

Carolina country *Adventures*



Carolina Country Adventures



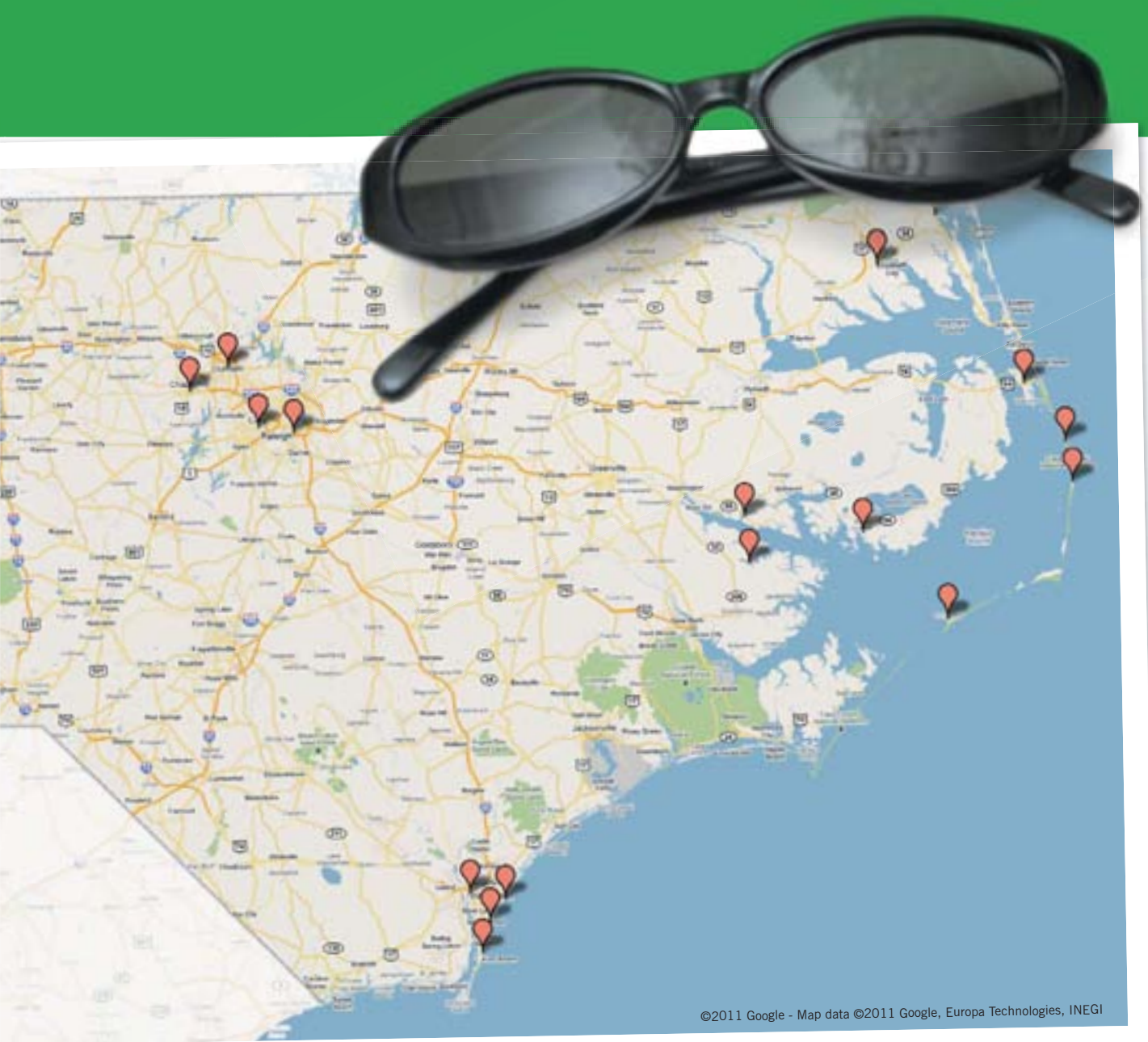
From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat and how we talk varies from one region to another.

Our annual Touchstone Energy Travel Guide encourages you to experience this variety firsthand.

This year, we offer you six great travel stories about interesting areas in the mountains, Piedmont and coast. We've also updated the primary sources of general information about regions in our resource listings. The adventures we offer may be familiar to you, or they may not. In any case, each holds the promise for a lot of travel fun.

As you make your way through this guide and through the countryside, you can be assured that a Touchstone Energy cooperative is nearby.

Thanks to everyone who helped us compile this guide, and to our sponsors: the cooperatives and the advertisers on pages 36 to 38.



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This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement. Send comments and corrections to editor@carolinacountry.com



Carolina Country Adventures

By Renee Gannon



Port City Adventures: Wilmington and the lower Cape Fear region

The fall of Fort Fisher (south of the city at the mouth of the Cape Fear River) on Jan. 15, 1865, saved Wilmington from the destructive fate other Southern cities such as Atlanta and Charleston faced. The 230-block historic district combined with the area's 31 miles of island beaches, makes the region a year-round destination.

Visitors enjoy river cruises and historic tours by foot, trolley and even by Segway. Several tours feature television and movie set locations in and around the city. Those looking for a little kick to the usual tour should try one of several ghost tours, including the Haunted Pub Crawl.

The string of islands offers Wrightsville Beach and its famous Johnny Mercer fishing pier, Carolina Beach, with its revitalized boardwalk area and state park, and Kure Beach, a family favorite for generations. Just south of Kure Beach lies Fort Fisher State Historic Park and Recreation Area and the Fort Fisher State Aquarium.

