

# Sweet Carolina

Bluegrass, barbecue and beachfront B&Bs? Nobody puts North Carolina in the corner, writes Jenni Doggett

**N**orth Carolina's state motto is 'esse quam videri' - 'to be rather than to seem' - which is pretty apt for the home of a town called Duck, named after its ample waterfowl.

But don't mistake simplicity for a lack of sophistication - North Carolina is a revelation.

Bordered by Virginia, South Carolina and Tennessee, the Tar Heel State has long tracts of dramatic Atlantic coastline to the east and movie-set mountains to the west. Dynamic cities brimming with innovation and small towns rolling in old-school southern charm abound.

Sleepy streets are fragrant with crepe myrtle and confederate jasmine, dusk skies teem with fireflies and gently wafting smoke

stacks. It's absolute bliss for food fans and families, bluegrass aficionados, couples and history buffs alike.

## ► SELL: BEER AND BARBECUE

North Carolina caters for an impressively broad spectrum of tastes. Mark Crosby of luxury operator Destinology says: "It's interesting for second or third-time visitors to the States, easier to get to than California and less busy than Florida and some of the other better-known US destinations. I was genuinely surprised by the variety of possibilities on offer."

Divers can explore thousands of ancient shipwrecks in this region, nicknamed the 'graveyard

of the Atlantic'. The Gulf Stream promises exceptional deep-water fishing for those who want to look their dinner in the eye, and an array of excellent restaurants for those who don't. Kayaking, golf, hang-gliding and horse riding are on offer, but the pace is laid back enough for lazier holidaymakers looking to kick back at the seaside with a book.

Movie groupies can visit the waterfalls and forest locations featured in *Last of the Mohicans* and *The Hunger Games*, Lake Lure where Johnny and Baby practise *Dirty Dancing*'s iconic lift, or the eccentric stilted beach house from *Nights in Rodanthe* on the Outer Banks.

More than anything, though, North Carolina is a pure delight

for lovers of food and booze. You can't throw a growler (a take-home jug for draught beer) in these parts without hitting one of the state's abundant craft breweries.

The spirited collaboration between farmers and chefs makes for an exciting and experimental food scene. Local snow crab, lobster tails, shrimp and grits with pimento cheese and oysters galore dominate menus. But it's barbecues that Carolinians take most seriously: slow wood-smoked pork with a side of impassioned debate about eastern (vinegar-based) versus traditional southern (mustard-based) versus western (tomato-based) style. You could base a tasting tour of North







**LEFT:**  
Raleigh  
Beer  
Garden



**RIGHT:**  
Durham  
Bulls  
Athletic  
Park

**BELOW:**  
Biltmore  
Estate

PICTURES: JARED KAY

➔ Carolina on the breweries and barbecue joints alone.

There are adventure stories in spades for those who want to explore North Carolina's colourful folklore. Pirates terrorised the coast and bootleggers ran 'shine' from illegal stills during prohibition (which led to the souped-up cars designed to outrun the police that evolved into Nascar). Most famously, this is the auspicious site of the Wright brothers' inaugural flight.

▶ **SEE: HIPSTERS, HIKES AND HISTORY**

**Raleigh:** North Carolina's capital is the place to explore the difference between Appalachian Mountain Panic Water and Kittyhawk Blonde, and other beers besides. Raleigh Beer Garden is the perfect start for a pub crawl, with more than

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400 brews available.

Recover at 42 & Lawrence and Larry's Coffee Lab with a nitro latte, or go for old-school grits at Big Ed's City Market Restaurant, a Raleigh institution. Worth a trip too is the much-lauded Raleigh Denim factory, where jeans are hand-made on vintage sewing machines using locally sourced cotton.

**Durham:** This ex-tobacco town, home to prestigious Duke

University and a thriving tech scene, thrums with cosmopolitan cool. A Durham Bulls baseball game is worth a trip if you can take the afternoon heat. Or if you want the largest collection of lemurs outside Madagascar (and who doesn't?) the Duke Lemur Center can oblige - but make sure you book in advance.

**Asheville:** North Carolina's bohemian heartland is inhabited largely by hippies, hipsters and artists. The hill town's streets are alive with the sound of music, bluegrass, newgrass and tattooed washboard-wranglers.

More than anywhere, this is a place to wander round and absorb the local vibe. Tour the Moog electronic instruments factory for extra cool points. The grand gardens, winery and mansion of George Vanderbilt's 3,200-hectare

Biltmore Estate, one of America's biggest private residences, are tucked away in the surrounding mountains. Entrance starts at \$40 for adults.

