

Ecotourism in the Sandhills

By Rick Lietz, Economics major at East Carolina University and Sustainable Sandhills intern

As the environmental protection movement gains momentum, many people are seeking to minimize the impact that their vacation time has on the environment. This has spurred the growth of the ecotourism industry, which helps people to recreate and relax sustainably. The easiest and most important way to ensure that your vacation isn't harming the environment is to stay local; transportation is a leading source of greenhouse gases. Many people love living in the piedmont for its convenient location between the beach and mountains, however, the North Carolina Sandhills provide the perfect setting for many fun, environmentally-friendly activities right here at home.

- [Raven Rock](#), near Lillington, is an ideal place for a family day trip or hike. One of the best kept local secrets, you could explore the park for hours and probably only see a handful of other people. The park is located in the transition zone between the piedmont and coastal plain, which causes the river to drop elevation, creating some of the best rapids in the area. You can see the fall-line for yourself at a spot known as "Fish Traps," which provides some of the best fishing on the Cape Fear River.



- [Cape Fear Botanical Garden](#), just 2 miles from downtown Fayetteville, is an idyllic setting for events and weddings. The grounds are spectacularly maintained by staff, volunteers and even FTCC horticulture students. The natural gardens and trails provide a perfect opportunity for educational experiences for people of all ages. Go on a weekday afternoon and you're likely to have the place all to yourself. Don't forget to bring your AAA card or military ID to get discounted admission, or go on a Quarterly Free Sunday to get in at no charge. **BONUS: CFBG is a Sustainable Sandhills Certified Green Business!**



- [White Lake](#), near Elizabethtown in Bladen County, has the distinction of being named "America's safest beach." This freshwater lake has a white sand bottom and was created by a natural spring. These two elements combine to create a natural filter that keeps the water refreshingly clean and clear. There are two public beaches, a water park, a marina, and various places to rent watercraft. Don't hesitate though, White Lake is a favorite summer destination and is getting more and more popular, evidenced by the growing construction along the shores of this enchanting Carolina Bay. Close enough for a day trip, White Lake also has many quaint little Inns when one day on the water just isn't enough.

- [ZipQuest](#) Waterfall and Treetop Adventure operates eight zip-lines over Carver's Creek and the surrounding forest in Northeast Fayetteville, just off Ramsey Street. This is an ideal getaway as it allows people to experience the breathtaking power of nature without harming the environment, especially because it is so close to town and requires very little travel. The tour also includes 13 platforms offering views of the forest and waterfall, three canopy "sky-bridges," and even a couple of spiral staircases into the canopy. Your entire experience will last about two and a half hours and costs only \$79. **BONUS: ZipQuest is a Sustainable Sandhills Certified Green Business!**

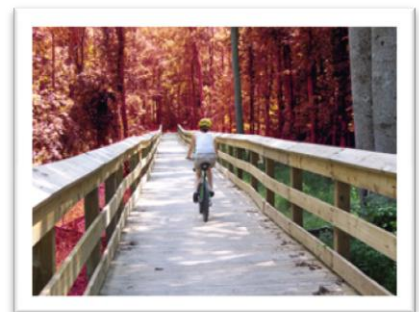


- The [Lumber River](#) flows through a number of counties in the southern North Carolina Sandhills including Moore and Scotland Counties. Over 80 miles of the river have been nationally designated as wild and scenic. Flanking the river are over nine thousand square miles of pristine state park. A favorite part of the river is a unique reverse flow, known as Griffin's Whirl.



- [Cypress Bend Vineyards](#) in Wagram offers the perfect getaway for the romantic traveler. Two Fridays a month the Vineyard provides live jazz music on the patio to accompany wine and light hors d'oeuvres. September 11th is the annual Fall Harvest Festival and grape stomp starting at noon.

- [Weymouth Woods](#), in southern Moore County provides a welcome change of pace from the manicured golf courses of Southern Pines and Pinehurst. The 900- acre nature preserve is protected with the purpose of preserving the natural and unique ecological features of this region. It is designated limited use and provides a home to a number of endangered species native to this area such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, the pine-barrens tree frog, and the bog spicebush. Weymouth Woods is an ideal location to relax and reconnect with nature in a setting that seems untouched by man.
- The [Cape Fear River Trail](#) winds for four miles parallel to the river, providing some particularly breathtaking views. Designed to minimize its environmental footprint, the trail itself is ten feet wide and welcomes all non-motorized transportation. The Cape Fear River Trail is one part of the east coast greenway, which is a series of urban trails and parks that will one day stretch from Maine to Key West.



The next time you need a break, don't waste all that gas driving to the ocean or the mountains, keep your vacations close to home and sleep in your own bed. It will save money, time, and the environment!