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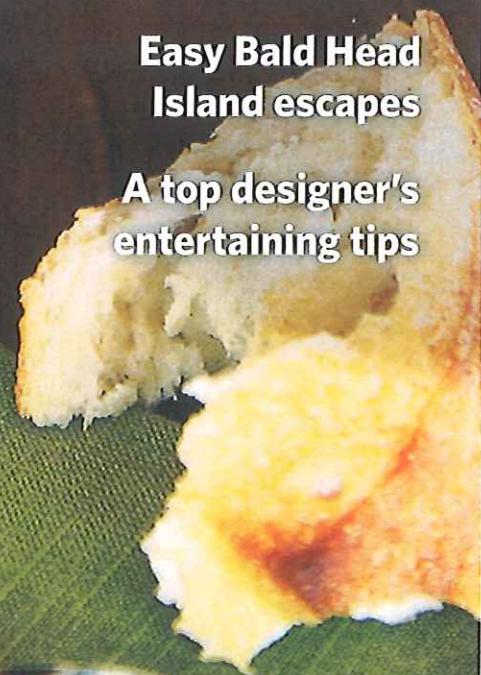
indulge in the flavor of fall



**Apple season's
best bets**

**Easy Bald Head
Island escapes**

**A top designer's
entertaining tips**



Bald Head Island

Five itineraries to guide your tour BY ROBBY NELMS

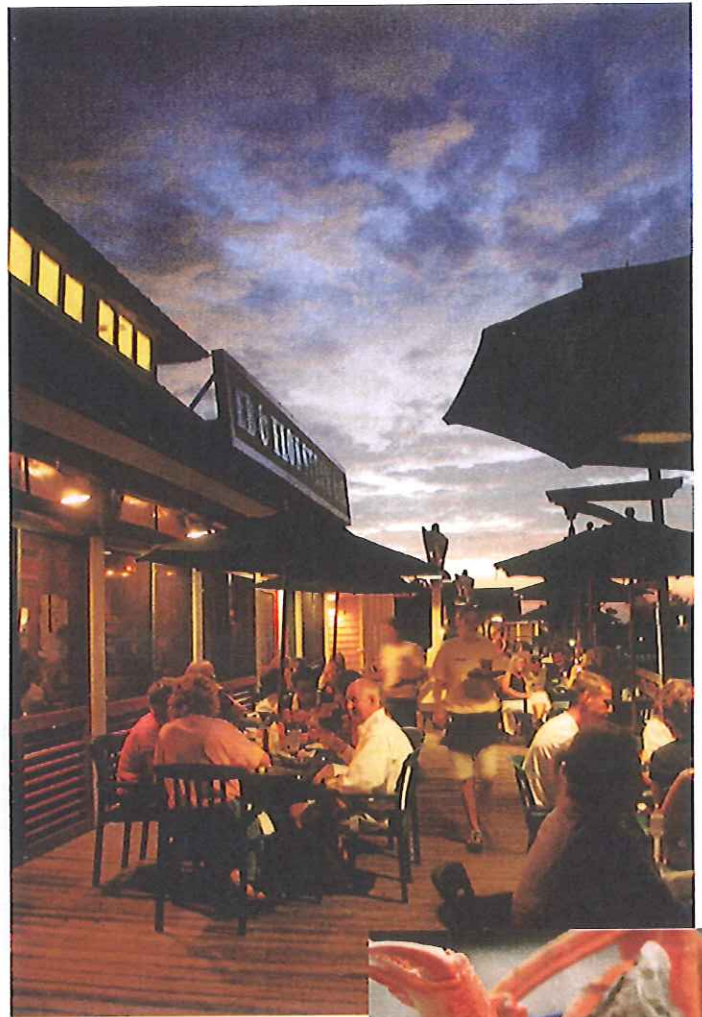
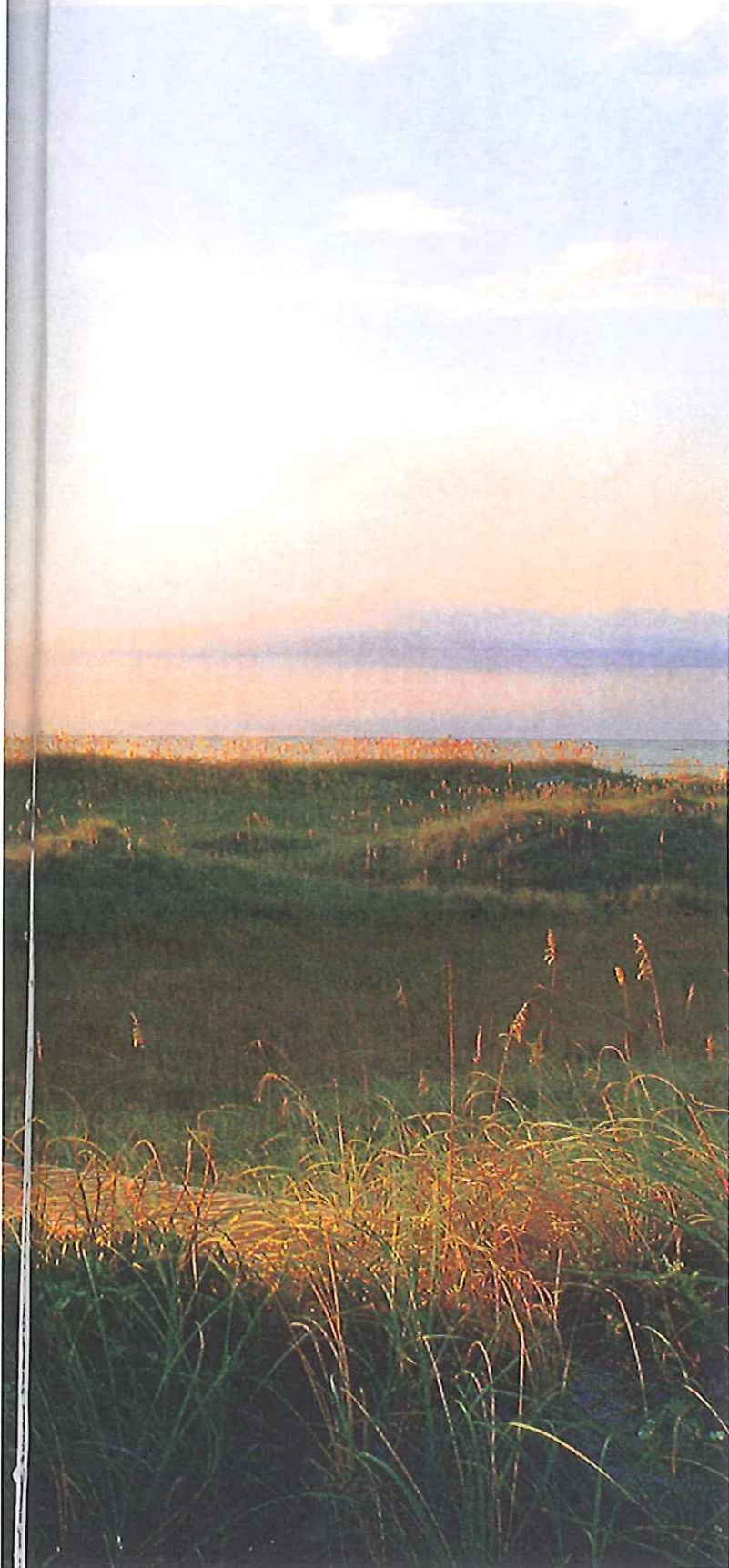
Bald Head Island's leisurely lifestyle dictates a change of pace before vacationers can even feel the sand between their toes. Forced to leave their cars behind in a parking lot on the mainland, travelers to this island oasis accept the call of the natural wonders of the island and sway comfortably together on a ferry. Cruising across the water, a collective relaxed sigh seems to accompany the boat's arrival to port. It's not

hard to get into vacation mode on Bald Head Island; the Old Baldy Lighthouse, though its beacon is retired, seems nonetheless to beckon visitors to its sacred space, known for a lush maritime forest and spotless shell-lined beaches. The pace is slower on Bald Head Island. Golf carts, bicycles, kayaks, and flip-flops are the modes of transportation. Hiking, biking, eating, swimming, shopping, golfing, fishing, and relaxing are all in a day's work.



