

Cape Hatteras

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Seashore
North Carolina



To protect it from the encroaching sea, Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was moved inland in 1999.

A thin broken strand of islands curves out into the Atlantic Ocean and back again in a sheltering embrace of North Carolina’s mainland coast and offshore sounds. For thousands of years these barrier islands—North Carolina’s Outer Banks—have survived onslaughts of wind and sea. Their long stretches of beach, sand dunes, marshes, and woodlands are set aside as Cape Hatteras National Seashore. It can be a lonely place; you may walk the beach unseen except by

shore birds looking for a meal. It can be a place of discovery; you may visit the 1870 Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, one of many monuments to our encounter with the sea. It can be a wild place; you may be buffeted by a gale or surprised by the honking of large flocks of migrating geese. And it can be an exciting place for surf fishing, sunbathing, swimming, beachcombing, canoeing, sailing, surfing, snorkeling. Part land, part sea, Cape Hatteras offers rewards from each.



LIGHTHOUSE ©SCOTT T. SMITH; BUXTON WOODS ©MIKE BOOHER/TRANSPARENCIES INC.; SNOW GEESSE ©STEPHEN J. KRASEMAN/PHOTO RESEARCHERS INC. CRAB AND HOLLY BERRIES NPS ©KEVIN ADAMS ©ALEX DEMYAN ©SCOTT T. SMITH

Top, left to right: Exploring a Pamlico Sound beach; coquina clams; Ocracoke harbor and lighthouse. Center: Bodie Island lighthouse; Buxton Woods, Hatteras Island; ghost crab; wild holly berries. Bottom: migrating snow geese, Cape Hatteras; sunrise surf fishing; brown pelican.

Where Land and Sea Merge

Cape Hatteras lies at the ocean’s edge. But no well-defined boundary marks where sea ends and land begins. Land and sea work in an uneasy alliance here. They share many valuable resources, but the sea rules barrier islands and few places escape its influence. Take a moment to discover this seaside kingdom.

Dwarfed, odd-shaped trees may catch your eye. Severely pruned by salt-laden winds, they are just one example of how the sea affects living things. Closer by the sea, shore birds patrolling the beach for food are fun to watch. Some catch small fish or crabs carried by waves. Others probe sand or search under shells for clams, worms, or insects. Hiking through the maritime forests you briefly leave

the sea behind. These woodlands of oak, cedar, and yaupon holly grow on the islands’ higher, broader, somewhat protected parts.

Bright red holly berries and wildflowers enliven the mostly green, brown, and blue landscape. It is a landscape that is usually peaceful—but not always. Storms sometimes batter the islands with fierce winds and waves. Over the years you can witness the retreat of the shoreline from these violent attacks.

For the tiny ghost crab who lives on the beach in a wave-washed underground burrow, survival is a matter of adaptation, of adjusting to meet the demands of the land and sea.

In protected sounds west of the islands you can find excellent opportunities for crabbing and clamming. The ocean also harbors a bounty of life—channel bass, pompano, sea trout, bluefish, and other popular fish. Wintering snow geese, Canada geese, ducks, and many other bird species populate the islands. Best times for birding are during fall and spring migrations and in winter.

Salt marshes are food sources for birds and other animals year-round. Here the sound waters meet the marsh twice each day as tides come and go, exchanging and replenishing nutrients. At the edge of the ocean you stand always on the threshold of a new experience.

Graveyard of the Atlantic

Treacherous waters off the coast of the Outer Banks bear the name Graveyard of the Atlantic, a grim but fitting epithet. Over 600 ships wrecked here as victims of shallow shoals, storms, and war. Diamond Shoals, a bank of shifting sand ridges hidden beneath a turbulent sea off Cape Hatteras, has never promised safe passage for ships. But seafarers often risked the shoals to take advantage of the north- or south-flowing currents passing nearby. Many never reached their destination.

Fierce winter nor’easters and tropics-born hurricanes drove many ships aground, including the schooner *G.A. Kohler* (right) in 1933. Other ships were lost in wars. World War II German submarines sank so

many Allied tankers and cargo ships here that the waters earned a second sobering name—Torpedo Junction.

In the past 400 years the graveyard has claimed many lives, but island villagers saved many. As early as the 1870s villagers served in the U.S. Life Saving Service. Others staffed lighthouses built to guide mariners. Later, when the U.S. Coast Guard became guardian of the nation’s shores, many residents joined its ranks. When rescue attempts failed, villagers buried the dead and salvaged shipwreck remains. Few ships wreck today, but storms still uncover the ruins of the old wrecks that lie along the beaches of the Outer Banks.



