

Overview of North Carolina

North Carolina isn't a state known for high-paced cities or cultural attractions, and is ideal for those seeking unspoilt beaches and peaceful mountain scenery. The coast and gorgeous mountains sit on opposite sides of the state, with miles of sparse wilderness separating them.

The west of North Carolina is home to beautiful rugged mountains, valleys, and flower-filled meadows, where waters, streams, and rivers brim with trout. Additionally, there are some brilliant scenic drives and miles of hiking trails.

Sharing the border with Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the most visited parks in the country, home to acres of virgin forests and some of the oldest mountains on earth. Snaking its way along the backbone of the Blue Ridge Mountain Range is the dramatic Blue Ridge Parkway road, providing magnificent scenery and elevated views on its way towards Virginia.

The east of North Carolina boasts the Atlantic coastline, complete with good beaches, fascinating historical sites, and natural refuges that stretch from the thin band of barrier islands, known as the Outer Banks, to the Cape Fear Coast and seaport of Wilmington in the south.

The Cape Hatteras National Seashore contains seaside holiday resorts, as well as protected beaches, dunes, and marsh areas. There are plenty of recreational activities, such as surfing, fishing, swimming, and bird watching.

The central Piedmont, or Heartland, lies between the coastal plains and the mountains, dominated by academic institutions of the Research Triangle. There is also a trio of university towns, including Durham, the state capital of Raleigh, and Chapel Hill.

Despite the growth and swift economic progress, a typically southern pace of life still exists among the rolling farmland and picturesque golf courses. Its landscapes are reminiscent of the writings of Southern authors such as Thomas Wolfe.

Key Facts

Language:

English is the most common language spoken but Spanish is often heard in the south-western states.

Passport/Visa:

It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. A visa is required for short visits unless travellers qualify for entry under the Visa Waiver Program. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables citizens of certain countries to travel to the US for a stay of up to 90 days without a visa. Visitors under the VWP need to register online three days before travel and have an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). This allows the US government to screen all visitors before travel. Visitors entering the country under the VWP must have a machine-readable passport (MRP) that has a barcode on the photo page. Travellers under the VWP must have passports that include biometrics if they wish to enter the country without a visa, which means that passports must contain unique personal data such as fingerprints or iris details. All passports must contain a digital photo image in order to travel visa-free. All visitors to the USA have a photograph and two fingerprints taken by an inkless scanner on arrival, including those travelling visa-free under the VWP. As part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), all travellers travelling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region are required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States. If departing from the USA, a valid passport is required by immigration authorities. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 120 volts, 60Hz. Plugs are mainly the type with two flat pins, though three-pin plugs (two flat parallel pins and a rounded pin) are also widely used. European appliances without dual-voltage capabilities will require an adapter.

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Travel to North Carolina

Climate for North Carolina

The climate of North Carolina is subtropical and humid, with hot, humid summers, and mild winters, particularly in the east and central regions. Temperatures seldom rise above 100F (38C) or drop below 10F (-12C), but conditions vary according to elevation and proximity to the sea.

Statewide, January is the coldest month, and July is the hottest. In midsummer, North Carolina generally experiences an average temperature range of between 68F (20C) and 80F (27C). Temperatures in the mountainous areas tend to be much lower.

Rainfall is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, but is heaviest in the humid summer months. Hurricanes and tornadoes do affect North Carolina and the eastern region, in particular, is susceptible to high winds and flooding from hurricanes in late summer and autumn.

Health Notes when travelling to United States of America

There are no specific health risks associated with travel within the USA. Medical facilities are excellent, but expensive. Only emergencies are treated without prior payment and treatment can be refused without evidence of insurance or proof of funds. Good medical insurance is essential. Visitors must be fully vaccinated with the primary series of an accepted COVID-19 vaccine to travel to the United States by plane if they are non-U.S. citizens.

Safety Notes when travelling to United States of America

Travel within the United States is generally trouble-free, though travellers should be aware that the US shares with the rest of the world, an increased threat from terrorist incidents. Security has been heightened, particularly at airports. Restrictions on hand luggage apply and travellers are advised to check on the latest situation with airlines in advance. Travellers should also be alert to the dangers of car and street crime in cities and should use common sense and take basic precautions. Hurricanes are common between June and November, putting the southern USA, including the Gulf Coast and the eastern US at risk. There is a risk of wildfires in many dry areas in the US, particularly on the West Coast from March to November.

Customs in United States of America

Laws vary from state to state, including speed limit, fines and punishment. The age at which alcohol may be legally bought and consumed is 21 years.

Duty Free in United States of America

Travellers to the United States who are returning residents of the country do not have to pay duty on articles purchased abroad to the value of \$800 provided their stay was longer than 48 hours and their duty-free allowance was not used in the 30-day period prior. For passengers arriving from Samoa, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, a duty-free allowance of \$1,600 is allowed. The following items are included in this: 50 cigarettes and 10 cigars and 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages or 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of perfume containing alcohol. Restrictions may apply to goods from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Burma (Myanmar), Angola, Liberia and Sudan. It is prohibited to import Cuban cigars from any country.

