

## Lowcountry Coastline Driving Tour

### *A GUIDE TO DRIVING ALONG SOUTH CAROLINA'S NORTHERN COASTLINE*

Starting just west of Edisto Island at the South Edisto River and heading down past Hilton Head, the [Lowcountry and Resort Islands](#) area of South Carolina's southern coastline provides many options to visitors willing to meander off US 17. It starts by crossing the South Edisto River.

Scenic highway 17 features several intriguing stops before taking many unique detours to the water that include Beaufort, Hilton Head Island and much more.

This area features many natural waterways and wildlife management areas ideal for canoeing, bird watching, fishing and hiking on your own or with local outfitters. The possibilities include: Bear Island Wildlife Management Area, Donnelley Wildlife Management Area and ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge. "ACE" represents the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers.

After crossing the Combahee River, stop in at The Country Store at Gardens Corner for some authentic homemade South Carolina ciders and jams.

Before heading south to Beaufort, continue on 17 briefly and look for the right-hand turn to the [Old Sheldon Church Ruins](#). This peaceful property features the ruins of a mid-1700s church, several ancient gravestones and many informative plaques. It's just a short diversion, and well worth the stop before heading down to the Beaufort waterfront.

### **Beaufort**



[Beaufort](#) is a beautiful spot to spend a few days and nights. Locals first send visitors to the Greater Beaufort Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center, which is located in a former 1870 home. Visitors leave loaded with brochures and lots of insider information about what to see and experience, where to stay and what to eat.

Highlights by foot in Beaufort proper have to include: the Federal-style John Mark Verdier House Museum; the Beaufort Arsenal Museum; and lots of private historic homes simply found by wandering the beautiful streets.

For a more in-depth view with a local, excellent guided historic tours are available through The [Spirit of Old Beaufort](#) and [Jon's Walking History Tour](#).

Bay Street has lots of great shopping options including the original "Beaufort Hook Bracelet" at [Bay Street Jewelers](#). This bustling street also features several restaurants that look out over the Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park and the Beaufort River. [Plums](#) is highly recommended for creative seafood cuisine, while Luther's, which located in an old pharmacy and general store, is known for its perfectly prepared steaks.

Those who want to get on the water will find a variety of options. Located at the Downtown Marina, [Capt. Dick's Beaufort River Tour & Dolphin Watch](#) has two excursion options by boat, while

[Beaufort Kayak Tours](#) provides a great way to see Beaufort and —further afield — the ACE Basin and Hunting Island.

Locals without room in their homes send visitors to [The Rhett House Inn](#) or [The Beaufort Inn](#). Both are located directly in the heart of the historic district and have their own distinct charms.

## Hunting Island

It's hard to leave Beaufort, but the drive out to Hunting Island is consoling. The Sea Island Parkway heads over Lady's Island and onto St. Helena Island, where an interesting stop at Penn Center awaits visitors in-the-know.



At the right-hand turn for Penn Center, look for [Gullah Grub](#) on the left for some seriously local grub like barbeque ribs and chicken, the “Fish Chowder Dinner,” and the “Lowcountry Crab Soup Dinner.” All dinners come with white rice, a mixed salad, and, of course, cornbread.

[Penn Center](#) was the site of one of the country's first schools for freed slaves. The fascinating center features burial grounds, a nature trail and a collection of 19 restored buildings including the Brick Church, Darrah Hall and Grant Cottage, where Martin Luther King Jr. once stayed. The York W. Bailey Museum is the perfect starting point.

Back on the Sea Island Parkway, two more restaurants are worth noting. Both the [Shrimp Shack](#) (veterans know to place their order at the window) and [Johnson Creek Tavern](#), which features views as good as its seafood, will fit the food bill for lunch or dinner.

The pretty drive down to Hunting Island, Hunting Island State Park and the famed Hunting Island Lighthouse is perfect for the day, or a night stay in one of the varied state park cabins.



[Hunting Island State Park](#) consistently ranks as the state's most popular state park, attracting more than one million visitors annually. But that doesn't stop the sprawling park from offering many peaceful spots. The barrier island features five miles of beach, thousands of acres of marshland, tidal creeks, a maritime forest, a saltwater lagoon and an ocean inlet — a popular fishing spot for the locals.

