



# CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

Hit the culinary and cultural highlights of one of the South's great college towns

BY JENNIFER BRADLEY FRANKLIN

The Carolina Inn

**Chapel Hill**, home to the University of North Carolina (UNC), has that elusive blend of qualities that makes for an ideal weekend destination: instantly comfortable yet demanding to be explored. It's like the brainiac scholar who happens to be good-looking and fun. While you're out and about, expect to encounter baby-faced undergrads, top-of-their-field professors, and a mix of smart locals befitting a Research Triangle town. Here's a proposed itinerary that will sample beloved dining institutions and cool cocktail spots, with stops at a few on-campus cultural gems.

Friday

**CHECK-IN** > Drop your bags in one of the traditionally decorated rooms and suites at **The Carolina Inn**. Opened in 1924 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the stately Colonial Revival-style building is perched on the hill for which the town is named. Its prime location on the northwest corner of the UNC campus is just a block from Franklin Street, downtown's main thoroughfare, making it an ideal home base. Walls and lounge areas throughout are peppered with Tar Heel memorabilia and photos of noteworthy alumni, from actor Andy Griffith to basketball legend Michael Jordan.

**EVENING** > Get the sun-tinged lay of the land at **Top of the Hill Restaurant & Brewery**, where you can enjoy the view with a Bell Tower Blueberry Wheat. Then head to **Il Palio**—located a short drive away in





Il Palio



The Crunkleton



Morehead Planetarium &amp; Science Center



Thirteen West

the city's other signature hotel, the Siena—for an upscale Italian dinner. Chilled oysters with Prosecco mignonette, burrata-stuffed ravioli with lobster, and espresso-rubbed beef tenderloin with 12-year balsamic are just a few of the menu's highlights. Finally, head back downtown and settle into a high-backed leather stool at **The Crunkleton**, a bar that's amassed a loyal following since 2008 but feels older, with its vintage books and imposing taxidermy. Order one of more than 100 bourbons straight, or have the bartender whip up a flawless Negroni, Sazerac, or elderflower sour to cap off the evening.

### Saturday

**MORNING** > Don't be deterred by the line of cars trailing onto the street at the drive-thru-only **Sunrise Biscuit Kitchen**—it moves fast. Plus, the fluffy buttermilk cathead biscuits, made from owner David Allen's grandmother's recipe, are worth every minute of the wait. Add your choice of pairings (including fried chicken or pork chop), and you'll discover why breakfast here has drawn a crowd since 1984. Then, make the 10-minute drive to the **Carrboro Farmers Market**, a Saturday-morning tradition for more than 40 years. All the goods at this producer- and artisan-run market—from handwoven rugs and pottery to fresh pasta and produce—come from within a 50-mile radius. While you're in the neighborhood, swing by **Car Mill Mall**, the 1898 cotton mill that's now a shopping destination. Find Carolina-crafted gifts and fashion at **Thirteen West** and gentle skincare products made on-site at **Hidden Forest Naturals**.

**AFTERNOON** > Ask locals for a restaurant recommendation, and you're likely to hear, "You have to go to **Mama Dip's!**" Founded in 1976 by Mildred "Mama Dip" Council, who passed away in 2018, the comfort-food institution serves favorites like chicken and dumplings, barbecue pork ribs, sweet potato biscuits, and banana pudding. Dine family-style or order a la carte, then walk off your lunch at UNC's **Morehead Planetarium & Science Center**, the South's first planetarium, founded in 1949. Learn about the center's impact on space exploration (John Glenn and Neil Armstrong trained here), and finish with a showing of *Carolina Skies*, an ethereal, narrated look at the heavens on a 68-foot-wide screen. For another visual treat, head to **Ackland Art Museum**, where the permanent collection includes works by Diego Rivera and Andy Warhol. (On tap for fall: Asian masterworks from the Rockefeller collection.)

**EVENING** > Prepare to go high-low tonight: First up is dinner at **Hawthorne & Wood**, where chef/owner Brandon Sharp (who helped Napa's Solbar earn seven consecutive Michelin stars) creates art on every plate. The moody dining space, with olive banquettes, brass sconces, and fish-scale-tiled bar, accents globally inspired dishes like shrimp remoulade served alongside

# Weekend Getaway

spiced fried saltines; chilled English pea soup with delicate crabmeat; and sauteed flounder with coconut-lemongrass broth over jasmine rice. After you've wined and dined like royalty (or at least like a prospective scholar-athlete), make your way to downtown dive **He's Not Here**, so named for the standard answer bartenders give to girlfriends who call looking for their beaus. Find a spot in the breezy courtyard and sip a Mother Earth Brewing Long Weekend IPA from the bar's keepsake Carolina blue plastic cups.

Sunday

**MORNING** > Wake up your senses with a walk around **Coker Arboretum**, a five-acre copse of fall color right on campus. Tours are offered every third Saturday; otherwise, relax in the grassy areas or on the plentiful benches. Make one last stop at filling-station-turned-restaurant **Merritt's Grill** to fuel your trip home.



This Chapel Hill staple has doled out the carbs since 1992; just about everything is served between slices of fresh-baked bread. While you'll find flavorful chicken salad, small-batch pimento cheese, and all manner of breakfast sandwiches, it's the extraordinary BLT, made with ultra-crisp bacon, vine-ripened tomatoes, and crunchy lettuce, that will have you dreaming of a return visit.



## MORNING JOLT

*A superior caffeine scene fuels students, locals, and weekend explorers*

### DRINK IN HISTORY

Pouring since 1922 out of a former student post office, **Carolina Coffee Shop** is the state's oldest continuously running restaurant. Now serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as coffee and cocktails, it's known for its spectacular French toast.

### SIP IN THE WOODS

**Caffe Driade**, set in a tree-shaded garden ("driade" means wood nymph in Italian), is equal parts coffee bar, wine bar, and teahouse. Order a local Carrboro Coffee Roasters brew and Ninth Street Bakery biscotti.

### UP YOUR GAME

Thai iced latte (espresso, cardamom, cinnamon, and condensed milk), sparkling matcha lemonade, and on-tap nitrogen-infused cold brew are favorites at **La Vita Dolce**.

MERRITT'S GRILL

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