

# Off the Beaten Path

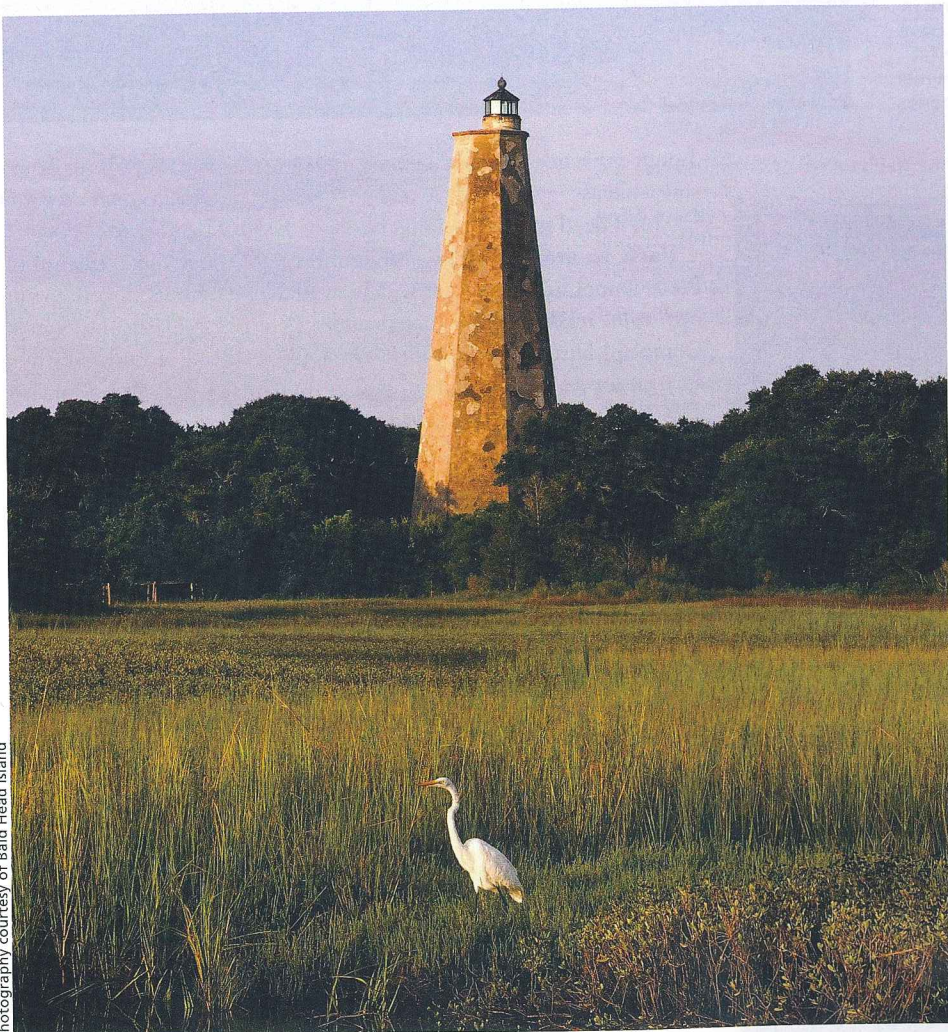
## Visiting Bald Head, NC

By Anne Dunbrack

From the gentle rock of the deck, the salty smell of the marsh, and a pleasant ocean breeze, there is something nostalgic about traveling by boat, and for anyone planning to enjoy the delights of Bald Head, an island with no bridge, the hourly ferry is the only mode of access. Once on the island, the primary mode of transportation is by golf cart with the only other options comprised of walking, running, biking, or swimming. This slower pace is accentuated by the secluded atmosphere, but make no mistake, there is no dearth of luxury either. Bald Head strikes that rare balance of wilderness and development, charm and commodities, nature and comfort.

### Where to Stay

While there is one bed & breakfast on the island, most accommodations are upscale home rentals. We stayed at Twin Peaks, hosted by Intracoastal Realty Vacations who took care of our every need. A delightful welcome basket of fruit, tea, coffee, and other goodies greeted us upon entry, as did the fabulous ocean views from the spacious second floor living area. Our bedrooms, located on the ground level, also looked out on the beach, each with direct access to the front porch. The house could have easily slept two families, so it was fun to have this luxurious space all to ourselves for a girls' weekend!



Photography courtesy of Bald Head Island

### Where to Eat

*Maritime Market* — Our first morning, we enjoyed a hot breakfast on the diner side of the upscale market, which in itself has anything a guest may want — from high-end wine and cheese to toothpaste. Owner Claude Pope also includes a fabulous gift store within the market with chic Bald Head apparel items; I took home a nautical fleeced-lined rugby shirt! We enjoyed breakfast burritos and hot, creamy, cheesy grits with coffee before ambling around the other shops along Maritime Way.

