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Wilmington, North Carolina and its island beaches is a destination on the rise, according to TripAdvisor's 2018 Travelers' Choice list of "Top Destinations on the Rise - United States." The vibrant riverfront city ranks third out of 10 on the coveted TripAdvisor list that reveals the top trending spots in 2018. Other recent accolades include a nod from *CNNtravel.com* as one of "15 charming cities in the American South you may have overlooked" and a *Runner's World* thumbs-up as one of "8 Under-the-Radar Summer Escapes." A not-to-be-missed Southern destination, visitors return to explore the city's award-winning Riverwalk, timeless attractions, outstanding restaurants, breweries, and attend festivals such as Riverfest (October), N.C. Jazz Festival (Feb.), Cape Fear Blues Festival (June), Beer Weeks (spring/fall) and the world-famous N.C. Azalea Festival (April).

Known for its independent spirit, welcoming people, and transformative waters, Wilmington continues to inspire fresh ideas, building on authentic heritage and adding unexpected offerings. Wilmington ushers in a new era of vitality and experiences with its renewed riverfront concentrated in a vibrant, walkable River District. An expanded riverfront affords a picturesque landscape that seamlessly blends historic charm with modern new hotels, restaurants, rooftop bars and event venues. The new 186-room Embassy Suites by Hilton Wilmington Riverfront is the most recent addition to the northern end of Wilmington's pedestrian-friendly Riverwalk which connects tours, attractions, locally owned shops and cafés, and nightlife. More exciting additions will come to life in 2018 and beyond, including a lush city park.

Wilmington, North Carolina and the nearby island beaches of Carolina Beach, Kure Beach and Wrightsville Beach are where you go for sweeping vistas with spectacular Atlantic Ocean sunrises, dramatic sound-side and river sunsets, picturesque waterways and world-class gardens. Stray off course and see for yourself why our family-friendly beaches with crystalline water

and surfable waves have racked up accolades in *TripAdvisor*, *Country Living*, *Southern Living*, *USA Today*, *SUP Racer* and more. One destination with four unique settings, North Carolina's most accessible coastal destination is an easy drive from I-95 via I-40. Prefer to fly? The Wilmington International Airport (ILM) offers non-stop domestic flights via Delta, American Airlines and United, and is one stop from the world.

SAMPLE STORYLINES

Iconic Made-in-Wilmington Television Series "Dawson's Creek" Marks 20-Year Milestone

When the coming-of-age television series "Dawson's Creek" first aired in 1998, fans assumed the fictitious town of "Capeside" was located in New England. By season 2 the secret was out that it was filmed in Wilmington, N.C. Fans began arriving in droves to visit the show's locations, so the Wilmington and Beaches CVB created a Dawson's Creek FAQ sheet with a self-guided tour. Although 20 years have passed, visitors can still experience the show's coastal landscapes. From the riverfront to the oceanfront and marshes in-between, Wilmington and its island beaches is reminiscent of the "Capeside" setting where fans still travel to walk in the footsteps of Dawson (James Van Der Beek), Joey (Katie Holmes), Jen (Michelle Williams), Pacey (Joshua Jackson), and other characters, including Bessie who is portrayed by Wilmington actress Nina Repeta. Wilmington's 30+ year film history boasts nearly 400 film/TV credits, including *Ironman 3*, *A Walk to Remember*, *The Choice*, "One Tree Hill," TNT's "Good Behavior" (starring Michelle Dockery) and cult classics such as *Blue Velvet*. Visitors can experience Wilmington's film/TV connections by taking a guided Hollywood Location Walk or a self-guided tour using our Hollywood East online film trail. Stay tuned for details about 2018 events that commemorate "Dawson's Creek's" 20th Anniversary.



Dining Renaissance Continues as Celebrity Chef Vivian Howard Opens Gourmet Pizzeria

Just as Wilmington is coming into its own as a foodie destination with farm-to-fork restaurants, renowned chefs and culinary accolades, celebrity Chef Vivian Howard (PBS "A Chef's Life") opens Benny's Big Time Pizzeria in Wilmington. *Food & Wine* magazine recently named Vivian Howard one of the "20 Most Innovative Women in Food and Drink". Owners Vivian Howard and husband Ben Knight's flagship restaurant, The Chef & The Farmer, is located two hours away in Kinston. The couple opened Benny's Big Time Pizzeria in Wilmington's newly revived South Front neighborhood, which will soon welcome PinPoint pastry chef Lydia Clopton's new bakery, as well as a new wine bar/cafe. Watch for Benny's Big Time Pizzeria on episodes of "A Chef's Life" in 2018.

