

50 Things Every Charlottean Should Do

50 THINGS EVERY Charlottean SHOULD DO

{ [Click here for a printable checklist version of this list](#) }

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1.

Stay Put

This city defies darkness. That's an impressive accomplishment, to take something that's central to the earth's being and wound it so deeply that it's no longer a natural force but an accompaniment. The earth may win in many ways, but not this one. We have no true night. And to find anything close, we have to go to faraway places.

As Charlotteans, we're lucky. Those faraway places are pretty close, and we brag: *We're three hours from the beach! We're two hours from the mountains!* One of this city's appealing characteristics is that it's easy to roam from here. I've lived all over the state, and I've seen the most incredible sights from the Smokies to the sea, but it wasn't until I moved here that I discovered a great piece of Carolina beauty that nobody talks about: the view of sunset from east Charlotte. You can see it in a few places—rooftop patios in Plaza Midwood, overpasses that cross Independence Boulevard, the cover of this magazine.

The show starts every night with the sun, 92 million miles away, perched atop the tips of the skyline. As it drops, the plot progresses in natural order: yellow becomes orange and orange becomes red and the clouds become supporting characters, embracing or denying the colors of dusk. If you're there at just the right moment and stare long enough into those flaring, fiery colors, your eyes will adjust to the last light, and only in this one moment in this one city, those tall, electrified buildings become shadows of black. —M.G.

2.

WAIT IN LINE FOR
Price's
Chicken

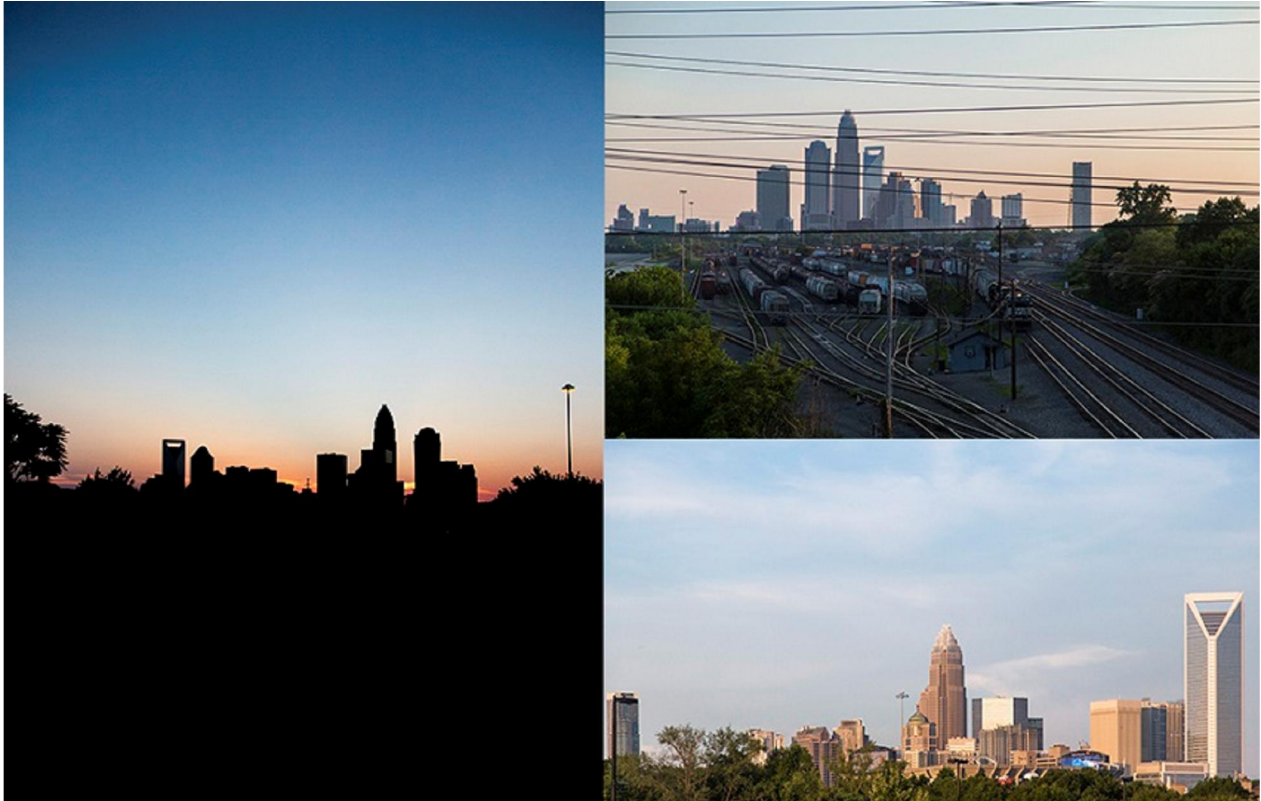
It's worth it.