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Boardwalk to South Beach. RIGHT: Eb & Flo's Steam Bar and the succulent catch of the day.



Epicure

Long before the restaurants of today, Bald Head Island was known for its cuisine. Historians believe Native Americans would seasonally venture to the island to hunt, fish, and eat oysters. Today, the cuisine on the island is similar, albeit a bit more refined. Overlooking the marina is **Eb & Flo's Steam Bar** (910-457-7217). Enjoy crispy fried shrimp or a succulent tuna burger from the extensive menu, or go for the namesake — something from the steamer. The Signature Steampot is cornucopian, overflowing with shrimp, clams, oysters, crab legs, corn, new potatoes, and kielbasa. An extensive patio seating area allows guests to gaze at the boats coming and going below.

For dinner, head to **The River Pilot Café** (910-457-7390). The relaxed atmosphere

and friendly staff are the precursors to a truly divine dining experience. Known for its Lowcountry cuisine, The River Pilot delivers from the get-go, offering cornbread and biscuits to munch on while perusing the menu. The appetizers are enticing, and it takes restraint to keep from spoiling dinner with selections like creamy Homegrown Deviled Eggs, made with bacon and backfin crab meat, or the restaurant's take on chips and dip: Stokes County sweet potatoes served with a smoky shrimp dip. A must-try on the starter list is the Pickled Shrimp. Pickled in-house and

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served with a butter bean chowchow, these plump beauties are presented in a small mason jar. Entrees offer the chef's take on Southern favorites like fried chicken and shrimp and grits in generous portions. For dessert, try the Red Velvet Cake Balls. They're small in size but big in flavor.

Fall visitors should plan their trip around the annual **N.C. Wine & Food Weekend** (www.ncfoodandwine.com), taking place this year October 14-16.

Insider Tip: Try your luck on one of the fishing charters offered by **The Sail Shop** (910-457-6844). Captain Charles Gladden or Captain Jack McGill will guide you on your excursion and help you tackle dinner.

"There are plenty of fish inshore. We clean them and you take them home and cook them," says McGill, who notes that they regularly catch black bass, Spanish mackerel, and flounder. While they can't guarantee you'll catch your supper, they can promise one thing: "You'll definitely have a good time. The fish are just the icing on the cake."

History Buff

Bald Head Island's past is steeped in lore and legend. The unofficial mascot of the island, and most prominent man-made structure, is **Old Baldy Lighthouse** (www.oldbaldy.org). Constructed in 1817, the lighthouse was soon found to be ineffective at aiding the navigation of the treacherous

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One of the top destinations for families in the state, Bald Head Island offers water adventures for all ages. Here, two teens try stand-up paddleboarding in Bald Head Creek.

Frying Pan Shoals and Cape Fear. While it has long been decommissioned, Old Baldy is the oldest standing lighthouse in North Carolina, and is the best way to view the beauty of the island. Up its 108 steps, visitors are treated to a 360-degree view of all the island offers.

For an all-inclusive guided look back at the history of Bald Head Island, schedule a day-visitor package tour from the mainland at Southport, offered by the **Old Baldy Foundation**. For \$55 for an adult or \$45 for kids, you'll ride the ferry, tour Fort Holmes, learn about pirates, and climb to the top of Old Baldy. Included in your fare is a voucher for \$10 at Eb & Flo's Steam Bar. Reservations are required (910-457-5003). The foundation also offers tours originating on the island.

Insider Tip: In your rush to see the lighthouse, don't skip the exhibit at the **Smith Island Museum of History**, located in the lighthouse compound. The museum is a replica of the Light Keeper's Cottage (c. 1850-1890). Visitors can immerse themselves in 1800s island life and learn about Bald Head's rich history and cast of characters. While the exhibits are extremely informative, the collective knowledge of the individuals operating the museum give life to what you're viewing.

Art Lover

The Woods Gallery (910-454-4892) is

an art lover's oasis amid the wonders of the great outdoors. Opened in 2008, the gallery houses original oils, sculptures, and jewelry. At least 20 percent of its artwork is created by island residents, and the majority of the collection is from artists located within a couple of hours of the island.