Travellers to the United States who are non-residents do not have to pay duty on the following items: 50 cigars or 200 cigarettes and gifts to the value of \$100 provided their stay in the USA is not less than 72 hours and that the allowance has not been used in the preceding six-month period.

Prohibited items for residents and non-residents include meat or meat products, poultry, narcotics, absinthe, plants, seeds, vegetables, fruits, soil, live insects and other living plants or animal pests. Fish is prohibited unless it carries disease-free certification. Wildlife and animals or their by-products carry restrictions. Dairy products and eggs from specified countries are not allowed. Firearms and ammunition are not allowed without the necessary license and permit.

Doing Business in United States of America

In such a large country, filled with so many diverse groups, business practices may differ according to each state, however rarely to any large degree. The East Coast is traditionally more formal than the West Coast, though in states such as California, dress code and conservative appearance are as common as they would be in New York. Punctuality is important throughout the country and it is considered rude to be late for a meeting. Gift-giving is uncommon as it may be construed as bribery. Appropriate titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms) are used upon introduction and until otherwise stated. Americans favour politeness and greetings of 'Hello' and 'How are you?' are often expressed with sincerity. Business hours may vary in each state, but an 8am start and 5pm finish Monday to Friday is the most common with an hour over lunch.

Status and age are not necessarily indicative of seniority, nor do they carry much weight in themselves. Those doing business in the States should be mindful of this fact; foreigners should never make assumptions about someone's position or rank. Best practice is to be respectful to all parties. That said, the US upholds a hierarchal business structure, in which 'the boss' is the ultimate decision-maker. Senior leaders have the power of the last word, and can go against the grain just as easily as they can follow popular opinion. Foreigners should concentrate on winning over this individual, even if the greater group seems unsupportive. Americans value a direct style of communication. In this fast-paced, consumer culture 'time is money', and small-talk is viewed as unnecessary and wasteful. It's best for foreigners to get to the point quickly, speak about issues in a frank and open manner, and to avoid taking offence if someone questions or challenges them outright.

Communication in United States of America

The international country dialling code for the United States is +1. Mobile networks cover most of the country, especially all urban areas, and WiFi is widely available.

Tipping in United States of America

A 15 percent tip is expected by taxi drivers, bartenders, hairdressers and waiters, but travellers shouldn't tip in fast-food or self-service restaurants. In expensive restaurants or for large parties, the tip should be 20 percent of the bill. It is normal to tip staff such as valets and porters in hotels; this is discretionary, although a minimum of \$5 is expected. Most services are customarily tipped if the service is good.

Passport/Visa Note

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Airports in North Carolina

Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU)

Raleigh-Durham International Airport

www.rdu.com

Location: Raleigh The airport is situated 14 miles (23km) from Durham and 14 miles (23km) from Raleigh.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Contacts: Tel: (919) 840 2123

Transfer between terminals: Free buses run between the two terminals.

Getting to the city: The GoTriangle Route 100 bus provides a public bus service between the airport and its Regional Transit Center, where passengers can connect to bus routes throughout the region. This includes major areas such as Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary, and Research Triangle Park. The buses depart at least once an hour from outside both terminals. Other bus services include Amtrak and Greyhound.

Car rental: Car rental companies located at the airport include Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Hertz, and National. A shuttle service runs every 15 minutes from outside the baggage claim area of both terminals to the car rental offices.

Airport Taxis: The official taxi company servicing Raleigh-Durham Airport is RDU Airport Taxis. Extra charges are added for excess baggage.

Facilities: Facilities include ATMs, a post box, restaurants, bars, shops, vending machines, a spa, shoeshine services, smoking areas, tourist information, and hotel reservations. Business centres in both terminals offer currency exchange and travel insurance. Facilities for the disabled are good.

Parking: There are a number of parking lots available. The Premier lot is \$3 and hour, and up to \$22 per day. The Economy Lots are also available for \$1 an hour, or \$7 per day, with a shuttle which connects the lots and the terminal building.

Charlotte Douglas International (CLT)

Charlotte Douglas International Airport

www.charlotteairport.com

Location: Charlotte The airport is situated eight miles (13km) west of Charlotte, near the border between North and South Carolina.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Contacts: Tel: (704) 359 4013

Getting to the city: The CATS airport bus ferries passengers to the city centre. Buses leave every 20 minutes during weekdays, and every 30 minutes at night and on weekends. Courtesy shuttles are available for many local hotels and motels. Taxis and rental cars are also available, as are ride-hailing apps like Lyft and Uber.

Car rental: Car rental companies include National, Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, and Hertz.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available from outside the terminal and cost approximately \$25 to the city centre.

Facilities: Airport facilities are extensive and include ATMs, bureaux de change, restaurants, bars, shops, duty-free shopping, a post office, and a tourist information desk. Facilities for the disabled are good.

Parking: Daily, hourly, and long-term remote parking is available, while valet parking is also an option. Complimentary shuttle buses transport passengers between parking lots and the terminal building. Parking is free for the first 30 minutes in the hourly car park and costs \$1 per half hour, up to a daily maximum of \$20. Long-term parking costs \$7 per day.