In the 1800s, island rescue crews returned shipwreck survivors to safety in small oar-powered boats. Now the U.S. Coast Guard patrols the Outer Banks with helicopters and other modern craft.

The Gold Lifesaving Medal is the highest peacetime honor for saving a life. It has been awarded to many of the Hatteras rescuers for their extraordinary heroic deeds.

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Exploring Cape Hatteras

Touring the Islands

Cape Hatteras stretches north to south across three islands, Bodie, Hatteras, and Ocracoke. N.C. 12, a narrow, paved road, and Hatteras Inlet ferry link the islands. The highway goes through eight villages that reflect the nearly 300-year history of the Outer Banks. The villages are not part of the park. For more information stop at any park visitor center. Activity schedules are available. For places to camp, fish, swim, and hike, see the map below.

Bodie Island Bodie Island Lighthouse, built in 1872, still has its original 1st-order Fresnel lens (*not open for climbing*). Bodie Island marshes teem with waterbirds, visible from a viewing platform near the lighthouse. See the sportfishing catch-of-the-day at Oregon Inlet Marina when off-shore boats return in late afternoon.

Hatteras Island Built in 1870, Cape Hatteras Lighthouse is the world's tallest brick lighthouse, at 198.5 feet (*open for climbing in summer*). The nearby Buxton Woods Nature

Trail winds through the maritime woods. Multiple access areas to Pamlico Sound let you explore the Seashore's marshes and wetlands.

Ocracoke Island This isolated island and its small harbor village retain much of their early charm and character. Visit the Pony Pen to see descendants of a horse herd that once freely roamed the island. Ocracoke Lighthouse, built in 1823, is North Carolina's oldest operating lighthouse (*not open for climbing*). Because it is close to the Gulf Stream, the island offers excellent shelling opportunities.

