

JESSICA TAYLOR, LUXURY BROKER

FALL 2026

# My Ultimate Guide to *Fall*

IN COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA

WELCOME

---

# What fall *looks like* here

Every year I get the same question around this time: what is there to do here once fall settles in? The honest answer is: this is when the coast turns back into a fishing town — porch lights come on early, king mackerel start running off the piers, and Wrightsville's sandbar goes quiet enough to actually hear the water again.

This is the list I send to friends, the mornings worth getting up for, the places I take people from out of town, and the few things I do every single year without fail. Steal all of it.

---

## FALL HERE MEANS

Mornings finally need a hoodie

---

Oyster roasts and bonfires  
start

---

Porches stay full past sunset

---

If we haven't met yet, I'm Jessica Taylor, and I've been showing people around Coastal North Carolina for over 5 years.

PREMIERE

real



# Make the most of *the season*

Every year the season sneaks up the same way: one month you're still in summer mode, the next you're outside every weekend, and then suddenly it's the holidays.

---

## CARTERET COUNTY

### September

---

**HAPPENING:**

Cape Lookout National  
Seashore Starlight Cruise  
Sept 12, 2026 | 7:30-10:45 PM

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Clawson's 1905 — downtown  
Beaufort

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Surf fishing picks up on the Bogue  
Banks piers as the first real cool  
snap kicks off the king mackerel run.

---

### October

---

**HAPPENING:**

40th Annual NC Seafood  
Festival  
2-4, 2026 | 10 AM-11 PM

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Floyd's 1921 — Morehead City

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

NC oyster season opens Oct 1 —  
good month for a Core Sound  
oyster roast.

---

### November

---

**HAPPENING:**

Beaufort Pirate Invasion  
Nov 14-15, 2026, Eury Park,  
Beaufort

---

**WORTH EATING:**

RuckerJohns — Emerald Isle

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Waterfowl start moving through —  
good month for birding at Cedar  
Island National Wildlife Refuge.

---

## CRAVEN COUNTY

### September

---

**HAPPENING:**

15th Annual BSH Oktoberfest  
Fundraiser  
Sept 26, 2026 | 5-9 PM

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Persimmons Waterfront  
Restaurant — New Bern

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Paddle the Neuse or Trent while the  
water's still warm and the summer  
boat traffic has cleared out.

---

### October

---

**HAPPENING:**

MumFest, 46th Annual  
Oct 10-11, 2026 | Sat 10  
AM-6 PM, Sun 10 AM-4 PM

---

**WORTH EATING:**

The Chelsea — downtown New  
Bern

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Cooler mornings on the trails at  
New Bern Battlefield Park.

---

### November

---

**HAPPENING:**

Tuscarora Society Singers and  
Dancers presentation  
Nov 8, 2026 | 2 PM

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Morgan's Tavern & Grill — New  
Bern

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Cool, quiet walks along the New Bern  
riverfront as the Neuse empties out  
for the season.

---

NEW HANOVER COUNTY

## September

---

**HAPPENING:**

American Craft Walk  
Sept 12, 2026 | 10 AM-5 PM,  
Front St, downtown Wilmington

**WORTH EATING:**

Voyce Bistro — downtown  
Wilmington (Chef Keith Rhodes'  
new spot, formerly of Catch)

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Evening surf sessions and  
Wrightsville Beach walks now that  
the crowds have thinned.

## October

---

**HAPPENING:**

30th Annual Art in the  
Arboretum  
Oct 10-11, 2026 | 10 AM-4 PM

**WORTH EATING:**

Ceviche's — downtown  
Wilmington

**GET OUTSIDE:**

NC Oyster Month runs all  
October along the NC Oyster  
Trail.

## November

---

**HAPPENING:**

BAD Day Music + Arts Festival  
Nov 14, 2026 | 12 PM, Brooklyn  
Arts District, Wilmington

**WORTH EATING:**

Seabird — downtown Wilmington  
(hosting its own inaugural oyster &  
seafood festival Nov 4-5)

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Quiet cool-morning walks on the  
Carolina Beach boardwalk before the  
holiday season picks up.