The 170-foot Hunting Island Lighthouse is the state's only publicly accessible historic lighthouse. Dating from the 1870s, the lighthouse sports several historic outbuildings and can be climbed for a couple of bucks. The views of the South Carolina Coast atop the lighthouse deck are breathtaking.

## Port Royal

Heading back toward Beaufort, the next stop is historic Port Royal just across the Lady's Island Drive Bridge on State 802. Though not as visited as nearby Beaufort, the peninsula town of Port Royal is similarly charming. The [Beaulieu Guest House at Port Royal](#) provides a quiet port for the night, while the waterfront [11th Street Dockside Restaurant](#) is the place to catch up on a local seafood fix. The

hands-on exhibits concerning the coast draw those who know about it to [Port Royal Estuarium](#), which is located next to the park at Paris Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **Parris Island**

Back on State 802 and heading out of Port Royal on Battery Creek Bridge, Parris Island awaits curious visitors who want to explore the Marine lifestyle without signing up for boot camp. Once past the initial gate, there's the excellent Douglas Visitor's Center and [Parris Island Museum](#). Free entrance belies the fascinating collection of artifacts and more relating to the Marine Corps.

## **Bluffton**

Next, State 802 heads toward Bluffton and Hilton Head Island by turning left at State 170/the Robert Smalls Parkway. Historic Bluffton is well worth a stop (or daytrip from Hilton Head Island).

The [Heyward House Historic Center](#) is the place to go for insider info on the town and you'll find valuable resources including the helpful "Walking Tour" brochure.

Bluffton offers many attractions, entertainment and delicious regional cuisine. Tour historic houses like the Fripp House the waterfront Church of the Cross; Dine on fresh seafood right off the docks at the Bluffton Oyster Company, which was established in 1899. Find great food and local entertainment at Pepper's Porch on May River Road. Located in an old drying barn, the popular restaurant's tagline is "Where Seafood and Culture Come Together."

## **Hilton Head Island**

Famed [Hilton Head Island](#) is next. Using smart development techniques and offering environmentally-oriented attractions and activities long before being "green" was trendy, it's still easy to find several things to see and do that only the locals and long-time visitors seem to know.

A stop at the helpful Visitor Center just after crossing the bridge onto the island is a great way to start exploration. They'll likely send interested visitors to the main location of the [Coastal Discovery Museum](#), which is nearby on Honey Horn. This facility features lots of exhibits, hands-on experiences, tours and educational programs that highlight the cultural heritage and natural history of the Lowcountry.

There is a lot to see and do on or near the island. Some unique possibilities include horseback riding at Lawton Stables in the Sea Pines Nature Preserve, or visiting the community garden in the town of Sea Pines. Climbing the red-and-white [Harbor Town Lighthouse](#) is also extremely popular. Sure, it's touristy, but the view is worth the short climb. Take one of many varied "dolphin" tours on a small and personalized boat from [Lowcountry Nature Tours](#). Even hike and explore the peaceful Pinckney Island Wildlife Refuge.



Hilton Head Island has lots of accommodations options, with a variety of hotels, condos, and houses. For something different, consider [Main Street Inn & Spa](#). Featuring European-style accommodations, combined with Southern charm and Charleston-like gardens, the inn is truly “something different.”

The restaurant scene can be as equally overwhelming, but locals love to head to [Hudson’s on the Docks](#) for fresh seafood in the shadows of working shrimp boats.

### **Daufuskie Island**

For a unique excursion that takes you close to the Savannah River — the dividing line between South Carolina and Georgia — [Daufuskie Island](#) is well worth the ferry ride.

The quiet and history-laden island was made famous in Pat Conroy’s *The Water is Wide*. Today, a variety of accommodations, creative dining, a soothing spa, world-class golf and tennis, and much more await lucky visitors at Daufuskie Island Resort & Breathe Spa. Stay a night, or stay a week. Either way, this resort makes for a great way to end an exploration of the South Carolina coast.

