



at Fort Fisher

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The North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher Highlights

KURE BEACH – The North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher, located at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, welcomes visitors to "The Waters of the Cape Fear." To tour the facility is to take a journey down the Cape Fear River – from freshwater streams and swamps, to coastline habitats, to reefs and the open ocean.

The focus of the **Cape Fear Conservatory**, the visitor's first stop in the aquarium, is freshwater life. In this large, tree-filled atrium, streams, ponds and swamps are home to frogs, snakes, bass, catfish and perch. Carnivorous plants and box turtles hide among the conservatory's groundcover. American alligators, native to North Carolina, occupy one of the larger exhibits in the conservatory.

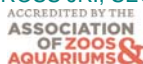
Next up is the **Coastal Waters** gallery, which includes the Coquina Outcrop Touch Pool, with hands-on opportunities to learn about sea urchins, stingrays, horseshoe crabs, whelks and other creatures of a rocky outcrop surf zone. Masonboro Inlet Jetty features the fishes common around a wave-washed rock jetty. This gallery also includes an indoor salt marsh, a sea horse habitat, and a loggerhead sea turtle display.

Holding 235,000 gallons, Cape Fear Shoals is the largest of the aquarium's saltwater exhibits. This 24-foot-deep replica of an offshore reef offers two-story, multi-level views of several species of sharks, stingrays, groupers and moray eels – all at home within a rocky-ledge habitat.

The Cape Fear Shoals aquarium anchors the **Open Oceans** gallery, which comprises several exhibits highlighting the creatures and habitats found off North Carolina's coastline. The realistic displays include an octopus, hard-bottom reefs and the wreck of a sunken vessel, as well as two dramatically-lighted jellyfish cases.

In 2005, the aquarium completed a unique exhibit with five new displays, collectively titled **Exotic Aquatics**. The exhibit now features lionfish, spiny lobsters, Hawaiian fishes, Pacific reef fishes, and dart frogs, all of which embody the Exotic Aquatics theme of "strange and beautiful life on Planet Ocean." The creatures come

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from the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the West African Coast, and the Indo-Pacific. It is the aquarium's first opportunity to display non-indigenous marine species.

Across from the Open Oceans Gallery, a life-size model of a humpback whale, with her calf alongside her, dominates an entire wall of the aquarium's marine building. To complete their tour of the marine building, visitors can watch skates and rays cruise the clear waters of their sandy-bottom habitat in the **Shadows on the Sand** exhibit.

Just outside the aquarium's marine building is a boardwalk that meanders through the aquarium's **Memorial Gardens**. Making their way toward the aquarium exit, visitors can stroll through the lush gardens, learning about indigenous plants and watching birds from a birding deck. Near the main parking lot, visitors will find a lovely maritime-forest trail, perfect for walking, bicycling or bird watching. For a diversion, children and adults alike will enjoy sifting for shark's teeth in the nearby **Fossil Pit**.

For details, contact Amy Kilgore or Donna Moffitt at (910) 458-8257. For complete information and program schedules, visit: www.ncaquariums.com.