



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

HERE NOT THERE

100 UNEXPECTED TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

Andrew Nelson

GO HERE:

For Good Beer, Bites, and Bytes
Raleigh, North Carolina, U.S.A.

Instead of Austin, Texas, U.S.A.

Raleigh's two-day Artsposure festival showcases the works of artists from across the United States.



Raleigh, North Carolina, is all in on tech. The vibrant city (population 469,000) possesses a large and growing number of start-up companies as well as established names including Apple, Google, and Red Hat, all drawn to a town where 66 percent of the residents have an undergraduate degree. Despite its growth, Raleigh remains small enough to retain the local charm that has evaporated in bigger tech hubs like Austin, Texas, where prices for everything from housing to margaritas are more expensive than ever. Raleigh also offers visitors a large number of outdoor recreational activities including parks, greenways, and water sports in a relatively mild climate.

Besides technology, or maybe because of it and its battalions of well-compensated young geeks, the parallel with Austin is stronger than ever with Raleigh's lively nightlife and restaurant scene. Within two miles (3.2 km) of downtown are more than 165 restaurants, 87 percent of them locally owned and operated, and half run by women or minorities. The food is equally diverse, with chefs offering dishes from traditional North Carolina barbecue to Laotian pork belly soup. Some 22 Raleigh chefs have been nominated for James Beard Awards. The **Morgan Street Food Hall** and the **Transfer Co. Food Hall**, inside an old bus depot, are both good places to sample the tasty local fare. For thirsty visitors there are 80 bars

Take your pick of Raleigh's locally owned rooftop restaurants.

OPPOSITE: The ever popular North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences displays a massive whale skeleton.

and clubs, and 18 craft breweries—with some 35 in total across Wake County. In milder weather the **Glenwood South** neighborhood along Glenwood Avenue is jammed until late in the evening with weekend revelers crowding its many bars, clubs, and restaurants.

Also like Austin, Raleigh is a state capital, with a large number of North Carolina government employees and political organizations, as well as universities, drawing a mix of people from diverse backgrounds. No surprise the city is filled with cultural destinations, including 72 art galleries, museums, entertainment venues, performing arts spaces, and other outposts. Because many of them are state supported, free admission has been a long tradition with Raleigh's institutions. Many are located in the downtown **Capital District** neighborhood, home to a number of state museums including the **North Carolina Museum of History** and the **North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences**, the home of the **SECU DinoLab**, opened in 2024, which allows visitors direct contact with the scientific teams examining dinosaur fossils. Also nearby is the new **North Carolina Freedom Park** honoring the African American struggle for freedom in the state. Designed by Phil Freelon, architect of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., the park features moving quotations by Black North Carolinians. Farther afield, the **North Carolina Museum of Art** transformed its galleries in 2023, when it reimagined its **People's Collection** to create a more dynamic and inclusive visitor experience.

There are a number of new hotels in the city, but two reach back into Raleigh's past. The **Heights House** is a nine-room boutique hotel in an 1860 mansion in the historic Boylan Heights district. Its opposite is the **Longleaf Lodge**, a revamped 1960s motor lodge done in a fizzy style mixing fire pits and Danish modernism.



The Greenway

Raleigh's pride is its Greenway, an emerald necklace of trails and parks more than 100 miles (160 km) long. It is used by cyclists, commuters, runners, rollerbladers, and walkers eager to escape traffic and reconnect with nature. The Greenway took shape in the 1970s, when Raleigh began acquiring land along the Neuse River and other nature corridors. The first major section, the **Neuse River Greenway Trail**, opened in 1979. Stretching 27.5 miles (44 km) from Falls Lake Dam to the Johnston County line, the paved trail follows the winding Neuse River through the city and offers a variety of experiences for hikers, bikers, and runners. The diverse range of landscapes, including wetlands, forests, and meadows, is peppered with interpretive signage about the ecosystem and Raleigh's history including the landmark **Milburnie Dam**, built in the early 1900s as part of a hydroelectric power plant that supplied electricity to the city. Connected to the Neuse River Trail is the 15-mile-long (24 km) **Walnut Creek Greenway Trail**, another linear park offering scenery and recreation for pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized users. The **Falls Lake trailhead** provides access to the **Falls Lake State Recreation Area**, a state park covering approximately 12,000 acres (4,860 ha) situated around a human-made reservoir. The **Crabtree Creek Greenway Trail** connects to the Neuse River Greenway Trail at **Anderson Point Park**, a great spot for wildlife-viewing, walking trails, and canoeing.