMENTS

WHEN TO GO

The bounds of the visitor season here are Easter (any time Mar 22–Apr 25) to Columbus Day, the second Monday in October. The area is busiest in July and August, followed by June. The temperatures in midsummer are cooler than on the mainland, but still quite hot if you're not used to it, with highs averaging in the mid-80s (high 20s Celsius) and often going into the 90s (30s Celsius). The trick is to stay in the wind, which is almost always blowing,

and in the shade—even the hottest days don't feel that bad if you're under a beach umbrella and there's a strong sea breeze. Wind also helps with mosquitoes, which can be bad all summer, depending on the year. Weather is changeable during spring break, with highs in the 60s and 70s (teens–20s Celsius), but the water then is too cold for swimming. The ocean water is warmest on Ocracoke. Swimming starts there around Memorial Day and on the east-facing islands in mid-June.

The best time to go—if you don't have to go during a school break—is September and October, when the weather is cooler, birds and fish are plentiful, the bugs and crowds are gone, and the water is still fine. You'll also save on accommodations after Labor Day and find campsites easy to obtain. Midwinter is stingingly cold on the Outer Banks; not much is open.

Hurricane season runs June through November, with the most likely time for storms mid-August to the first week in October. If one comes, you may have to evacuate and forget about your whole trip. See p. 121 for important information about hurricanes.

HOW MUCH TIME TO SPEND

The Outer Banks draw millions of people from nearby states for weekends of beachgoing and fishing, but I'd recommend at least a week at the national seashore. You'll want plenty of time to enjoy the beach and other outdoor activities, a couple of days for the historic sites, and time to get down to Ocracoke Island to catch the slow rhythm of life there. Avoid arriving on weekends, especially for camping or sightseeing, because of the crowds. During the week, even in the high season, there aren't many people around.

HOW FAR TO PLAN AHEAD

Summer weekends are busy; weekdays are not. For motels, 4 weeks should be enough lead time to reserve, and in the middle of the week there's a good chance of finding vacancies on the same day as the stay. For weekends, especially summer holidays, bookings may be needed months ahead. Weekly cottage rentals should be reserved in February or March for the summer. People who come back every year reserve a year ahead. Less notice is needed for all accommodations in the off season.

For national seashore camping, only the Ocracoke Campground takes reservations, handled through the national system described in chapter 1, "Planning Your Trip."

READING UP

The National Park bookstores have good selections in history, nature, and the outdoors. You can order some of these by phone or online from Eastern National (☎ 877/NAT-PARK; www.eparks.com).

Nature: The best nature guidebook I've found on this or any other area is *The Nature of the Outer Banks*, by Dirk Frankenberg (University of North Carolina Press, \$19). It explains seashore concepts in understandable terms using mile-by-mile commentary on what you see as examples. You can order directly from the publisher (☎ 800/848-6224; www.uncpress.unc.edu). **Fishing:** The visitor centers sell an excellent 40-page booklet by Ken Taylor, *Fishing the Outer Banks*, for \$4, a good purchase for any angler who doesn't know the area.

GETTING THERE

By Car

From the north, you leave I-64 or U.S. 13 in Norfolk. Two parallel routes from there—Highway 168 and U.S. 17 and 158—are about equal. Either way, you end up taking U.S. 158 across Currituck Sound to Kitty Hawk, then south to Whalebone Junction and the start of the national seashore.

From the west or south, U.S. Highway 64 leads east from I-40 at Raleigh or from I-95 at Rocky Mount to Roanoke Island and Whalebone Junction. Or, if you are headed to Ocracoke, split from U.S. 64 at Highway 45 and follow it to the ferry at Swan Quarter.

To Ocracoke, the main route is to drive through the national seashore on Highway 12 and then take the free ferry from Hatteras Village. This route was destroyed in Hurricane Isabel but should be restored by the time you read this. If you are coming from the south or west, take the ferry across Pamlico Sound. You can stay in your car, parked on the deck, getting out to watch the water and scenery pass by from the rail; there's also a small indoor seating area. From the west, split from U.S. 64 onto

WEATHER CHART: CAPE HATTERAS

	AVG. HIGH (°F/°C)	AVG. LOW (°F/°C)	PRECIPITATION (IN.)	WATER TEMP. (°F/°C)
December–February	54/12	39/4	14	49/9
March	60/16	44/7	4.3	52/11
April	67/19	51/11	3.5	59/15
May	74/23	59/15	4	68/20
June	80/27	67/19	4.1	74/23
July	85/29	72/22	5	77/25
August	85/29	72/22	6	80/27
September	81/27	68/20	5.3	76/24
October	72/22	59/15	5	70/21
November	65/18	49/9	5	58/14

Cape Hatteras averages; precipitation is for the entire period covered

Highway 45 to Swan Quarter. From the south, wend your way up the country roads to Cedar Island. The crossing from either point to Ocracoke is about 2½ hours, and the fare is \$15 per car. Reserve in advance, because the ferries are small. Contact information is under “Outer Banks Address Book” (p. 106).

By Air

You need a car to get around at Cape Hatteras. If you want to fly there and then rent a car, the nearest major city airport is in Norfolk, Virginia, about 100 miles north. Major car-rental agencies are located there. To shop car-rental prices or airfares, Richmond, Virginia, and Raleigh, North Carolina, are each around 190 miles from the national seashore.

WHAT TO PACK

Clothing

During the summer season you’ll spend most of your time in shorts, T-shirts, swimsuits, sandals or beach shoes, and sun hats. Also bring long pants and shirts for protection against insects, walking shoes for the historic sites and scratchy nature walks, and windbreakers or

raincoats. If you come in the off season, bring more warm clothing. There aren’t many places to wear formal clothing.

Gear

Prepare for wind, sun, and bugs. Bring mosquito repellent and strong sunblock. You can buy a beach umbrella to get away from the sun, and sand toys for the kids, at surf shops all along the highway. If you have a toddler, bring a backpack or rent a sand cart to carry him or her over sand. You often have to hike over a dune to get to the water, and once there you may want to walk along the beach. A portable radio to keep track of the weather forecasts is a good idea, too.

If you’re camping, bring lots of rope or cord. Camping on a windy sand dune requires you to tie your tent to the picnic table, the bumper of the car, or anything else that won’t move. Short, skinny tent stakes won’t work; instead, you need metal, blade-shaped stakes, and plenty of them (see “Gear,” in chapter 1). Also, shade is rare at any of the campgrounds, so canopies and screen-house tents that can go over a picnic table are popular.

WHERE TO SPEND THE NIGHT

CAMPGROUNDS

We love camping at Cape Hatteras, surrounded by wind and sand and close enough to the ocean to stroll from the tent to the water. But you do need shade and wind to escape the heat, and mosquitoes can be vicious near the marshes and when the wind is low. And life is gritty. Despite the cold showers, which are heaven on a hot day, you're always sandy.

At the National Seashore

There are four National Park Service campgrounds in the national seashore, all just behind the dunes on the ocean beach. The facilities generally are more modern and cleaner than those at most national parks. All the campgrounds have cold showers in booths—fine on a hot afternoon—and cold-water restrooms with flush toilets. There are no hookups at any of the campgrounds; a dump station is at Oregon Inlet.

Only Ocracoke takes reservations; the other three are first-come, first-served. On Sundays through Thursdays, that system works well, but on Friday and Saturday nights and holiday weekends, getting a site is difficult. The campgrounds often fill on Friday before noon; a waiting list is kept for Saturday in case someone leaves early. During the week, arrive before noon for your choice of prime sites, but even in late afternoon there's usually something left.

Campgrounds are listed here by their distance from Whalebone Junction, at the north end of the national seashore.

Oregon Inlet. On Hwy. 12, at the south end of Bodie Island. \$18 per night. 120 sites. Closed Columbus Day to Easter.

Right across the highway from the marina and fishing center, where you can shop for food and fishing supplies, these grassy and sandy sites sit on the edge of and among the dunes. Many informal paths lead through a series of dunes to the broad beach, which is heavily traveled by off-road vehicles. It's an attractive

campground, and a good place to stay if you want to be within the national seashore but still close to the historic sites. Coquina Beach, which has lifeguards, is several miles north.

Cape Point. At the Cape Point Beach access, near Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. \$18 per night. 202 sites. Closed Labor Day to late Memorial Day.

This campground occupies a big grassy lawn behind the dunes near the point where the Outer Banks make their sharp turn from north-south to east-west. The walk to the very end of the point is about 1½ miles each way. Of the four National Park Service campgrounds, this one is the nearest to a beach with lifeguards. The Buxton Woods Nature Trail and the big lighthouse also are nearby, as is the town of Buxton, but the campground is at the end of a quiet road. It operates during a shorter season than the others.

Frisco. On Billy Mitchell Rd., off Hwy. 12, Frisco. \$18 per night. 127 sites. Closed Columbus Day to Easter.

