

## Carolina by car

By Lorraine Williams

We were on the last leg of a motor trip through North Carolina, a state of infinite variety. Our last stop was the legendary Outer Banks, which stretch for 200 kilometres along the eastern seaboard of this “northern state with a southern charm.”

How to tackle the Banks in three days required ingenuity. But we solved it. We’d settle somewhere in the middle of these barrier islands, drive southward to one end, then northward to the other, cross the Virginia state line and head home to Canada.

It isn’t difficult to find a place to stay in the Outer Banks. There are thousands of hotels, motels, single and multiple-suite dwellings, B&Bs and inns of every shape.

We were determined to see America’s oldest running historical outdoor (1,500 seats) drama, *The Lost Colony*, performed for 72 years on nearby Roanoke Island. It traces the arrival of 117 English colonists in 1587 (after an earlier attempt in 1854 failed) sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to found England’s first North American colony. Virginia Dare, the first person born of white parents in North America, was born here. Through song, dance and spectacular stage sets, we witness their attempts to survive and then their mysterious disappearance barely three years later. Their story has intrigued historians and archeologists for decades, and today’s audiences are just as fascinated.

The exquisite 16th-century style Elizabethan Gardens on Roanoke provide a companion piece to this period of history. Visitors wander through a colourful, fragrant maze of wildflower and formal gardens, herbs, statuary and gazebos. There’s a bloom for every season and in the summer you can catch a performance of *Elizabeth R*, a one-woman play about Good Queen Bess. At the dock in Manteo, one of Roanoke’s villages, you’ll find a replica of the Elizabeth II, which carried those first colonists.

Our next excursion was to the south end of the Outer Banks, along the Cape Hatteras Strip (N.C.-12), past islands that have been aptly described as existing “in a constant tussle with the wind and the sea.” There are over 100 km. of free and open-access beach. Driving along here, lonely stretches are relieved by camping grounds and a few small villages. We passed the creepy abandoned oceanfront cottage used for the Richard Gere movie, *Nights in Rodanthe*.

This stretch, with its wildlife refuges, is also a favourite for lighthouse aficionados. Among the five lighthouses, the most well-known are Bodie Island Lighthouse with its distinctive horizontal stripes and nature trail; Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, at 208 feet high, the tallest brick beacon on the American coast; and the Ocracoke Lighthouse, oldest operating one in the state reached by a free 40-minute ferry ride to Ocracoke Island. Opportunities abound for fish safaris for shrimps and crab, deep-sea fishing, parasailing or sea kayaking.

We ended our trip driving north on U.S. 158, spending several hours at the Wilbur and Orville Wright National Memorial. A huge Visitor Center features fullscale reproductions of the 1902 glider and 1903 flying machine. Lectures by knowledgeable staff retell the frustrating, persistent and exciting tale of these two Ohio brothers who dreamed of the possibility of human flight. Proprietors of a Dayton bicycle shop, they began their search in 1899. For the next four years, they used their intuitive mechanical abilities and analytical intelligence as they experimented.

*For information about the Getaway Discount Card, contact the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau at 877-629- 4386 or [www.outerbanks.org](http://www.outerbanks.org).*