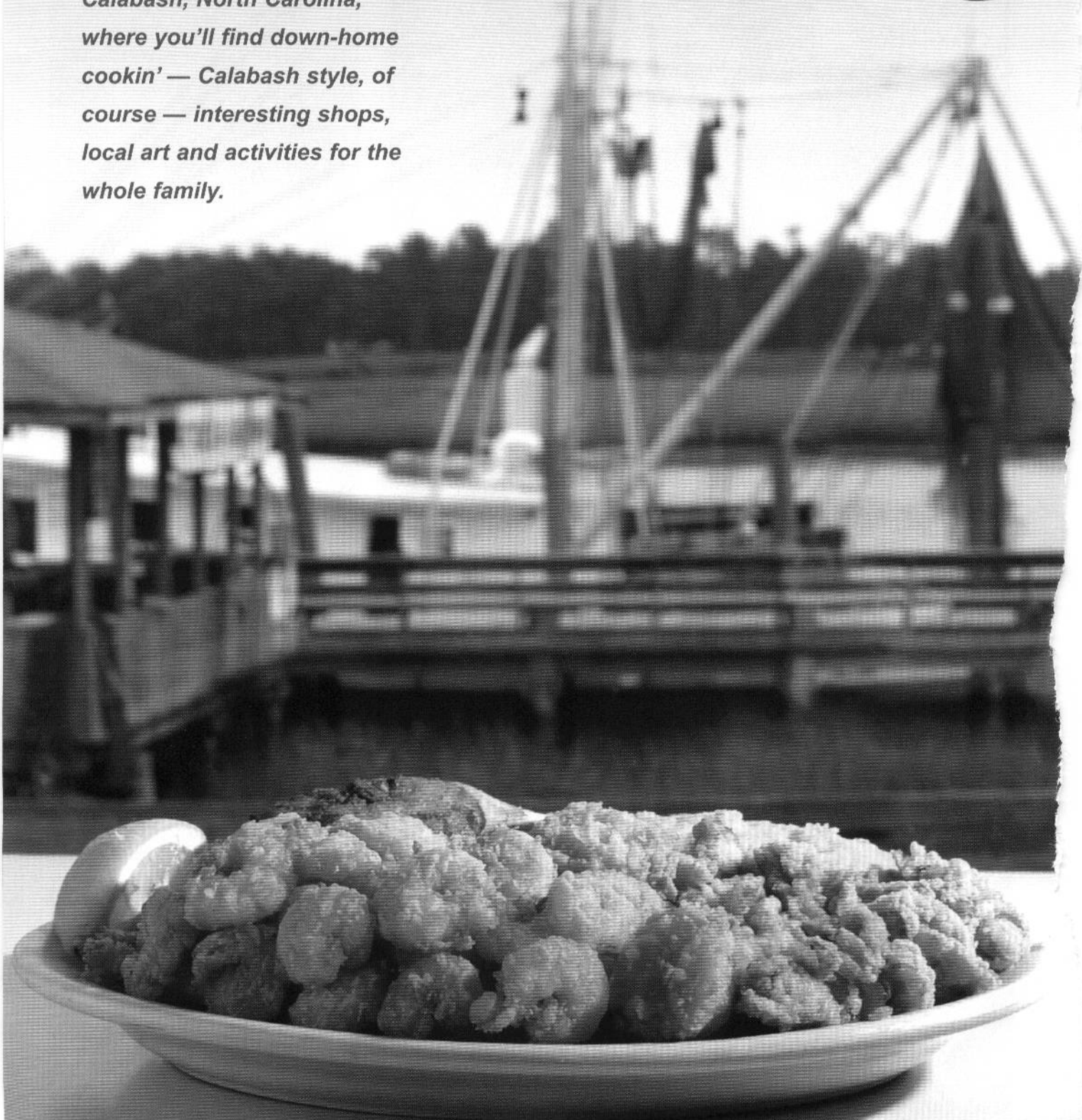


*When you've had enough sun,
or just want to escape the
crowds at the beach for a day,
head south down Route 17 to
Calabash, North Carolina,
where you'll find down-home
cookin' — Calabash style, of
course — interesting shops,
local art and activities for the
whole family.*

Cruising



To Calabash

By Sandra Chambers • Photography by Allison Breiner

This quaint waterfront town, about an hour's drive from Wilmington, is located at the southernmost point in the Brunswick Islands on the Calabash River. Known as "The Seafood Capital of the World" for once having 30 restaurants within a square mile, the town prides itself on a long history of fresh local seafood.