A few miles west of Cape Point, the Frisco campground has an isolated, wilderness-like feel. Bushy dunes rise around the sites, many of which have good privacy (arrive early to get one of those, not those that are packed close together). From atop the dunes, there are sweeping views all the way to the lighthouse. The seaside is near, too. A mile away, on Highway 12, are the Frisco Market, Frisco Rod and Gun, a post office, and a Texaco that stocks everything a camper could need.

Ocracoke. On Hwy. 12, about 4 miles east of the village. \$18 per night. Reservations accepted through national system. 135 sites. Closed Columbus Day to Easter.

A grassy area stands behind a single dune, close to long, empty Ocracoke Beach. Don't set up camp on the other side of the campground near the road, where marshy, mosquito-ridden brush grows. To escape the bugs, you have to be in the wind. Reserve through the national system (see chapter 1), but because you choose

PARK CAMPING BASICS: TOILETS, SHOWERS & LAUNDRY

The national seashore campgrounds and beach restrooms lack hot water. The visitor centers have hot water and soap. There are cold-water showers in booths at the campgrounds and open-air showers just for getting sand off at Coquina Beach and Sandy Bay Day Use Area. Places to wash your clothes are not convenient to the national seashore, so bring a good supply. You can drop off laundry at **Outer Banks Cleaners**, 414 S. Hwy. 64/264 in Manteo (☎ **252/473-5185**).

your site on arrival, it pays to be early. Groceries are available in the village.

Commercial Campgrounds

All rates listed here are for the high season; they drop somewhat in the off season.

Camp Hatteras. Hwy. 12 (P.O. Box 10), Waves, NC 27968. ☎ **252/987-2777**. www.camphatteras.com. Tent sites \$30–\$35, full hookups \$55, up to 2 people; \$4 per extra adult, \$2 per extra child 6–17, free for children under 6. 400 sites. Indoor and outdoor pools, hot tubs, playground, clubhouse, tennis, sailing, minigolf, store, laundry.

I've never seen a place quite like this, although a similar KOA campground is right next door. Covering 50 acres all the way across the Cape, with long frontages on both shores, it has everything listed above and more—three stocked fishing ponds, for example. RVs couldn't do better for this kind of place; tenters may not be as happy.

The area is a bit tacky, with a lot of roadside tourist development, including amusement parks, minigolf courses, and the like—a place for a fun kid trip, but not what you might think of as a national park trip.

Cape Woods Campground. 47649 Buxton Back Rd. (P.O. Box 690), Buxton, NC 27920. ☎ **252/995-5850**. Tent sites \$26, full hookups \$35, up to 2 adults and 2 children; \$4 per extra adult, \$2 per extra child under 17. 130 sites. Pool, playground, laundry.

In the woods next to a pond in Buxton, more than a mile from the ocean, this is a nicely landscaped, family-run campground. The sites are wooded and shady and have a natural feel.

Frisco Woods Campground. 53124 Hwy. 12 (P.O. Box 159), Frisco, NC 27936. ☎ **800/948-3942** or 252/995-5208. www.outer-banks.com/friscowoods. Tent sites \$28–\$35, full hookups \$37–\$42, up to 2 adults and 2 children; extra adult \$6, extra child under 17 \$3. 250 sites. Pool, coin-op laundry, watersports rentals, playground.

This is an exceptional campground, combining a natural setting with enough activities to make you want to spend plenty of time. Set among trees and on lawns along with lots of frontage on Pamlico Sound, the family-run campground offers gear rental for playing on the water and even windsurfing lessons. There's a small beach. The campground also has cabins.

Teeter's Campground. British Cemetery Rd., Ocracoke, NC 27960. ☎ **800/705-5341** or 252/928-3135. Tent sites \$15, full hookups \$25; \$2 per extra person over age 6.

If you want to hook up your RV or camper in Ocracoke, or absolutely must have a hot shower, this campground under shade trees right in the village is the place to go.

HOTELS

Motels are all along the islands in each town. They generally have pools—an advantage over most cottage arrangements—and some rent cottages, too; read the section below if you are considering that option. Rates are highest in July and August, often declining in June and into the off season. Some places have five or six levels of rates depending on the season. Here I've listed just a few of the better places, going from north to south, with peak weekday rates only. Higher rates may apply for weekends or holidays. All rooms have TVs, phones, and air-conditioning. You can easily find cheaper accommodations in the area's many motels. The Outer Banks Visitor Bureau's website (www.outerbanks.org) contains links to accommodations, including rental houses, with updated vacancy information.

READ ALOUD: BLACKBEARD'S GHOST

Here's a scary story for the campfire. Beware—it has lots of blood and guts.

Back before just about anyone lived on the Outer Banks, when there were no roads, towns, or bridges, before our country even became the United States and was still part of England, pirates used the islands for their secret hideouts. The pirates had learned to fight in wars between the countries of Europe, when they had permission to attack ships that belonged to the other side and sell the valuables they took. That was called "privateering," and ship captains could get rich doing it. So when the war ended, some of them didn't want to stop. But without permission, they weren't privateers anymore—they were pirates.

A pirate ship had to be fast and carry a lot of sailors who were good fighters. The strongest and fiercest pirate was the captain, and he could rule his men only by fear and respect. When the pirates saw a ship on the horizon, they would chase it and fire cannons at it until they could come alongside and get onboard. Ships carrying passengers and cargo didn't have enough sailors or weapons to defend themselves against the pirates, but navy ships did. If the pirates got caught by the navy, they would be hanged. So the pirates might kill everyone onboard a ship they caught to keep anyone from telling what they had done.

One of the worst pirates was Blackbeard. His real name was Edward Teach. He grew up in England and went to sea as a privateer. After the war was over, he met a pirate named Captain Hornigold in the Bahamas, and Captain Hornigold put Blackbeard in command of his own ship. Blackbeard turned out to be a very scary pirate. He was a fierce fighter. Going into battle, he wore two gun belts across his chest and carried two pistols, and he made himself more frightening by braiding his hair and beard and tying slow-burning fuses in the braids. With the ship Hornigold gave him, Blackbeard soon captured a much larger ship of his own and loaded it with hundreds of pirates and 40 cannons. Within a couple of years, he had 4 ships and 400 pirates—his own little navy, able to beat anyone.

By that time, piracy had become such a serious problem in America that our king, George I (remember, this is before we were the USA), decided to offer the pirates a deal. He wouldn't punish them if they would agree to stop being pirates. Blackbeard decided to take the offer and settled down as a wealthy gentleman in Bath, North Carolina. He got rid of most of his ships and pirates; the worst of his pirates he marooned on an island. But pretty soon he went back to his old ways. Blackbeard set

Roanoke Island Inn. 305 Fernando St., Manteo, NC 27954. ☎ **877/473-5511** or 252/473-5511. Fax 252/473-1019. www.roanokeislandinn.com. 8 units, 1 bungalow. \$168 double; \$198 suite for 3; \$228 bungalow for 4; \$30 extra person (child or adult). AE, MC, V. Closed Nov–Mar.

A huge, perfectly proportioned country house on elaborately landscaped grounds stands right on the waterfront in Manteo, with good restaurants within walking distance and bikes to head to the historic parks or aquarium. The house, still in the family that built its first section in 1860, was remodeled by its current architect owner. It feels just right. Guest rooms are comfortable and stylish, with wood floors, quilts, antique furniture, and reproductions. The parlor, site of the included continental breakfast and snacks, looks like a movie set,

with a stunning ceiling mural painted by an artist from Fort Raleigh's *Lost Colony* show. Several rooms and the bungalow out back are big enough for families.

First Colony Inn. 6720 S. Virginia Dare Trail, Milepost 16, Nags Head, NC 27959. ☎ **800/368-9390** or 252/441-2343. Fax 252/441-9234. www.firstcolonyinn.com. 26 units. \$125–\$200 double; \$35 per extra person, \$15 child under 2. AE, DISC, MC, V.

The lovingly restored wooden building contains large rooms furnished in colonial style with antiques, reproductions, and custom pieces. They have every amenity, from the usual ones such as VCRs and refrigerators to more exotic additions, including individual climate control and dedicated hot-water heaters. Children are welcome and well provided for, with an upstairs library stocked with games



off on a voyage, saying he was going to trade cargo. When he came back he had a French ship, which he claimed he had just found floating in the ocean without anyone onboard—as if anyone believed that! Then he shared the cargo with the governor and chief justice of North Carolina.

Soon Blackbeard went back to piracy full time, grabbing ships sailing up and down the coast, but the governor of North Carolina didn't do anything to stop him, maybe because he had gotten a share of the booty. People in North Carolina were angry and asked the governor of Virginia to help. In November 1718, that governor sent two British navy warships, led by Lieutenant Robert Maynard, to stop Blackbeard.