Piedmont Triad International Airport (GSO)

Piedmont Triad International Airport

www.flyfrompti.com

Location: Greensboro The airport is 11 miles (18km) west of Greensboro.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November)

Contacts: Tel: (336) 665 5666

Getting to the city: Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) offers a shuttle between the airport and several destinations nearby. Taxis and rental cars are also available, as are ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft.

Car rental: Rental desks are in the baggage claims area. Car rental companies represented at the airport include Avis, Alamo, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, National, and Thrifty.

Airport Taxis: A Triad Transportation desk is located on the lower level of the terminal, where taxis can be ordered.

Facilities: ATMs, a post office, conference facilities, a chapel, information desks, airline lounges, vending machines, and a games room are all available at Piedmont Triad Airport. There are also a number of shops, restaurants, and snack bars.

Parking: Parking garage rates are \$10 per day, while long-term lot rates are \$8 per day. A free shuttle runs between the long-term lots and the terminal. Short-term metered parking bays are available in front of the terminal for two hours or less of parking. There is also an overflow lot that costs just \$5 per day.

Jacksonville Airport (OAJ)

Albert J. Ellis Airport

www.flyoaj.com

Location: Jacksonville The airport is situated 11 miles (19km) northwest of Jacksonville.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Getting to the city: There is no public transport servicing the airport, but taxis, rental cars, and airport shuttles are available.

Car rental: Avis, Budget, National, Hertz, and Enterprise are represented at the airport.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are generally available outside the terminal, but to be safe they can be booked in advance.

Facilities: Facilities at the airport include a cafe, a restaurant, a gift shop, an ATM, and a lost and found.

Parking: The first 15 minutes of airport parking is free. Thereafter, it costs \$2 each hour and up to a daily maximum of \$9.

Asheville Regional Airport (AVL)

Asheville Regional Airport

www.flyavl.com

Location: Asheville The airport is located 15 miles (24km) south of Asheville.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Getting to the city: Bus services are available to downtown Asheville. Many local hotels offer free shuttle transfers to guests.

Car rental: Car rental companies represented at the airport include Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, Alamo/National, and Thrifty/Dollar.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available to and from the airport.

Facilities: Airport facilities include a business centre, phone charging stations, ATMs, vending machines, a guest service centre (faxing, scanning, printing, and postage available), post boxes, a restaurant, and an art gallery.

Parking: Short-term parking costs \$1 for the first 30 minutes, \$1 for every additional 30 minutes after that, and a daily rate of \$25. Long-term parking costs up to \$2 for an hour, \$2 for every additional hour, a daily rate of \$9, and \$54 for a week.

Wilmington International Airport (ILM)

Wilmington International Airport

www.flyilm.com

Location: Wilmington The airport is situated seven miles (11km) north of Wilmington.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Getting to the city: WAVE Transit's bus route #207 runs to and from the airport, Monday to Friday, on an hour frequency from 6am to 9pm. The route does not run on the weekend. Rental cars and taxis are available at the airport while app based taxi services like Uber are also in operation.

Car rental: Avis, Alamo, Dollar, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, National, and Thrifty are among the car rental companies represented at the airport.

Airport Taxis: Numerous taxi companies service the airport and are usually available, but advance booking is recommended for peace of mind. Ride-hailing apps like Uber are also present.

Facilities: Airport facilities include a pet relief area, ATMs, a restaurant and lounge, gift shops, an art gallery, a putting green, baby-changing facilities, the Greater Wilmington Sports Hall of Fame, and a lost and found.

Parking: Parking is within walking distance of the terminal and the first 30 minutes are free in all parking lots. Short-term parking costs \$1 for the second half hour and \$1 for each additional hour, up to a daily maximum of \$24. Long-term parking also costs \$1 for the second half hour, and \$1 for each additional hour, up to a daily maximum of \$10.

Charlotte

The Queen City of North Carolina, Charlotte has been the benefactor of a royal facelift of late. Once sleepy, sprawling suburbia, it sat back with true Southern patience and observed massive reconstruction and unprecedented expansion unroll at its feet.

The city vies for the attention of local and international tourists alike. The midpoint between the Appalachian Mountains and the Atlantic, Charlotte enjoys a temperate climate best spent across the region's rolling green hills.

The centre of Charlotte divides into many districts, each with their own personality. Uptown is home to many museums, theatres, and nightclubs amongst Fortune 500 company buildings, while North Davidson Street, known as NoDa, is an eclectic and artistic area of funky restaurants, shops, and art galleries.

South End is a gentrified mill district with hip, upmarket entertainment and attractions. The 'old money' mansions of Myers Park are worth a drive to see, while University City, as the name suggests, is home to many students and a few shopping malls.

There are plenty of parkland and pedestrian thoroughfares, while an extensive array of shopping and dining options are great for retail therapy. The refurbished urban core of Charlotte's city centre has created a well-nourished nightlife network, and even peripheral neighbourhoods are alive with plenty to do and see.