As far back as the 1930s, fishermen would gather under the trees to cook the day's catch in large pots. People from the town would gather round to see what had been caught and to buy any leftover cooked seafood. Soon, enterprising locals began cooking up tubs of deep-fried seafood to sell. These open-air venues were the beginning of several local seafood restaurants still in operation today.

Capt. Nance's restaurant serves up Calabash-style seafood and a view of the Calabash River.





With a dozen or more to choose from, be sure to bring an appetite and plan to stop for lunch at a local Calabash-style restaurant serving up piping-hot fresh seafood, dipped in a seasoned cornmeal batter and complemented with sides of creamy coleslaw and hush puppies.

Several restaurants line the waterfront, offering picturesque views of shrimp boats and the river. Captain Nance's family-owned restaurant has been serving up Calabash-style seafood for the past 30 years. Tourist John Schnabel of Columbia, North Carolina, (formerly of New Orleans), says, "Calabash shrimp is what people in New Orleans try to imitate. It's truly the best!"

Another popular spot is Ella's of Calabash. While the restaurant is not on the waterfront, what it lacks in view is certainly made up for in taste. The Oyster Stew is enough to turn a non-oyster lover into a diehard fan — the bowl brims over with big, succulent oysters. The fried oysters are another dish that is a

must. For the main course, try the "create your own seafood platter," offering one, two or three choices of shrimp, clam strips, oysters, flounder, scallops, crabs or catfish. With ample sides of coleslaw and yummy hush puppies — you won't leave hungry!

Beach Drive offers some of the best shopping in Calabash. At the crossroads of Beach Drive and River Road, you will find Callahan's Nautical Gifts and St. Nick Nacks Christmas Shop. This expansive, 25,000-square-foot mega shopping area will delight adults and children alike with its nautical gifts, jewelry, crafts, collectibles and two million (yes, that's correct!) Christmas ornaments. Be sure to stop by the fudge shop next door at Pea Landing Mercantile before heading south on Beach Drive to Ragpach Row.

While the ladies shop, husbands and children may want to play a round of miniature golf at the Tropical Adventure Mini Golf located adjacent to Ragpach Row.

A family visiting from Florida fishes from a dock on the Calabash River.



For a splurge that's worth it, check out **Victoria's Ragpatch**, an upscale boutique with a wide selection of clothing, shoes and accessories. Be sure to check out the versatile selection of summer sandals. Then head upstairs for unique home furnishings and gourmet kitchen items.

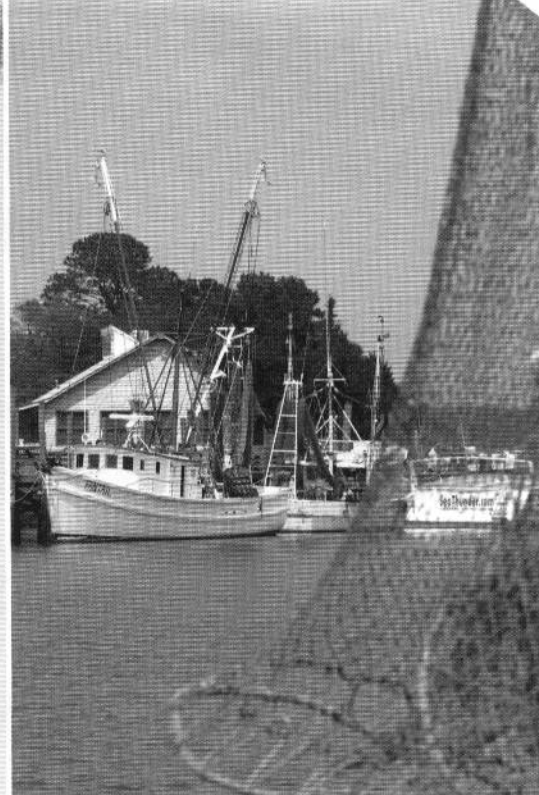
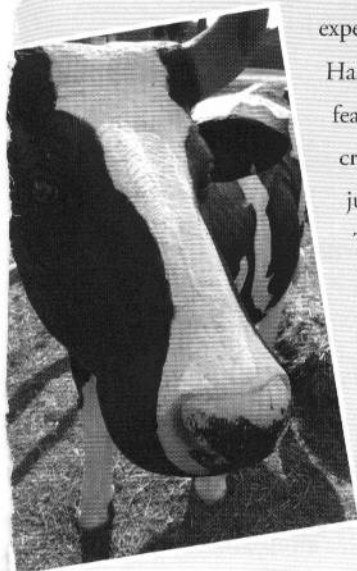
Next, pop into **The Mole Hole**, where you can scoop up a Vera Bradley purse at 20 percent off and chat with the friendly owner, who will tell you "how Calabash used to be."