Lieutenant Maynard found Blackbeard at his hideout in Teach's Hole, a small bay on Ocracoke Island, and attacked. Blackbeard was outnumbered and surprised. He fired his cannons at Maynard's ship and disabled it, but Maynard's sailors knocked out Blackbeard's rigging with their guns, and the pirate ship ran into a sandbar and got stuck. Maynard sent his men below decks to protect them from Blackbeard's guns while his ship drifted toward the pirates. When the ships touched, the pirates jumped aboard, throwing bombs, and Maynard's men ran up on deck.

Blackbeard and Maynard met face-to-face, and both fired pistols at the same time. Blackbeard was hit, but he drew his sword and fought on. Maynard's sword broke, and Blackbeard lunged at him to finish him off, but just then one of the British sailors turned around and slashed Blackbeard's neck with a sword. Blood went everywhere, but Blackbeard and his men kept fighting. Blackbeard fought on even after he had been cut with swords five more times. Finally he fell to the deck. Seeing their leader fall, the other pirates jumped in the water and then gave up. Later, all but one were hanged.

Seventeen men died in the battle, and 15 were injured. Maynard had Blackbeard's head cut off and hung from the bow of his boat as he sailed to Bath. Blackbeard's body was thrown into the ocean. His treasure was never found. He had never told anyone where it was hidden. Maybe you can find it on your visit to the Outer Banks.

Or maybe you'll see Blackbeard himself. People say his body was so strong that it swam around and around his ship after his head had been cut off, then sank to the bottom. And since then, late at night, his ghost has often been seen on the beaches of Ocracoke and along the rest of the Outer Banks. Blackbeard's body wanders on and on, looking for his head.

and an elegant, wooden-decked pool. You have to walk to the beach, which is across the road. The place doesn't quite fit the neighborhood, with the Dairy Queen and Blackbeard's Mini Golf across the street, but the national seashore and Manteo are a short drive away. Rates include a hot breakfast. Reserve well ahead, because some dates book up a year in advance.

Lighthouse View Motel-Cottages. Hwy. 12 (P.O. Box 39), Buxton, NC 27920. ☎ **800/225-7651** or 252/995-5680. Fax 252/995-5945. www.lighthouseview.com. 50 units, 28 cottages. \$149–\$176 double; \$5 extra person; efficiencies \$1,125 weekly; cottages \$2,500 weekly. AE, DISC, MC, V.

The large, modern, sun-drenched motel rooms feel like a beach house, with the sound and sight of surf ever present just beyond the dune.

Standing on pilings, the weathered shingle buildings rise several stories around a sandy, grassy compound with an outdoor pool. Many rooms have decks, and there are many steps to climb. All I saw were well kept and smelled fresh, and some of the cottages are real showplaces: luxurious, current, and large. I counted five bathrooms in one. Check the complex rate card on the website; rates are substantially lower in most of June and August, with the rates listed here applying only for the 6-week summer peak. Off-peak, some of the cottages rent by the night as well. If you can't get in here, right across the street is the **Comfort Inn Hatteras Island** (☎ **800/432-1441** or 252/995-6100; www.outerbankscomfortinn.com), with very nice rooms in an attractive building.

Holiday Inn Express Hatteras. 58822 Hwy. 12, Hatteras Village, NC 27943. ☎ **800/361-1590** or 252/986-1110. Fax 252/986-1131. www.hatterasisl.hiexpress.com. 72 units. \$130 double; \$150 suite; \$10 extra adult, children under 18 free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V.

Right by the ferry dock and marina at the south end of Hatteras Village, this fresh, modern hotel was built to look like a lifesaving station and covered in painted shingles, giving it a pleasingly historic look. All rooms in the solid buildings are large and crisply decorated. They have microwaves, refrigerators, and other extras. Those with views look out on the marsh. The pool is large, with a deck of brick. A coin-op laundry is on-site.

Note: The rate information here is out-of-date—Hurricane Isabel stranded the hotel on newly formed Little Hatteras Island and left it closed indefinitely. The building was intact, so it will reopen, but details were up in the air at press time.

Pony Island Motel. Hwy. 12 (P.O. Box 309), Ocracoke, NC 27960. ☎ **252/928-4411**. Fax 252/928-2522. 50 units. \$87–\$150 double; \$5 extra adult, \$2 extra child under 12. DISC, MC, V.

There are other, more historic hotels on Ocracoke, but the newly remodeled rooms at this place on the edge of the village are just about perfect for families. In the new building, each of the large, airy rooms has a microwave, refrigerator, wet bar, and coffeemaker. The suites are like homes, and the prices aren't out of line. Most of the older rooms have been remodeled and have wainscoting and similar details and fridges, but remain on the small side. A good-size pool is in front by the highway. The popular on-site restaurant serves some of the best breakfasts in town, and the hotel rents bikes for \$2 an hour.

COTTAGES

If you plan to stay a week or 2, renting a summer house is the best way to enjoy the Outer Banks. You can relax and spread out, you don't have to worry about eating out with the kids, and you'll have a home base with a place to

play and a sense of security. You'll have privacy from each other and from the rest of the world. The downside: You have to rent by the week, you usually won't have a pool, and prices can be high, especially if you want to be on the beach. You also add the work of cooking, cleaning, shopping, and possibly bringing housewares and linens from home. During the season, rentals are for a full week, turning over on Saturday or Sunday. You might be able to negotiate shorter periods during the off season, when a lot of places are empty.

Only families can rent some places, and the agent may ask for references. You, on the other hand, often must choose based on a photo and put up a lot of money before you even arrive. Ask plenty of questions, get a complete listing of what the rental comes with and what you need to bring, and make sure you understand the lease conditions. Most agencies sell insurance against unavoidable cancellations. It costs 4% to 7.5% of the rental cost, depending on the agency and the time of year—hurricane season costs most. Your cash deposit often amounts to half of the rental cost and generally is not refundable if the owner can't rent to someone else—even in case of hurricane—so the insurance seems like a good bet. For even greater security, consider third-party trip cancellation insurance. **Access America** (☎ **800/284-8300**; www.accessamerica.com) is a reputable firm, or shop at www.insure.com and click on the "Travel" tab. When you arrive, inventory any preexisting damage so that you don't get stuck with a bill for it when you leave.

Rates are highest in July and early August, in some cases going down 10% to 20% in June and late August, and dropping as much as half in the spring and fall. Size, location, and view determine how much you pay, with beachfront properties commanding a high premium. Prices in the high season for beachfront houses range from around \$1,200 a week for a two-bedroom house to more than \$10,000 for a large place. On the sound side, prices are on the lower end of that range, sometimes as low

as \$800. Real-estate agents publish catalogs and websites of their summer rental listings, often with pictures of the houses, rates, and enough details to allow you to make a choice. Here are three agencies; the chamber of commerce (see “Outer Banks Address Book,” p. 106) can tell you about many others.

Hatteras Realty. Hwy. 12 (P.O. Box 249), Avon, NC 27915. ☎ **800/428-8372** or 252/995-5466. www.hatterasrealty.com.

This agency lists hundreds of houses from Avon to Hatteras Village in a detailed catalog of almost 300 pages. Renters get the major bonus of free use of Club Hatteras, a facility in Avon with a large pool, tennis courts, and a summer camp drop-off program for kids. Nonrenters can use the pool for \$7 a day.

Outer Beaches Realty. P.O. Box 280, Avon, NC 27915; local offices in Avon, Waves, and Hatteras. ☎ **800/627-3150** or 252/995-4477. Fax 800/627-3250 or 252/995-6137. www.outerbeaches.com.

This agency has an extraordinary selection of more than 500 properties on Hatteras Island, all listed with interior and exterior photos in a catalog you can obtain by calling or going online.

Ocracoke Island Realty. 1055 Irvin Garrish Hwy. (P.O. Box 238), Ocracoke, NC 27960. ☎ **252/928-6261** or 252/928-7411. Fax 252/928-1721. www.ocracokeislandrealty.com.

Martha Garrish offers 175 houses in Ocracoke, with high-season prices ranging from \$500 to \$3,100 a week. Although the island has no beachfront housing, it does have some houses on the sound, a few with their own docks, and some where you can bring a pet.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

ENTRANCE FEES

There are no entrance fees or beach fees at Cape Hatteras, but historic sites may charge fees (see “Places for Learning,” p. 125).

REGULATIONS

Camping is permitted only in formal campgrounds. **Fires** are allowed below the high-tide line, below the dunes. Put them out with water, not sand. **Fireworks** are not allowed anywhere on the national seashore, including the beaches along the towns, because they cause too many fires. **Pets** have to be on a leash and aren’t allowed at beaches with lifeguards.

VISITOR CENTERS

Wright Brothers National Memorial, in Kill Devil Hills (p. 127), and **Fort Raleigh National Historic Site**, on Roanoke Island near Manteo (p. 125), are good first stops for national seashore information. Both are open year-round.