Charlotte's not-to-be-missed cultural, entertainment, sporting, and historical mainstays make it a great destination for families, young professionals, and pensioners. A large student population keeps things youthful and fun, balancing out the historic charm of the city.

Getting around in Charlotte

Public transport is comprehensive in Charlotte, including light rail, bus, and trolley services. The LYNX Blue Line Light Rail connects southern Charlotte with museums, shopping, and entertainment venues in the city centre. It operates every day between 5.30am and 1.30am, stopping at 26 stations. The Sprinter Bus services the airport and city centre every weekday; the CATS bus service operates more than 40 countywide fixed bus routes. Taxis are also available in Charlotte, as are Lyft and Uber. Despite all this public transport, many visitors still prefer to hire cars.

Climate in Charlotte

Charlotte has a humid subtropical climate, characterised by hot, humid summers and mild winters. Charlotte is a rainy city, with rainfall evenly distributed throughout the year, though it still gets plenty of sun.

In summer, between June and August, temperatures average between 64F (18C) and 89F (32C); and in winter, between December and February, temperatures average between 30F (-1C) and 54F (12C). Some snow falls in winter, but it's seldom heavy and only occurs on a handful of days a year.

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Car rental: Car rental companies include National, Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, and Hertz.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available from outside the terminal and cost approximately \$25 to the city centre.

Facilities: Airport facilities are extensive and include ATMs, bureaux de change, restaurants, bars, shops, duty-free shopping, a post office, and a tourist information desk. Facilities for the disabled are good.

Parking: Daily, hourly, and long-term remote parking is available, while valet parking is also an option. Complimentary shuttle buses transport passengers between parking lots and the terminal building. Parking is free for the first 30 minutes in the hourly car park and costs \$1 per half hour, up to a daily maximum of \$20. Long-term parking costs \$7 per day.

Raleigh

Raleigh, North Carolina's capital, makes up the southeast corner of the famous Research Triangle, with Durham and Chapel Hill at the other two points. The state's second-largest city is a vital centre of high tech business and education.

Unlike many cities that grow up around ports or stations, Raleigh was planned specifically to be the state capital. At its centre stands the beautiful North Carolina Capitol building, a fine Greek Revival-style landmark, from which wide, oak-lined streets radiate.

This careful geometry makes exploring Raleigh quite straightforward. In this pleasant city, there's a unique mix of Southern heritage and unpretentious manners; elite academia and boisterous university life and athletics; and the fast-paced, sleek sophistication of Triangle professionals.

Raleigh is often lumped together with nearby cities Durham and Chapel Hill. Although the three are only about a 30-minute drive from one another, they are different communities. Durham was once one of the most thriving African-American centres in the country.

Today, its main attraction is Duke University, one of the top schools in the United States and home of the Blue Devils, another sports powerhouse. Although revitalisation efforts are underway, its downtown areas have sadly suffered in recent decades.

Meanwhile, Chapel Hill is a lovely college town, with beautiful old homes, endless coffee shops, pubs, and restaurants, enjoying a decidedly liberal leaning. It is home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, another top American educational institution, and the beloved Tar Heels, a force in college athletics.

Known as the 'Smithsonian of the South', there are a few renowned museums and an excellent performing arts scene. Ultimately, Raleigh is a perfect destination for those seeking to experience a bit of Southern history and culture without giving up the attractions and conveniences of a big city.

Getting around in Raleigh

While it is possible to walk in Raleigh within certain districts, especially in the central downtown area, a car is highly recommended. Raleigh is a big and spread out city, although navigating the area by car is relatively straightforward. The GoRaleigh, GoCary, R-LINE, and Wolfline bus systems provide riders with an extensive network of local routes. When in need of a taxi, it is best to call ahead for one, as it can be difficult to hail taxis on the street.

Climate in Raleigh

Raleigh has a moderate subtropical climate. Although the city has four fairly distinct seasons, warm weather is common throughout spring, summer and autumn. Summers, between June and August, can be quite hot and humid, with temperatures averaging between 65°F (18°C) and 90°F (32°C).

The spring and autumn seasons are extremely pleasant and sunny. Winters are mild, with somewhat chilly temperatures but very rare snowfalls. In winter, between December and February, temperatures average between 31°F (-1°C) and 55°F (13°C).

Sightseeing in Raleigh

The nightlife scene in Raleigh has become much livelier in recent years, a far cry from its reputation as a somewhat sleepy hideaway in the town. Its diverse historic districts and neighbourhoods cater to many different tastes.

The area surrounding the Capital is the centre of government, business, and history. Despite its daytime bustle, it remains a lovely spot for a stroll amongst grand museums and a leafy square. Nearby Oakwood is full of exquisitely restored 19th-century homes and gardens.

With its old-fashioned lampposts and cobbled streets, Moore Square is another city oasis. By day, visitors can lounge in the park and must rub for good luck the giant copper acorn sculpture, in honour of Raleigh's nickname, the 'City of Oaks'.

