

North Carolina tourism officials make a pitch for Canadian visitors

Travel Talk

MIKE COHEN



Dollard des Ormeaux native Stephanie Freed-Burns is the Canadian public relations manager for Visit North Carolina (www.visitnc.com), the official tourism organization for the state. Based in Toronto, she was here in Montreal in late February for a series of media sessions alongside regional representatives from Raleigh, Charlotte, Durham, Transylvania County, Johnston County and the Outer Banks. I took part in the event at Marcus Restaurant at the new Four Seasons Hotel. At that time none of us knew that the COVID-19 pandemic would take us hostage and certainly delay any travel plans. When matters normalize, this looks like a fun destination.

The State of North Carolina sure did come across to me as impressive. What does it have to offer? Professional sports teams in the NFL, NHL and NBA; college sport powerhouses like Duke and North Carolina State; world class BBQ and incredible southern fusion cuisine; funky and artsy Mountain towns; unique boutique accommodations; epic cycling routes all the way to the stunning Outer Banks beaches with unparalleled windsurfing and fishing; great art museums, music; and shopping in Charlotte and Raleigh. In 2018 Air Canada launched new direct service to Raleigh from Montreal.

From the misty mountains to the sunny coast, the North Carolina travel experience offers endless dimensions of natural beauty, urban vitality, history, arts and culture, outdoor adventure, culinary craft and artisan drink. In the mountains, you can surround yourself with scenic beauty while picnicking, hiking, golfing, or whitewater rafting and rock climbing. In the winter, ride the slopes on skis, tubes or snowboards. Find serenity on snowshoes. In central North Carolina, you can find one-of-a-kind shopping, tee off on one of the state's more than 400 golf courses and experience the "home" of NASCAR. Sample wine at one of North Carolina's wineries or step back in time at a Civil War battlefield. Along the coast, why not dive into water sports like boating, swimming and saltwater fishing;



Looking Glass Falls in Brevard, one of 250 waterfalls in North Carolina

climb historic lighthouses and bask in the warm sun on the Atlantic coastline. Savor Eastern Carolina barbecue and Calabash seafood.

I especially appreciated the format of this program. Journalists sat at different tables and the tourism reps rotated, ensuring to sit next to each of us to chat. Stephanie kept a close eye on proceedings and made sure we had sufficient time to ask all of our questions. In addition, we got to enjoy a delicious breakfast.

Raleigh: This city (www.visitraleigh.com) is considered one of the hottest destinations in the country. RDU International Airport currently averages approximately 400 daily arrivals and departures and service to 60 plus destinations via non-stop flights. There are plenty of activities, dining spots and some really nice looking hotels.

Durham: Perhaps the best testimonial about what a nice place Durham (www.discoverdurham.com) is to visit and even reside comes from Veda Gilbert, the public relations manager. A native of Australia, she took a shine to this place after multiple visits and it was

enough to call it home. It is known for a celebrated food scene, top-notch universities and a buzzing start-up culture, inspiring and absolutely alluring.

Charlotte: Charlotte (www.charlottesgotalot.com) is a city on the rise. It has been recognized as the top travel destination in the Carolinas, the number one "up-and-coming city in America" by Yelp, and is also one of the fastest-growing major cities in the U.S. This year, the city will be in the national spotlight again as Charlotte will host the Republican National Convention in August. Charlotte is also described as a blend of inventive chefs, talented artists, fierce athletes and mission-minded game-changers: equal parts funky and eclectic, traditional and charming. Thus places are reportedly a mix of night owls, early risers and all-day adventurers.

Brevard: Brevard and Transylvania County (www.explorebrevard.com) are the home of North Carolina's Land of Waterfalls. "There are 250 in our region," said Nathan Jordan, whose advertising firm promotes the area. Jordan said that the region draws a lot of outdoor adventure seekers and cyclists. Brevard and Transylvania County is two hours from Charlotte. Here you will also spot white squirrels.

The Outer Banks: The Outer Banks (www.outerbanks.org) features uncrowded beaches that stretch for miles and the endless possibilities that come with them. This is recognized as America's First Beach, the site of the country's first National Seashore and the place where the English first tried to settle in the New World. National and state parks share those stories and more.

Johnston County: Johnston County (www.johnstoncountync.org) is a destination rooted in history, located just 30 minutes east of Raleigh, and convenient for visitors traveling through North Carolina at the crossroads of I-95 and I-40. Its rich history runs deep. Visitors are invited to learn about their farming history at the Tobacco Farm Life Museum, discover a connection to Hollywood at the Ava Gardner Museum, and stand in the echo of battles fought, at the 155th Anniversary Bentonville Battlefield Reenactment, March 21-22.

Mike Cohen's email address is info@mikecohen.ca. Follow his travels at www.sandboxworld.com



The Charlotte skyline – one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S.