

# Richmond magazine

## **Head South Emerald Isle and the other Outer Banks**

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For most of my life, my family and I have spent our summer vacations in the Outer Banks — Nags Head, Kill Devil Hills, Manteo. For me, the Outer Banks have always ended at Ocracoke, until I rounded the bend to the other Outer Banks. The southern Outer Banks, aka the Crystal Coast, begins beyond Ocracoke at Cedar Island, goes south to Cape Lookout and doglegs west to Cedar Point. Towns along this 100-some mile stretch include Atlantic Beach, Pine Knoll Shores, Salter Path, Indian Beach and Emerald Isle.

While Emerald Isle has been called, yes, the gem of the Crystal Coast, I chose this beach strictly for its cool name. It reminded me of the Emerald City from *The Wizard of Oz*, and oddly enough we even met the mayor while we were there, but that's a horse of a different color.

Emerald Isle is actually named for its maritime forests. For a beach, it's probably among the greenest places I've ever seen. As we crossed the Route 58 bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway, we could hardly see the water for the trees.

And despite the five-hour trek, more Richmonders go to Emerald Isle than you might think. In our cottage alone, we had my boyfriend, Ted; my two girls, Brittany and Nicole; Nicole's best friend, Lillian; and her mom, Catherine. Then, of all the gem joints in all the world, who should turn out to be down there on the same weekend but my mother. As if that weren't enough of the small-world phenomenon, we ran into one of my college sorority sisters who also used to work with Ted at Best Products. She told us Ted's former roommate was in Emerald Isle as well. I was expecting to bump into the Scarecrow and the Tin Man next.

We didn't. But we did get a chance to meet Art Schools, the great and powerful mayor of Emerald Isle. The Richmond native makes it his business to keep up with island goings-on, and when he heard a writer from Richmond magazine was visiting from back home, he stopped by to say hello.

Emerald Isle consists of the western half (12.5 miles) of the barrier island called Bogue Banks. The town was incorporated in 1957 and is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2007. Emerald Isle prides itself on being a "small-town family beach."

Our oceanfront cottage on Ocean Drive was appropriately named All Water, Water Everywhere. Perched on one of the highest points on the island, it had magnificent views

up and down the expansive beach.

If you do want an excursion, the aquarium is a good choice. The North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores (252-247-4003 or [www.ncaquariums.com/pks/pksindex.htm](http://www.ncaquariums.com/pks/pksindex.htm)) in Atlantic Beach re-opened last year after a \$25 million expansion. Now three times larger, the 93,000-square-foot aquarium has about 3,000 animals in nearly 40 exhibits. A centerpiece is the 50,000-gallon Queen Anne's Revenge, which duplicates the marine community of an 18th-century shipwreck discovered near Beaufort Inlet in 1996 and thought to be from a pirate ship once commanded by the infamous Blackbeard.

Another wonderful thing about this beach is that because of the island's orientation, you get to watch the sun both rise and set over the ocean. Walking at sunset one night, we were accompanied by crowds of people all enjoying the same amazing pink-orange sky as the sun sank into the sea.

Emerald Isle recently completed two additional miles of bike paths and two more miles of sidewalks so that non-motorists can now bike or walk for nine miles without traveling on main roads. Ted, Catherine and I found running each morning on Ocean Drive to be nearly car-free.

After a half-hour run and a half-hour cool-down walk on the beach, we were ready for a big breakfast. And that is how our long weekend at Emerald Isle went. Exercise, meal, lie on the beach, swim in the ocean, meal, nap, game of paddle ball, happy hour, meal, dance, watch fireworks, dessert.

We hardly left our compound except for groceries and fresh seafood. We cooked in every night, though the mayor recommended Portofino Ristorante & Wine Bar (252-354-8111), on Coast Guard Road in Bell Cove Village, and Kathryn's Bistro & Martini Bar (252-354-6200 or [www.kathrynsbistro.com](http://www.kathrynsbistro.com)), two fine-dining restaurants by the same owner.

Turns out, my mother went to both during her visit and found them to be excellent. When we asked Ted's accountant (who, naturally, was headed to Emerald Isle the same day we were) where his family went out to eat on the island, he said, "We never go out to eat here. We eat in." So did we. There's no place like home.

### **A Highlight of the Trip**

Emerald Islanders are so passionate about the Bogue Inlet Pier, open since 1963, that they've developed an impressive Web site ([www.saveourpier.com](http://www.saveourpier.com)) to try and preserve it. As one commenter on the Web site put it, "Pier fishing on the coast of North Carolina is a valuable heritage that needs to be available to our children."