By night, Moore Square comes alive with upscale bars and restaurants, as do pedestrian Fayetteville Street and the chic Warehouse District, popular with Raleigh's hip crowd. Shoppers should head for the posh shops of North Hills or the boutiques of Cameron Village.

Those in search of a more colourful atmosphere will find it on Hillsborough Street and in the NC State University district, where a jumble of undergrads, professors, and tourists mingle in coffeehouses, restaurants, and casual pubs. NC State is North Carolina's largest university. It's a leader in intercollegiate sports, often overshadowing its strong reputation for research.

Raleigh Attractions

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences has recreated a series of natural environments, complete with living animals and a 20-foot-high (6m) waterfall, through which visitors can walk and discover North Carolina's diverse geography, geology, flora, and fauna. Dinosaurs such as Acro (short for *Acrocanthosaurus atokensis*), a predator that stalked the southern half of North America nearly 110 million years ago, are also on display, as is one of the world's finest whale skeletons. The museum's cafes serve tasty breakfasts and lunches. General admission is free but donations are welcome; special exhibitions do have cover charges.

Website: www.naturalsciences.org

Artspace

Artspace is a pioneering visual arts centre that allows the public to become part of the creative process. As the heart of Raleigh's arts community, Artspace stages countless challenging and award-winning exhibitions, workshops, outreach programs, and public events each year. Its unique open studio environment enables artists to collaborate with one another and with visitors. Today, it is one of the largest open studio spaces in the country, and offers a variety of art classes for children and adults. The fact that there is no admission cost is an extra bonus.

Website: www.artspacenc.org

North Carolina Museum of Art

The collection at the North Carolina Museum of Art spans about 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt up to the present day. Ancient pieces include Greek and Roman sculptures and vases, and an internationally celebrated European collection. This includes significant works from the Renaissance through Impressionist periods by artists such as Botticelli, Raphael, and Monet. There's also a collection spanning 18th and 19th-century American works, as well as modern art by major contemporary artists. The museum shop offers books, posters, and other art-related merchandise; the East Cafe and Sip Coffee Bar and Cafe serve delicious meals.

Website: ncartmuseum.org

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Parking: There are a number of parking lots available. The Premier lot is \$3 and hour, and up to \$22 per day. The Economy Lots are also available for \$1 an hour, or \$7 per day, with a shuttle which connects the lots and the terminal building.

North Carolina Coast

Barrier islands stretch the length of North Carolina's coastline and are home to sandy beaches, estuaries, historic sites, and enclosed lagoons. Linked by bridges and ferries, the thin curving line of sand bar islands shelters the mainland from the Atlantic Ocean.

Known as the Outer Banks, they've become popular tourist destinations in North Carolina and include the islands of Bodie, Roanoke, Hatteras, and Ocracoke. Located in the Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout National Seashores, it contains wildlife refuges, stretches of undeveloped beaches, tall dunes, and salt marshes that are home to a variety of birds.

Among the historic sites of interest is Roanoke Island, where the continent's earliest settlers, known as the Lost Colony, vanished inexplicably shortly after their landing in 1587; and the Wright Brothers Memorial at Kitty Hawk, which commemorates the world's first powered flight in 1903.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore stretches for 70 miles (113km) down the Outer Banks and has a wealth of history relating to shipwrecks and lighthouses. Once known as the 'Graveyard of the Atlantic', wrecks of over 600 ships lie in the treacherous waters along the coast.

Boasting some of the best fishing and surfing spots on the East Coast, the park's beaches provide opportunities for many water activities. Cape Hatteras towns offer shops, restaurants, and accommodation, while Cape Lookout is a beach wilderness unconnected to the mainland, remaining pristine and undeveloped.

The beach resort of Wilmington sits at the southern end of the North Carolina Coast in the Cape Fear Coastal area. Although the largest seaport on the coast, it is an attractive and friendly town with an appealing historic district around its waterfront, as well as cobbled streets, cafes, and restaurants.

Sightseeing in North Carolina Coast

Although home to all sorts of wonderful attractions, the coastline of North Carolina is loved mostly for its protected wilderness, ensuring that vast swathes of the coast remain pristine and untouched. It has always lured nature lovers seeking peace and relaxation.

Apart from the protected enclaves of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Cape Lookout National Seashore, coastal state parks in North Carolina include Jockey's Ridge, Fort Macon, Hammocks Beach, Carolina Beach, and Fort Fisher.

The coastline is honeycombed with islands, lagoons and estuaries, creating a natural playground for water sports and activities such as birdwatching, hiking, or simply lounging on the shores. Popular islands along the coast include Bodie Island, Hatteras Island, Ocracoke Island, and Roanoke Island.

The main urban travel hubs of the region are Wilmington, a charming laidback city with many historic buildings, and New Bern, a small city located at the confluence of the rivers Trent and Neuse. However, most visitors choose to spend time in the small villages and resorts of North Carolina.