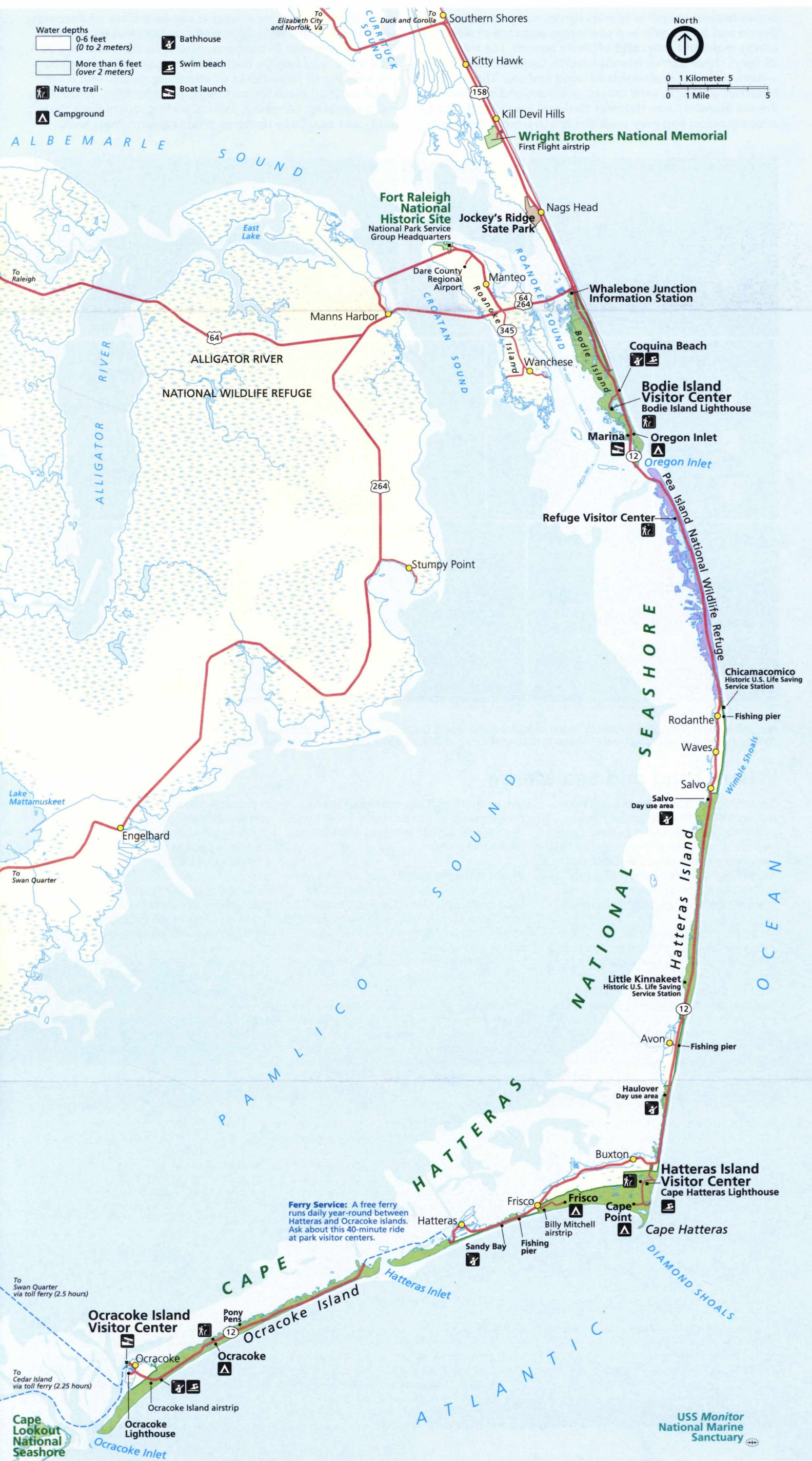


From left: Bodie Island, Cape Hatteras, and Ocracoke lighthouses

Camping

The four park campgrounds, Oregon Inlet, Cape Point, Frisco, and Ocracoke are open in summer; contact the park for opening and closing dates. You can reserve Ocracoke campsites for June, July, and August by calling the National Park Service reservation system 1-877-444-6777. All other campsites are first-come, first-served. Camping fees are charged. Camping is allowed only in designated campgrounds. All campgrounds have cold showers, drinking water, tables, fire grills, and modern restrooms. (*No utility hookups.*) Dumping stations are near Oregon Inlet, Cape Point, and Ocracoke campgrounds. Sand and wind conditions require longer-than-normal tent stakes. Shade awnings and insect netting will make your camping more enjoyable.

Cape Hatteras is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities visit www.nps.gov.



Access, Safety, and Regulations

Motorists can reach the park from the north via U.S. 158 or from the west via U.S. 64 and 264. Two toll ferries travel from the mainland to Ocracoke. Reach the one from Swan Quarter, N.C., via U.S. 264, and the one from Cedar Island, N.C., via U.S. 70. From Swan Quarter the ferry trip takes 2½ hours; from Cedar Island 2¼ hours. *Reservations are recommended*: call 1-800-BY-FERRY.

More Information
Cape Hatteras National Seashore
1401 National Park Drive, Manteo, NC 27954
252-473-2111; www.nps.gov/caha

Safety Today Take these safety tips for a safe and enjoyable stay. Questions? Ask a park ranger. Swim only where lifeguards are on duty. Unlike swimming pools or lakes, oceans can have strong littoral currents, rip currents, tidal currents near inlets, and shifting sand that make swimming dangerous. Winds blow air mattresses and other flotation devices out

to sea. Breaking waves can dislocate shoulders, and sand abrasions are not uncommon. *Even broken necks and paralysis have resulted from riding the waves and being thrown into the sand head first.* If this is your first ocean visit, ask a lifeguard or ranger for more information. Ocracoke and Avon offer limited medical services; the nearest hospital is in Nags Head.

Sunburn can be painful and ruin your vacation. Bright sun, water, and sand can make you burn quickly. Brief exposures and sunblock are recommended. In summer, light clothing gives sun protection and is comfortable at evening. Mosquitos and other insect pests call for effective repellent and mosquito netting for camping. Wear shoes when on the beach and dunes or in campgrounds. In winter, wear warm, wind-resistant clothing—high humidity and northerly winds magnify cold temperatures.

Hurricanes are rare but may occur from June to October. Don't take winter storms or

nor'easters lightly. Authorities try to warn you in time to leave areas if a storm threatens.

Your pet is welcome at the park but you must keep it leashed and under your control at all times. Pets are not allowed on designated swim beaches or in buildings. Don't leave pets unattended and please clean up after them.

Always walk—never drive—across barrier dunes to sand beaches. Park your car only in designated areas so you don't get stuck in soft sand. Many areas have access ramps for vehicles properly equipped to drive on soft sand. Check with rangers or at visitor centers for regulations on off-road vehicle travel. Bicyclists must use extreme caution because there are no established bike trails in the park.

Nearby Parks Fort Raleigh National Historic Site and Wright Brothers National Memorial are eight miles west and nine miles north, respectively, of Whalebone Junction.