

Pack Your Bag, *Sweet Friend*

From the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Crystal Coast — the most magical weekend escapes within 2-3 hours of Raleigh



||
One of the very best things about living in our little corner of North Carolina is that we sit almost perfectly between the mountains and the sea. On a Friday afternoon, you can decide "beach" or "mountains" — and by dinnertime, you're there. I've been exploring this state my whole life, and I never get tired of it. Whether you're brand new to the area or a fellow longtime local, I hope this guide helps you fall even deeper in love with where we live.


— Whitney, House in Bloom Realty · Lifelong North Carolinian 🌸





 ~2 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Wilmington & Wrightsville Beach

The Classic NC Beach Weekend

 Wrightsville Beach — crystal-clear water, 4 miles of gorgeous barrier island, great for surfing & paddleboarding

 Historic downtown Wilmington riverfront — cobblestone streets, boutiques, the NC Battleship (open year-round, ~\$14)

 Want dog-friendly? Try Carolina Beach or Kure Beach — about 30 min further south


Wrightsville Beach

Historic Downtown

NC Battleship

Dog-Friendly Options

Fresh Seafood


 *Whitney's Note: The very first warm Friday in spring, half of Raleigh heads down I-40 — and for good reason! Go early, grab a waterfront table, and order the shrimp & grits. You can thank me later. 😊*


 ~2.5 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Beaufort, NC

America's Favorite Small Town — Crystal Coast Gem

 Ferry to Shackleford Banks to spot **wild banker horses** roaming free on the barrier island — truly unforgettable

 NC Maritime Museum (free!) — see actual artifacts recovered from Blackbeard's ship, the Queen Anne's Revenge

 Kayak Taylor's Creek, stroll the waterfront boardwalk, take a sunset boat tour — it's all perfectly charming


Wild Horses Ferry

Free Maritime Museum

Cape Lookout Seashore

Ghost Tours




Kayaking

 *Whitney's Note: Beaufort is one of NC's oldest and most enchanting towns. Walk Front Street at golden hour with an ice cream cone and you'll understand why people move here. It is **that** dreamy.*

 ~3-3.5 HRS FROM RALEIGH

The Outer Banks

Wild Horses, Lighthouses & Open Sky

-  See the **wild mustangs of Corolla** — descendants of Spanish horses, roaming the beach freely. Pure magic.
-  Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kitty Hawk — where history took flight on Dec. 17, 1903
-  Jockey's Ridge — the tallest living sand dune on the East Coast; incredible for hang gliding, sunset watching & photos


Wild Mustangs

5 Lighthouses to Hunt

Jockey's Ridge

Wright Brothers Memorial




Manteo Waterfront

 *Whitney's Note: Plan an overnight — the OBX deserves more than a day. Stay in Nags Head or charming Manteo for that quintessential NC coastal experience.*

 ~2.5 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Topsail Island

Quiet, Unhurried & Completely Lovely

-  Home to the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Hospital — tour the facility and meet recovering sea turtles (seasonal)
-  Fewer crowds than Wrightsville, slower pace — three towns to choose from: Surf City, Topsail Beach & North Topsail
-  Excellent shelling, fishing piers, cozy seafood spots & beautiful sunrises over the Atlantic


Sea Turtle Hospital

Uncrowded Beaches

Surf City

Shelling Paradise

Fishing Piers

 *Whitney's Note: If Wrightsville feels too busy, Topsail is your answer. It has that sleepy, old-Florida beach town feel that is getting harder and harder to find. Go before it changes!*






Mountain Escapes *crisp air & wide open views*

 ~4 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Asheville, NC

The Crown Jewel of the Blue Ridge

-  The Biltmore Estate — America's largest home, with stunning gardens, a winery & guided tours worth every penny
-  Downtown Asheville is an outdoor gallery — colorful murals everywhere, eclectic shops, world-class food scene
-  Surrounded by Blue Ridge hiking trails, swimming holes & waterfalls — paradise for outdoor lovers

