

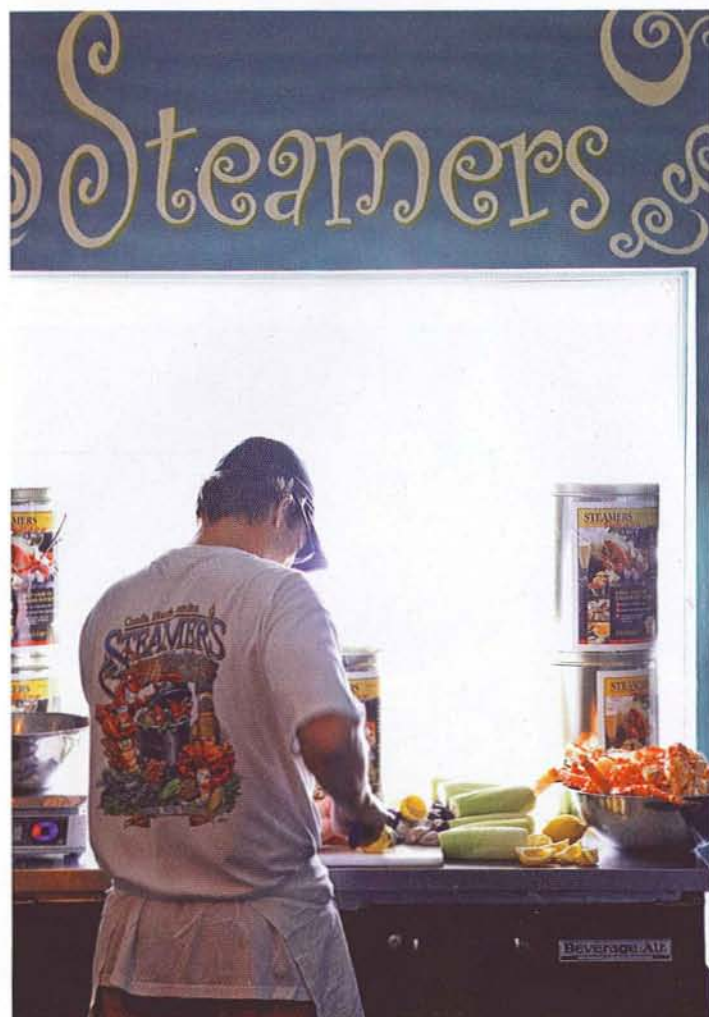
TRAVEL | VACATION GETAWAY

Outer Banks

When you just want to feel like a beachcomber, consider following **Kimberly Goad's** path along the coast of **North Carolina**, where her extended family congregates for simple indulgence and exploration



Like all the lighthouses on the Outer Banks, the Currituck Beach Lighthouse in Corolla Village still serves as an aid to navigation; the beacon comes on automatically every evening at dusk and turns off at dawn. Vacation homes along the beach are multistoried affairs, typically offering amenities such as pool tables, swimming pools, and fully outfitted kitchens. Just north of Corolla, a stretch of land is home to horses believed to be direct descendants of the mustangs brought to the United States by the Spanish in the 16th century.



Steamers Shellfish To Go, the Outer Banks version of a New England clambake, offers ready-to-steam pots of fresh veggies and seafood. Island Bookstore attracts book lovers of all ages with best-selling beach reads and tomes about all things Outer Banks.

THE LAST TIME MY FAMILY took an official family vacation, we were still living under one roof in Houston, and my brother, two sisters, and I were at that age: Galveston had the best beaches in the world, sunburns were meant to be, and getting a seat next to the window on the drive down was a very big deal. In those days, the success of any family vacation rested on the allocation of window seats and whether or not my father made good on his promise to pull the car over if tears were shed and tantrums were thrown over seat assignments. It was that long ago.

When we decide to resurrect the tradition, it seems at once easier (no one cares about window seats anymore), and trickier. Thanks to marriage, babies, and job transfers, our family of six is now a family of 15 spread out among

four cities—Dallas; Nashville; Bethesda, Maryland; and New York. With that kind of geography, a central meeting place ends up being somewhere around Muncie, Indiana. Not exactly a vacation hot spot. But the Outer Banks—a narrow string of barrier islands along the North Carolina coast—most certainly is.

The 200-mile stretch is where the Wright brothers made their first flight and Blackbeard met his demise. It also boasts the tallest brick lighthouse in the country and the first person of English descent born on American soil—plenty, in other words, to attract tourists and history buffs. But the regulars who return each summer (typically, residents of D.C., Virginia, and the Carolinas) tend to settle into a rhythm that has little to do with the sights and everything to do with the glorious setting.

