

Day Trips From Paradise

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

If you're a visitor to the South Brunswick Islands, you have made a brilliant choice of a vacation spot. If you live here, you're a genius, indeed. In both cases, Paradise is all around you.

There are no more beautiful, unobstructed beaches on the eastern seaboard, no greater collection of great golf courses, no better fishing, no nicer people, and no islands with the kind of peace and family orientation found in the South Brunswick Islands. We even have the only museum of natural history in the coastal Carolinas!

Should you, however, be inclined toward a little standard sight-seeing, you're still in the right place. The best of both worlds is what you get here, because from Brunswick County you can trek into adjoining counties for a day of something different. Each of the following trips can be accomplished easily in a day.

To the north, New Hanover County offers some exciting history in two different locations. Each one could occupy a short, unhurried day or, being just 20 miles apart, they could be combined.

The Battleship

You will first encounter the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial as you cross the bridge leaving Brunswick County. A tour of this "great lady" of World War II is an adventure for youngsters but enjoyable to adults as well.

Commissioned in 1941, the ship earned 15 battle stars in WWII and participated in every major naval offensive in the Pacific theater. It was dedicated in 1961 to veterans of all U.S. services who fought in that war.

The USS North Carolina is now open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., every day of the year, with a two-hour, self-guided tour available to crew's quarters, galley, engine room, pilot house, sick bay, a Kingfisher float plane and the museum. Children under six are welcome free of charge, while those six through 11 pay \$2.50 and adults 12 and over pay \$5.00.

For even more drama, you can enjoy the 70-minute drama, "The

Immortal Showboat," an outdoor sound and light spectacular that begins nightly at 9 p.m., June 7 through Labor Day. From a 1,000-seat grandstand near the ship, you will relive the colorful history of the battleship from its construction in 1937 to the present. There is narration of exciting events in the ship's



AMY GRINGLE of St. Louis, gingerly handles a living starfish in the touch tank at the N.C. Aquarium.

career, blending historic voices, stirring music, sound effects and lights. The fee for adults is \$3.50, for children six through 11, \$1.75, while younger children are admitted free.

Fort Fisher

Following Hwy. 421 from the battleship memorial to Kure Beach, you will come upon another chunk of history in another century. Fort Fisher was built during the Civil War near the tip of the Cape Fear River to protect Wilmington, the South's chief blockade-running port. The fort fell January 15, 1865, leaving the army of General Robert

E. Lee vulnerable and leading to the South's defeat.

In 1960 the Fort Fisher State Historic Site was established, a 180-acre tract that is now the state's most visited state historic site. The visitor center offers a 15-minute film of the fort's military history and numerous panoramas and artifacts, including items recovered from sunken blockade runners.

Outside, you can visit the remains of one of the most important earthwork fortifications in the south, with a restored palisade fence and newly-erected roadside exhibits that explain and describe what you're seeing all along the site.

There is also a building where underwater archaeology is pursued and a shaded picnic area. All is free to the public and open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

N. C. Aquarium

Follow a winding road beyond Fort Fisher and enjoy a visit to the North Carolina's Aquarium. There is a pretty thorough marine education in this building, especially for children, who can delight in the Touch Tank, picking up a starfish, getting close to many small creatures.

The larger creatures, on the other hand, like a ferocious shark, are securely enclosed in a huge central tank, swimming for your entertainment.

There is much more in the aquarium for the whole family to enjoy, plus a well-equipped gift shop. Except for the shop, the experience is free.

There you have one or two day trips, depending on how tenacious you are as a sightseer and history buff.

Brookgreen Gardens

A third recommended experience is south of Brunswick County in South Carolina's Horry County, just beyond Myrtle Beach.

As opposed to historical adventures, this visit to famed Brookgreen Gardens is an exercise in art and beauty.

The sculpture gardens, just off U.S. 17, were opened in 1933, a dream of Anna Huntington who, with her husband, Archer Milton Huntington, purchased the land for a winter home in 1930.



STAFF PHOTOS BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

BENNY, ALENA AND RYAN WALKER of Garner enjoy a display of artifacts in the Fort Fisher Historic Site Museum in Kure Beach.

Construction began at once on gardens that would house the world's finest sculpture and most beautiful plants and flowers. Mrs. Huntington herself sketched the layout, which took the form of a butterfly with outstretched wings.

By 1968 a visitors pavilion was under construction and a modest fee for visitors was initiated. It remains modest, \$5 for adults, \$2 for children. In that same year a greenhouse was built, and brochures printed. In 1970 the gardens received the Governor's Travel Cup Award as the most outstanding travel attraction in South Carolina.

The year 1977 was a banner year at Brookgreen, even though the coldest winter on record. Indigenous plant species were established in the wildlife park, deer introduced, a bird sanctuary begun and thousands of azaleas and wax myrtles placed along the drive.

The sculpture collection that is so aesthetically arranged in gardens and along walks now includes 525 works by 231 sculptors. There are also wildlife park trails, a new visitors center that frequently offers Sunday afternoon musical or dramatic programs, a bird aviary, a museum shop and a cassette tour of the collection.

This attraction has become a "must-see" for all who visit the South. It was voted "The Best Place to Take Guests" in a recent reader's poll by a local newspaper and has received numerous other awards.

These are just three days of rewarding travel to special attractions that are easily reached from the South Brunswick Islands, the hub of your vacation life. The best part of these and other "day trips" is getting back to catch the sunset on the water, rejoicing that you're once again in Paradise.



VISITORS to the Fort Fisher Historic Site stroll in front of fortifications where Civil War soldiers desperately defended this important last port of entry in the South.

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