---

ON SLOW COUNTY

## September

---

**HAPPENING:**

55th Annual Sneads Ferry  
Shrimp Festival  
Sept 25-26, 2026 | Fri 5-9 PM,  
Sat 10 AM-9 PM

**WORTH EATING:**

Riverview Cafe — Sneads Ferry

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Watch the shrimp trawlers work the  
inlet — prime season to see the  
boats come in at the docks.

## October

---

**HAPPENING:**

72nd Annual Swansboro Mullet  
Festival  
Oct 10-11, 2026

**WORTH EATING:**

Riverside Steak & Seafood —  
Swansboro

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Kayak the White Oak River as the  
water cools and clears.

## November

---

**HAPPENING:**

Turkey Trot & Gilet 1-Miler  
Nov 26, 2026 | 8 AM, 100  
Recreation Cir, Jacksonville

**WORTH EATING:**

Red's Crab Shack — Jacksonville

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Prime time for a hike or paddle at  
Hammocks Beach State Park near  
Swansboro.



## September

---

**HAPPENING:**

DRIVEN: The Art of the Car  
Sept 19, 2026, ArtExposure  
Gallery, Hampstead

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Tidewater Oyster Bar —  
Hampstead

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

First porch-sitting evenings of the  
season — good month for a sunset  
paddle on Topsail Sound.

## October

---

**HAPPENING:**

36th Annual Autumn With  
Topsail Festival  
Oct 16-18, 2026, Topsail Beach

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Beach Shop & Grill — Topsail  
Beach

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Empty-beach walks on Topsail  
Island now that the summer  
crowds are gone.

## November

---

**HAPPENING:**

NC Spot Festival  
Nov 7-8, 2026 | 9 AM-6 PM, field  
south of Hampstead Women's Club

---

**WORTH EATING:**

Daddy Mac's Beach Grille — Surf  
City

---

**GET OUTSIDE:**

Last warm-enough days for a Topsail  
Sound paddle before the real chill  
sets in.



# Slow mornings

The best mornings here don't have a plan. Coffee first, then wherever the rest of the day goes.



---

## COFFEE

### **Dancing Baristas Café (Beaufort)**

dog-friendly patio, feels like your neighbor's porch

### **New Bern Coffee Roasters (New Bern)**

hey roast it right there, you can smell it

### **Hidden Grounds Coffee (Cargo District, Wilmington)**

dinosaur murals, a jungle patio, somehow still calm

### **Havana 58 Cafe (Jacksonville)**

real Cuban coffee, veteran-owned, worth the wait

### **Surf City Coffee (Surf City)**

local art on the walls, baristas who know your name

---

## BAKERY

### **Marmalade Cafe & Bakery (now in Morehead City)**

crème brûlée waffles worth the drive

### **Baker's Kitchen (New Bern)**

bakers start at 5am so your cinnamon roll's still warm

### **Little Loaf Bakery & Schoolhouse (Wilmington)**

century-old starter, cinnamon rolls worth the wait

### **Sweeter Things Bakery Cafe (Swansboro)**

cinnamon rolls fresh from the oven, coffee's great too

### **Burney's Sweets and More (Hampstead)**

stuffed croissants worth crossing the bridge for

## BREAKFAST

### **Cox Family Restaurant (Morehead City)**

same warm plate of home cooking, every time

### **Bella's Cafe & Catering (New Bern)**

cinnamon raisin sandwiches, pillows to sink into

### **The Dixie Grill (downtown Wilmington)**

order the Dixie Benedict, thank me later

### **The Kettle Diner (Jacksonville)**

all-day breakfast, big portions, Southern hospitality done right

### **Sawmill Grill (Hampstead)**

the Sawmill Benedict, biscuits like your grandmother made

## QUIET SPOT

### **Cru Wine Bar & Beaufort Coffee Shop (Beaufort)**

coffee by day, wine by night, never rushes you

### **Tryon Palace Gardens (New Bern)**

sixteen acres of garden paths, minutes from downtown

### **Old Books on Front Street (Wilmington)**

two miles of books, a piano, wine if you want

### **Blend Cafe (Jacksonville)**

patio right on the New River, bring a book and stay

### **Sugar Island (Surf City)**

a bookshop and bakery in one, upstairs is even quieter

## THE FEEL

---

# Outside

The whole point of this season is ending up outside for longer than you meant to.

