

N.C. COAST **6** easy places

Need to save money, gas and travel time? We'll save your summer vacation

BY JOHN BORDSEN ♦ TRAVEL EDITOR

NAGS HEAD/KITTY HAWK



TODD SUMLIN - STAFF FILE PHOTO

Wright Brothers National Memorial at Kill Devil Hills.

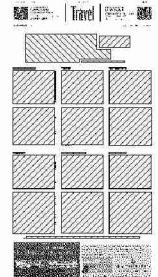
DISTANCE: About six hours (360 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: Wright Brothers National Memorial (252-441-7430; www.nps.gov/wrbr) is big-time history on the cheap: \$4 for the museum/grounds. The Black Pelican restaurant/bar (3848 Virginia Dare Trail) is in one of the few buildings from 1903 still standing. Dinner range: \$14-\$20; (252-261-3171; www.black-pelican.com).

TOTALLY FREE: Climb the sand dunes and hike the trails at Jockey's Ridge State Park. Hike through Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve. Details: 252-441-2525.

GOTTA TRY: Across from Jockey's Ridge is Kitty Hawk Kites/Carolina Outdoors, the place to buy your kite, try their climbing wall or take hang-glide lessons. Details: 252-441-4124; www.kittyhawkkites.com.

DETAILS: Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, 704 S. U.S. 64-264, Manteo, NC 27954; 877-629-4386; www.outerbanks.org Map of Kill Devil Hills with visitor information: www.kdhnc.com.



NEW BERN



BYRON HOLLAND - ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

The grape arbor at Tryon Palace in New Bern.

DISTANCE: About five hours (280 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: **Tryon Palace**, built for the last royal governor, burned to the ground in 1798. But its blueprints were discovered in the 1940s and a replica was built on the same spot. Guides in colonial costume take you through the place; explore the gardens on your own. Allow a half-day for this and related buildings. (\$15; \$6 for school-age kids; discounts available. Through Labor Day, open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Saturday; 252-514-4900; www.tryonpalace.org.)

TOTALLY FREE: **Croatan National Forest** (252-638-5628; <http://ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Croatan>) is a sprawling coastal/inland preserve that has hiking trails, boat launches, picnic areas and campgrounds (the rustic campgrounds are no charge). The forest's trio of developed trails range from half-mile to 20 miles in length.

DETAILS: Craven County Convention & Visitors Bureau, 314 S. Front St., New Bern, NC 28563; 800-437-5767; www.visit-newbern.com.

BALD HEAD ISLAND



BALD HEAD ISLAND LIMITED PHOTO

The beach at Bald Head Island.

DISTANCE: A little over four hours (220 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: You can do a day trip by taking the ferry (\$15 roundtrip), then renting a golf cart at **Riverside Adventure Company**, right where the ferry lands. Best bet is to rent a cottage or house – \$200 per night and up – on the beach, in the forest or on the marsh. (Rental info at www.baldheadisland.com/vacations.) This summer's Gas-Free Getaway promotion: Rent a place for a week and receive a gas card worth \$150 (info on Web site). Hungry? Two restaurants are in the harbor, two at private clubs (when you rent, you get temporary membership/access to both). Most popular is **Eb & Flo's**, at the harbor (\$9-\$20).

TOTALLY FREE: Slightly more than 83 percent of the 12,000-acre island is given over to nature. The whole island is ringed by beaches, marshes and creeks. Go biking, hiking, in-line skating, fishing, crabbing, swimming or beachcombing. Climb to the top of **Old Baldy** – N.C.'s oldest lighthouse.

DETAILS: 800-432-7368; www.baldheadisland.com.

WILMINGTON



RAUL R. RUBIERA - ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

The battleship USS North Carolina in Wilmington.