Price's Chicken Coop, 1614 Camden Rd.

3.

FIND YOUR FAVORITE skyline shot



(Above) The last moment before sunset, photographed from the east at the Central Avenue bridge. **(Above, right)** NoDa provides one of the best views of the city at the Matheson Bridge. **(Bottom, right)** Bank of America Stadium is center stage in the skyline view from the west, here, taken from Suttle Avenue. Check out the Twitter results for #CLTSkyline [here](#).

4.

GET OUT → OF YOUR ← neighborhood

If you only watch the evening news, you might be afraid to drive to West Charlotte on a weekday. But if you turn west on Atando Avenue from North Tryon Street, the landscape will surprise you.

Past the warehouses and industrial lots, past the Family Dollar and check-cashing store at the intersection with Beatties Ford Road, the road widens. It's LaSalle Street now, and it's lined with stately trees and ranch houses built in the 1950s. Turn right on Senior Drive, and you'll see the same: a tree canopy shading a divided boulevard, flanked on one side by homes on suburban-style lots. Residents here live across the street from a high school that was once the pride of the black community. Then, throughout the 1970s and '80s, when white children were bused to West Charlotte High School from places like Eastover, the school became a national model of integration. People of all races would line these streets to cheer at the school's annual parade. "The whole community surrounded and supported the school," says Beverly Smith, an art teacher at West Charlotte who grew up in this area.

Some people still remember. You can see it in the occasional American flag and manicured lawn, in the trimmed hedges and long driveways. This part of West Charlotte is a testament to a different kind of history, a living record of brighter days. Not what you expected, is it? —*L.R.*

5.

Get to
KNOW
your
NEIGHBORS

...and not just the ones next door.

On a Saturday morning, a spattering of Plaza Midwood residents gather in Midwood Park, weeding in the community garden, hitting a tennis ball across the net, and watching as their kids give an impromptu performance on the amphitheatre stage. But if you don't live nearby, you probably don't know of the six-acre park on a dead-end street in the center of the neighborhood. Many of Charlotte's small neighborhood parks are just as hidden—from Cherry's petite, two-acre park on Baxter Street to Eastover's sweeping 19 acres. As you take in the green space, strike up a conversation with someone you don't know—you'll leave feeling more connected to your neighbors and to your city. To find your closest park, visit charmeck.org and use the interactive park locator. —*A.A.*

6.



Because that's ridiculous.

Off Elm Lane in south Charlotte, not far from Piper Glen, there's a cluster of boulders on the banks of Four Mile Creek. Big Rock, as it's called, served as a campsite for the first humans to pass through Mecklenburg County—about 12,000 years ago. The tribe left no

evidence of permanent settlements, no burial sites, no pottery. They never formed a written language. They hunted. They had families. They passed through.

History isn't always tangible, especially in Charlotte. The city has been known to raze historic places, but the history of a place isn't always proved by the existence of a building or a marker or photograph. It's a collective sense of place over time—an ever-evolving collection of the stories of those who pass through. That includes yours. —*V.B.*

7.

A wide-angle photograph of a large outdoor festival. In the background, a large, arched, metallic stage structure stands over a grassy area. Numerous people are scattered across the field, many sitting on colorful blankets or towels. In the foreground, several bright green and blue folding chairs are visible. The sky is overcast, and the overall atmosphere is that of a community gathering.

8.

9.



Princess, later Queen, Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, may have died 196 years ago, but that doesn't mean you can't get to know our city's namesake. The Mint Museum Randolph's permanent collection includes works dedicated to the one-time Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. —A.S.

10.

Don't be so surprised when you meet a native Charlottean. {This is Charlotte.}

11.



What's so damn funny?

When the mayor took bribes, you laughed. You found funny quotes in the affidavit, and you cracked little innocent jokes on the internet. It was cute. And then you learned that a strip club was one of the corrupt mayor's pet projects, and you acted like a giggling 13-year-old boy. Even the newspaper had fun. On its Twitter feed one day the paper wrote, "Topless!" exclamation mark and all.

The mood was so damn light around here that the man himself, Patrick Cannon, felt safe and loved enough to take a selfie and post it to Facebook—just smiling away a week after pleading guilty. A week. People commented like crazy on the picture, forgiving him, saying they'd vote for him again if they could. Then again, only about 18 percent of you showed up to the polls in the last mayoral election anyway.

You're too passive, Charlotte, oh Queen City of khaki pants and button-down shirts.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE.](#)

12.