Visitors to the Wilmington area spend time shopping, sight-seeing, hiking nature trails, learning at nature camps and surf camps, kayaking, fishing or just walking the beach looking for shells and worn glass.

Food offerings are in abundance, from local favorites like the Pier House in Kure Beach to the white tablecloths at the Pilot House on Wilmington's Riverfront, with Carolina Beach landmark Britt's Donuts in between.

Downtown Wilmington

One way to become acclimated to downtown Wilmington is by taking one of the many tours available.

"Tell them 'the Carriage Man sent me!'" is often heard from the horse-drawn carriage of the Springbrook Farms trolley and carriage tour when he points out a place to visit. The tour company's rescued Percheron draft horses pull the carriage through the downtown district streets while a costumed driver provides historic and cultural tidbits about the region. Seven different 30-minute tours

are offered. Carriage Man John is often holding the reins on the tours. He offers non-stop entertainment combining history and a few jokes that you cannot help but chuckle at, no matter how bad. He even lets riders know when to say "Ah!" at little-known facts. Tours start on Market Street, between Water and Front streets. www.horsedrawntours.com or (910) 251-8889.

Historic homes in the downtown district are on the carriage man's must-see list. Three homes, the Latimer House, the Burgwin-Wright House and Gardens and the Bellamy Mansion, offer a three-historic-homes passport ticket for \$24, instead of the usual \$10 for each house.

Earlier this year, The Bellamy Mansion opened the restored original slave quarters. Enslaved black artisans built the Bellamy mansion more than 150 years ago. The property tour offers an interpretive history of the Bellamy family, the enslaved builders and the Federal troops that occupied the property, and it discusses historic preservation, as well as design arts and the home's gardens. www.bellamymansion.org or (910) 251-3700.

The Victorian-style Latimer House offers a look at Wilmington life before the Civil War, with 14 rooms open and furnished for the 1850s. www.hslcf.org or (910) 762-0492.

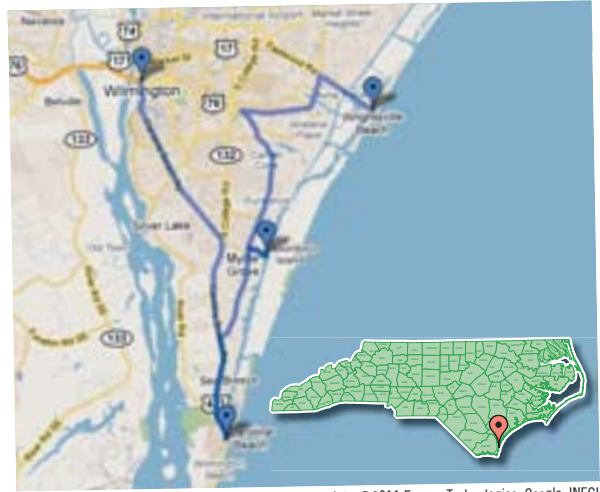
The Georgian-style Burgwin-Wright House and Gardens dates back to 1770, when the home was built using an old jail as its foundation. Lord Cornwallis occupied the house during the Revolutionary War. www.burgwinwrighthouse.com or (910) 762-0570.

The coastal environment

Wrightsville Beach, east of Wilmington, is known for its 5 miles of beach, shopping areas, seafood restaurants and concrete fishing pier. Wrightsville Beach is also closest to Masonboro Island, the largest undisturbed barrier island found on the southern end of Wrightsville Beach.

You can access this island, one of just 10 N.C. Coastal Reserves, only by boat. A protected natural resource, the island's dunes, grassy flats, marsh and shoreline allow fishing, birding, shelling and nature trails. If you are looking for fun and a nature lesson, a few outdoor companies provide expeditions to and from the island. One is run by the Cape Fear Naturalist, Captain Joe Abbate, whose eco-tour educates you on coastal habitats and the ecosystem of the lower Cape Fear region. www.capefearnaturalist.com or (910) 200-4002.

Farther south of Wilmington and over the Snow's Cut Bridge lies Pleasure Island, with Carolina Beach, Kure Beach and the Fort Fisher State Park. Wide beach areas,



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More sights and sounds

Other Cape Fear Coast attractions include the Battleship North Carolina, the most-decorated ship in World War II, which is celebrating its 50th year of calling the Cape Fear River home. www.battleshipnc.com

Poplar Grove Plantation, just north of downtown Wilmington, is the oldest peanut plantation in the country. In 2011, the plantation hosts living history programs to celebrate its 30 years of teaching N.C. heritage. www.poplargrove.com or (910) 686-9518.

Wilmington's Cape Fear Museum of History and Science is the oldest history museum in the state. www.capefearmuseum.com or (910) 798-4350. The Children's Museum of Wilmington offers a break for families. www.playwilmington.org or (910) 254-3534.

And for the nature lovers, Zeke's Island, also one of 10 N.C. Coastal Reserves, can be found at the end of Pleasure Island in the Cape Fear River basin. Local expedition companies lead eco-tours of the island as does Fort Fisher Aquarium, where you can also learn about the mysterious Fort Fisher Hermit. www.ncaquariums.com/fort-fisher or (910) 458-8257.

fishing, a family friendly boardwalk, a just-opened disc golf course, a Civil War site and a state Aquarium are some of the attractions.

The 7-mile island boasts one of the few remaining habitats for the endangered Venus flytrap, with one of the best viewing spots on the half-mile loop at Carolina Beach State Park. The park offers 6 miles of hiking trails, camping and picnic sites, a marina with boat slips at the junction of Snow's Cut and the Cape Fear River, and a visitor's center. www.ncparks.gov/visit/parks/cabe/main.php or (910) 458-8206.



For more information see Southern Coastland travel resources starting on page 55.