For a stop for the entire family, look for the life-size cows in front of the **Calabash Creamery**, also located on Beach Drive. The creamery offers 24 home-made flavors of ice cream and sherbet. "We have tons of fun experimenting with new flavors," say owners Greg and Kristen Hansen. Their signature ice cream — Cow-A-Bash Crunch — features a smooth white chocolate base with chocolate cake crumbs. Or try the flavor of the month — which in July, just happens to be fresh peach with chunks of fresh peaches. Then grab a rocking chair on the front porch and join fellow "lickers" for a cool blast of refreshment.

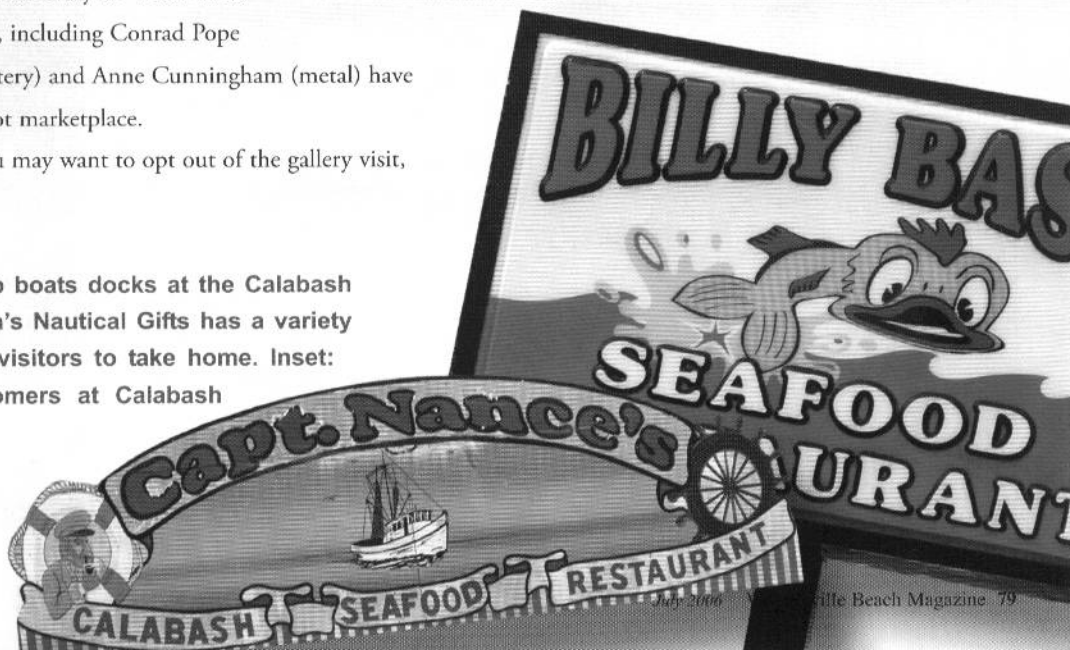
Don't leave without visiting the **Sunset River Marketplace** on Beach Drive. This gallery/shop features more than 200 North and South Carolina artists and artisans with displays of pottery, photography, blown glass, jewelry, sculpture, oil and acrylic paintings, watercolors and mixed mediums.

Owner Ginny Lassiter says her store is not the typical tourist shop. "We aim to offer a quiet atmosphere where people can come, browse and enjoy the art," Lassiter says. The gallery rotates a featured exhibit every six weeks in its foyer. Several Wilmington artists, including Conrad Pope (photography), Brian Evans (pottery) and Anne Cunningham (metal) have displays in the 10,000-square-foot marketplace.

If you have small children, you may want to opt out of the gallery visit,



Top: A small fleet of shrimp boats docks at the Calabash waterfront. **Middle:** Callahan's Nautical Gifts has a variety of Calabash souvenirs for visitors to take home. **Inset:** Life-size cows greet customers at Calabash Creamery.