Wave at people. Acknowledge strangers. This is the South.

13.

Know your leaders.

Attend the annual Mallard Creek Barbecue, held on the fourth Thursday of October—just before Election Day—at Mallard Creek Presbyterian Church in University (1600 W. Mallard Creek Church Rd.). All public officeholders show up, so you can give them an earful over pulled pork and Brunswick stew. —G.L.

14.



Though many of his adult years have been spent behind the scenes of Yiasou! Greek Festival, John Tsumas says his affiliation goes back even further. "I'm 40 years old," Tsumas says, "which means I've been with this church for 40 years and the festival for 36 years."

Tsumas, a Charlotte native, is president of the parish council at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral, the church behind one of the city's biggest annual cultural events. His duties with the festival include aiding production of meals and desserts. From September 4 through 7, tens of thousands of visitors will enjoy the live entertainment, games, vendors, and fresh food at Greek Fest. And even though you can get items like baklava in several places around town, it doesn't get more handmade than the hours-long baking sessions and preparation from church volunteers. "A group of many mothers and grandmothers are really the basis for everything happening," Tsumas says. "They have it down to a science."

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE.](#)

15.



Plenty of movies and TV shows filmed in Charlotte are in the works, such as Kevin Smith's upcoming horror film, *Tusk*. But you don't have to wait. Grab the popcorn, rent the following flicks and TV shows (all of which were filmed locally) and geek out at glimpses of Charlotte.

*The Hunger Games * Bad Grandpa*
Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby
*Shallow Hall * Richie Rich * Leatherheads*
*The Color Purple * Last of the Mohicans*
*Days of Thunder * Juwanna Man * Nell*
*Banshee * Homeland * Sleepy Hollow*
*The Bachelorette * Eastbound and Down*

Check out a sample of scenes and trailers filmed in Charlotte below. —A.S.

The Hunger Games - Girl On Fire Scene



TheHungerGames

Shallow Hal - Movie Trailer



Talladega Nights Crash & Fire Scene



16.



Charlotte's goal is to have 50 percent of the city shaded by 2050. We're now at 47 percent. Dig in the dirt with TreesCharlotte at one of its planting-season events from October to April, and let's keep our nickname as the City of Trees. treescharlotte.org —V.B.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT CHARLOTTE'S TREES.](#)

17.

Spend a day
on a Lake




With Lake Norman to the north and Lake Wylie to the south, we have a combined 45,900 surface acres of water and 845 miles of shoreline waiting for us within a half-hour drive of uptown.

18.



Amos' Southend welcomed Tanner Jones of You Blew It! to Charlotte this summer. Rock out.

It wasn't long after the **Double Door Inn** opened in 1973 that a blues guitarist named Stevie Ray Vaughan walked through the venue's doors. His first crowd drew six people—six—including the bartender. But like the venue's legendary status, and the Charlotte music scene as a whole, his audience grew over time. Now, it's not a question of where to see rock music in Charlotte; it's a matter of competition.

From legendary clubs to grand amphitheatres, there's no shortage of rock venues in town. For the outdoors experience, check out **Uptown Amphitheatre**, **PNC Music Pavilion**, and at certain times of the year, **U.S. National Whitewater Center**. Popular clubs and indoor venues include **Amos' Southend**, **Tremont Music Hall**, **The Fillmore**, **The Evening Muse**, **Visulite Theatre**, **Neighborhood Theatre**, and for fans of historical spots, **The Milestone** and **Double Door Inn**. If you must go big, go **Time Warner Cable Arena**, which hosts acts between major sports events. —A.S.

See the band above play a special acoustic song for the Revue blog here.

19.

get out OF TOWN

Charlotte Douglas International Airport ranked eighth in the nation in passenger traffic in 2013, transporting 43,457,471 travelers to regional and far-off destinations.

* **41** nonstop international destinations. Latest additions: Brussels, Belgium.

* **713** daily departures

* **9** major airlines

* **95** gates

* **1.8** million sq. foot terminal

* **5** concourses

* **150** nonstop destinations

20.

WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF *Revolutionary War* SOLDIERS

I walked the streets of uptown recently, looking at my phone like everyone else. This time, though, I was embarking on the Charlotte Liberty Walk.

Unveiled in 2012 by the Mecklenburg Historical Association and May 20th Society, the Charlotte Liberty Walk ties together 15 historic sites, each with plaques explaining their significance, and along the way, more than 100 pavers are placed in the sidewalks to guide you through the route.

I stood at the site of the original Queen's College, then moved along to the sites of Cook's Inn (where President George Washington once spent the night) and the Battle of Charlotte. I stepped into Thomas Polk Park.