North Carolina Coast Attractions

Wilmington

Restored through a massive revitalisation effort, Wilmington is a quaint, charming, and genuine Southern town. Grand antebellum mansions sit back from shady, tree-lined lanes leading towards the Cape Fear River and historic downtown district. Brick streets overflow with sweet shops, fashion boutiques, jewellers, and craft stores. Locals lounge alongside tourists at sidewalk cafes, resting up before taking a stroll on the system of boardwalks and promenades along the Cape Fear River. Here, dining is an art. Genuine barbecues contain pit-cooked pork, with sides of collard greens and hush puppies. Those who are more discerning might indulge in exquisitely presented low country cuisine in beautifully restored buildings. The Atlantic coastline is worth the drive across town. Across a short bridge spanning the Intracoastal Waterway lies the beautiful barrier island of Wrightsville Beach, a breathtakingly lovely hideaway of pastel beach houses raised on high pilings and weathered fishing piers. A handful of upmarket shops, beach-gear outfitters, and restaurants are the only distractions from the warm waves dotted with surfers, the boats skimming along the intracoastal and endless stretches of sandy beach bordered by dunes and sea oats. Wrightsville's reputation as a quiet, classy, family destination is carefully guarded. Farther down the peninsula toward the tip of Cape Fear, there are other pretty beaches, like Kure and Carolina, though none with quite the same charm as Wrightsville. However, along the ocean and the myriad inlets and waterways of the Wilmington area, visitors will discover pockets of the quintessential coastal South. Oyster gatherers wade through marshland mud and shrimp trawlers cruise against the sunset.

Bald Head Island

Beautiful Bald Head Island lies off the tip of the Cape Fear peninsula, a serene retreat to a simpler way of life. Stunningly constructed homes that complement the natural surroundings are scattered along the tiny island's beaches, tidal creeks, and maritime forest. Many are available as holiday rentals. Year after year, families board the ferry at Southport for a week or two of relaxation. The ferry is the only way to reach the island, however. Bald Head is also a lovely day trip. There are no cars on the island, so visitors are free to meander along the roads on bicycles or golf carts. Other than the tiny, picturesque harbour, the country club and the Old Baldy Lighthouse, the main attractions are the sun, the sand, and the quiet.

Website: <http://www.baldheadisland.com>

Kitty Hawk

Famous as the site of the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903, Kitty Hawk is a sleepy village on the North Carolina coast that offers visitors the chance to enjoy outdoor activities such as kayaking, boating, golf, fishing, surfing, and more. The town itself has a few shops and restaurants, and family entertainment such as cinemas and mini golf. The most popular attraction in Kitty Hawk is the Wright Brothers National Memorial and Visitor Centre, where travellers can learn all about the brothers and their experiments in flight. Another popular attraction is the Kitty Hawk Woods, a maritime forest home to a variety of flora and fauna. The village is a popular destination for relaxing beach holidays and boasts some interesting cultural diversions.

Website: <http://www.townofkittyhawk.org>

Atlantic Beach

A tiny town in the Crystal Coast region of North Carolina, Atlantic Beach is a popular beach resort offering water activities such as surfing, fishing, sailing, and kayaking. There are also land-based activities such as hiking along Hoop Pole Creek Nature Trail and in Fort Macon State Park, or playing beach volleyball. The North Carolina Aquariums located in Kure Beach, Roanoke Island and Pine Knoll Shores offer great family activities, and the Atlantic Station Shopping Center has cinemas and an arcade lined with shops and restaurants. The town of Atlantic Beach has a number of good restaurants, shops, and bars, many geared toward the influx of tourists each summer. Atlantic Beach is a great base from which to explore the Crystal Coast and other small towns such as Emerald Isle, Beaufort, Harker's Island, and Morehead City, all within easy distance.

Asheville

Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the beautiful town of Asheville has long been a haven for artists, poets, and visionaries. A rugged region of majestic terrain, the Paris of the South is a cultural epicentre with extensive displays of wonderfully preserved Art Deco, Beaux Arts, and Neoclassical architectural triumphs.

These structures hint at Asheville's fascinating history as an elite getaway during America's Gilded Age. One of its premier cultural attractions is the Biltmore Estate, one of the largest homes in the country, opened in 1895 by George Vanderbilt.

Today, its magnificent grounds boast a luxurious inn, stunning gardens, and an award-winning winery. Its 8,000 acres offer visitors an abundance of outdoor activities, including hiking, mountain biking, fly fishing, rafting, and golfing.

Downtown Asheville is a vibrant destination for both tourists and locals, with buzzing arts and music scenes. The Urban Trail offers visitors a comprehensive understanding of the town, with its 30 landmark sculptures, arranged along a lovely walk through downtown streets, revealing Asheville's legends and lore.

Countless galleries showcase hundreds of artists, from fine art to folk art and traditional mountain crafts. The music and performing arts scene includes a symphony orchestra, an opera company, and dozens of venues for bluegrass, folk, jazz, and blues, as well as rock and alternative music.

The local writers' scene is thriving, and Asheville natives such as Thomas Wolfe, whose boyhood home is now a historic site downtown, and Charles Frazier, who penned *Cold Mountain* have had significant impacts in the literary world.