Bodie Island Visitor Center. Near the Bodie Island Lighthouse, west of Hwy. 12, 5 miles south of Whalebone Junction. ☎ **252/441-5711**. Daily summer 9am–6pm; off season 9am–5pm.

This small center occupies the keeper’s quarters for the lighthouse here and has an exhibit on lighthouses. The lighthouse itself is open intermittently, when volunteers are present, and then only the base is accessible.

Hatteras Island Visitor Center. Near the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, Buxton. ☎ **252/995-4474**. Daily summer 9am–6pm; off season 9am–5pm.

The national seashore’s main center occupies a small, historic building, moved from the eroding shore along with the famous lighthouse. Displays cover the history of industry and war in the area with artifacts and written placards at an adult level. An information desk and a good little bookstore are downstairs. Many ranger programs start here; for details, see the park newspaper and “Programs” (p. 130). Information on climbing the lighthouse is under “The Lighthouses” (p. 123).

Ocracoke Island Visitor Center. Near the ferry dock in Ocracoke Village. ☎ **252/928-4531**. Daily summer 9am–6pm; off season 9am–5pm.

The center mostly is a place to ask questions and join ranger programs, and has a few exhibits.

FOR HANDY REFERENCE

Emergencies Dial ☎ **911** in emergencies. For nonemergency situations, call **Dare County dispatch** at ☎ **252/473-3444** north of Oregon Inlet, or the **Dare County sheriff** ☎ **252/995-6111** south of the inlet. The **Regional Medical Center** (☎ **252/261-9000**), at Milepost 1½ on Highway 158 in Kitty Hawk, has a wide range of services and is open for urgent care 9am to 9pm. **Outer Banks Hospital**, at 4800 S. Croatan Hwy., Nags Head (☎ **252/449-4555**), has a 24-hour emergency room. On Ocracoke the **Ocracoke Health Center** (☎ **252/928-1511**, or 252/928-7425 after hours) is on Back Road by the school playground. Follow the sign off Highway 12 by the ferry terminal.

Stores Each town has a grocery store with most of what a summer visitor would need. There are large **Food Lion** stores on U.S. 158 in Nags Head and Kitty Hawk, and on Highway 12 in Avon, and a **Food-A-Rama** grocery in Manteo on U.S. 64. On Ocracoke, **The Community Store** on Silver Lake Road (☎ **252/928-3321**) is a classic country store and community center established in 1918.

Banks ATMs are in towns up and down Highways 12 and 158 and in Manteo and Ocracoke Village. **East Carolina Bank** has locations in Manteo (☎ **252/473-5821**), Avon (☎ **252/995-7900**), Hatteras (☎ **252/986-2131**), and Ocracoke (☎ **252/928-5231**), all with ATMs.

Post Offices Each town along the national seashore has a post office on Route 12. In Nags Head the post office is on U.S. 158, and in Manteo, at 212 B South U.S. 64/264.

Gear Sales & Rental A complete sportsman-oriented sporting goods store, **Frisco Rod and Gun**, is on Route 12 in Frisco (☎ **252/995-5366**; www.friscorodgun.com). The website includes a message board full of fishing reports and discussion. Rental agencies for just about anything summer people might need are all along the Outer Banks, and it's easy to find people who will stock your beach house. **Ocean Atlantic Rentals** (☎ **800/635-9559** for reservations; www.oceanatlanticrentals.com) rents all kinds of baby, beach, watersports, and household equipment, as well as bikes, bike trailers, trikes—whatever. It has offices at Mile 10, Beach Road, in Nags Head (☎ **252/441-7823**), and on Route 12 in Avon (☎ **252/995-5868**).

Outdoor Activities **Kitty Hawk Kites** (☎ **877/FLY-THIS** or 252/441-4124; www.kittyhawk.com), with 12 stores, including locations in Manteo, Avon, Hatteras, and Ocracoke and a main office in Nags Head, offers lessons, guided outings, rentals, or day camps for hang gliding, sea kayaking, kite surfing, parasailing, rock climbing, and other sports; see "Activities" (p. 127).

Town Visitor Centers

Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center. 101 Town Hall Dr., Kill Devil Hills. ☎ **252/441-8144**. Mon–Fri 8:30am–5pm.

If you're coming from the north, this may be the most convenient source of information on businesses.

The Outer Banks Welcome Center. 1 Visitors Center Circle, Manteo. ☎ **877/298-4373** or 252/473-2138. Daily 9am–5:30pm.

This is the county visitor bureau's large information stop in Manteo, providing information on offerings for the whole region, including

Ocracoke, which doesn't have its own center. Besides staff to answer questions, there are touch-screen kiosks and a drive-in dump station for RVs.

GETTING AROUND By Car or RV

Driving is the only practical way around the national seashore. Traffic flows pretty well on Highway 12, but don't count on getting anywhere fast. Be careful stopping or trying to turn around on the highway; many vehicles get stuck on the sandy shoulders every day. For off-road driving, see p. 129.



By Ferry

To get to Ocracoke Island from the rest of the national seashore, you have to take the free state ferry from Hatteras Village, a fun ride that's part of what makes the place special. This service was suspended for Hurricane Isabel recovery but should be restored by the time you read this. In the summer the ferry runs from 5am to midnight, leaving on the hour and half hour during the day, on the hour in the early morning and evening. From November 1 to April 30, it runs on the hour only. If you time your arrival at the ramp perfectly to catch the boat, you may find that it's full and you have to wait for the next one. The ride takes 40 minutes. Contact information for the **North Carolina Ferry System** is under "Outer Banks Address Book" (p. 106).

By Bike

Highway 12, the national seashore's main road, with its fast traffic and lack of shoulders, is not safe for children on bikes. If you're spending a week, you or the kids may enjoy taking a bike to the beach, or around the campground or cottage. Bikes can also come in handy in Manteo, where a paved bike trail leads from the village to the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site and elsewhere. In the village of Ocracoke, traffic is slow and there are quiet lanes safe for biking. Bike-rental agencies are listed under "For Handy Reference" (p. 120); the Pony Island Motel in Ocracoke (p. 118) rents bikes.

KEEPING SAFE & HEALTHY

In addition to these tips, see the information on sunburn, dehydration, insects, poison ivy, and seasickness under "Dealing with Hazards," in chapter 1.

Drowning

The fact is, people *do* drown every year in the surf of the national seashore, and that's why you see warnings posted every time you turn around. Some of the advice is easy, but also easy to forget: Don't swim in big surf, and don't let small children swim in little surf,

which is proportionally much larger than they are. Have someone watching everyone in the water. Go to beaches that have lifeguards. Red flags mean swimming is dangerous, so stay out of the water if you see one. In any weather the gradual beaches and calm water on the sound side of the islands are better for little ones. For more tips, see "Practicalities: Swimming Safely in Surf" (p. 123).

Foot Injuries

You can run into cacti, burrs, sharp shells, and hot sand unexpectedly, and they can cause great anguish and even injury. Tiny prickly pear cacti grow all over Wright Brothers National Memorial, so heed the signs that tell you to stay on the path. Plants called sand spurs aren't dangerous, but they can hurt and upset kids. They are common in the seaside campgrounds. The spurs stick to socks and soft shoes but don't seem to be as bothersome if they don't have fabric to cling to. Be cautious at the beach and at least carry shoes with you. The sand can burn, and sharp shells and washed-up debris can cut.

Hurricanes

The storm surge, a bulge of water brought by the low pressure and wind of a hurricane, can submerge large parts of the Outer Banks. You really don't want to be here when it happens. Hurricane season is June through November, although hurricanes are most frequent mid-August through the first week of October. Keep tuned to a local station for forecasts, or check the National Hurricane Center at www.nhc.noaa.gov. A **hurricane watch** means that hurricane conditions (winds over 74 mph) are expected within 36 hours; a **hurricane warning** means 24 hours. County officials give the word if it's time to go. Leave as soon as you can. Evacuation routes are published in the park newspaper and posted along the road, but they're pretty obvious, leading off the islands on U.S. Highways 64 or 158. Ocracoke Islanders go north on the ferry to Hatteras, then north by road.

ENJOYING THE NATIONAL SEASHORE

NATURAL PLACES Outer Beaches

The entire length of the Outer Banks, 75 miles of it in the national seashore, is all brilliant sand and roaring waves. You really can be alone, getting over the dune from the highway at any of many deserted ramps and then walking until you drop in the sand. Even without swimming there's plenty to do and discover on the beach. (Beachgoing and off-road driving are covered below, under "Activities.") Collect seashells: The best places are at the end of the barrier islands, where the current wraps around. Hunt for sand crabs: This is great fun at night, with a flashlight and a sand bucket, but be sure to release all the crabs when you're done. See how close to the waves you can build a sand castle: What design holds up best against the waves? Walk back in the dunes, staying on trails so that you don't trample the beach grass, and see what kinds of birds and plants you can identify. Watch the water and see if you can find the three kinds of breakers discussed under "The Waves," in chapter 2. Cape Point, at the very tip of Cape Hatteras near the lighthouse, is a great place to do this. Think about how the sand shapes the waves and how they shape the sand.