But I spent the most time in Settlers' Cemetery. It's not creepy at all. Rather, it's intriguing to learn about the people who founded and settled in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in the late 1700s, while being reminded about the role religion played in this city's history and that the affluent had servants and slaves.

You can download a free Charlotte Liberty Walk app to your phone (charlottelibrarywalk.com), which includes details and audio for each of the historic sites. I spent about an hour and a half on the walk, fascinated by sites I'd passed so many times before but never gave much attention.

—J.H.

21.



The motorsports industry contributes about \$6 billion annually to our regional economy.

That's billion, with a "B."

22.

Be a **KID** again!



Walking through the gates at Carowinds on a warm June afternoon, it might as well be 20 years ago. Sure, this amusement park is modern and has grown since I was a kid, but it immediately evokes the same feelings. What am I brave enough to ride? What county-fair-like food am I going to eat? What games am I going to play to try to win a stuffed animal that's too big to carry?

There are kids everywhere. They sprint to get in line for rides like the Carolina Cobra (it goes upside down and backward) and Intimidator (inspired by Dale Earnhardt, the park says it's the tallest, fastest, and longest coaster in the Southeast). On this real-life throwback

Thursday, I decide to ride Thunder Road, one of the park's oldest roller coasters, first.

I strap into the seat. The train departs slowly, makes a couple of short turns, and here it is: the slow climb, and *that* sound. *Click, click, click, click* ... I take a deep breath, then whoosh! The deep drop, and we're speeding along the tracks, turn after turn, jerking, gliding. My eyes are closed, and if it

weren't for the lap bar, I'd be in the fetal position. After two minutes, it's over. I emerge victorious—at least, that's how I stroll from my seat: Not going to let these kids upstage me. —J.H.

**Other local attractions to unleash your inner kid: Discovery Place, Charlotte Nature Museum, Ray's Splash Planet, Lazy 5 Ranch, Carolina Raptor Center, ImaginOn, and Reed Gold Mine.*

23.



Eat fried pickles.

24.

Recycle everything you can.

Only 30 percent of Charlotte's residential landfill-bound trash was recycled or composted in fiscal year 2014. We need to do better.

25.

DON'T
assume
EVERYONE
works for a
BANK

If everyone you know works for a bank, meet new people. [See Nos. 5, 7, 8, 14, 28 ... well, you get the idea.]

26.

Gain perspective at
1,625 FEET



Crowders Mountain covers 5,126 miles and 20 trails. To get to the top, hikers have to climb 336 wooden steps.

When I was in high school and college, I worked a summer job installing siding and windows with my dad. One day, I stood on a scaffold about four feet off the ground and tried to remove a window. As I tugged on it, I fell backward into a bush. The branches were strong enough to support me but not so strong that I could push off of them. I couldn't reach the ground or the scaffold or the stepladders.

I hung there for a minute, relaxed, unseen branches holding me like a fly in a spider's web. I wanted to hover for hours. But I knew I should get back to work, so I crossed my arms over my chest and rolled back and forth until I fell out. It's been 20 years, but I still remember the peace I felt resting softly atop those branches. I couldn't easily get out and didn't want to. That feeling comes back to me every time I hike Crowders Mountain State Park.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE AND CHECK OUT A GALLERY.](#)

27.



At Food Truck Friday in South End, the lines start to build around 5 p.m. But after a long week of work, nobody seems to mind waiting and taking it slow.

He nods and gives a thumbs-up to a young girl walking by in a yellow Batman cape. At the Comfort Foods on Wheels truck, where the menu includes chicken 'n' waffles, fish 'n' chips, and shrimp 'n' grits, a grown man of about 40 walks by in a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles shirt. He's here at Food Truck Friday, though, and in this South End field of trampled grass people don't care how you dress.

In the line outside the Wingzza truck, two men in ties and rolled-up sleeves chat: "How's work?" "Work's been good." They can't complain, and if they did it wouldn't do them any good anyway.

The lines keep growing, different personalities in each one. Outside the Sal's Roadside Eatery truck, parents push strollers back and forth. Outside the OooWee Barbecue truck, people in flip-flops and sundresses line up for "organic, hormone-free, free-range" pork. Outside the Auto Burger and Fry Guys truck, beef-eaters.

Side by side are the strangest neighbors, the Roaming Fork "Bistro on Wheels truck" and the Masterbacon truck. The line for the bistro is neat and orderly, about what you'd expect from a place with blackened fish tacos. The crowd for the bacon truck is disorganized, with no real line at all, about what you'd expect from a place with bacon-wrapped hot dogs.