## TRAIL OR WALK

### **Elliott Coues Nature Trail, Fort Macon State Park**

boardwalks through marsh and maritime forest, right off the beach

### **Neusiok Trail, Croatan National Forest**

swamp to sand in one hike, twenty-one miles if you want it

### **Greenfield Lake Park loop**

cypress, Spanish moss, turtles, loop it twice if you can

### **Hammocks Beach State Park**

mainland woods before the ferry, quiet enough to hear yourself think

### **Moore's Creek History Trail**

boardwalk over the creek, history under every step



## PARK

### **Emerald Isle Woods Park**

quiet, sandy, and empty, the sound side of the island

### **New Bern Battlefield Park**

cannons in the woods, and hardly anyone else around

### **Long Leaf Park (formerly Hugh MacRae Park)**

ponds, longleaf pines, room to just wander for a while

### **Sturgeon City Park**

willows and boardwalk, feels nothing like the rest of town

### **Hampstead Kiwanis Park**

a real walking trail with fitness stations, actually gets used

## LOOKOUT

### **Beaufort's waterfront boardwalk**

working boats and marsh views, right off Front Street

### **Union Point Park**

two rivers meet right here, best view in town

### **Sugarloaf Dune Trail, Carolina Beach State Park**

climb the dune, the whole river opens up below you

### **Soundside Park, Surf City**

everyone's here for the same reason: the sunset



## BEST PATIO

### **Clawson's 1905**

third-floor deck, Taylor's Creek spread out below you

### **Persimmons Waterfront Restaurant**

a table on the water, boats drifting by all evening

### **The Pilot House**

go upstairs to the Crow's Nest for the real view

### **Riverside Steak & Seafood**

deck on the White Oak River

### **Daddy Mac's Beach Grille**

deck right on the ocean, watch the tide roll in

# With the kids

Weekends go easier when you already know where you're going. These are the reliable ones.

---

## WEEKEND ACTIVITY

### **NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores**

sharks, otters, a touch tank, always a hit

### **Pepsi Family Center, NC History Center**

sail a ship, run the general store, all hands-on

### **Trask Family Farms Corn Maze & Pumpkin Patch, Castle Hayne**

four miles of trails, hay rides, homemade ice cream

### **Zing Zumm Children's Museum of Jacksonville**

hands-on play, ages 0-10, genuinely good

### **Poplar Grove Plantation**

farm animals, a playground, and grounds to wander

---

## PARK

### **Kidsville Playground, Seth West Parrot Park**

a wooden fort of slides, swings, and zip lines

### **Emerald Isle Woods Park**

boardwalk, disc golf, and a floating dock to explore

### **Long Leaf Park (formerly Hugh MacRae Park)**

splash pad, inclusive playground, a pond with ducks

---

## TREAT STOP

### **Beaufort Creamery**

two locations, open every day of the week

### **Cow Café**

homemade ice cream and a barnyard play area for little ones

### **Boombalatti's Handcrafted Ice Cream**

homemade, award-winning, and dog treats too

### **Candy Edventure, Swansboro**

a whole shop of candy, exactly what it sounds like

### **Four Cousins Ice Cream, Topsail Beach**

homemade flavors that rotate weekly

---

## DOG FRIENDLY

### **Dancing Baristas Café, Beaufort**

leashed pups welcome on the patio, treats included

### **Ruff Draft Dog Park & Bar, Cargo District**

an actual off-leash dog park with a bar attached

### **The Boro Restaurant & Bar, Swansboro**

front lawn seating, and yes, a dog menu

# After dark

Evenings get better this time of year. Here is where I'd spend one if I had it free.



---

## DINNER

### **Seabird**

downtown Wilmington, seasonal NC seafood done right

### **Beach Shop & Grill, Topsail Beach**

the island's one dressed-up dinner spot

### **Riverside Steak & Seafood, Swansboro**

river view, live music some nights

---

## DESSERT

### **The General Store, Beaufort**

an old-school sweet shop right on Front Street

### **Nautical Star Coffee Company**

dessert cocktails like an espresso martini

### **Pie Slayer**

a genuine late-night dessert bar, downtown

### **Celtic Creamery, Surf City**

hands-down the best ice cream on the island

---

## DRINKS

### **Brewery 99**

Craven County's first brewery, cozy taproom, friendly regulars

### **The UnderFront Company**

craft cocktails under century-old beams

### **The Clove Hitch Beer Company, Jacksonville**

16 local beers, family and dog friendly

---

## LIVE MUSIC

### **Floyd's 1921, Morehead City**

live music from local musicians on the patio

### **Baxter's 1892**

a 1900s supper club built for live music

### **Bowstring**

9,800 square feet, a real live music venue

### **Gilligan's, Surf City**

a beach bar that turns into a real dance floor

# When people visit

When someone is in town for a weekend, this is the short list I actually hand them.