Biltmore Estate

Vibrant Arts Scene

Hiking Trails

Craft Breweries




Swimming Holes

☀️ *Whitney's Note: A tiny bit over 3 hours but absolutely worth it — Asheville is one of the most special cities in the entire South. Go in fall for the most jaw-dropping leaf color you've ever seen in your life.*

 ~3 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Blowing Rock & Boone

Hallmark Movie Mountains — For Real

-  Blowing Rock — a stunning natural rock formation with panoramic Pisgah Forest views. Rocking chairs, fudge & Christmas shops downtown
-  Grandfather Mountain — the Mile-High Swinging Bridge will make your knees wobble; the views will steal your heart (~\$24)
-  Tweetsie Railroad (seasonal) — an iconic old-fashioned fun train adventure the kids absolutely love

Blue Ridge Parkway

Grandfather Mountain

Glen Burney Waterfalls

Tweetsie Railroad




Boone Breweries

☀️ *Whitney's Note: Blowing Rock's downtown is genuinely the coziest place on earth in the fall and at Christmas. Grab homemade fudge, drive the Parkway, and breathe deeply. You deserve it. 🍂*

 ~2 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Pilot Mountain & Hanging Rock State Park

Your Mountain Fix Without the Long Drive

-  Pilot Mountain's iconic Big Pinnacle — one of the most recognizable peaks in NC, wonderful for hiking & photography
-  Hanging Rock State Park — waterfalls, a mountain lake for swimming, and trails that feel like a true escape from it all
-  Yadkin Valley wine country is nearby — an afternoon of vineyard hopping is a wonderful pairing (literally!)



Pilot Mountain Views

Hanging Rock Waterfalls

Mountain Lake Swimming

Yadkin Valley Wine




Easy Hiking

 *Whitney's Note: This is the perfect "I need mountains but only have one day" answer. Two beautiful state parks within 20 minutes of each other — pair with a winery stop and call it a perfect Saturday!* 

 ~4 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Bryson City, NC

Great Smoky Mountain Magic

-  Great Smoky Mountains Railroad — a bucket-list train excursion through the most stunning mountain scenery in NC
-  Nantahala Outdoor Center — whitewater rafting, kayaking, hiking & riverside dining all in one gorgeous spot
-  Gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park — the most visited national park in America, and with good reason


Smoky Mountains Railroad

Whitewater Rafting

National Park Access

Quaint Downtown

Deep Creek Waterfalls

 *Whitney's Note: Worth every minute of the drive. Book the train in advance — it sells out! The Deep Creek trail to three waterfalls is gorgeous and perfect for families.*



Charming Small Towns *slow down & soak it in*


 ~2 HRS FROM RALEIGH

New Bern, NC

Bear Town — Birthplace of Pepsi & Rich History

 Historic Tryon Palace — stunning colonial governor's mansion with costumed tours & gorgeous gardens

 Pepsi was born right here in 1898! Visit the Pepsi Store downtown for nostalgic souvenirs and a slice of history

 Bear-themed everything (the name "Bern" means bear!) — adorable shops, Bear City Fudge, waterfront dining & more


Tryon Palace Tours

Birthplace of Pepsi

Riverfront Dining

Ghost Tours


Antique Shopping


 *Whitney's Note: New Bern is one of NC's most underrated gems. The Tryon Palace gardens in spring are absolutely breathtaking. And yes — get the Bear City Fudge. Non-negotiable. 🐻*


 ~1.25 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Pinehurst, NC

Elegant Village Charm & World-Class Golf

 Pinehurst No. 2 — hosted more US Open Championships than any other course in America. Non-golfers love this town too!

 The Carolina Hotel — a grand Southern resort with wide verandas, spa treatments & refined dining. Treat yourself!