"The gallery features coastal, regionally themed art," says manager Shawn Best. In addition to two art shows per year, The Woods Gallery even offers workshops in the off-season. "There are so many full-time artists living on the island. You feel like you're in another environment — it's a great place to make art."

A testament to the number of artists who call Bald Head home is the **Smith Island Art League** (www.smithislandartleague.com), whose members hold annual art shows on Memorial Day weekend and Thanksgiving weekend. Formed in 1993, the Art League continues to provide shows for the island and give its members a forum to share their common artistic interests.

The art of modern coastal décor is alive in the **Merchant's Row Shops**, where the folks at **Room Service** (910-457-9911) have their art on display. Selling eclectic home furnishings, gifts, bedding, and furniture, the designer caters her designs to island dwellers and visitors alike.

Insider Tip: At Room Service, you can purchase the visual masterpieces of a local



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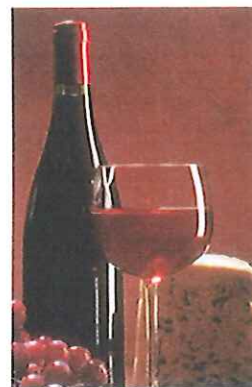
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Active-ist

Adventure is easy to find on Bald Head Island. Shortly after disembarking from the ferry, visit the **Riverside Adventure Co.** (www.riversideadventure.com) for your recreational rentals. Rent a golf cart to whizz around the island or a bike to enjoy the 8-mile loop. Umbrellas and chairs set up your beachside base while you explore the extensive sandbars that lead down from the island's point out into the ocean or any of the 14 miles of beaches.

Coastal Urge (www.coastalurge.com) is your one-stop shop for outdoor exploration on Bald Head Island. The store offers stand-up paddleboard rentals and lessons, kiteboarding lessons, and bike rentals. "The paddleboard is great. You can stand up and see more of the horizon. It's versatile. You don't really fall off, so it's even good in winter, and it is just as easy as kayaking," says owner Catherine Nathan. You can tour the salt marsh at your own pace, or go on one of the guided tours. They also offer paddle-

surfing lessons and fishing excursions.

Insider Tip: Trade a day of rays on the beach for a golf cart. Don't forget to pull over and explore the **Bald Head Woods Maritime Forest Preserve** (www.nccoastalreserve.net). Lovely live oaks, Loblolly pines, gray foxes, and whitetail deer are all inhabitants of this varied and beautiful ecosystem. Along the trail, seashells remind you that you're not far from the beach, though it seems like a different world. Also, directly off Federal Road is the **M. Kent Mitchell Nature Trail**. While walking the trail, grasses gently brush your ankles as you explore the marsh. Watch crabs scuttle by from the wooden walking bridge. The sound of the breeze blowing through the Sabal Palms is soothing as you wind your way along the trail.

Parental Unit

There isn't much on Bald Head Island that isn't kid friendly. Nature trails and beautiful beaches are quintessential family adventures, but if you're looking for a little edu-fun, check out the **Bald Head Island Conservancy** (www.bhic.org), which works to protect the island's flora and fauna. From children's camps and kayaking

the creeks to crabbing and stargazing, the Conservancy offers activities for the whole family. But the true stars of the show are the sea turtles. Charged with protecting these creatures, the group hosts turtle walks for members. Alyssa Taylor, Sea Turtle Program Coordinator, says of the late-night tours, "It's a pretty prehistoric process. It's amazing to see something you'd normally never see."

For a bit more adventurous fun with the fam, try sailing lessons or take a Fun Sail with an instructor from The Sail Shop. The shop offers three-hour lessons from an expert or a chance to breeze out of the marina guided by an instructor. Either way, with the wind in your hair, your family will be all smiles as you ease back to the docks.

Insider Tip: Take on the GPS scavenger hunt at Riverside Adventure Co. They preload a GPS with destinations around the island and fun questions to test your knowledge of what's around you. If you return with all your questions answered correctly, they give you a trophy. Finally, for a spookier tour of the island, make reservations with The Sail Shop for the **Ghost Walk** and seek out the characters that are said to haunt the island.

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