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YOUR AAA MAGAZINE FEBRUARY 2018 | THE TOP 10

TOPIC: ROAD TRIPS

10 Things We Love in Raleigh, N.C.

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A copy of Antonio Canova's George Washington statue outside the North Carolina state capitol.
(Photo: SeanPavonePhoto / iStock / Thinkstock)

North Carolina's capital city is a delight to visit, with a compact downtown, thriving restaurant scene, exploding craft brewery industry and several free museums and green spaces. The walkable city is bursting with energy, and it can be fun to time your visit with one of the city's many festivals.

1. The **North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences** (look for its outdoor three-story multimedia globe), the **North Carolina Museum of History** and the **North Carolina Museum of Art** are all completely free. Admission is just \$5 at the excellent **Marbles Kids Museum**, where families can enjoy hands-on exhibits and educational programs.



The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.
(Photo:Eric Kinsley)

2. You can get into endless debates about what barbecue style is best, but any place that's been around for more than 75 years, like **Clyde Cooper's BBQ**, must be doing something right. The casual spot has been serving Carolina-style barbecue since 1938. Top lean pork shoulders are slow cooked until beyond tender and mixed with a secret barbecue sauce. Order a plate with hush puppies and collard greens for a classic meal.

3. Hop aboard the **Raleigh Brews Cruise**, a bus tour that takes visitors on a behind-the-scenes visit to three local breweries. Guides explain the brewing process, the different styles of beer, and what makes each brewery unique. Of course, multiple samples are supplied, and – best of all – someone else does the driving. Coolers are provided on the bus if you decide to pick up some beer to go.

4. One of city's more creative restaurants is **Bida Manda**, one of the few true Laotian restaurants in the U.S. The cuisine is a blend of Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese, with a dash of influences and techniques from its French colonial past. Crispy pork belly soup with coconut curry is outstanding, as are more familiar dishes like fresh summer rolls and pad thai. Servers will patiently walk you through the menu and following their advice is highly recommended.



An artfully plated dish at the Umstead Hotel and Spa.
(Photo:Umstead Hotel & Spa)

5. Located about 15 minutes from downtown, the luxurious AAA Five Diamond Rated **Umstead Hotel and Spa** is worth the drive. The six-story hotel sits on 12 acres filled with gorgeous gardens and a lake. It has an amazing collection of art, complimentary bicycles to borrow and an outdoor pool. Guests also have use of the spa facilities, including a steam room, sauna, whirlpool and pool, even if they don't book a treatment.

6. Raleigh is a real food-lover's town, and a great way to get a feel for the area is to take a **Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tour**. You'll meet chefs while enjoying their food, most of which features local ingredients. Guides also talk about the city's history and architecture along the way. Tours might visit five to seven restaurants and shops, and various types of walking tours are offered every weekend.

7. It's fun to browse the city's eclectic shops and boutiques. You'll find that one-of-a-kind something for yourself and all types of unique gifts in the **Warehouse District**, an enclave of creative entrepreneurs. Check out the **Raleigh Denim Workshop**, which uses local materials and artisanal methods to create an ideal pair of jeans, and the award-winning, bean-to-bar **Videri Chocolate Factory**, to name just two.

8. **North Carolina's state capitol** is a gorgeous Greek Revival-style building that was completed in 1940. Today, it's a National Historic Landmark that houses a museum and executive office space. Outstanding features include the domed rotunda, original 1840 furniture and a copy of **Antonio Canova's** statue of George Washington depicted as a Roman general, wearing a tunic, body armor and a cape. Free guided tours are offered Saturdays at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

9. To get your blood pumping, rent a bike and head to the Art to Heart Trail, part of the city's 104-mile **Capital Area Greenway System**. The route begins at the North Carolina Museum of Art, which has an outdoor art park and 3 miles of trails, then heads through **Pullen Park** and **North Carolina State University's campus**.

10. For a spooky end to the night, take a **Raleigh Haunted Footsteps Ghost Tour**, a 1.5-mile stroll that combines local ghost stories, folklore and history. You'll head to four different sites to hear about the capitol phantoms, a peg-legged ghost and the specters that haunt the area where the Yarborough House once stood.

Have you been to Raleigh? Tell us about it in the comments section below.

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