

Outer Banks

A nice weekend getaway, but watch for hurricanes

By CHARLES HERNDON

Exploring North Carolina's Outer Banks in the Autumn can be an exercise in lonely contemplation and can be, for the weekend visitor, a chance to get away from the hustle and pressures of school and city and retreat to a land rarely visited in the fall.

Particularly captivating in the fall are the southern Outer Banks, starting at the northern end of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and proceeding south to the isolated island of Ocracoke. The islands, stretching almost 150 miles from the resort towns of Kitty Hawk and Nags Head to the southern tip of Portsmouth Island, are a string of narrow, sand-swept barrier islands, jutting far out into the Atlantic Ocean and often bearing the brunt of many fall and winter storms and hurricanes.

The islands are fragile and are nearly deserted in the Autumn months when the tourists desert the islands and leave the lonely beaches and lagoons to the few hardy Bankers who live and work off the islands throughout the year. Starting at Whalebone Junction in South Nags Head, the visitor in search of quiet meditation and a portrayal of raw nature would travel south on NC 12, a two-lane highway that serves as the only road connecting the southern Outer Banks with the mainland.

Moving down the Outer Banks, one encounters the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, a stretch of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore that comes alive in the fall with thousands of migratory birds and wildlife. Pea Island (which is really not an island at all), is shadowed by the black-and-white ringed Bodie Island Light House.

The Bodie Island light is one of the five remaining lighthouses on the Outer Banks warning sailors of the treacherous waters off the coast. More than 500 ships have foundered on the Banks in the past five centuries, and the waters around Cape Hatteras and Lookout remain tricky and deadly to the unwary mariner.

Between the populous northern resort areas and the Cape stretch 70 miles of deserted beach and two lanes of blacktop.

Along the way, the tiny fishing villages of Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, and Avon offer places to rest and to see a part of the Old Outer Banks that has been relatively untouched by the past 40 years growth of the tourist industry further to the north. These weather-beaten old villages, clinging stub-

bornly on the narrow strip of land, survive as fishing villages on the large Pamlico Sound, which borders the Banks on the west. One note of caution to the Autumn Outer Banks traveler: the fall is the heart of the hurricane season, and the tiny islands are often buffeted by high winds and flood waters during bad weather. Should bad weather descend during a weekend study break to the beach, it would be best to move inland, just to be safe.

Cape Hatteras lies 70 miles south of Nags Head and would be well-worth the trip for the weekend traveler.

The Cape Hatteras lighthouse, standing 208 feet above the ground, is presently being

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