

Where to Play, Eat, and Sleep in Historic RALEIGH

By Kirsten Harrington
Photographs Courtesy Of Kirsten Harrington

Raleigh Skyline at Night

North Carolina is the birthplace of three U.S. presidents, the first airplane flight, and Lexington-style barbecue. The capital city, Raleigh, is a living history lesson wrapped in Southern charm, with elegant Victorian neighbourhoods, centuries-old oak trees, and free world-class museums. Here are a few tips on where to play, eat and sleep in historic Raleigh.

Play

If you have ever wondered what the first airplane looked like, head to **North Carolina Museum of History**. Soaring high above the lobby is a 1902 replica of the Wright Brothers' glider that launched them into aviation history with their patented flying machine.

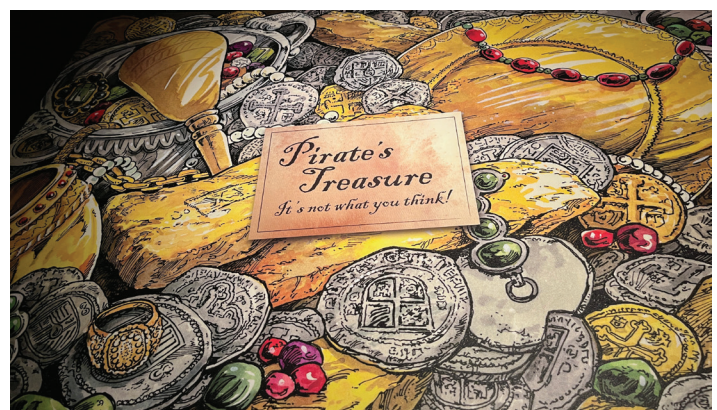
Travel through thousands of years of history in "The Story of North Carolina" exhibit, where visitors can step inside Indian houses, and peek into a pirate's treasure chest (hint: it is not all gold and rum). With many interactive experiences and a downloadable scavenger hunt, this Smithsonian affiliate museum is fun for all ages. And the best part? Admission is free.

North Carolina State Capitol, with its massive stone columns and copper dome, is one of the best-preserved public buildings built in the Greek revival style. Stand in the centre and look up at the impressive rotunda on the second floor, home to the lavish chambers of lawmakers who held session here until 1963. Take a self-guided tour to learn how history unfolded in these walls, including the struggle of African Americans who moved from enslaved workers maintaining the building to politicians voting from its chambers. Notice the ruts carved into the stone steps from the heavy loads of firewood they carried, across from a plaque commemorating the 13th Amendment which ended slavery.

Located just east of downtown, the **Historic Oakwood** district is filled with 19th century charm. This 25-block area is Raleigh's oldest and best-preserved neighbourhood, featuring Italianate, Victorian and French-inspired architecture. The best way to explore these colourful homes is on foot, so you do not miss the leaded windows, turrets, and ornate front porches. These preserved historical homes are truly a highlight of any visit to Raleigh. If you happen to visit during the second full weekend of December, you can join the Historic Oakwood



1902 Replica of Wright Brothers' glider



Pirate Exhibit at North Carolina History Museum





North Carolina
State Capitol

Candlelight Tour where a dozen homes are open to the public for docent-led tours. To learn more about Oakwood and download a walking map, visit www.historicoakwood.org.

Persons Street runs along the western border of Oakwood and makes a great stop for shopping, a Krispy Kreme doughnut (a North Carolina original) or a lovely meal on the rooftop patio of French Bistro **Jolie**.

If you need a break while sightseeing, head to **Moore Square**. In the heart of downtown, this four-acre park is as old as the city itself. Across the centuries, this urban green space served as a school, church and a staging ground for troops heading into battle during the 1861-1865 Civil War. Now, Moore Square is a vibrant park with expansive lawns, a children's play area, entertainment, and a weekly market. There is a ping pong table, benches and Square Burger restaurant for a takeout alfresco lunch or dinner. Rest under a shady oak and take in the city skyline.