---

## FIRST STOP

### **Tryon Palace**

the first capital of North Carolina, right downtown

### **Surf City Ocean Pier**

the landmark that tells you you've made it to the island

---

## THE VIEW

### **Fort Macon's ramparts**

dunes, marsh, and Beaufort Inlet below you

### **Cloud 9 Rooftop Bar**

sunset over the Cape Fear, nine floors up

---

## ONLY HERE

### **Shackleford Banks wild horses**

free-roaming horses, boat-only, here 400 years

### **Birthplace of Pepsi-Cola**

invented right here in 1898, still pours from the fountain

### **Missiles and More Museum**

a secret Navy missile program tested right here, 1946-48



EVERY YEAR

---

# Traditions

The things locals look forward to every season.

---

## NC Seafood Festival

Morehead City's biggest weekend of the year, 200,000+ people and every seafood dish imaginable

---

## MumFest

thousands of chrysanthemums fill historic downtown New Bern for the riverfront's signature fall festival

---

## Hoggard vs. New Hanover football

the county's cross-town rivalry game, the one Friday night nobody misses

---

## Swansboro Mullet Festival

a 72-year-old tradition built around the local mullet run, parade included

---

## Beaufort Pirate Invasion

pirates take over downtown Beaufort for cannon fire, sword fights, and a waterfront battle reenactment

---

## Trask Family Farms Corn Maze & Pumpkin Patch

the corn maze, pumpkin patch, and flower fields families circle back to every fall

---

## Sneads Ferry Shrimp Festival

the official NC Shrimp Festival, now in its 55th year, parade and all

---

## NC Spot Festival

Pender County's longest-running festival, spot fish dinners, fireworks, and proceeds that go straight to local schools



DON'T MISS THESE

---

# The *Fall* bucket list

- ☐ Carve a pumpkin
- ☐ Drink a pumpkin spice latte
- ☐ Wear a flannel outside
- ☐ Watch a Friday night football game
- ☐ Take a hayride
- ☐ Get lost in a corn maze
- ☐ Pick your own pumpkin at Trask Family Farms
- ☐ Slurp oysters at Shuckapalooza in Beaufort
- ☐ Walk MumFest in downtown New Bern
- ☐ Catch the Sneads Ferry Shrimp Festival
- ☐ Watch sunset at Soundside Park, Surf City
- ☐ Drink a seasonal beer outside
- ☐ Watch cypress trees turn at Greenfield Lake
- ☐ Bundle up for a bonfire
- ☐ Watch wild horses on Shackleford Banks
- ☐ Take a ghost tour downtown
- ☐ Buy a mum for the porch



WORTH THE DRIVE

---

# Weekend trips

---

## Blowing Rock, NC

DRIVE TIME

About 6 hours from Beaufort

KNOWN FOR

Blue Ridge Parkway fall foliage in a walkable mountain village

WORTH THE STOP

The Blowing Rock itself — the clifftop rock formation the town is named for

---

## Edenton, NC

DRIVE TIME

About 2 hours from New Bern

KNOWN FOR

colonial waterfront charm on the Albemarle Sound

WORTH THE STOP

The Barker House and the historic waterfront

---

## Duplin Winery, Rose Hill

DRIVE TIME

About 1 hour from Wilmington

KNOWN FOR

the largest muscadine winery in the South

WORTH THE STOP

The Bistro at Duplin Winery





## *Hey there,* I'm Jessica Taylor

COASTAL NC LOCAL LUXURY BROKER

I love sharing about all the things that make Coastal North Carolina special. I hope you learned something new in this guide!

If you're looking for more local recs-check out my Instagram or send me a message, I'd love to hear from you!

@LISTINGCOASTALNC

(910) 544-9897

JESSICA@JESSICATAYLORREALTY.COM

## Let's talk

Thinking about a move before the year turns? Start here.

[SCHEDULE A CALL](#)