The local market nearby, the Common Market, has a line, too. It wraps from the checkout counter back through the funny birthday cards (a baby with a beard!), through the rack of bubble gum and Twix, past the bin of T-shirts, past the women's bathroom to the deli counter, then U-turns back around to the coolers of craft beer. It's a 30-minute wait to make a purchase, "or about two beers," says a guy in a purple tank top. It's a long line, but Journey's on the radio and people are softly humming and bobbing their heads to "Don't Stop Believin'," and eventually everyone buys something.

Back at the trucks, you should read every menu before selecting a line, because food is a choice and choice is freedom and freedom is what Friday night is all about, isn't it? Ponder the curry at The Herban Legend truck. Pet the dogs on leashes outside the Dog Haus Bakery truck. And take a long look at the menu of Papi Queso and say it to yourself, Grilled cheese? As a job? Why didn't I think of that?

The Tin Kitchen has octopus tacos on the menu, and it also has the longest line. So you think, if food is a choice and choice is freedom and all these people freely chose this, it must be good. And you want to be a part of it because being a part of something is what Food Truck Friday night is all about, isn't it?

People are eating all around the trampled field. At tables. In camping chairs. Sitting on the ground, knees to their chests. You're almost there, to the eating part, but the line's pretty long and soon you've forgotten what you'll order and why you're in this line at all: Was it the wings? The shrimp 'n' grits? The organic, hormone-free, bacon-wrapped fish hot dogs? There's Batman again.

Why would smart people do this? Why would we wait in one 30-minute line for beer, then another 45-minute line for food? We've been evolving for thousands of years, with most of our adaptations designed specifically to help us better secure food. After all those years tossing spears at fish and shooting arrows at buffalo and crying over lost crops, we've made it here, to standing in line for food on wheels. Just when it all seems too ridiculous, the woman behind you says she can't wait to eat the octopus tacos, and some guy wearing a "Save Ferris" T-shirt comes lollygagging by, and you remember: At Food Truck Friday, it's not really about the food. —M.G.

28.

SPEND HAPPY HOUR AT Common Market



The patio at the Common Market in South End attracts crowds whenever the weather is fine. Sip a craft beer at an outdoor table and you're bound to meet someone interesting.

One Friday evening a few months after I moved to town, I sat alone at the bar at the Common Market in South End, waiting for a friend to arrive.

Sipping a beer, I willed the dark liquid to ease my discomfort. My friend—one of approximately three people I knew in this supposedly hospitable city—was late, and the strangers surrounding me were too engrossed in their own festivities to care.

Then a couple appeared on my left. Isra was boundlessly warm and chatty, a transplant from Philadelphia who raved about Charlotte's symphony and local theater. Her partner, Haakon, a lawyer from Minnesota, was quiet and kind. They are Common Market regulars—the people who know what band will be playing on Saturday nights and stake out seats among the crowds on Food Truck Fridays. I left the bar, thrilled

to discover friends who made me feel welcome in a new city.

But I didn't see them again for months. We exchanged text message and last-minute invites, never able to make firm plans. Finally, six days after the 2013 New Year, Isra and Haakon threw a party, and I was determined to attend.

That night, Isra introduced me to a man with warm brown eyes and an affinity for random trivia. "This is Dr. Love," she said, drawing out the last word as if he were a late-night radio host. He laughed, and explained that he's not really a doctor. But his last name is Love, and he and I have dated ever since. Turns out, he's also a regular at the Common Market. —*L.R.*

29.



Go see the "Miracle on the Hudson" plane.

It's a permanent exhibit at Carolinas Aviation Museum.

[CLICK HERE TO READ OUR STORY ABOUT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE MIRACLE ON THE HUDSON.](#)

30.



Eat a \$1.50 Cheese & Jalapeno Tamale from Las Delicias Bakery at 4405 Central Avenue.

31.

Cheer on the Charlotte Knights.

READ ABOUT THE KNIGHTS' MOVE TO CHARLOTTE HERE.

32.

SPEND AN AFTERNOON ON A BLANKET AT *Freedom Park*



Freedom Park also offers free jazz during the summer. The next show is August 16. Whatever problems Charlotte has, they fade when you step on the grounds of this mid-city refuge, whether it's to play on the swings, go for a run, or just sit and relax. Watch long enough and you'll start to think solutions to those problems might be right here.

There's a boy in bright yellow socks and a navy blue T-shirt. Everyone follows him, wherever he runs, wherever he plays. He soars off the swings, his head wet from the clouds, until he crashes to the ground. He draws a line in the mulch where he lands, daring everybody: beat that. Charlotte needs that kind of attitude.

