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January 20, 2015

*Below: Just off I-95, make learning fun, no goblins allowed, fan those flames, for your next phase, ah - sweet chocolate, stay warm, Lowcountry boil.*  
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## Take a Road Trip to Rocky Mount, NC

Traveling on I-95 between New York and Miami you might not think to stop mid-North Carolina, but stop you should and spend a day or two in the charming town of Rocky Mount. It's been on the north-south Amtrak route for years, and in fact, their train station has earned accolades from railroad enthusiasts from all over.

In a town of about 60,000,  
you'll find southern  
hospitality to spare, plus  
history, recreation, unique  
shops, the beautiful Tar  
River, and of course,  
world-famous Eastern  
North Carolina Barbecue.

[Read more.](#)

Where in the Carolina World is this?

## Make a Smart Entrance!

Education and children don't always blend seamlessly together. Skill and understanding are needed to create adventures that teach, and this children's museum has both.

Little ones love it. Parents love it, too, for what it gives.

This enigmatic sculpture welcomes families to enter and enjoy!

Where are you?

## Carolina Grown

### Witch Hazel – in Winter

by Robert F. Polomski, Ph.D.  
Horticulturist/Lecturer • Clemson University

I don't think I have seasonal affective disorder but for sure, Winter is my least favorite season. One thing that really brightens my mood is being in the presence of flowering plants. Although many shrubs and trees showcase colorful stems or bark, berries, or evergreen leaves in winter, they don't compare to the emotional rush that's triggered by winter blooms. A serious consequence to blooming in winter is the ever present danger of losing the flowers to freezing temperatures. Nevertheless, their appearance and fragrance during the winter months is a chance worth taking.

Some of my favorites are the witch hazels (*Hamamelis* spp.). These deciduous winter-flowering shrubs are highly regarded for their fall and winter attributes. Fall color ranges from shades of yellow to combinations of brilliant yellow, orange and red. Flowering time varies among the species and hybrids, but begins in the fall (Oct-Nov) with common witch hazel (*H. virginiana*), to mid-winter with the vernal witch hazel (*H. vernalis*) and late winter and early spring for the Asian species and hybrids (*H. mollis*, *H. japonica*, and *H. x intermedia*).

The striking ornamental feature shared by witch hazels are the spiderlike flowers whose four, strap-like petals look like strands of confetti that appear to have exploded from the bud. The flowers vary in size from one-quarter to an inch in diameter and occur predominantly in shades of yellow with the natives, but some of the Asian species and hybrids soar off into the oranges and maroons.

The standard-bearers of garden witch hazels are the hybrids between the Chinese and Japanese species (*H. x intermedia*). They

produce the showiest flowers and become multi-stemmed shrubs that reach 6 to 15 feet high. There are over 25 cultivars with some having fragrant flowers and sporting flowers that range in color from yellow, copper, or red. The fall color can be spectacular with splashes of yellows, oranges and reds. Flowering time varies among the cultivars, so early, mid-season and late-blooming cultivars can be selected to keep the landscape in bloom for months.

*Photo credit: Alex Niemiera, Ph.D.*

*Learn more about Carolina gardening from Dr. Polomski's new book, [Carolinas Month by Month Gardening](#). Available wherever books are sold.*

## Travel + Leisure – Most romantic towns

### No. 2 Beaufort, NC

## Discoveries for 2015

Hello Gerry,

With 2015 launched ... no matter where you live, the Carolina life and adventures await folks like you from Columbia.

Yes, winter is here, too, but without the deep-freeze temperatures and frostbitten fingers I felt growing up in Minnesota and working in Chicago and Manhattan. Snow forts and ice hockey were thrilling as a child!

We say, focus on sunnier thoughts. Golf, beach, tennis and trail conditions here invite us outdoors, with seasonally attractive prices. Expect to pay less and get more as you tour the land of "smiling faces" and "beautiful places."

Watch for an abundance of new discoveries on [CarolinaLiving.com](#), including 90 town profiles and current tax advantages, all guaranteed to make the Kester life happier (and easier on the pocketbook). Still true. South Carolina tax burden remains ranked 50th lowest in the USA. NC comes in 35th. Another reason to keep the Carolinas on your radar.

Today, enjoy a new NC road trip to an easily accessible, small town full of charm, plus:

Beaufort (pronounced Bō-fort in NC) is one of the oldest towns in North Carolina. According to a recent article from *Travel + Leisure*, it's also one of the most romantic towns anywhere to be found. Pirates hid out here, and intrepid explorers came through on their way west. Romance wasn't at the top of the list.

Others stayed, loving the sea (and seafood), history and natural beauty. And now, you and yours can plan a visit to reconnect and fan those flames of passion. To jump start your romantic weekend, make reservations in one of the lovely old homes which are now B&Bs.

**Travel+ Leisure's Description.**  
Discover more at: [www.crystalcoastnc.org](http://www.crystalcoastnc.org).

*Photo courtesy: The Crystal Coast Tourism Authority*

## 25 Best Towns to Retire

### According to

With four in the top 25, the Carolinas are well represented in *Forbes* list of Best Towns in which to retire. We've visited them all and agree that they are great possibilities – along with many, many more.

