

Carolina country *Adventures*



Carolina Country Adventures



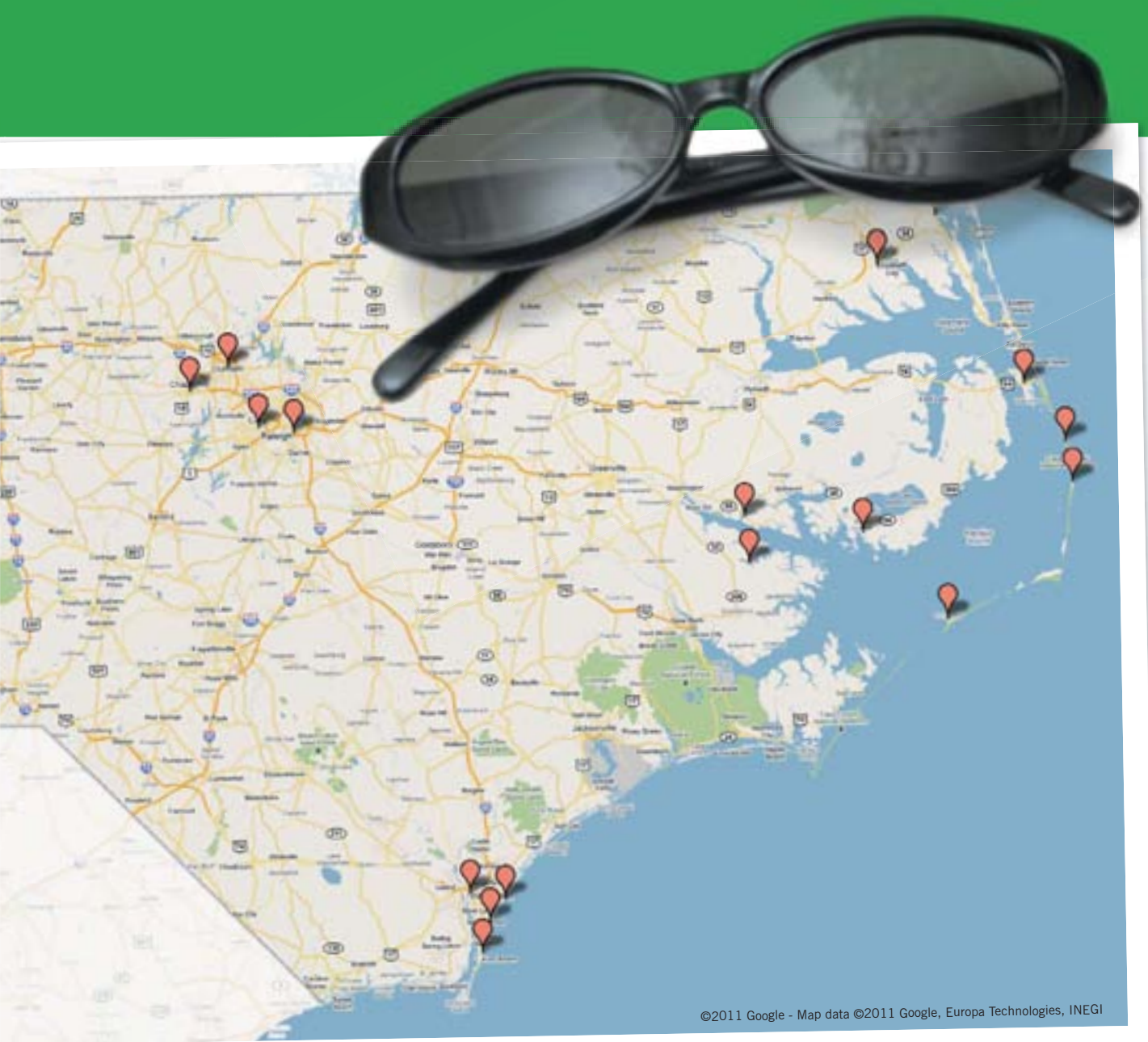
From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat and how we talk varies from one region to another.

Our annual Touchstone Energy Travel Guide encourages you to experience this variety firsthand.

This year, we offer you six great travel stories about interesting areas in the mountains, Piedmont and coast. We've also updated the primary sources of general information about regions in our resource listings. The adventures we offer may be familiar to you, or they may not. In any case, each holds the promise for a lot of travel fun.