Behind him, a fisherman and fisherwoman spend the morning with lines in the stream and a bag of groceries at their feet. Whether they catch anything could not be less important. Charlotte needs a little of that, too.

A man runs by. He slows, bends over, catches his breath. He repeats this as he makes his way along the path that leads out of the park. But he always starts running again.

A teacher summons her 20 students to line up. Each kid wears an ugly purple shirt with uglier pink writing. All except the 19th in line. She looks resplendent in her flowered dress. The rest of the kids dutifully walk behind the teacher. She dances along to music only she hears. Freedom Park, indeed. —M.C.

33.



They rarely get a night off, so when they do, they're not wasting it on mediocre food. Here's where three local chefs eat when they're not on the line. —A.A.

"For just kind of a hole-in-the-wall place, we go to Miguel's. It's on a service road off I-85—literally a stone's throw from the airport. Best fajitas in town, best patio in town, best margaritas in town. It's a tiny little place and it's run by a family and they've been open for 10 or 15 years. It's solid. That's what I look for in a dining experience. I don't look to be wowed every time. It's tasty and the owners are friendly." —Chris Coleman, executive chef, *The Asbury*

"I have a five-year-old, so we go to Smashburger. I get the truffle mushroom burger with fries. There's a place on the corner of Park Road and 51 called Musashi. It's a Japanese restaurant. If I have a night off—I have a 21-year-old, too—if we have a night off together, that's where we tend to go. It's got a really nice Japanese menu. They have a carpaccio that I love. And a beef and tofu soup, kind of like a French onion soup with beef in it. It's really good. It's got no ambiance; there's a hockey stick on the wall—I don't get it. But it's good." —Bruce Moffett, chef and owner, *Moffett Restaurant Group*

"All the places I always want to go are closed on Mondays [when Heirloom is closed]. I just went out this past week to The Asbury. Me and my sister went there for dinner and had a fantastic time. That's probably the best restaurant on a Monday for sure. Apart from that, Mama Ricotta's is my guilty pleasure. I worked there when I was in culinary school back in 2005. I worked the pizza station there. Frank Scibelli is one of my mentors and just a super great guy. I sort of go back and forth between the pastas and the chicken dishes. Most of the time I cook at home. I really just love cooking, so even on my days off I'm still going to cook." —Clark Barlowe, chef and owner, *Heirloom*

34.

Pull for the PANTHERS and the HORNETS
NO MATTER WHERE YOU
GREW UP

The balloon made it real.

My friend Chris and I stared at it, bobbing in the chilly January wind, wondering how we got here. We're both from the Washington D.C. area, born into families that were crazy about the Redskins. But we live in Charlotte now, and we watch our hometown team together on Sundays. As the Skins' failures mounted last year, we found ourselves turning one eye to Panthers' games. We'd sarcastically joke, "Lifelong Panthers' fans here." Until one day we wound up in the parking lot of Bank of America Stadium, tailgating before the Panthers' playoff game against the 49ers. Another friend, a Giants fan, joined us.

Chris had purchased a Panthers balloon from the grocery store. He tied it to the door of his car. It flew high against the backdrop of the Charlotte skyline, and we all took pictures of it and sent them back home. —M.G.

35.

ROOT FOR THE OTHER home teams



Sin Plicity skates as the “Jammer” for the Charlotte Roller Girls. The jammer scores points by passing the other team.

There are only eight Major League Lacrosse teams in the nation. Charlotte has one. The 25 members of the Charlotte Hounds might not be the best in the league—in fact as of late June, they were tied for sixth in the standings—but they don’t lack heart.

“There is nothing like walking into Memorial Stadium and playing in front of a packed crowd cheering for the home team,” says defenseman Ryan Flanagan, a University of North Carolina graduate. “Every game the opposition talks about how tough it is to play here because of how loud and engaged our fans are. As a Hound, I absolutely love it—the Royal Legion of the Hound banging on the drums; fireworks during player introductions; Blue, our mascot, running through the crowd; the sun setting with the Charlotte skyline in the background ... [all] make Charlotte a really special place to play.”

Charlotte also has a professional soccer team (the Eagles), and the Charlotte Roller Girls flat track roller derby. —V.B.

36.

Spend a day at the U.S. National Whitewater Center.



37.

Sip on the best IPA *in the world*.

NoDa Brewing Company's Hop, Drop, 'n Roll American-style IPA won 2014 World Beer Cup gold. (2229 N. Davidson St.)

[READ MORE ABOUT HOP DROP'S ORIGINS HERE.](#)

38.

Get Lost.

