

# Cape Lookout

National Seashore  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Backpacking and Camping

Welcome to Cape Lookout National Seashore! The national seashore consists of three undeveloped barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina. There are no designated campgrounds in the park; however, primitive camping is allowed by backcountry use *permit only*. **Permits can be obtained at the Harkers Island Visitor Center or from any Park Ranger.** The following information will help you plan and enjoy your trip:

**Getting to the Park:** You can only access the park by private boat or public ferry. For up-to-date ferry information, please call 252-728-2250 and ask for the listing of ferry services.

**Regulations:** Camping is not permitted in the following areas:

- \*Within 100 yards of any cabin or house
- \*In concession cabin areas
- \*Portsmouth Village Historic District
- \*Cape Lookout Light Station Complex
- \*Cape Lookout Coast Guard Complex
- \*Areas of reserved private rights (Retained Use & Occupancy leases)
- \*Harkers Island Administrative Site
- \*Turtle and bird closure areas
- \*Designated long-term parking lots/areas

Camping is allowed up to 14 consecutive days.

Firearms are not allowed at the national seashore except during hunting season.



**Weather:** Weather conditions can rapidly change on the islands. During the summer months, afternoon thunderstorms can occur. These storms pass quickly, but lightning can strike dunes, beach, and water.

Hurricane season begins on June 1 and ends on November 30. The park will be evacuated and closed if a hurricane threatens the area. Please check the visitor center for the latest watches and warnings.

Extreme high and low tides occur during the year and may affect camping and hiking. Areas can fill quickly with water. You may want to get a copy of tide tables before going out on the islands.



**Food & Water:** Food is not available on the seashore. Fresh water is very limited. Campers should bring enough to serve their needs. If you plan to do long-term camping, please contact the visitor center for additional information on water storage.



**Trash:** Please carry out everything you carry into the park. Littering is illegal. Do not bury trash since sand is constantly moving and buried trash resurfaces quickly! Also, trash can injure the turtles and birds. Plastic bags look like jellyfish to sea turtles and they will eat them. The bag will injure or kill the turtle.



Proper disposal of human waste is important to avoid pollution of water and to minimize the possibility of spreading disease. Human waste should be disposed of by using catholes. The cathole should be above high tide line. Select a site where people will be unlikely to walk or camp. With a small trowel, dig a hole about 6-8 inches deep and 4-6 inches in diameter. When finished, the cathole should be covered.

**Insects:** Biting insects such as mosquitos, greenhead flies, deerflies and gnats can be found throughout the seashore during the months of May through October. Chiggers and ticks can also be found. Insect repellent should be carried with you.



**Fires:** Driftwood campfires are allowed below the high tide line. A permit is not required. Only dead and down wood may be collected. Since this source of wood is extremely limited, cold camping with a self-contained stove is recommended.

**Hints:** Swimming is not recommended on the seashore. There are no lifeguards in the park. Swimming hazards such as strong tides, crosscurrents, waves and riptides can occur without warning. These hazards can result in drowning.



Sturdy walking shoes are recommended. Walking in soft sand can be difficult without shoes.

A hat and sunscreen would be helpful for your trip.

**Shelter:** For adequate shelter, a tent that has insect netting and is able to withstand strong winds is recommended. To anchor the tent properly, use stakes that are about one foot in length. Standard tent stakes may not withstand high winds.

**Pets:** Pets are required to be on leashes at **all** times, to protect native wildlife. Dogs are natural predators. Fines will be assessed to owners having pets off a leash. Pets are not permitted on ferries or in concession lodgings.

**For additional information, please contact:**

**Cape Lookout National Seashore**  
131 Charles Street  
Harkers Island NC 28531  
252-728-2250

or check us out on the web at [www.nps.gov/cal/](http://www.nps.gov/cal/)

