



NEWS FEATURE

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ECONOMIC STIMULUS CHECKS REACH TAXPAYERS IN SEARCH OF AFFORDABLE VACATION OPTIONS

North Carolina Coastal Towns Offer Ways To Stretch A Dollar Into A Great Family Beach Vacation

May 19, 2008, Carolina Beach, N.C. — Economic stimulus checks have begun reaching taxpayers' pockets, making the idea of a family vacation at the beach feasible once again. But with the economy in a funk and gas prices high, it's even more important to find ways to stretch those precious tax dollars while pursuing family fun. Here's a look at two surprisingly affordable resort towns that deliver both quality and fun for less.

Carolina Beach (CarolinaBeachGetaway.com) and Kure Beach (KureBeachstories.com) are a short drive from North Carolina cities like Raleigh, which is just a few hours away on Route 40. And, those who live in other major East Coast cities as far away as Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. can reach the towns on less than a tank of gas.

What makes these two places so affordable is that they both offer reasonably priced accommodations and lots of high quality free stuff to do with the kids. Relatively undiscovered, their pristine beaches are uncrowded and beautiful, much like the more famous Outer Banks resorts. But at Carolina Beach and Kure Beach, you won't find the big-city prices charged at the trendier resorts.

Carolina Beach is a place where you can kick back and sample the simple pleasures of a mid-20th century beach village. The town promises unpretentious charm and it delivers with streets lined with quaint beach cottages, bed & breakfast establishments, and mid-rise condo villas and hotels. The charming streetscape includes small shops, restaurants and family entertainments like beachwear, ice cream and candy shops, and a boardwalk that lines several miles of clean, Atlantic oceanfront.

Carolina Beach has also packaged some free activities that make it the perfect choice for a long, weekend getaway.

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The free fun includes a popular “Film and Fireworks Series” that is tailor-made for families. Weather permitting, free family-friendly, first-run movies are shown on a huge screen under the stars at Carolina Beach Lake Park every Sunday. Films this year include Spiderman III, Shrek III and Horton Hears A Who.

On Thursdays, there are free concerts, followed by a wonderful fireworks display on the beach near the boardwalk. On Friday and Saturday, the days will pass quickly on the beach. Or sample some of the fishing. Just 15 miles south of Wilmington, N.C., Carolina Beach sits near the convergence of the Cape Fear River, the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean. That translates into the perfect location for surf fishing, bottom fishing, shell fishing and deep-sea fishing. (In fact, thousands of visitors arrive each year just to participate in several annual fishing tournaments each summer and fall.)

Carolina Beach actually shares “Pleasure Island” with another great affordable beach, Kure Beach. Here you’ll discover a world-famous fishing pier, which — unlike many commercial or municipal piers on the East Coast — is free. The 712-foot-long Kure Beach Fishing Pier is a wonderful place to hang out with the kids, drop a line and savor the day.

Kure Beach is also home to the Fort Fisher State Historic Site & Civil War Museum, the largest earthen fort in the South. There’s the N.C. Military History Museum and the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Center, which provides exhibits on dive sites and maritime history dating from prehistoric to Civil War to present.

Fort Fisher is also home to the N.C. Aquarium, which showcases marine life in the Cape Fear River basin and the nearby beaches, estuaries and ocean. The Aquarium features a 235,000-gallon saltwater shark tank; the half-acre Cape Fear Conservatory with alligators, sturgeon and other freshwater species; and the Open Oceans Gallery that focuses on marine creatures and the nearby ocean reefs. At \$8 for adults and \$6 for kids, it’s one of the most affordable aquariums in the country.

Over at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area families can enjoy a five-mile stretch of undeveloped beach that is home to nesting loggerhead sea turtles. There’s a swimming area, picnic area with grills and a visitor’s center.

Tax stimulus checks can go farther when you pick the right vacation spot. Check out Carolina Beach (CarolinaBeachGetaway.com) and Kure Beach (KureBeachstories.com). You’ll be glad you did.

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