 The Village of Pinehurst — charming pedestrian streets, boutiques, cafés & a gorgeous, peaceful pace of life


World-Class Golf

The Carolina Hotel Spa

Village Boutiques

Elegant Dining

Closest Getaway!

 *Whitney's Note: Only about 75 minutes away and it feels like an entirely different world. Perfect for a girls' spa weekend or a romantic anniversary trip — the Carolina Hotel is simply stunning.*

 ~2.5 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Mount Airy, NC

The Real-Life Mayberry — Andy Griffith's Hometown



The Andy Griffith Museum — a wonderful tribute to one of NC's most beloved sons, right in his actual hometown



Snappy Lunch — the famous diner Andy himself mentioned on The Andy Griffith Show. The pork chop sandwich is legendary



Old-Time Music Heritage Hall & Pilot Mountain State Park just minutes away — a full, wonderful weekend


Andy Griffith Museum

Snappy Lunch Diner

Pilot Mountain Nearby

Old-Time Music

Downtown Antiques

 *Whitney's Note: This is the sweetest, most wholesome little town. If you grew up watching The Andy Griffith Show, bring tissues — it feels just like coming home. ❤️*

 30-45 MIN FROM RALEIGH

Hillsborough & Pittsboro

Artsy, Unhurried & Perfectly NC



Wander into independent bookstores, pop into galleries, grab lunch at a locally-owned café — no plan needed



Eno River State Park (Hillsborough) — gorgeous trails, historic mill ruins & the most peaceful afternoon you can imagine



Craft breweries, local wineries nearby & beloved Saxapahaw's Haw River Ballroom music venue just down the road


Eno River Trails

Local Bookshops

Art Galleries

Craft Beer Scene

Barely a Drive!

 *Whitney's Note: When you just need one of those "no agenda" days — wander here. Hillsborough's Main Street will slow your heartrate in the best possible way. 🌿*

🚗 ~1 HR FROM RALEIGH

Rocky Mount, NC

The Comeback Town — Don't Sleep on It



Rocky Mount Mills — a beautifully renovated 1800s cotton mill now home to restaurants, breweries & live music



Tar River Trail — scenic riverside biking & walking right through the heart of town



River & Twine — a stunning boutique hotel right in the Mills complex, perfect for an easy overnight getaway

Rocky Mount Mills

Tar River Trail

Craft Breweries

River & Twine Hotel

Only 1 Hour Away!

☀️ *Whitney's Note: Rocky Mount doesn't get enough credit. The Mill complex is genuinely stunning and a wonderful date night or weekend spot. So close — so underrated!* ☀️

🚗 ~1.75 HRS FROM RALEIGH

Washington, NC

The Original Washington — Waterfront Serenity



The first US city to be named after George Washington — a beautifully preserved historic waterfront downtown



Pamlico River waterfront — kayaking, birding, sunset strolls & some of the most unspoiled Inner Banks scenery in NC



Nearby Goose Creek State Park — incredible wildlife including alligators, otters & spectacular birding trails

Historic Waterfront

Goose Creek State Park

Kayaking

Wildlife Spotting

Hidden Gem!

☀️ *Whitney's Note: Washington is one of NC's best-kept secrets. It's quiet, authentic & stunning — the kind of place that makes you exhale the moment you arrive.* 🌅



The Mountains. The Beach. *It's All Yours.*

One of the greatest gifts of calling Raleigh home is this: on any given Friday, you can choose your own adventure. Wild horses

or mountain waterfalls. Salt air or crisp pine. Fudge shops or fresh shrimp. The road is yours, sweet friend — go explore it.



🌸 House in Bloom Realty 🌸

Drive times are estimates from Raleigh and may vary by traffic and starting point. Always check seasonal hours for parks and attractions before you go. This guide is lovingly curated by your House in Bloom Realty team — because we believe home is also everything within reach of it.

Affiliated with LPT Realty · Serving Wake County & surrounding areas · Helping families bloom where they're planted 🌿