Sound Side

The inner coast of the national seashore, mainly facing the sound, differs from the outer shore in many ways, most of which have to do with the energy of the waves that hit the coast. On this side the waves don't have much distance to build, so they're smaller. Without being battered by large waves, the coast can develop into marshes full of delicate birds and animals.

Two kinds of marsh grow on the shore: freshwater marshes on Albemarle Sound, to the north, and saltwater on Pamlico Sound, to the south. Many of the saltwater marshes also have freshwater parts nearer land, where rainwater trapped in the sand pushes out against the salt

water. You can see examples of both kinds, with excellent birding, on the **Bodie Island Dike Nature Trail**, on the same road that leads to Bodie Island Lighthouse and Visitor Center. A guide brochure, available at the start of the trail or at the nearby visitor center, matches numbered posts. The trail loop is 6 miles long; don't overexert yourself on a hot day. This marsh and those just north on Highway 12 grew upon deltas of sand left behind by the flow of water through inlets that have since filled up with sand. Four inlets existed at one time or another along here, including the one Sir Walter Raleigh's ships came through in 1585. Where the Cape is wider, it's often because a former inlet allowed the tide to move sand into the sound. Sand finally filled the inlet completely, connecting islands with the dry land we see today. Other great trails for marsh exploration are at Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve (p. 124) and the Hammock Hills Nature Trail on Ocracoke Island (p. 129).

READ ALOUD: WHY THE STILTS?

Why do you think so many houses are built on stilts on the Outer Banks? Here's a clue: Early settlers built their houses far from the water, and they didn't need to put them up in the air. The answer is that in hurricanes and winter storms, waves can easily wash over the area where the beach houses are built. If the houses are up on legs, called pilings, the waves can flow under them and are less likely to do damage.

Now, why do you think people put those crisscrossed strips of wood between the pilings, called lattice? Today, it's done just for decoration, but when they first started building beach houses on pilings, these islands were used for raising cattle and sheep. The lattice kept the animals from going under the houses, which they always wanted to do to get out of the sun.

PRACTICALITIES: SWIMMING SAFELY IN SURF

Only strong swimmers should swim in ocean surf, and that never includes younger children, whose size makes them vulnerable to even small waves. Even the strongest swimmers will be safer with some knowledge of how the waves work. (See “The Waves,” in chapter 2, for more on wave mechanics.)

Ocean water is always moving, sometimes faster than you can swim. A rip current pulls directly away from the beach. It forms where water running back to the sea funnels through a channel in a sand bar. Rip currents are narrow and ease up as soon as the water gets deeper, so if you find yourself in one, don't swim against it. Instead, swim along the beach until you escape the flow of the rip current. Your biggest risk is fighting the flow and getting tired. Currents along the shore can move fast, too. To guard against them, always be aware of where you are, checking landmarks on the beach, and return to the beach before you're too far into waters you haven't observed carefully from shore. Never swim near piers or jetties, where the currents can be very strong. And don't swim near inlets, where the currents created by the tide rushing in and out of the sounds could sweep you away.

By paying attention to how the water moves you in the surf, you can learn how to take advantage of the waves. Developing that awareness also helps keep you from getting hit by a falling breaker, which can be scary and even dangerous. Dive into breaking waves. Go with the flow rather than fighting rushing water. For example, a backwash current, or undertow, is the water of receding waves pulling back into the surf. If you don't fight it, you're carried a short distance from the beach and then back toward shore with the next wave; if you swim against it, you can end up getting smashed down by the next breaking wave. When you do get tumbled in the froth of a breaking wave, try to relax and curl up rather than fighting it. The water will leave you on the beach or the undertow will carry you to calmer water, where you can surface.

Finally, remember that in case of trouble, you're on your own unless the beach has a lifeguard.

You also can explore the marshes and channels along the sound shore by sea kayak, rowboat, or other craft. Go crabbing along the way, about the most fun a kid can have. Since the water is so shallow, warm, and gentle, these waters are relatively forgiving, a good place to learn to sail or windsurf, kayak, or try other new watersports (see “Activities,” below).

Swimming is different on the sound side, too. The sand is coarser and the bottom is gradual—so gradual that an adult probably could walk miles out into the sound in places. Waves tend to be small. There are beaches, without lifeguards, at **Haulover**, just north of Buxton; **Sandy Bay**, between Frisco and Hatteras village; and **Jockey's Ridge State Park** (p. 125).

The Woods

You could easily visit the Outer Banks without ever noticing the woods, but two notable pockets of ancient forest survive amid the sand, making refuges of quiet and shade, marsh and ponds, and homes for wildlife. **Nags Head**

Woods is described on p. 124 and **Buxton Woods** under “Nature Walks” (p. 129); they're both well worth a visit. Before people caused increased erosion here by grazing sheep and cattle on the beach grass, woods covered much more of the barrier islands; without the beach grass, sand dunes buried some of the woods. The oak and pine of the woods grow where a large area is sheltered from salt spray by sand dunes and by plants that can handle salt. Over time, falling leaves and pine needles and dying plants build a layer of soil that can nourish generations of larger and more varied plant life. Finally, the woods grow thick and green, but you can still see the shapes of sand dunes underneath, sometimes holding ponds in between their ridges. Depending on how the islands move, these peaceful places, full of birds and animals, can last for thousands of years.

The Lighthouses

The most impressive lighthouse you're ever likely to see is the great **Cape Hatteras**

Lighthouse at Cape Point. At more than 200 feet tall, it's the tallest brick lighthouse in the United States; in clear weather, it's visible 20 miles out to sea. Visitors can climb 257 steps up an iron spiral staircase right to the circular balcony at the top for an amazing view, but it's a long, hot, and potentially scary climb. Children under 13 can go only with an adult, and children under 38 inches are not allowed; I wouldn't recommend it for children under 5 or for anyone with a fear of heights. Carrying a child or any kind of backpack is rightfully prohibited. To climb, you need to buy a ticket and join a tour with 60 visitors in a group. During the summer the ticket booth opens at 8:30am for tours that day only, and they usually sell out by noon. The ticket indicates the tour time; they start at 9am and run every 20 minutes until 4:40pm. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$2 for children under 13 and seniors 62 and older. The lighthouse is open Easter to Columbus Day.

The lighthouse was built well back from the beach in 1870, but erosion moved the shoreline closer, and by 1935 the Coast Guard gave it up for lost, with waves crashing at its foot. After 60 years of struggle to stop the erosion, the National Park Service moved the light 2,900 feet in 1999, placing it back in the woods 1,600 feet from the beach. Today, the light looks as if it has always been there, but you can see where the tracks lay that over the course of a summer very slowly inched the tower to its new home, without a crack—an amazing engineering achievement.

The **Bodie Island Lighthouse**, at the Bodie Island Visitor Center, and the **Ocracoke Lighthouse**, in Ocracoke Village, are picturesque historic buildings, but they lack the drama and scale of Hatteras, and you can't go inside except irregularly at Bodie Island, when volunteers let visitors into the base.

Ocracoke Pony Corral

In 1585, Sir Richard Grenville picked up some Spanish ponies in Haiti along with other supplies to help establish the colony at Roanoke

Island. On June 23, one of his ships, the *Tiger*, ran aground, and the ponies and other goods were put off. More than 400 years later, their descendants are still running around Ocracoke Island, today confined to a large fenced pasture off Highway 12 north of the village. At least, that's the most plausible explanation for how wild Spanish ponies got here. You can see them from a 600-foot boardwalk, and sometimes the rangers saddle them and ride them on beach patrol. For more on the colony, see "History & Culture: First Encounters," in chapter 2.

Parks & Preserves

Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Hwy. 12, north end of Hatteras Island. ☎ **252/473-1131**; visitor center 252/987-2394. <http://peaisland.fws.gov>. Visitor center summer daily 9am–5pm; winter hours vary.

This refuge at the north end of Pea Island, within the national seashore, protects an exceptional bird habitat, the best for birding in the area. The cape's unique geography has contributed to an amazing 400 identified species. The refuge encompasses a sound-side salt marsh and freshwater ponds in the middle of the island. A few exhibits and bird mounts, and a spotting scope, are inside the visitor center. Outside, superb trails, with boardwalks, tour the wetlands and reach across a dike between the ponds with built-in spotting scopes. You can also see turtles.

Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve. 701 W. Ocean Acres Dr. (see directions below), Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948. ☎ **252/441-2525**. Trails open daylight hours.

