



Wilmington is set on the Cape Fear River, inland from the Atlantic Ocean.

IF YOU GO

Stay

ARRIVE Wilmington
arrivehotels.com/wilmington

Eat

Manna
mannaavenue.com
PinPoint Restaurant
pinpointrestaurant.com
Savorez
savorez.com

Do

Airlie Gardens
airliegarden.org
Battleship North Carolina
battleshipnc.com
Cape Fear Museum
capefearmuseum.com
New Anthem Beer Project
newanthembeer.com
Wilmington Filming Locations
wilmingtonandbeaches.com/
famous-film-tv-locations

LIGHTS, CAMERA, WEEKEND

Exploring the other "Hollywood of the South"

STORY: Caroline Eubanks

Before Atlanta became known as the film capital of the South, there was Wilmington, North Carolina, or as it became known, "Wilmywood." Hundreds of movies and television shows used the charming town as the backdrop, including "Dawson's Creek," "One Tree Hill," *Empire Records*, *Iron Man 3* and *A Walk to Remember*. I visited as a teenager when the soapy dramas that made it famous were still on television. But I returned as an adult to see what else the city had to offer.

Wilmington is located on the Cape Fear River, a few miles inland from the coast and six hours from Atlanta. It was established in 1725 as Brunswick Town, North Carolina's first capital. It became a significant port, bringing goods to and from nearby farms and plantations and constructing ships.

I learned even more about Wilmington's history at the Cape Fear Museum that covers the area's past from the prehistoric age to the present. Fascinating exhibits include a replica of a giant ground sloth skeleton and a jersey belonging to sports legend Michael Jordan, who went to high school in Wilmington.

Movie fanatics can see real-life places from the big screen using the Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau's website. I got to see Joey's boat from "Dawson's Creek" and the bench from "One Tree Hill" on a pre-pandemic film locations tour.

After getting my first tastes of the city, I checked into ARRIVE Wilmington, which opened in 2019 on the former site of The Wilmingtonian, a hotel that often hosted actors and film crews. It's the second location from the ARRIVE brand, after the Palm Springs original, and brings in similarly stylish and playful modern design to the boutique hotel.

The city has an incredible culinary scene, which I didn't expect. I had dinner at PinPoint Restaurant, which has been praised by *Southern Living* and Food Network. I indulged in fresh vegetables from local farms and cornmeal-battered fish on a bed of grits. On the two-block walk back to the hotel, I stopped for a nightcap at New Anthem Beer Project, one of a dozen craft breweries in town.

In the morning, I hit the ground running, crossing the river to see the Battleship North Carolina. I'd heard that it can get toasty below deck, so I wanted to explore the tunnels of rooms before the sun rose fully. Built in 1937, the ship was a part of America's fleet during World War II. The hull was damaged by a Japanese torpedo and was decommissioned, permanently docked in the Cape Fear River. Visitors can see the small bunkrooms, commanders' offices and even the onboard dentist's office.

I worked up an appetite after navigating through every corner of the sprawling ship, so I chose Savorez, a cozy Latin restaurant near Wilmington's stretch of historic homes. The seared tuna tostones, jerk shrimp to-

Right: Airlie Gardens is a botanical garden that has appeared on screen.



Allie Wilson

Above: PinPoint Restaurant creates stunning dishes with seasonal ingredients.

Right: Battleship North Carolina is permanently docked in the Cape Fear River.

stada and yucca fries were delicious.

After cooling off back in my room, I went for an early dinner and cocktail at Manna, a New American restaurant a block away from ARRIVE. I sipped a cucumber gin concoction and ordered seared scallops and a perfectly-cooked steak with sweet potato gratin.

Before starting the long drive back to Atlanta the following morning, I detoured to Airlie Gardens, a 67-acre botanical garden created in 1886 by the Pembroke Jones family. I was captivated by the majestic 500-year-



Courtesy of Wilmington CVB

old oak tree in the middle of the property and the Minnie Evans Bottle Chapel, named for the folk artist who worked at the gardens for many years.

I didn't spot a single celebrity during my time in Wilmington, but nonetheless, left with happy memories. ■