**OBX:** The Outer Banks, or OBX to its friends, is Carolina's real prize. A slender bracket of windswept islands stitched together with sweeping bridges, it has a fascinating history. There are local tales of the Lost Colony - the earliest English settlement in the States, which mysteriously disappeared - or Blackbeard's hideout in Ocracoke and the fabled wild horses still wandering the dunes, descendants of Spanish mustangs brought here by the earliest European explorers.

Long stretches of pastel clapboard houses and saltwater taffy (toffee) stores line the busier towns, but there are more than 130 miles of coastline in ➔





➔ which to find a quiet spot to watch the sun rise on one side over the Atlantic and set in the Sound on the other.

Explore the backwaters of Roanoke on the Lost Colony Kayak Tour (from \$45), visit America's tallest lighthouse in Cape Hatteras or take an air tour over the islands (from \$60).

The Wright brothers chose the Outer Banks over other locations for its windswept beaches and privacy. A popular museum dedicated to Wilbur and Orville celebrates the first successful self-propelled flight, in 1903. Pilots often make the pilgrimage to Kill Devil Hills to salute the inspiring siblings. Entrance is \$7 for adults and free for children under 15.

Self-catering is the main accommodation and there is a range of holiday homes newly available to UK operators. Renters can invest in a steamer pot – a big metal drum full of fresh veg, shrimp and fish – indulge in fish tacos at Tortuga's Lie, or try the fresh-catch special at the Kill Devil Grill.

Other sites worth highlighting for a fly-drive include the US National White Water Center near Charlotte, the biggest of its kind, where the US Olympic team trains in kayak and slalom (adult day pass \$59).

DuPont State Recreational Forest is a favourite for hiking among roaring waterfalls, followed by a dip in icy-cool pools. Feast on pulled pork and collar greens among extravagantly feathered chickens at Hubba Hubba Smokehouse, owned by pitmaster Starr Teel.



PICTURE: CHRIS COOPER



## Charming antebellum B&Bs, uber-cool boutique hotels and beach condos far outnumber the chain hotels and high-rises

Summer is rammed with families and nuptials, so locals recommend autumn as their favourite time. With only two roads in and out, it's best to travel during the week to avoid the jams.

### STAY: SMALL PACKAGES

Charming antebellum B&Bs, uber-cool boutique hotels and traditional beach condos far outnumber the high-rises and chain hotels.

**Lodge on Lake Lure:** Clients can get their Swayze on at this romantic 17-bedroom luxury lodge on the lake famously featured in *Dirty Dancing*. A sunset dinner on the deck watching fidgety squirrels (or 'critters' as they're known locally) scamper down hickory trees is a fine way to unwind. Rooms start at \$219.

**lodgeonlakelure.com**

**Sanderling Resort:** Simple but refined, the Sanderling Resort in Duck, on North Carolina's Outer Banks, is flanked by the Atlantic on one side and the brackish Sound on the other. Think New England's mellower cousin, with warm cedar wood scents and enormous Audubon bird books. Twin rooms start at \$159 per night, plus taxes.

**sanderling-resort.com**

**Bermuda Bay Resort:** This village of 170 candy-toned condos is ideal for families. A three-bedroom home starts at \$250 per night, plus taxes.

**outerbanksrentals.com/community/bermuda-bay**

**21c Museum Hotel:** An intriguing art hotel and exhibition space with a rotating curation of art including an elaborate, embroidered sound hood. This Durham hotel boasts 125 rooms, starting at \$169 per night plus taxes.

**21cmuseumhotels.com/durham**



### Premier Holidays

has a 14-night North Carolina holiday with a seven-night fly-drive taking in Charlotte, Asheville and Raleigh, followed by a week at Beachwoods Resort, Kill Devil Hills. Prices start from £1,799 in March and include Heathrow flights and car hire with fully inclusive insurance. **trade.premierholidays.co.uk**

### Funway Holidays

offers a week at Devonshire Place Villas in Bermuda Bay, Outer Banks, from £1,131 per person for a family of four sharing a two-bedroom home. The price includes flights from Heathrow to Raleigh and fully inclusive car hire for a March 15 departure. **funway4agents.co.uk**



ABOVE:  
21c Museum Hotel

LEFT:  
Sanderling Resort