The Nature Conservancy protects this uniquely diverse 1,400-acre forest, a shady mosaic of wetlands tucked between dunes that shield it from the salt spray on three sides. Five miles of nature trails with superb printed guides weave through the woods past ponds, sand dunes, orchids, herons, river otters, and ancient oaks, peaceful places a world away from the fast-food ghetto out on the highway. The place is poorly marked. Southbound on U.S. 158 near milepost 9½, a small brown sign

says NATURE CONSERVANCY, pointing west on Ocean Acres Drive toward the sound. Take it about a mile to the parking lot on the left. Besides the trails, there is a small visitor center.

Jockey's Ridge State Park. U.S. 158, Milepost 12, Nags Head. ☎ **252/441-7132**. www.jockeysridgestatepark.com. Daily June–Aug 8am–9pm; Apr–May and Sept 8am–8pm; Mar and Oct 8am–7pm; Nov–Feb 8am–6pm. Visitor center closes a little earlier.

As you drive through Nags Head on Route 158, you can't miss the state park's towering sand dune, the tallest dune on the East Coast. The wind blows northeast and southwest here, gathering the sand and moving it back and forth across the crest, but not spreading it out much. The main attraction is a fun and bizarre walk and slide on the shifting and cascading sands. It's a place where you just can't help playing. The view at the top, about 100 feet up, is terrific. If you want to get serious, there is a route (not a trail, because it would soon disappear in the sand) with numbered posts corresponding to a nature guide. On the sound shore of the park are a calm swimming beach, a couple of feet deep on Roanoke Sound, and another nature trail; take Soundside Road, the first turn south of the main park entrance. The park offers kids' programs on various natural topics. Adults and kids can even learn to hang glide at a school at the park (p. 129).

Cape Lookout National Seashore. 131 Charles St., Harkers Island, NC 28531. ☎ **252/728-2250**. www.nps.gov/cal.

The Outer Banks continue southwest of Ocracoke Island along 56 miles of wild, uninhabited barrier islands in Cape Lookout National Seashore. Visit to experience true wilderness and see a real ghost town. Portsmouth, on the island nearest Ocracoke, existed from 1753 until the last two residents left in 1971, when it was abandoned to the wind. In Portsmouth, ships would stop and unload their cargo to be stored and loaded into smaller boats that could cross Pamlico Sound to the mainland. It was once the largest and busiest town on the Outer Banks, with 500 people, a post office, a school,

and a hospital. But on the night of September 7, 1846, a hurricane washed over a dune on Ocracoke Island, parting the sand to make a new inlet and washing away an old man's fig and peach orchard and potato patch. The new opening was Hatteras Inlet, now the northeast end of Ocracoke Island, and it allowed ships to sail right into Pamlico Sound. Portsmouth was no longer needed.

On a day trip, taking everything you need with you, especially mosquito repellent, you can explore through the town and go into a couple of buildings, now preserved as a historic site by the National Park Service. The islands themselves are mostly just low dunes and bare beaches extending for mile after mile. Family-operated **Austin Boat Tours** (☎ **252/928-4361**; www.austinboatours.com) offers day trips to Portsmouth from Ocracoke. The ride takes half an hour each way, and you stay onshore, self-guided, for 4 hours. It costs \$20 for adults, \$10 for children, free for children under 7. You can also arrange your own, special tour at a group rate.

Places for Learning

Roanoke Island has several exceptionally interesting sites to visit. They take at least 1 full day and can be reached by bicycle from Manteo, mostly on a separated trail. The Wright Brothers National Memorial, in Kitty Hawk, is a short drive from there. There are other museums on the Outer Banks, but they hardly bear mentioning compared to this complex of attractions.

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. U.S. 64/264, 3 miles west of Manteo. ☎ **252/473-5772**. Free admission. Summer daily 9am–6pm; low season daily 9am–5pm.

This is where the Lost Colony likely stood, and the mounds of earth you can walk around may be the remains of a fort built by Colonel Ralph Lane, the leader of the first group of English colonists who tried to settle America (see "History & Culture: First Encounters," in chapter 2). Or maybe not—archaeologists can't pin down exactly who built the fort, but it surely

EXPERIMENT: SAND SLIDES

Make a hill of sand at Jockey's Ridge State Park or on the beach. The sand has to be dry and should be fine-grained. Add sand to the top of your pile until you set off avalanches that run down the sides. The question to answer with this experiment is, why does the sand avalanche down? Does it come down because the hill is too tall, or because it is too steep? How tall or steep can a sand pile be without starting an avalanche? Decide what you think (that's your hypothesis), then test your idea by building sand piles that are different sizes and shapes, big or small, steep or gradual, until you know if you were right.

Here's the answer: The size of the pile doesn't matter, but there is a limit to how steeply one kind of sand can be piled. Using careful observation, you can find the steepest angle possible for your sand, which is called the angle of repose. The size and shape of the individual grains of sand decide the angle of repose. Try it with different kinds of sand to see if the angle of repose changes. Also, pay attention when you walk on the side of the dune at Jockey's Ridge. Your footsteps make the sand avalanche down; it always keeps going until the sand on the slope organizes itself at the angle of repose.

had something to do with Sir Walter Raleigh's project. The area was also a Civil War-era colony set up by the Union Army for escaped and former slaves.

A good little museum in the visitor center concentrates on the Lost Colony, with artifacts, ship models, costumes, armor, and other interesting exhibits. The grounds have quiet, shady lawns, a picnic area, and several miles of walking and nature trails with exhibits that explain how people used the area's natural resources. This is a good place to rest and play during a break from a day of sightseeing. Most of it is navigable by strollers.

The Lost Colony (☎ 800/488-5012 or 252/473-3414; www.thelostcolony.org), a summer performance that has played on the grounds of the historic site since 1937, tells the story of the colonists and Indians with music, dance, and re-creations of the events in a large outdoor amphitheater facing the water. It's a local institution, a required part of a trip to the Outer Banks, and popular with kids. The season runs from early June through late August; performances start at 8:30pm Monday through Saturday nights. Tickets are \$16 for adults, \$8 for children under 12; reserve a week ahead if possible, and ask about nights with special ticket deals for children.

Also at the historic site are the **Elizabethan Gardens** (☎ 252/473-3234; www.elizabethangardens.org), with flower beds, well-trimmed hedges, and formal lawns Sir Walter Raleigh might have admired. The shady, symmetrical paths and fountains are charming and provide a window on the time. Those interested in gardening or the historic period should stop, but children may not relish the genteel setting or find enough to amuse them. The good little gift shop stocks decorative gardening items and plants grown from the garden's own cuttings. Picnicking is not allowed. Admission to the garden is \$6 for adults, \$4 for children 6 to 18, and free for children under 6. Hours are daily in summer from 9am to 8pm (until 7pm when the *Lost Colony* show is not performing), spring and fall 9am to 6pm, and winter 10am to 4pm.

Roanoke Island Festival Park. 1 Festival Park, Manteo. ☎ 252/475-1500. www.roanokeisland.com. Admission \$8 adults, \$5 children 6-18, free for children under 6. Summer daily 10am-7pm; off season daily 10am-5pm.

This remarkable new state historic park, across a channel from the waterfront shops and restaurants in Manteo, is the Outer Banks' best cultural attraction and should not be missed. It has several parts. A fanciful but highly informative museum of the area's history will

entrance children, who can learn to use an astrolabe, put on Elizabethan clothing, and listen to a mechanical pirate, among many other experiences. Docked on the water is the *Elizabeth II*, a superb replica of a 16th-century sailing ship, manned with sailors in period costume who stay in character; nearby, a small camp is similarly staffed, showing what the Lost Colony was like. An amphitheater stages performing-arts events all summer, and a gallery contains visual-art shows. Indoors, a 45-minute film, showing all day, tells the story of the Native Americans who lived here.

The North Carolina Aquariums—Roanoke Island. 374 Airport Rd., west of Manteo on U.S. 64/264. ☎ **252/473-3493**. www.aquariums.state.nc.us. Admission \$6 adults, \$4 children 6–17, free for children under 6. Daily 9am–5pm.

Reopened after a \$16 million expansion in 2000, this aquarium on the edge of the sound engagingly re-creates the local marine and aquatic environment in miniature. It's a place to learn about the habitat and animals you'll see on the Outer Banks and the sounds, why they live where they do, and how they live. Everything is in context. An atrium seems to put you right in the marsh with river otters, alligators, turtles, and other animals. Other displays are dramatic, too—divers sometimes swim in the shipwreck tank, as large as a baseball infield and 17 feet deep—but I was most impressed by how much I was learning. Children will love all of it, and the area especially for them is terrific, too. Programs included in the price of admission, for adults and children, happen as often as seven times a day in summer. The gift store is among the best in the area for natural-history books and toys. The grassy grounds and waterfront area are suitable for a picnic.