We make like the regulars and rent an oceanfront

Shore Things

Twiddy & Company Represents more than 800 vacation homes in Corolla and neighboring Duck and Carova. Oceanfront rentals range from \$3,000 to \$20,000 a week. 866/457-1190, www.twiddy.com.

Sanderling Resort & Spa Prefer to stay a few days before you commit to a week? This resort just completed a multi-million-dollar face-lift. Rates: \$179 to \$900 a night. 800/701-4111, www.thesanderling.com.

Corolla Village Home to the Currituck Beach Lighthouse (252/453-4939, www.currituckbeachlight.com), one of four working lighthouses on the Outer Banks; the Corolla Wild Horse Museum (252/453-8002); Lighthouse Garden (252/453-0171, www.lighthouse-garden.com), featuring the works of local artists and artisans; and Corolla Village Bar-B-Que (252/457-0076), a popular take-out joint (shack is more like it) specializing in barbecue pork.

Kitty Hawk Kites Offers every kind imaginable. 252/453-3685, www.kittyhawk.com.

Good Eats

The Blue Point A onetime oyster bar turned seafood restaurant overlooking the Currituck Sound. Go at sunset for the views; stay for the she-crab soup. 252/261-8090, www.goodfoodgoodwine.com.

Red Sky Café A laid-back place for soups, salads, and seafood. Leave room for dessert—the daily special is made in-house by a local who goes by the nickname "Red Sky's Grandma." 252/261-8646, www.redskycafe.com.

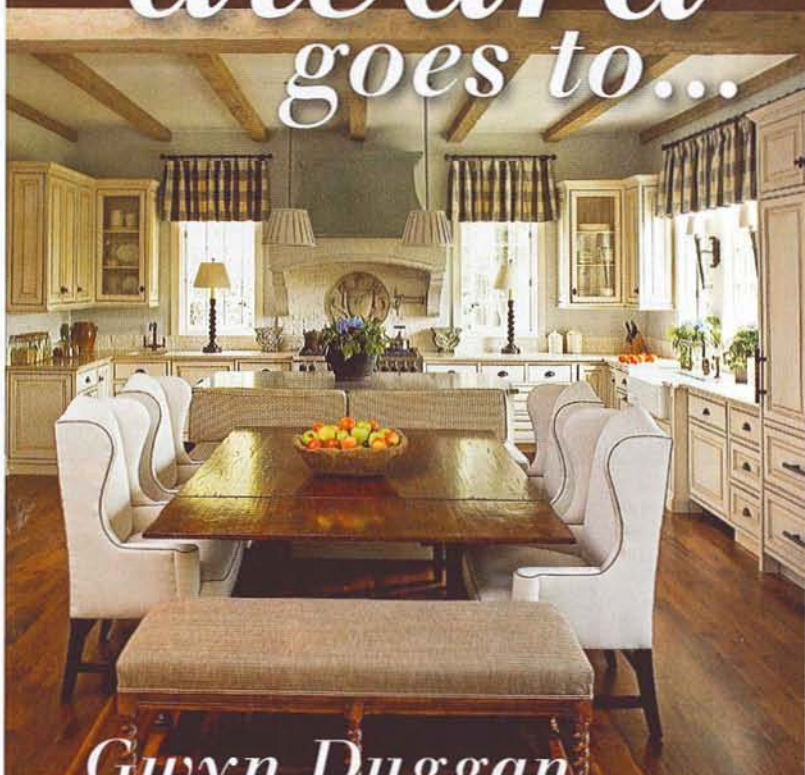
Steamers Shellfish To Go Call ahead and order Steamer Pots to Go. Each one is filled with fresh corn on the cob, potatoes, onions, butter, lemons, and your choice of lobster, mussels, clams, or crab legs. Just add water and steam. 252/453-3305, www.steamersshellfishtogo.com.

house in the northernmost town of Corolla, a place best known for the wild mustangs that roam freely along the coastline and for its uncrowded, unspoiled beaches. Our plan? Take in as much sun and sand as possible.

To that end, we swim, build sand castles, bodysurf, and—best of all—sit in fold-out chairs beneath three huge umbrellas and indulge one another with the long version of stories that would otherwise be reduced to a three-sentence e-mail or a five-minute phone conversation. The golfers in the group take advantage of the course at Nags Head Golf Links, about 35 miles south of Corolla; the shoppers check out the smattering of boutiques in neighboring Duck and Corolla Light. One day, we all charter two fishing boats, catching enough bluefish and Spanish mackerel for dinner that night.

In this setting, the simplest pleasure—like sitting

And the \$10,000 award goes to...



