

Southport holds hidden treasures

By LYNN EARLEY

Quiet shores, undisturbed pier fishing and reasonably priced restaurants often draw vacationers to North Carolina's family beaches.

And with its small town charms, the Southport-Oak Island area on the lower tip of North Carolina's coastline attracts many types of people. Although college students often prefer more popular beaches, this little-known area reveals hidden gems to those who know where to dig.

The beaches are clean and sunworshippers can easily find a place to park their blankets, coolers, and lotion-covered bodies. Local young people ranging in age from 14 to 28 hit the beach at 40th Street and usually welcome company. They befriend new people if the newcomers make the first overtures toward friendship.

Sun lovers must use public access sites instead of area residents' driveways as parking lots because some people will lodge complaints.

Strong southwest winds dominate the shores and contribute to ocean sailing's increasing popularity in the area. Long Beach Parks and Recreation Department recently established open class regattas, which draw about 25 catamarans and monohulls to July 4th and Labor Day holidays.

Visitors can sometimes convince area sailors to take on passengers as they experience the water and wind.

Surfing is a less-predictable sport than sailing because of Long Beach's south-facing proximity.

Hopeful fishermen line four piers in the Southport-Oak Island area — Long Beach Pier, Ocean Crest Pier, Yaupon Pier and Southport City Pier. The Southport pier usually yields fewer fish since it extends into the Cape Fear River instead of into the ocean as the other three do. The three Oak Island piers charge a minimal fee for fishing since they are privately owned.

Luckless fishermen can satisfy their appetite for seafood at local restaurants since practically all restaurants feature at least a few seafood selections. Prices parallel those of the famous Calabash restaurants and some of the fish is bought from the same area distributors since Southport is near Calabash.

The current popular place in Long Beach is The Windjammer, with its huge ocean-front windows and slightly more elegant decor. Southport sports Sandfiddler Seafood Restaurant on State Highway 211; this restaurant attracts many people since it is prominently located.

Other area restaurants serve equally ap-



Photo courtesy of The State Port Pilot

Fishing off the pier is a common pastime in the Southport area.

petizing seafood at comparable prices, with less crowding. Ships Chandler Restaurant and Waterway Restaurant in Southport face the Cape Fear River and Jones' Seafood in Long Beach attracts local business.

(One hint: when patrons ask a waitress whether the food is fresh, if the waitress is honest, she will reply, "Yes, it is fresh — fresh frozen." Those in the know realize that much seafood served at the coast is frozen — even in Calabash).

Prices range from about \$5.50 for a child's platter to \$10 for scallops or \$9.50 for a deluxe platter. Most restaurants will let any aged person order a child's platter and some will allow people to order side orders as a main meal. Since even the side orders are generous proportions, seafood meals can be inexpensive.

Putt-putt golf, a good-sized water slide and a recently built public swimming pool — all located at Long Beach — add slow-paced entertainment opportunities.

Relaxing nightlife starts with joining local people on their front porch for a lengthy conversation about politics or life and a cool drink which sometimes is iced tea and sometimes is Long Island Iced Tea.

Local bars range from the ever-popular local town redneck bar to the beach music spot to the quiet dimly-lit bar in the back of a local restaurant.

Bartenders can and will tell interesting stories about the area. Impromptu parties at various bars can lead to anything from dancing, listening to local musicians, shooting endless games of pool or organizing local road trips.

These road trips end at private parties, other bars, the shore or Boiling Spring Lakes. One popular midnight pastime, after participants have consumed several drinks,

is skinnydipping in the warm waters of Boiling Spring Lakes.

Southport provides a natural haven for those comfortable with themselves. No bright, highly-visible bars line the shores and the abandoned movie theater's marquee mocks anyone needing Hollywood's brand of entertainment.

But anyone with a sense of fun and a desire for hidden adventure can find something he or she wants in the Southport-Oak Island area.

Lynn Earley is a staff writer for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

For the Record

Due to a copyediting error in *Weekend's Bar and Restaurant Guide*, Kathy Ross was incorrectly identified as Corinthia Pickett in a photograph. The DTH regrets the error.

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