Wright Brothers National Memorial. On U.S. 158, Kill Devil Hills. ☎ **252/441-7430**. www.nps.gov/wrbr. Admission \$3 adults, free for children under 17 and seniors 62 or older. Summer daily 9am–6pm; winter daily 9am–5pm.

The Wright Brothers' story is truly inspiring: A pair of bicycle mechanics with no more than a high school education studied and worked

hard, and, by careful observation of nature, figured out how to fly. There was no luck involved. This is where they did it, in December 1903. A century later, a celebration commemorating the event added to facilities already deemed historic (the visitor center has been named a landmark of 1960s architecture). A vinyl-covered pavilion was erected for the centennial with plans to let it remain for 5 years; it contains exhibits and a large theater. A life-size sculpture showing the first flight was planned. At the site you can also see the tall dune where the brothers tested a glider in the process of developing their successful plane, which is topped with a huge marker. On the flat, a replica of their launch track and markers show the takeoff and landing points for the four successful powered flights. The Wrights' bunkhouse and workshop are also replicated here.

The memorial's fascinating visitor center contains a mock-up of the plane and a museum on the Wrights' accomplishments. The exhibit, too, has been deemed a historic landmark, so it won't be changing. Ranger talks take place frequently in the summer, and other flight-related programs, such as learning to make kites, happen at various times during the week. Check the website for a schedule.

Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station. Hwy. 12, Rodanthe. ☎ **252/987-1552**. Free admission. Summer Tues, Thurs, and Sat 11am–5pm; call for off-season hours.

Local historical society volunteers support this complex of buildings that date to 1874. Lifesavers once waited here for shipwrecks so that they could launch boats into the surf to save the victims. The museum contains their equipment and uniforms, objects from the wrecks, and other maritime artifacts, and there are programs in the summer such as knot-tying lessons and storytelling.

ACTIVITIES

Beachgoing

Surely this is how you'll spend most of your time at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The

75-mile strip of sand is one of the best beaches anywhere, and the water is terrific for swimming. There are no fees for any of the beaches and none is really crowded. You can always be alone if you're prepared to walk a bit or drive to a remote ramp. National Park Service lifeguards generally watch over **Coquina Beach**, near the north end of the seashore on Bodie Island; **Lighthouse Beach** in Buxton, near the big lighthouse; and **Ocracoke Beach**, just north of the village of Ocracoke. Coquina Beach has a bathhouse for changing, and cold, outdoor showers, as does the unguarded **Sandy Beach Day Use Area**, on the sound side southwest of Frisco. Each of the campgrounds is within walking distance of the beach, too, with showers in stalls but no lifeguards. All along the seashore, ramps for off-road vehicles lead over the dunes, providing access to long areas of rarely visited beach. You can use these ramps to walk to the beach in remote areas, but be careful about parking, because many people get stuck. North of the national seashore, various town beaches have lifeguards. I've described some other ocean and sound beaches, and some of the things to do here, under "Natural Places" (p. 122); safety information is under "Drowning" (p. 121) and "Practicalities: Swimming Safely in Surf" (p. 123).

Birding

The Outer Banks' tremendous variety of bird sightings results from its location and variety of habitat types. The islands are on the eastern migratory flyway. They stick out into the Atlantic, making a resting place for exhausted birds that have accidentally wandered far from their homes. The habitat includes placid salt and fresh water of the sound and the marshes, rough ocean beaches and offshore water, the Nags Head and Buxton woods, and the ponds at the Pea Island Refuge (see "Natural Places," p. 122). The refuge is birding central, where you can meet other birders and get advice from rangers.

Crabbing

First you take chicken necks and leave them out in the sun until they get really stinky. Then you tie the bait to a string and dangle it in the water in a marsh where you think a blue crab might be sniffing around. When you see a crab, you hold the bait near it in a tempting way. When the crab grabs hold, you scream and wave your arms, then pull it in on the string, net it, and drop it in a bucket, trying not to get pinched. Back home, steam or boil it and eat it.

For children, crabbing is a lot more fun than fishing, because you can see the crabs walking around in the shallow, marshy waters at the edge of Pamlico Sound from a rowboat or even on foot. You don't need a license, but get size and take regulations from a visitor center. The Park Service sometimes teaches this fine art in a ranger program that starts from the Bodie Island Visitor Center—check the park newspaper for details. Get the bucket and net at any sporting goods store (see "For Handy Reference," p. 120), and buy chicken necks—or any other kind of meat—at a grocery store.

Fishing

There are lots of ways to fish, places to go, and kinds of fish to catch at the national seashore, from common, pan-sized spot fish to the challenging 40-pound red drum. For children and beginners, the best choice may be one of the fishing piers along the outside beach. Anglers pay a fee, rent gear, and buy bait at the booth, where you can also get tips on how to fish. Fishing piers stick out all along the shore. Several are north of the national seashore and within its boundaries; piers are at **Rodanthe**, **Avon**, and **Frisco** (the latest hurricane permitting).

For more accomplished fishermen, surfcasting allows more of a solitary, natural experience. Pick anyplace you like along the islands away from swimmers; the best spots are in sloughs and holes, which smart fishermen scope out at low tide and come back to later. Fish on an incoming tide when wind and waves are light, casting just to the other side of the breaking waves. Tide tables run in the park

newspaper. Places to get gear are listed under “For Handy Reference” (p. 120).

There are several places to charter a boat with a guide. The **Oregon Inlet Fishing Center**, on Highway 12 on the north side of the bridge (P.O. Box 2089, Manteo, NC 27954; ☎ **800/272-5199** or 252/441-6301; www.oregon-inlet.com), has a huge fleet. Charter rates, which the Park Service controls, range from under \$300 for a half day on the sound in a small open boat (a good choice with kids) to over \$1,100 to go offshore all day for trophy fish. For peak weekends, you may have to book a year in advance. The center also sells fishing gear, supplies, and deli sandwiches. **Hatteras Harbor Marina**, P.O. Box 537, Hatteras, NC 27943 (☎ **800/676-4939** or 252/986-2166; www.hatterasharbor.com), offers trips in a similar price range, rents inexpensive apartments by the night, and has a deli. On Ocracoke the **Anchorage Marina**, P.O. Box 880, Ocracoke Island, NC 27960 (☎ **252/928-6661**; www.theanchorageinn.com), represents a few boats for offshore fishing and rents small boats and bicycles. It also has a cafe on the dock. The biggest fishing trips from the Outer Banks are full-day, offshore voyages 20 miles out to the Gulf Stream for tuna, dolphin, sailfish, marlin, and the like. For beginners and children, choose a short, easy trip on the sound instead. It costs much less and will probably be more fun with kids. Renting your own boat and messing around in the shallow waters can also be a lot of fun.

Hang Gliding

Jockey’s Ridge State Park (p. 125) is the only place I’ve run across that makes hang gliding a family activity. The school there, run by **Kitty Hawk Kites** (see “For Handy Reference,” p. 120), takes children regardless of age as long as they weigh at least 80 pounds, as well as people with disabilities. It claims to be the world’s largest hang-gliding school, in operation since 1974. Three-hour beginner classes take five flights from 5 to 15 feet high on the dune and cost \$85.

Nature Walks

The $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile **Buxton Woods Nature Trail**, starting from the road to the swimming beach just south of the Cape Hatteras Light, is a pleasant walk over wooded rises and past swamp ponds that formed on the sand dunes and dips that the woods now cover. Excellent interpretive signs explain the landscape. The **Hammock Hills Nature Trail**, on Ocracoke Island across the road from the campground, shows each of the typical ecological areas of the Outer Banks: forest, dunes, and salt marsh, with signs describing what lives there. Bring mosquito repellent. Other trails include the **Bodie Island Dike Trail** (p. 122), **Pea Island Trail** (p. 124), and **Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve** (p. 124).

Off-Road Driving

Large stretches of the national seashore on both sides are open to four-wheel-drive vehicles, if you follow rules designed to save the dunes, nesting birds, and sea turtles. Driving on the beach can be a lot of fun, and it’s a practical way for families to get to beaches of their own that would be too far for little ones to walk. A map given away by the visitor centers tells you where you can drive, what the regulations are, and what equipment you’ll need, and provides important tips on how not to get stuck—you can’t really do without it. Find the information online at www.nps.gov/caha/bdriv.htm. Ask about seasonal closures before you go.

More than 20 dune ramps, from the Bodie Island area to the south tip of Ocracoke, allow vehicles access to the beach. They are marked by numbers that represent the mileage from Coquina Beach, with those farther south having higher numbers. On the sound side, drive only on designated trails.

