

North Carolina is “pretty near perfect” one person said. And she is right. With beautiful mountains, some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, four beautiful seasons and some of the most exciting growing cities and cultural centers in the country, it's hard to beat.

In the west, you have the beautiful Blue Ridge and Smoky mountains and all the joy of mountain sports: hiking, biking camping, rock climbing even skiing in the winter. The Pisgah National Forest and the Great Smoky Mountain National Park are two of the most beautiful in the country. The dramatic Blue Ridge Parkway, also a national park, runs right through some of the Blue Ridge Mountains. A scenic roadway running from Virginia to Tennessee, the Parkway affords some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world.

In the mountains, there is great time honored culture all its own: old mountain music, bluegrass music, and the beautiful tradition of hand crafts of all kinds. One of the most unique places to view these crafts and the artisans at their work is the Penland School of Crafts in Bakersville.

On the east Atlantic coast are the beaches. They are breath taking, particularly those of the Outer Banks where wild horses roam protected over sea swept beaches, stark, in places, in their lack development. There is great history here, too. For example, there is the dramatization of The Lost Colony in Manteo, depicting the founding of the first American colony on this soil. There are numerous national and state parks on the shore, too, both adventuresome and historic. Check your national and state park websites for North Carolina.

Of historic interest, too is the living history village of Old Salem in Winston Salem. This is the restored village of the Moravians, a German religious sect that settled this area of North Carolina in the 1700's. It is particularly lovely during the holiday season, with many festive decorations and occasions.

Some of the cities you may want to visit are Charlotte, Raleigh and Asheville. Located in the heart of the Blue Ridge mountains, Asheville has become a mecca for artists, writers and creative outlets.. The famed Biltmore Mansion is located here. There are many smaller, beautiful mountain towns in the area as well, such as Tryon and Saluda. Raleigh, the capital city, offers many museums and cultural attractions, as does Charlotte. One of the most exciting, growing cities in the country, Charlotte is fast becoming a financial center of the nation. The Research Triangle Park of Raleigh Durham Chapel Hill is home to some of the most progressive and exciting research in the country and, with over 100 colleges, universities, and junior colleges in North Carolina, education factors high on the Carolinians' list.

All of this is exciting, but if you miss the exquisite waterfalls, hiking trails and views in the mountains or the tranquil and inspiring beaches, you will just have to come back, again and again.