Where to romance your soulmate;

Carolina chocolate that reigns supreme (and where to find it);

A Carolina plant that blooms in winter and sounds a little scary;

Four retirement towns that achieve top honors;

Lowcountry Boil for 4 or 6.

Our 2015 wish for you in Columbia:  
Good health and abundant prosperity.  
Happy travels around the Carolinas!  
Finding what feeds your soul.

All the Best,

Leyla & Patrick Mason  
Co-Founders,

PS: Register here for the new and free  
CarolinaLiving.com Guide!

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## A Hunk of Burning Love

### Ironworking at

Wild Dunes Resort, A Destination Hotel, is heating up the romance scene and bonding couples with an exclusive ironworking class included in the newly debuted *Love in the Lowcountry* package. Incorporating authentic Charleston experiences, this package treats pairs to a behind-the-scenes peak into the culture and lifestyle of the Lowcountry, including:

- Accommodations in the resort's AAA Four-Diamond Village at Wild Dunes or Boardwalk Inn
- Burning Love Ironwork Experience for two: Charleston's homes, churches, gardens and gates are adorned in elaborate and iconic ironwork dating back to the city's origination. During

**Bluffton, SC:** Small town, with dramatic water views, warm climate, affordable housing, low crime, and walkable.

**Brevard, NC:** Mountain charm, waterfalls galore, great climate, affordable, arts and culture, walkable.

**Charleston, SC:** Southern Hospitality. Gorgeous city, history, good times, great shopping, superb chefs, water, and the world-class *Spoleto Festival* for all.

**Clemson, SC:** College town in the foothills. Home of Clemson University, great climate, affordable housing, low crime, a beautiful recreational lake, walkable, lots to do.

[Read](#) about all the choices and visit [CarolinaLiving.com](http://CarolinaLiving.com) for more superb possibilities for the next stage of your life.

## They Hit the Sweet Spot

## North Carolina's Chocolate Artisans Among the best

Among the 2015 Good Food award winners in some of our favorite categories (cheese, chocolate, oils, charcuterie), North Carolina received three of ten awards in the category of chocolate.

The winners harkened from 33 states, having risen to the top amongst 1,462 entries in a Blind Tasting with 182 judges held in September. The highest scoring entries were submitted to a rigorous vetting process to verify they met the sustainability and social responsibility criteria to win a Good Food Award. This year's Good Food Award winners represent the forefront of American craft food, making products that are delicious, respectful of the environment, and connected to communities and cultural traditions.

We salute the NC award winners in chocolate:

**Black Mountain Chocolate**  
Mountain Milk Bar, [Black Mountain](#)

**Escazu Chocolates**  
70% Tumbes - Peru, [Raleigh](#)

**French Broad Chocolates**  
68% Nicaragua - [Asheville](#)

Discover more about the awards at [seedlingprojects.org](http://seedlingprojects.org)

*Photo courtesy French Broad Chocolates*

the class, couples can learn this celebrated art form of the Lowcountry and create a commemorative piece that will serve as a long lasting memory of their very special day in Charleston.

- Rivers and Rice Plantations Blackwater Kayaking Paddle Trip for two: Couples enjoy an intimate paddle through beautiful, historic rice plantations, left untouched for over 300 years. Pairs will explore Blackwater creeks through abandoned rice fields full of wetland wildflowers and see raptors, wading birds and an occasional alligator from a safe distance.

Available through Feb. 28, the *Love in the Lowcountry* package starts at \$480 per night, based on double occupancy for three-night stays. To learn more please visit [www.wilddunes.com](http://www.wilddunes.com) or call 888.778.1876.

### The New Guide is Here.

***Updated town information, six fun new Carolina Adventures, and one heck of a good-looking water story. Order yours today.***

[Click here](#) for the official hold-in-your-hand Guide to Carolina lifestyle fun and adventure trips, plus real estate tips, tax & cost-of-living advantages, retirement opportunities and town profiles. Just share your dream goals and we'll help lead you to smart Carolina life and times.

## Carolina Cuisine

Lowcountry Boil, Beaufort Stew, Seafood Steam Pot -- it all boils down to good eating Carolina-style. Imagine our surprise to find an entertaining, thoughtful blog from New Jersey that turns one of our signature dishes into a soup that serves four to six -- seafood lovers needed; no giant pot required.

Different restaurants have their own riffs on the dish and we've tasted some pretty spectacular concoctions. Now that we're in the middle of what passes for winter in this area (sweaters, yes, gloves, probably not needed), we're sharing a great taste of the Carolinas -- courtesy New Jersey.

Won't you give her [Lowcountry Boil Soup](#) a try?

## Heading your way twice a month

- Let's Take a Road Trip!
- Carolina Famous Faces
- Insider Attractions
- [eNewsletter Archives](#).

## Facebook

### Baby, it's cold outside!

We know, with our 30s and 40s, there's no sympathy headed our way from our Northern neighbors. But, for folks accustomed to winter meaning pulling out the sweaters, this is brisk. Luckily, it won't last long and for now, enjoy the accoutrements of the cold -- hot chocolate, hot tea, boots, and colorful scarves. Maybe even a fire. How do you embrace winter? Please share on [Facebook](#).

**[www.carolinalive.com](http://www.carolinalive.com)    phone 803.782.7466  
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*Compiled by Katherine O. Pettit • Designed by Ann Dolin*

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