Sailing/Boating

The sound side’s calm, warm water and steady winds are just right for day sailing. **The Waterworks**, on the causeway between Roanoke Island and Whalebone Junction

(☎ 252/441-6822; www.waterworks.ws), and at other locations, has 15- and 18-foot sailboats for rent, as well as all kinds of motorboats and other craft, guided tours to see dolphins, and lessons. **Hatteras Watersports**, on the sound side in Salvo (☎ 252/987-2306), offers sailing equipment, parasailing, fishing, and kayaks at a big lawn, beach, and picnic area; kids were catching crabs when I visited. **Kitty Hawk Kites** (see “For Handy Reference,” p. 120) also has kayaks and kayaking programs.

Sailboat rides on schooners are available, too. The 56-foot **Downeast Rover** (☎ 800/SAIL-OBX or 252/473-4866; www.downeastrover.com) sails three times daily on 2-hour cruises from the Manteo waterfront. They cost \$25 for adults, \$15 for children 2 to 12, or \$30 for adults or children on the evening trip. They’re often full in summer, so reserve ahead.

Sea Kayaking

The shallow coastal salt marshes on Pamlico Sound are prime sea-kayaking areas, where the silent craft can sneak up on birds and animals. Unlike those in areas farther north, most rental agencies and guides on the Outer Banks use open kayaks, which are like low canoes, not traditional closed-deck kayaks. You get wetter in this kind of craft, but with the water so warm, it probably doesn’t matter.

Most agencies offer rentals, guided trips, and classes. **Kitty Hawk Kites** (see “For Handy Reference,” p. 120) offers guided kayaking, rentals, and a kayaking camp of a couple of hours for kids 8 to 15. It takes children as young as 5 on tours with parents. On Ocracoke, **Ocracoke Adventures/Wave Cave**, at the intersection of Highway 12 and Silver Lake Road (☎ 252/928-7873), offers kayaking and educational outings run by a former ranger and a real Ocracoker. It also teaches surfing for adults or kids; you can leave your kids for lessons.

PROGRAMS

The National Park Service offers programs at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Wright

Brothers National Memorial, and Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. Other organizations have programs at Jockey’s Ridge State Park, Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, and North Carolina Aquariums—Roanoke Island. All are covered under “Parks & Preserves” (p. 124) and “Places for Learning” (p. 125).

Children’s Programs

The three National Park Service units on the Outer Banks give patches or badges to kids who complete a list of tasks in their Junior Ranger programs, but the instructional booklets they do to earn the patches emphasize rote learning—mostly just finding facts and filling them in on a piece of paper. Besides the paperwork, kids attend ranger programs to earn the award. While the ranger programs are certainly worth attending, judge how much time you want to spend on this before committing to do it with your child.

The **Sand Castle Environmental Education Center** at Coquina Beach gives kids something meaningful to do while apart from their parents. The 30- to 60-minute activities have included shirt printing, low-tide beach walks, and studying seashells. They take place frequently on summer days. Check the bulletin board at the beach or ask at a visitor center for details, because the program changes annually.

PLACES FOR RELAXED PLAY & PICNICS

The beach is the best place for relaxed play, but if you want a change, you also could stretch out a blanket on the lawns of **Fort Raleigh**, around the **North Carolina Aquarium**, or at the **Roanoke Island Festival Park**. For active play, there’s a great **ship-theme playground** on the Manteo waterfront, Kill Devil Hills has a **city park playground** at 1634 N. Croatan Hwy. (U.S. 158), and a school playground is at the north end of the town of Buxton.

Family & Adult Programs

The schedule and a description of programs at up to six sites appear in the national seashore newspaper. In addition to guided walks and lectures, which you can join by showing up at the appointed time and place, rangers also lead

hands-on sessions on snorkeling on the sound, net fishing in a salt marsh, fish printing, boogie boarding, and the like, with the lineup changing annually. If you want to join one of these programs, which may be for limited numbers of people, be sure to contact the applicable visitor center in advance.

WHERE TO EAT

The strip of highway north of the national seashore, including Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills, and Nags Head, has every fast-food joint you can think of, often all right next to each other. Just drive the highway until you find your favorite flavor. Below, I have included some of the better restaurants to the south, in the national seashore and Manteo.

MANTEO & ENVIRONS

Manteo's redeveloped waterfront area, facing the Roanoke Island Festival Park across a small bay, is a pleasant place to walk, window-shop, take boat tours, and eat. **The Waterfront Trellis** (formerly Clara's Seafood Grill) sits right over the water with good views (☎ 252/473-1727). The food includes local basics and some trendier fare, such as a sandwich of grilled portabella mushrooms. It's a popular place, so there can be lines to get in. Lunch is \$5 to \$8, dinner \$17 to \$24. Hours are 11:30am to 9:30pm daily, plus earlier brunch hours on Sunday. Also on the waterfront, on Queen Elizabeth Street across from the courthouse, **The Full Moon Café** (☎ 252/473-6666) serves tasty cuisine that combines Southwestern and Southeastern influences—a shrimp-and-crab enchilada, for example. Lunch is \$6 to \$15, dinner \$6 to \$20, with children's items \$5. The cafe is open daily 11:30am to 9pm.

The Lone Cedar Café. On the U.S. 64 causeway between Manteo and Nags Head. ☎ 252/441-5405. Lunch \$7–\$12, dinner \$11–\$22; children's menu \$3–\$5. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 4:30–10pm. DISC, MC, V. Closed Dec–Feb.

Known locally as Basnight's, for its state senator owner, this is a good-time Southern

seafood place surrounded by Roanoke Sound. Friendly waitresses in shorts quickly bring big plates of fish, shrimp, and shellfish to tables with plastic tablecloths in a dining room rocking with noise and cheer. The preparation is generally simple, but the chef gets a chance to shine with a rich crab lump dip appetizer and tasty crab cakes. Kids will enjoy it, too, except for the wait for a table at popular hours.

HATTERAS ISLAND

There are casual eateries in each town along the island, places where families slip out of the beach house for a pizza when they don't feel like cooking. One is **Nino's Pizza** on Highway 12 in Avon (☎ 252/995-5358). It's open Monday through Saturday 11am to 10pm, Sunday 4 to 10pm; it closes an hour earlier in the off season, and closes altogether in January and February. On Highway 12 in Buxton, **Angelo's** (☎ 252/995-6364) serves pizza and delivers in the evening. Its hours in summer are daily from 11am to 10pm; winter daily 4:30 to 9pm.

Also on Highway 12 in Buxton, near the turn for the lighthouse, the **Tides Restaurant** (☎ 252/995-5988) is a casual beach place decorated with local artists' work. The menu includes a lot of local seafood and regional ham and chicken, with entrees topping out at \$20. The restaurant is open daily Easter to Thanksgiving 5 to 9pm.

Fish House Restaurant. On Hwy. 12 overlooking Buxton Harbor, Buxton. ☎ 252/995-5151. Dinner \$10–\$18; lunch \$3.25–\$7. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. AE, DISC, MC, V. Closed Thanksgiving to 1 month before Easter.

Among all the touristy stuff, here's an authentic-feeling old fish house turned long ago into a sound-side restaurant. (The floor slopes because it once was used for draining water from fish boxes.) The specialty is locally caught seafood, prepared simply, and it's done right and is served quickly. There's a decent kids' menu and a beer-and-wine list. The plastic tableware adds to the funky Southern seaside feel and conserves water.

OCRACOKE

The **Cat Ridge Deli** (☎ 252/928-DELI) is in Albert Styron's Store, a well-preserved historic fixture on Lighthouse Road. It's a gourmet takeout place specializing in Thai cuisine and wraps, as well as more traditional deli fare. It's open daily summer 10:30am to 6:30pm, spring and fall 11am to 5pm; closed December to April.

Captain Ben's Restaurant. Hwy. 12, Ocracoke. ☎ 252/928-4741. Dinner \$11–\$21; lunch \$3.50–\$16. Daily 11am–9pm. Closed Dec–Mar.

If you've spent much time in East Coast seaside towns, this old-fashioned, nautical-themed

place, in business more than 30 years, will be familiar as soon as you walk in. The service is fast and friendly, with a long menu that includes lots of seafood, prime rib, and something for everyone in the family. Our meals were good, plentiful, and straightforward.

Howard's Pub and Raw Bar Restaurant. Hwy. 12, Ocracoke. ☎ 252/928-4441. www.howardspub.com. Lunch and dinner \$7–\$18. Daily 11am–2am.

If you can get past the feeling that you're taking your children into a bar, this is a great place for families. You can eat away from the smoke on a screened porch or in a light, air-conditioned dining room with a wood floor that's been worn down by sandals and beach sand. Toys and games are stored on one side—as the proprietor said, it's the kind of place where the kids can get up and run around. The menu offers beef, seafood, and items from an in-house smoker as well as sandwiches and pizza. The grilled tuna I ordered was done just right. There's a generous kids' menu. The beer list includes more than 200 brews. Howard's never closes all year, even for hurricanes.