Starting in 1914, farmers hitched up their horse-drawn carts to bring produce, poultry, seafood, and flowers to the newly opened **City Market**, next to Moore Square. This commercial hub for fresh food became obsolete in the 1950s as grocery stores joined the scene. Thankfully, in the 1980s, City Market was recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and rehabilitation began. Today, the cobblestone streets remain but modern shops and restaurants have infused City Market with new life, making it a top destination in downtown.



Home in Historic Oakwood District



Clyde Cooper's BBQ

WHERE TO PLAY, EAT, AND SLEEP IN HISTORIC RALEIGH

Greek Salad at
Mecca Restaurant

Eat

There is no shortage of delicious places to eat in Raleigh. **Clyde Cooper's BBQ** is one of Raleigh's longest-running restaurants and a great place to try some Carolina barbecue. Order a chopped barbecue sandwich to get a taste of Clyde's original style – tangy, smoky, and peppery pork piled high on a bun. You will understand why this family-friendly place has been voted among the top 10 barbecue places in America. Side dishes are half the fun, so order some mac 'n' cheese, hush puppies, and collard greens.

Founder Clyde Cooper started this family-owned place in 1938 and served customers faithfully for 50 years until he sold the business to a friend. He was known for his welcoming manner, insisting that people of all colours use the front door together at a time when racial divides were deep. Clyde passed away in 1998 but his memory lives on in photos and memorabilia that hang throughout the restaurant.

Greek immigrant Nick Dombalis opened **Mecca Restaurant** in 1930 with a mission to serve hearty, comforting food at a good price. Located near the North Carolina State Capitol Building, Mecca has been a popular meeting spot for local politicians, judges, and businessmen. Little has changed over the years, and the red swivel chairs at the counter and wooden booths with electric candles add to the historic charm. All-day breakfast, comfort food like lasagna and a few Greek dishes are served in a casual diner-like setting at a reasonable price. Dombalis would be proud.

For a modern dining experience housed in an historic setting, visit the **Transfer Co. Food Hall**. Originally home to the Carolina Coach company, this former bus garage has been restored into a community gathering place where people come to socialize over good food and drink. Dine under high beam ceilings surrounded by brick walls containing over 100 years of history. Early risers will be rewarded with coffee and wood-fired bagels from **Benchwarmers Bagels**. The midday and evening crowd will enjoy a variety of good eats from ham and cheese empanadas from **Che Empanadas** to bite-sized servings of Indian street food from **Chhote's**.

Sleep

What better way to soak up the historic atmosphere of the city than by staying in an 1858 Italianate-style mansion? **Heights House Hotel** was originally the private residence of influential Raleigh businessman William Montfort Boylan. Montfort Hall, as it was known, had many owners over the years, including the Baptist Church. In 2021, restoration was complete to turn the property into a small luxury hotel, maintaining many original features. With a grand entrance flanked by four Corinthian columns, a rotunda topped by a stained-glass cupola and details such intricate crown moulding and crystal chandeliers, Heights House Hotel is a stunning, unique property.

The hotel is in the historic Boylan Heights neighbourhood, which offers superb views of the downtown skyline from its hillside location. Walk the quiet, treelined streets to see magnificent Craftsman-style bungalows and Victorian homes with wrap-around porches. Stroll to **Boulded Bread** bakery for a morning pastry and coffee or reserve a table on the patio at **Wye Hill Kitchen & Brewing** to drink in a craft beer and unparalleled views. **Rebus Works** is tucked just under Boylan Bridge, offering coffee, sundries, and local gifts.

There is so much to see in Raleigh, we have just scratched the surface. Whether you visit the refurbished **Warehouse District** for hip restaurants and shops housed in century-old industrial buildings, or tour **North Carolina Executive Mansion**, you are sure to fall in love with Raleigh's blend of modern hospitality and historic charm. **UA**



Transfer Co. Food Hall



Heights House Hotel