Gwyn Duggan

Grand Prize Winner of the 2008 ASID/Southern Accents
National Residential Interior Design Contest

DESIGNER

*Gwyn Duggan, ASID
Savannah, Georgia*

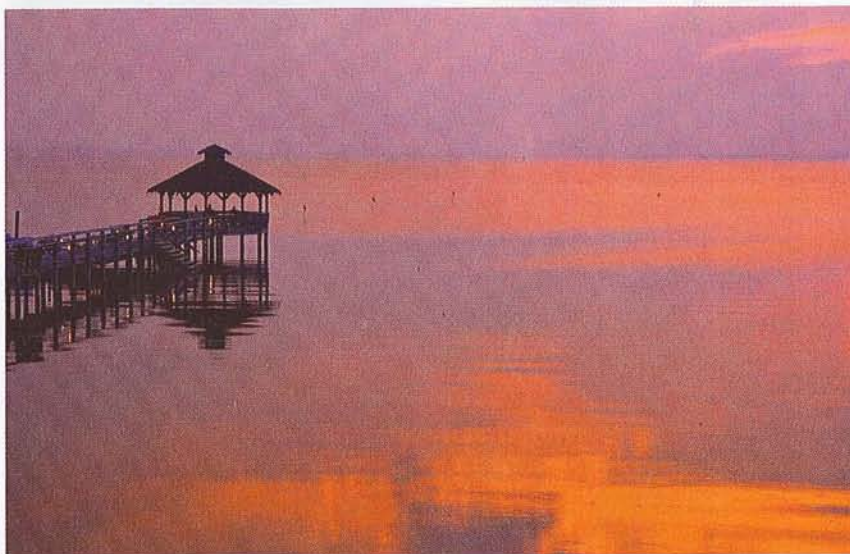
CATEGORY

Kitchen

HOMEOWNERS

*Jennifer and Bonneau Ansley III
Atlanta, Georgia*

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To enter and for complete details, visit
SouthernAccents.com.



Beachfront or more inland, enjoying the view is a primary diversion. At dusk, the entire island pauses to take in the breathtaking sunset—or so it seems.

down to a family dinner in a room with a view of the sunset—seems like anything but. By week's end, we are so spoiled by the beauty of our surroundings, we decide that leaving Corolla without spotting a wild mustang would be like traveling to India and missing the Taj Mahal.

To give you a sense of the hold these horses have on the town: Ask about the population in Corolla, and you'll get two figures: 500 (the number of year-round residents) and 200 (the approximate number of mustangs). Our best chance to see them, we are told, is to take a four-wheel drive onto the beach at sunrise. If we're lucky, we'll spot a few.

As we drive onto the beach early the next morning and see dozens of others doing the same, we feel less like regulars and more like tourists—tourists, on second thought, on a family vacation. Life is good. ♦

For details, see *Sourcebook*, page 126.

Beach Bound

With glorious beaches on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, we have more than a few to choose from. Here are our favorites.

Alys Beach, Florida

"Its pure white architecture makes it seem almost displaced on the Gulf Coast. Yet it fits right in as one of the most relaxing and luxurious places to stay or live."

—Lydia Pursell, *Leaf & Petal*, Birmingham

Fripp Island, South Carolina

"It has a resort island feel, but it's also next to the Lowcountry—Beaufort, shrimp boats, and Spanish moss draped from live oaks."

—Executive Editor Frances MacDougall

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

"Although it has changed so much over the years, at its core, it's still the same: sophisticated and elegant but down-to-earth."

—Lydia Pursell

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

"It's not the splendor and drama of Palm Beach, nor is it the exclusivity of the Hamptons, but rather the new Florida and old Florida all in one."

—decorator James Michael Howard

Rehoboth Beach, Delaware

"The beach is rarely crowded, and the waves can be great for riding."

—Editorial Contributor Susan Stiles Dowell

Rosemary Beach, Seaside, and WaterColor, Florida

"The string of beaches along Highway 30-A on the Panhandle is my kind of place—elegant yet family-friendly. You can't go wrong with any of them. Rosemary Beach has it all—lovely architecture, great restaurants, and unlimited family activities. Seaside draws us in with its retro beach town feel. And WaterColor is pretty and serene, just a great place to relax."

—Editor in Chief Karen Carroll

Sea Island, Georgia

"I have wonderful memories of bicycling up and down Sea Island Drive when I was decorating a house a few years ago."

—designer Joseph J. Minton

St. Simons Island, Georgia

"The jewel of Georgia's east coast. Nestled among pristine beaches is a coastal lifestyle enjoyed by generations of families."

—Debbie Weitz, B.D. Jeffries, Atlanta

For real estate recommendations, see *Sourcebook*, page 126.

—produced by Patricia Ann Weigel