DISTANCE: About 3 ½ hours (196 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: Battleship North Carolina, permanently docked in Cape Fear River; you can easily spend a day there soaking in military history (\$12; \$6 for ages 6-11; 910-251-5797; www.battleshipnc.com). Kids still have pep? Check the **Serpentarium**, downtown on Orange Street - it's an indoor reptile park with lots of cool/creepy residents (\$8; 910-762-1669; www.capefear-serpentarium.com). For the grownups: Check out the **vibrant downtown scene**, with lots of good bars, shopping and restaurants.

TOTALLY FREE: Wilmington's **Shakespeare on the Green series** has great plays in Greenfield Lake Amphitheater Friday-Sunday nights in June, plus the Shakespeare Youth Company takes the stage Monday-June 12 and June 16-19. (910-762-6393). South of Wilmington at Kure Beach, visit **Fort Fisher**, the Civil War bastion whose fate was decided in the largest amphibious invasion before D-Day. (910-458-5538).

DETAILS: Cape Fear Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau: 24 N. Third St., Wilmington, NC 28401; 800-222-4757; www.cape-fear.nc.us.

MOREHEAD CITY/BEAUFORT



N.C. DIVISION OF TOURISM, FILM AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PHOTO

Fort Macon offers history, nature and a beach.

DISTANCE: A little under six hours (295 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: N.C. Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores (Atlantic Beach; \$8; \$6 for ages 6-17; 866-294-3477; www.ncaquariums.com/pks/pksindex.htm) recently tripled its size; see the 300,000-gallon ocean tank and other exhibits.

GOTTA TRY: Charter a boat and go fishing; rent a surfboard and ride the waves at **Bogue Sound**.

TOTALLY FREE: N.C. Maritime Museum (315 Front St., Beaufort; 252-728-7317; www.ncmaritimemuseum.org) has a bunch of nautical attractions but is best-known and most-visited these days for its artifacts recovered from the shipwreck believed to be the Queen Anne's Revenge – the flagship of the pirate Blackbeard. **Fort Macon State Park**, one of the most-visited attractions in the state (Atlantic Beach; 252-726-3775; www.clis.com/friends) was a coastal fortification built in the 1820s and 1830s at the eastern tip of Bogue Bank. Tours of the fort are self-guided.

DETAILS: Carteret County Tourism, P.O. Box 1406, Morehead City, NC 28557; 800-786-6962; www.crystalcoastnc.org.

ROANOKE/MANTEO



CHRIS CURRY - VIRGINIAN-PILOT PHOTO

"The Lost Colony" outdoor drama on Roanoke Island.

DISTANCE: About six hours (356 miles), one way.

GOTTA SEE: **Roanoke Island** is the site of the first British colony on the North American mainland. The settlers dropped off there in 1587 disappeared – the famed “Lost Colony.” **The outdoor drama “The Lost Colony”** tells the story of the ill-fated settlers at the Waterside Theatre (\$16-\$20, \$8 for kids; www.thelostcolony.org). The two-hour history drama begins at 8:30 p.m. Sunday-Friday; closed Saturday, through Aug. 20. Adjacent 10.5-acre **Elizabethan Gardens** (\$8, \$5 for kids; www.elizabethangardens.org) has the moody Sunken Garden, other gardens and bloom-lined walks. Island’s main town, **Manteo**, is on Shallowbag Bay, as is **Roanoke Island Festival Park** (www.roanokeisland.com); \$8 (\$5 for kids) – gets you in its Adventure Museum and aboard the Elizabeth II, the 1580s-style ship.

TOTALLY FREE: Outdoor play and Elizabethan Gardens adjoin the **Fort Raleigh National Historic Site** (www.nps.gov/fora). Walk **Manteo’s nifty little downtown**.

DETAILS: Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, 704 S. U.S. 64-264, Manteo, NC 27954; 800- 446-6262; www.outerbanks.org.

OUR SERIES CONTINUES On June 22, we'll tell you about 6 easy places on the Grand Strand. For more info on N.C. coast destinations, visit www.charlotte.com/travel