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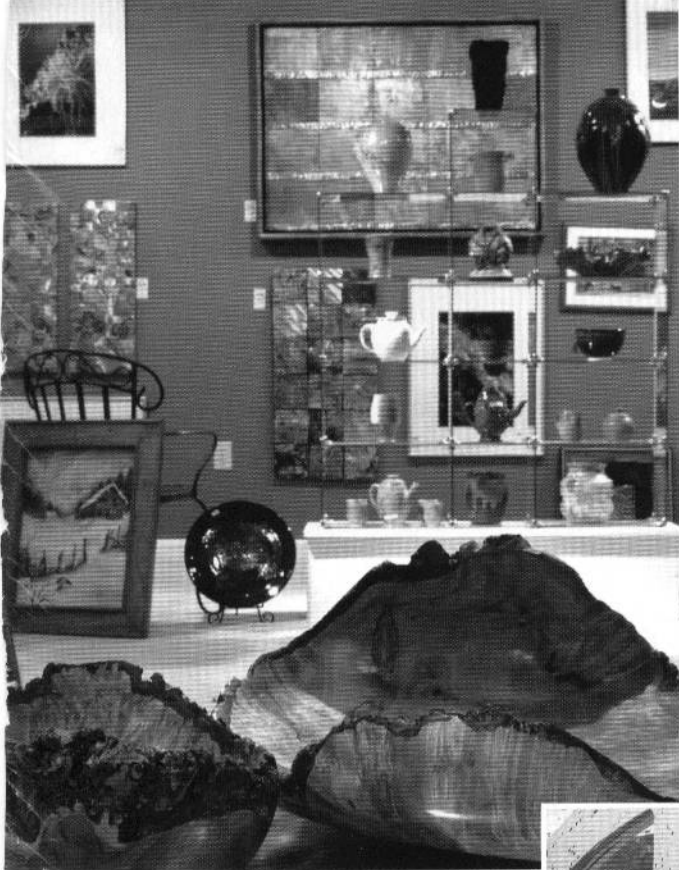
choosing instead to board the 65-foot *Navigator* at the waterfront for a two-hour dolphin adventure cruise. The boat pulls up behind a shrimp boat as the fishermen bring in their nets.

Ninety-eight percent of the time, this brings dolphins out for passengers to see. The tour continues on with other marine life in the mouth of the ocean.

Another option is to check out one of several afternoon shows at the **Ingram Planetarium** in nearby Sunset Beach. One new exhibit allows visitors to view outer space on a 50-inch, high-definition plasma TV through a direct uplink to NASA.

Still another option is to cross over the Odell Williamson Bridge to Ocean Isle Beach to visit the **Museum of Coastal Carolina**. Kids will especially love the touch tank, scavenger hunt and the new turtle exhibit.





Carved wood pieces by James Saunders, along with the work of more than 200 other artists, are on display at Sunset River Marketplace. Right: Shoppers can find clothing, home furnishings and kitchen accessories at Victoria's Ragpatch. Opposite: Ornaments of every style and theme at St. Nick Nacks Christmas Shop bring Christmas to Calabash year-round.



Heading back home at the end of a delightful day, you may want to bid farewell to the sleepy little town of Calabash in the same style that Jimmy Durante did back in 1940. Longtime residents tell the story of Durante's visit to a local restaurant while on tour. During the evening, he supposedly called over the 28-year-old owner, Lucy Coleman, and told her, "I'm going to make you famous." It wasn't long afterwards that Mr. Durante began signing off his radio shows with the same words he reportedly spoke that night as he left the restaurant — "Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are!"



Want to Go?

ATTRACTIONS

Calabash Fishing Fleet
www.calabashfishingfleet.com; (910) 575-0017

Ingram Planetarium
The Village at Sunset Beach, Sunset Beach;
www.ingramplanetarium.org; (910) 575-0033

Museum of Coastal Carolina
21 East Second Street, Ocean Isle Beach;
www.museumofcc.org; (910) 579-1016

Tropical Adventure Mini Golf
10124 Beach Drive SW; (910) 579-2226

RESTAURANTS

Calabash Creamery
9910 Beach Drive; www.calabash-creamery.com;
(910) 575-1180

Captain Nance's
Nance Street; (910) 579-2574

Ella's of Calabash
1148 River Road; (910) 579-6728

SHOPPING

Callahan's Nautical Gifts
9973 Beach Drive;
www.callahangifts.com; (910) 579-2611

St. Nick Nacks Christmas Shop
9973 Beach Drive SW; (910) 579-2611

The Mole Hole
10164 Beach Drive SW; (910) 579-7075

Sunset River Marketplace
10283 Beach Drive SW;
www.sunsetrivermarketplace.com (910) 575-5999

Victoria's Ragpatch
Ragpatch Row, 10164 Beach Drive SW;
(910) 579-2015