Whether you've lived here a day or a decade, getting lost in Charlotte is always one wrong turn away. Street names change without warning and sometimes even intersect with themselves (Queens and ... Queens?). If you long for an orderly city with an easy-to-navigate grid, move right along. But if you can embrace the tree-lined avenues that wind along the boundaries of the old farms that once surrounded the city's center, every commute feels like an urban adventure. —A.A.

39.

DISCOVER A secret garden

It's not an easy place to find. There are no billboards or road signs directing you there, no big advertising campaign. Still, since 1966, the UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens (9090 Craver Rd.) has remained quietly on the east side of UNCC's campus.

The first of two gardens, named after Susie Harwood, mother of Ralph Van Landingham, is home to exotic ornamentals—40 selections of Japanese maples, spider azaleas, unusual evergreens—plus a gorgeous Asian garden. Take the “hydrangea walk,” lush with the flowers' blues and whites in early summer, or just sit on one of several benches and watch the wildlife work.

Garden two, the Van Landingham Glen, showcases the native plants of the Carolinas. A meandering stream trickles by redbuds and maples, magnolias and oaks.

The Botanical Garden, which is free and open to the public, has welcomed visitors from 49 states and more than 30 countries, according to the guest log.

Don't you think it's time you stop by?

*Other secret gardens worth finding: Wing Haven Gardens & Bird Sanctuary (248 Ridgewood Ave.) and the McGill Rose Garden (940 N. Davidson St.) —V.B.

40.

Go hunting.



You might visit Metrolina Tradeshow Expo's Spring Spectacular or Fall Extravaganza (Oct. 29-Nov. 2) for the things you're in the market for—antique doorknobs or a vintage chair—but you'll likely leave with fun collectibles you couldn't pass up. Twice a year, hundreds of dealers showcase thousands of items—vintage road signs, Pez dispensers, first-edition books, that Quimper teapot you need to round out your collection, Civil War memorabilia, mint-condition coins, and antique furniture—across more than 100 acres just north of uptown. —V.B.

41.

Share With Nature.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Most cities of more than a million people have to consider rats wildlife. But in Charlotte, a city packed with 210 parks and dozens of miles of manicured greenway, even the most urban backyard often sees interesting visitors, from deer to owls, hawks, and hummingbirds.

42.

Eat This.

Looking for a true taste of Charlotte?

Here are three ways to find it.



Moon Pie ice cream. The Moon Pie was the “official snack cake” of NASCAR from 1998 to 1999. You can pick up the classic graham cracker-chocolate-marshmallow confection at almost any convenience store, but if you’d like a more upscale version, try the Moon Pie ice cream at Cabarrus Creamery in Concord (\$2.75 for the generous “baby” size).

Fried bologna sandwich. During Charlotte’s heyday as a mill town, it was common for blue-collar workers to snack on these hearty, greasy sandwiches. The standard, a thick slice of bologna fried on a griddle, slapped on a bun, and topped with chili, onions, and mustard can still be found on menus across the city. Four places to find it: The Diamond (\$4.95, order it “Southern style”), Pinky’s Westside Grill (\$5.25, order it “Westside”), Brooks’ Sandwich House (\$2.95, order it “all the way”), and Tavern on the Tracks (\$8.25).

Moonshine cocktails. Most people know NASCAR’s bootlegging roots, and now that moonshine is legal—assuming you’re not making it in a backyard still—it’s a go-to for local mixologists. Three to try: Halcyon’s Sparkle ‘n Shine (\$11), made with Troy & Son’s Moonshine, lemon, strawberry coriander syrup, and sparkling wine; Moonswine Mary (\$10) at Tupelo Honey, a Bloody Mary spinoff that adds jalapeño-poblano-infused moonshine to the restaurant’s house-made mix and a garnish of maple-peppered bacon and pimento

cheese-stuffed olives; and the moonshine bar at Ten Park Lanes, where there are a dozen varieties on tap. —A.A.

43.



Because you don’t have to deal with 15-foot snow drifts.

44.

Stay in Town for Christmas.

It started in 1956 with just nine trees. Today, more than 375 trees, from six- to 90-feet tall, sparkle with white and colorful lights in McAdenville every Christmas season, welcoming more than 600,000 visitors a year. Pile the out-of-town family in a car, warm up the cocoa, and take a drive through Christmas Town USA. —V.B.

45.

Explore Uptown, without going outside.