Shoppers will delight in the many antique shops, funky boutiques, and farmers tailgate markets found throughout the area, as well as in historic Grove Arcade, another of Asheville's architectural gems, a bustling marketplace with unique shopping and dining options.

Asheville is the ideal gateway to the Magnificent North Carolina Mountains in the west of the state. These are an outdoor enthusiast's paradise, hiking and biking trails crisscrossing miles of national parks and forests, grand landscapes, and beautiful mountain roadways.

Getting around in Asheville

Getting around Asheville is relatively easy, with a number of transport options available. The ART system operates buses along set routes around the city. This is an inexpensive way of getting around Asheville.

Tickets can be bought when boarding the bus and the exact fare is required as change is not given. There are also a number of options for bus passes which allow for more frequent travel on the ART buses.

For those wanting to explore the city independently, car hire is available. Central Asheville is pedestrian-friendly and, for a scenic tour around the city, vintage trolleys cover all major points of interest in Asheville. A number of taxi companies operate in Asheville are easily contacted via phone; Lyft and Uber are also available.

Climate in Asheville

Asheville has a humid subtropical climate, so the weather is mild throughout the year with warm summers and cool winters. However, due to its position in a valley surrounded by high mountains, the city's weather can be somewhat unpredictable. Light snowfall is possible in the winter months.

Temperatures during summer, from June to August, range between 58F (14C) and 82F (28C), with July being the hottest month. In winter, from December to February, temperatures range between 24F (-4C) and 47F (8C).

The best time to visit Asheville is during the spring, when the wildflowers are out. The late winter months are also quite pleasant, and less crowded than the summer months.

Sightseeing in Asheville

One of the best ways to see the Asheville area is to drive along the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway, which snakes its way along the spine of the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains from Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The national park is the most visited in the state, offering a variety of walking trails, including part of the Appalachian Trail that traverses the park on its way from Georgia to Maine. The Blue Ridge Parkway leads to the centre of Asheville and the Biltmore Estate and Winery, an enormous chateau-styled mansion built for the incredibly rich Vanderbilt family.

Natural attractions in the area include the highest mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountain Range, the Grandfather Mountain, with its Mile High Swinging Bridge, and the natural granite tower of Chimney Rock.

The mighty waterfall, sheer cliffs, and unusual rock formations are famous as the filming locations of the final scenes of 'The Last of the Mohicans', while the Nantahala River Gorge is home to one of the most popular whitewater rafting and kayaking destinations in the country, with rapids to suit beginners and experts alike.

It's best to see Asheville's historic attractions from aboard a vintage trolley. This narrated tour features the town's most memorable sites, including the Montford Historic District, the Grove Park Inn, and Biltmore Village.

The Thomas Wolfe memorial and Grove Arcade Building are also included in the tour, as are ghost tours, which add darker twists, while the Urban Trail allows sightseers to explore the highlights of the urban landscape on foot.

Asheville Attractions

Blue Ridge Parkway

Designed as a scenic drive, the Blue Ridge Parkway is a 469-mile (755km) road connecting the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the North Carolina-Tennessee border. Running through the Southern Appalachians, most of the roadway follows the spine of the Blue Ridge Range and providing stunning scenery and magnificent vistas of distant mountain peaks. It twists and turns through mountainous country that would otherwise be inaccessible. Created in 1935 to link the parks and also to provide employment during the Great Depression, today it attracts more than 20 million visitors annually. Its main attraction is the endless dramatic viewpoints overlooking forested mountains and valleys, and the rich autumn colours that blaze in October. The road also provides access to many hiking trails, including a section of the Appalachian Trail that follows the parkway from Mile 0 to Mile 103, as well as unusual rock formations, impressive waterfalls, wild flowers, lakes, and camping and picnic sites. Along the way are visitor centres, restaurants, food stalls, and modern lodgings nestled in striking mountain scenery. The parkway's highest elevation of 6,047ft (1,843m) at Richland Balsam Overlook has magnificent views.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/blri>

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Straddling the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park boasts many natural assets that have made it one of the most visited national parks in the United States. The Smoky Mountains are named for the blue smoke-like mist that frequently hovers in the air, caused by the natural oils and water vapour released by the plants. The mountains are thought to be some of the oldest on the planet. An unparalleled diversity of wildflowers, plants, and trees showers the mountainsides, and the park is renowned for its multitude of birds, fish, and mammals, particularly black bears. Within its vast wilderness are streams, rivers and waterfalls, acres of virgin forest, and miles of hiking paths. The Appalachian Trail runs along the crest of the mountains through the park, with remnants of Southern Appalachian mountain culture found in numerous historic buildings around the park, many of them found isolated in the mountain valley of Cades Cove, featuring both cultural history and recreational opportunities. The land was once sacred to the Cherokee, who were brutally removed from their ancestral home in 1838 to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears. But some remained hidden in the mountains and the Qualla Boundary (Cherokee Indian Reservation) was formed later, sharing part of the park's southern border. On the edge of the park, the towns of Cherokee and Gatlinburg offer extensive visitor facilities. The smaller towns of Bryson City and Townsend are arguably more atmospheric, but with more limited services.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/grsm>

Linville Caverns

The Linville Caverns are an underground labyrinth of rooms and passageways moulded out of the bedrock beneath Humpback Mountain by years of flowing water. The caverns were first discovered in the 19th century when locals thought they saw fish swimming out of the mountain. Informed professionals give guided tours of the caves, explaining the various natural phenomena found within. The cave system is about an hour and a half's drive from Asheville, making it a fun excursion from the city, especially for families travelling with kids.