*The Sandpiper Cafe* — A cute coffee bar with smoothies as well as grab-and-go pastries, this is a great option to start the day.

*Jules* — Lunch was the first meal I had upon arriving at Bald Head Friday afternoon, and what a standard this seafood restaurant set. Hushpuppies with cinnamon butter were followed by a pork

Old Baldy Lighthouse was completed in 1817 after erosion decimated its predecessor. The 110-foot walls consist of bricks covered with stucco as protection against the elements. Visitors can climb the 108 stairs for breathtaking views of the Cape Fear River estuary.



Photography courtesy of Bald Head Island

Bald Head's harbor, the only access to the island, is a hub of restaurants and beautiful homes.

delightful shops tucked down this charming drive, ranging from apparel to home decor.

*Island Retreat Spa* — After doing a little shopping one afternoon, we happily retreated to this delightful day spa to enjoy massages. Any remaining tension from the work week was quickly dissipated as I sunk into a pleasant stupor under my therapist's skilled hands.

*Turtle Central* — The BHI Conservancy is a wonderful way to experience the natural side of the island that has been preserved so well. A national leader in barrier island conservation, it facilitates research benefiting coastal communities and provides numerous educational activities to the island's visitors. Tons of learning opportunities are available for children and adults alike in and out of the "classroom," ranging from their structured kids and family programs, to guided kayak tours and turtle walks, to the myriad of nature trails available around the island for guests to explore any time.

*Hiking the Nature Trails* — I in particular loved the island's nature trails, and we made time to explore these woodland and marshland walks on both Saturday and Sunday. The island has a lot of contour, with surprisingly large hills for a barrier island. There are numerous ancient oak trees, the largest of which have plaques giving more information about them, and boardwalks give access to high land out in the middle of the marsh — just be sure not to get trapped at high tide if you don't want your feet to get wet!

*Golf, Tennis, Pickleball, and Croquet* — The BHI Club offers all of these country club sports in abundance. While not a golfer myself, I did enjoy a golf cart ride around the gorgeous course and can only imagine the ecstasy it would give an avid golfer.

*Water Activities* — While we went in November, the island is buzzing with bathing suit activities in the summertime. Going to any of the three beaches is obviously an activity in and of itself, but the BHIC also offers an aquatics center with waterslides, a splash pad, and a water playground in addition to two pools.☼

belly appetizer in a Cheerwine reduction with collard pesto. A pecan-encrusted bass over pumpkin risotto was my savory entree, and after that I sadly had no room for dessert. The beautiful view over the harbor was reminiscent of Fleet's Landing in Charleston and added to the delightful sensory experience of dining there.

*Delphina's* — This vibrant Mexican restaurant is also over the harbor. It offers a wide range of cuisine, from burritos and rice bowls to quesadillas and even burgers. We dined on loaded nachos and incredible shrimp tacos with chimichurri. Delicioso!

*Horizons* — Part of the Bald Head Island Club and one of its four restaurants, this casual lunch option looks out over the ocean and offers an appealing menu that truly has something for everyone. I enjoyed oysters on the half shell and a lobster roll, accompanied by a refreshing cocktail.

*Bald Head Island Club Grill Room* — Our first evening, we dined at the club's elegant, premier fine dining restaurant. We enjoyed an heirloom tomato and burrata salad with avocado as well as an arugula and radish salad with feta and a brown butter vinaigrette to start. This was followed by filet mignon with garlic whipped potatoes and asparagus,

and a peach and marionberry crisp with vanilla ice cream for dessert, with a glass of port. For our filets, we each got to choose the color of our French steak knife; I chose green!

*Aqua at the Shoals Club* — Having studied abroad in Spain, I am almost always disappointed when I order sangria stateside, but not here. The fine dining menu had an Asian slant, and we enjoyed wild mushroom soup with soy paprika; shrimp lettuce wraps with honey chipotle; and grilled beef tender with garlic buttered crab, corn scallion pancakes, and avocado bearnaise. For dessert — yes, we still had room — I enjoyed a smooth and creamy chocolate torte.

### What to Do

*Old Baldy* — A historic tour of the island and of Old Baldy, the historic lighthouse, is a must-do. We learned about the lighthouse history as well as the role the island played in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, WWII, and even Vietnam, as soldiers from Fort Bragg trained on the island to become accustomed to hacking through the jungle. Climbing to the top of Old Baldy for the scenic overlook of the island was a highlight.

*Shopping at the Maritime Way* — The Maritime Market is but one of the many