Because of our weather (see No. 43), it's often unnecessary, but as a bonus Charlotte has a labyrinth of indoor paths tunneling through the buildings uptown. The Overstreet Mall connects modern atriums decorated with trees (yes, inside) and artwork with high-end restaurants. Fast-food shops—chains and non-chains—share halls with quaint local shops, and you can people watch at one of several coffee shops. Plus, at Christmastime, all paths lead to Founders Hall's chorus of holiday bears. All this, without ever hitting a sidewalk. —V.B.

46.

GO TO Church



If you're not one of the thousands of Charlotteans who attend one of the city's hundreds of churches every week, catch a live music show at McGlohon Theater (345 N. College St.) or join a dulcimer jam with the Charlotte Folk Society at the Great Aunt Stella Center (926 Elizabeth Ave.). Splurge on a glass of wine and lobster tail at Bonterra Dining and Wine Room (1829 Cleveland Ave.) in Dilworth, or meet the artists in residence at the McColl Center for Art + Innovation (721 N. Tryon St.). All are housed in historic churches. —V.B.

47.

CATCH A
flick
AT THE
HISTORIC
MANOR
THEATRE

48.

Ditch the Car.

Today begins with strangers I've known for more than a year.

As a loyal customer of the Charlotte Area Transit System since last June, I see many of the same folks on a daily basis. I know their family dynamics, their destinations. I know which ones let the elderly take their seats, and which will greet me. (Most, in fact. They can check off No. 12.)

But we're all particularly tired this morning, exchanging mild pleasantries as if our moms are making us do it. My daily ride on Route 9 (Central Avenue) lasts an average of 45 minutes, and it usually begins like this: For the first few minutes, we're all just coming to terms with that fact that it's 7 a.m. and we're on a bus. By the trip's midpoint, we're talking weather here, the Charlotte Hornets, or what the weather's like somewhere else.

So why do I do this? Each day, I'd tell you something different, depending on who I felt like at that moment.

Mr. Pragmatic: I can get anywhere for two bucks, without involving my own giant, expensive machine.

Mr. Save the World: The buses use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, and many of them use filters that cut emissions by 90 percent. I'm a good person by association.

Mr. People-Watcher: This is the *real* Charlotte. The fascinating folks I meet and dramas I see unfold would make great ensemble films. Yes, I'd play me.

But are there bad days? Sure, I've been a single step too late trying to catch a bus to an important meeting. And it does get crowded, though despite what people tell you, it never smells that bad. I've witnessed arguments, teenage couples who refuse to come up for air, and fussy babies, three hours past naptime.

But today was normal, which means I've saved money, decreased my emissions, and have taken part in a mobile melting pot with people I never would have met otherwise. For me, it works. So, why don't you take a ride? I'll give you my seat, even if you're not elderly. —A.S.

Check out the city's guide to being a considerate rider below.



49.

Get to Know Your Food.

A few weeks ago, I waited for 10 minutes at the Yorkmont Farmers Market to buy a single ingredient for my weekly stir-fry. There were a few other vendors selling garlic scapes, the garlicky, green bean-like curls that grow from the tops of garlic plants in the spring. But this farmer had the most beautiful scapes—and he was selling them by the pound instead of the bunch. I waited while he chatted with several shoppers, all of us drawn to his huge pile. This is why I come to the market, why I patiently wait in line for 10 minutes when I can hardly be counted on to wait in the checkout line at Harris Teeter without releasing several exasperated sighs when the woman in front of me whips out her checkbook (sigh) and then searches for her drivers license (sigh) for what feels like an eternity (sigh).

I love the enthusiasm of the farmers, the pride they take in their produce. I love hearing the farmers' advice on how to cook their offerings, and eavesdropping as shoppers share their favorite recipes. (I also do this, inserting my favorite recipe for garlic scape pesto into the conversation: 10 raw, trimmed garlic scapes, a third of a cup of shredded Parmesan, a small handful of pine nuts, a little olive oil—pulse in a food processor until it comes to a paste-like consistency, adding oil as needed. Toss over hot pasta with a splash of pasta water to loosen it into a sauce. Die happy.)

When I reach the front of the line, I request my scapes, and the farmer remembers me. Not by name, by face. As he weighs out two pounds (garlic scapes are a once-a-year vegetable and I take full advantage), he asks about the pesto. We chat for a moment, and he smiles as I hold up a scape for my five-month-old to smell. Then he's on to the next customer.

This is my favorite way to embrace the local food trend. Yes, I see the names of local farms on restaurant menus all over the city, and I can appreciate the extra effort and flexibility that commitment requires from a chef. But until you've chatted with a farmer about her harvest or headed to the market five Saturdays in a row hoping that this will be the week the sweet-as-candy Sungold tomatoes are finally ripe, "local food" is just a phrase. —A.A.

50.

Be proud of your city.

There's a reason you live here.