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North Carolina Attractions

Overview

The state of North Carolina is most famous for its natural attractions, with ancient mountains beckoning hikers and climbers in the west, and pristine beaches and islands luring lovers of sea and sand in the east.

This isn't to say that the state is devoid of historical and cultural attractions. Cities such as Charlotte, Raleigh, and Wilmington can hold their own when it comes to sightseeing. As a tourist destination, North Carolina benefits from a healthy dose of Southern charm and fantastic restaurants.

The modern and the rural coexist in North Carolina, much as they have for centuries. Hog farms, mountain villages, and tobacco plantations lie alongside cosmopolitan urban centres, prestigious universities, and artistic communities.

This dichotomy makes the state hard to define. Most visitors choose to explore the Appalachian Mountains or scenic coastline, most of which are protected state parks and reserves. The cities and towns operate mostly as launching pads to other attractions.

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North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences has recreated a series of natural environments, complete with living animals and a 20-foot-high (6m) waterfall, through which visitors can walk and discover North Carolina's diverse geography, geology, flora, and fauna. Dinosaurs such as Acro (short for *Acrocanthosaurus atokensis*), a predator that stalked the southern half of North America nearly 110 million years ago, are also on display, as is one of the world's finest whale skeletons. The museum's cafes serve tasty breakfasts and lunches. General admission is free but donations are welcome; special exhibitions do have cover charges.

Website: www.naturalsciences.org

Artspace

Artspace is a pioneering visual arts centre that allows the public to become part of the creative process. As the heart of Raleigh's arts community, Artspace stages countless challenging and award-winning exhibitions, workshops, outreach programs, and public events each year. Its unique open studio environment enables artists to collaborate with one another and with visitors. Today, it is one of the largest open studio spaces in the country, and offers a variety of art classes for children and adults. The fact that there is no admission cost is an extra bonus.

Website: www.artspacenc.org

North Carolina Museum of Art

The collection at the North Carolina Museum of Art spans about 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt up to the present day. Ancient pieces include Greek and Roman sculptures and vases, and an internationally celebrated European collection. This includes significant works from the Renaissance through Impressionist periods by artists such as Botticelli, Raphael, and Monet. There's also a collection spanning 18th and 19th-century American works, as well as modern art by major contemporary artists. The museum shop offers books, posters, and other art-related merchandise; the East Cafe and Sip Coffee Bar and Cafe serve delicious meals.

Website: ncartmuseum.org

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Currency

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Exchange rate for 1 USD - U.S. Dollar

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.93 EUR Euro	0.80 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	152.99 JPY Japanese Yen	1.37 CAD Canadian Dollar	0.91 CHF Swiss Franc
1.52 AUD Australian Dollar	39.40 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	443.91 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	93,075.00 LBP Lebanese Pound	4.86 LYD Libyan Dinar	6.86 BOB Bolivian Boliviano
0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	1.35 SGD Singapore Dollar	10.82 SEK Swedish Krona	0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar
0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	58.11 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	16.95 MXN Mexican Peso	610.53 XOF West African CFA Franc	0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina
0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	133.87 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat	0.00 BWP Botswana Pula
3.72 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	938.44 CLP Chilean Peso	386.84 AMD Armenia Dram	23.29 CZK Czech Koruna	17.63 MDL Moldova Lei	139.89 ISK Icelandic Krona
12,582.40 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	3.72 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.71 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	38.15 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	10.88 NOK Norwegian Krone	4.03 PLN Polish Zloty	3.75 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	36.79 THB Thai Baht
3.66 AED U.A.E Dirham	5.09 BRL Brazilian Real	4.63 RON Romanian New Leu	7.81 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	610.53 XAF Central African CFA Franc	25,405.70 VND Vietnamese Dong
878.36 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	10.06 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	1.00 PAB Panamanian Balboa
1.70 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	3,920.00 COP Colombian Peso	88.42 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	362.00 HUF Hungarian Forint	10.89 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	16,073.70 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
47.95 EGP Egyptian Pound	1,358.84 KRW South Korean Won	7,456.52 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	4.74 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	508.31 CRC Costa Rican Colón	1.67 NZD New Zealand Dollar
277.87 PKR Pakistani Rupee	91.39 RUB Russian Rouble	18.51 ZAR South African Rand	3.13 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	1.82 BGN Bulgarian Lev
32.33 TRY Turkish Lira	57.28 PHP Philippine Peso	32.31 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	1,164.84 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	108.90 RSD Serbian Dinar	7.24 CNY Chinese Yuan	6.94 DKK Danish Krone
3.49 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	83.42 INR Indian Rupee				