Craft Beer Boom Continues; More Breweries on the Horizon

With more than a dozen craft breweries and more expected in 2018, Wilmington and its island beaches is now a *bona fide* craft beer destination. Readers of *Carolina Brew Scene* (Dec. 2017) voted Wilmington as "Best Beer Town" and several local breweries took home awards from the 2017 N.C. Brewer's Cup. Last year saw the opening of five new breweries, including Edward Teach Brewing (Blackbeard's real name). Wilmington breweries on tap for 2018 include: Flying Machine Brewing Company, Mad Mole Brewing, Tidewater Brewing Co., and Skytown. In Carolina Beach, Good Hops Brewing will add a beer garden and expand its disc golf course. Visitors can create an itinerary using the Wilmington Ale Trail or book a Port City Brew Bus tour, or visit during Cape Fear Craft Beer Week (March 23-April 1) and Wilmington Beer Week (October).

Established and New Eateries Redefine Carolina Beach's Dining Scene

A mix of new restaurants—ranging from barbecue, burger and hot dog joints to casual seafood cafés to upscale farm-to-fork restaurants—is redefining Carolina Beach's dining scene with eateries to suit every taste and budget. A great way to sample several restaurants and learn about the island's history is to sign up for the Tasting History Tour (by appointment). Led by local historians who love good food, the tour includes 5-6 eateries, including a stop at the island's farm-to-fork culinary standout: Surf House Oyster Bar & Surf Camp where owner/chef Craig Love uses what's fresh and local, whilst earning accolades in *Coastal Living*, *Garden & Gun*, and *Our State*. Be sure to stop for sweet treats along the famous Carolina Beach Boardwalk at Britt's Donuts (since 1939) and The Fudge Boat. You'll also find delectable desserts just a few blocks away at Squigley's Ice Cream & Treats and at Wake N Bake Donuts, winner of the Cooking Channel's show "Donut Showdown." For fresh local produce, meats, cheeses, baked goods, jams/jellies, sauces, coffee, wine and more, check out The Veggie Wagon.

Active Lifestyle and Adrenaline-pumping Watersports Lure Visitors to Wrightsville Beach

Known for its crystal blue water and clean spacious beach, Wrightsville Beach is becoming known as a premier water sport destination - it was named one of the top surf towns in the world by National Geographic and dubbed North Carolina's most naturally gifted watersport hub by Men's Journal. Wrightsville Beach is also recognized as a pioneer in East Coast surfing and the birthplace of surfing in North Carolina. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean along its east-facing beaches and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway along its west shore, Wrightsville Beach is perfectly suited for a variety of watersports and is internationally renowned as a standup paddleboard (SUP) destination that hosts SUP competitions, including the Carolina Cup - one of the world's five major standup paddle races according to SUPracer.com. Other watersports include kayaking, boating, sailing, kiteboarding, scuba diving and more. Surf camps and outfitters offer lessons, rentals, and excursions.

MORE WHAT'S NEW:

- North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher is among *Vacation Ideas'* "25 Best Aquariums in the U.S." The Aquarium's 2018 spring/summer exhibits include: **DINOSAURS!** and **Butterfly Bungalow**.
- The Wrightsville Beach Museum of History will expand next door in the historic Ewing-Bordeaux Cottage (c.1924), recently relocated to the town's Historic Square.
- **Country Living** magazine includes Wrightsville Beach in its round up of "Most Magical Island Getaways in America" and **Southern Living** magazine lists it among 2017's "The South's Best Small Towns."
- **TripAdvisor** includes family-friendly Carolina Beach and Kure Beach in a roundup of "20 Best All-American Family Vacations Your Kids Will Love"

DID YOU KNOW?

- Wilmington's storied Cape Fear River was named by early explorers as ships ran aground and sank due to dangerous shifting shoals where the river meets the sea. Board a cruise to explore.
- Wilmington is one of the most haunted cities in the South. Learn more on ghost walks and haunted pub crawls.
- Venus flytrap grows in the wild *only* within a 75-mile radius of Wilmington. Find flytraps and carnivorous plants at Carolina Beach State Park and Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden, the world's only public carnivorous plant garden.
- NC's only coquina outcrop is located at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.
- A giant ground sloth replica greets visitors to Cape Fear Museum, NC's oldest history museum.