As you make your way through this guide and through the countryside, you can be assured that a Touchstone Energy cooperative is nearby.

Thanks to everyone who helped us compile this guide, and to our sponsors: the cooperatives and the advertisers on pages 36 to 38.



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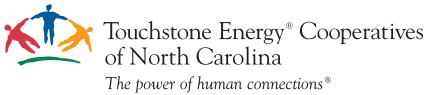
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This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement. Send comments and corrections to editor@carolinacountry.com



Carolina Country Adventures

By Karen Olson House



Food Tours in The Triangle

It was a rainy day, but that didn't stop our Saturday afternoon tour. No one's spirits seemed dampened either—on the contrary, our group of about 12 seemed almost giddy with mouth-watering anticipation.

Dos Taquitos Centro

Our food tour in downtown Raleigh began inside Dos Taquitos Centro. Housed in a 100-year-old building on Wilmington Street, this urban Mexican eatery serves creative food with flair. Our group was soon given agua frescas, a simple, refreshing blend of water, fruit and sometimes sugar. We greedily sipped the pineapple-flavored beverage while Amy, our tour guide, had us introduce ourselves.

She explained that Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tours, the company coordinating the tour, varies its sites and our itinerary would include five other stops. We would alternately walk and take the city's free R Line bus that circulates downtown. Dos Taquitos Centro staff then served us decent-sized samples of homemade corn tortillas in creamy salsa verde topped with two poached eggs. One person allergic to dairy enjoyed mixed greens tossed with cilantro vinaigrette, topped with toasted pepitas, and served with mango instead.

18 Seaboard

Next, we walked a few blocks to 18 Seaboard, headed by chef Jason Smith, who once worked with award-winning master chefs like Ben Barker and TV personality Tom Colicchio. Today, he met us at the elegant, contemporary bar and handed out desserts to sample, including a scrumptious candy-cane cr me fraiche. As we ate, he shared restaurant information and his personal bio, including an enlightening stint at a science research station in Antarctica, where he cooked for more than 1,300 hungry residents.

Market

Next stop was Market, on N. Blount Street in the historic Mordecai neighborhood. As we walked, Amy occasionally stopped to share tidbits about historic buildings, such as venerable Peace College. Speaking of history, Market's building used to house a laundromat. Today, it

sports soothing green walls, pendant lights and wooden tables, which combine to create a hip, “green” vibe. As we munched our turkey loaf with braised potato and sipped a smooth, delectable crab and brie soup, we learned Market’s chef, Chad McIntyre, is a passionate advocate for using organic ingredients grown in North Carolina soil.

Escazu

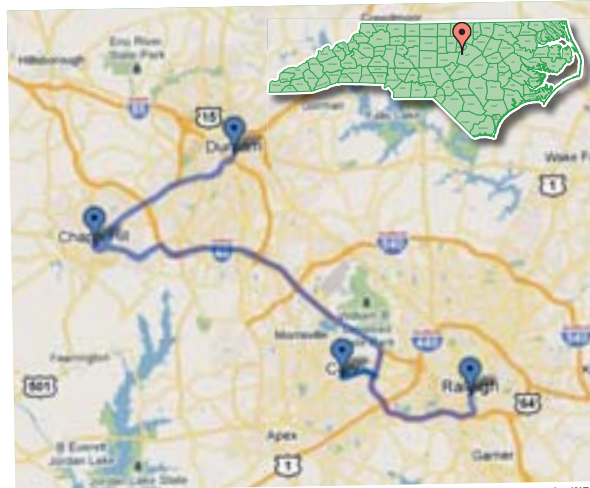
Then we strolled next door to Escazu, a chocolate “factory” and retail store. It is only one of a dozen like it in the U.S. because Escazu’s chocolatiers handcraft from start to finish. This means they source, sort, roast, winnow and grind cocoa beans. The resulting chocolate is then aged, tempered and poured into bars or handcrafted into truffles and confections. Hallot Parson, the shop’s co-founder, gave us a great kitchen tour that included sampling raw cocoa beans and marveling at white chunks of pure cocoa butter as large as landscape rocks. We learned that white chocolate is made from the same cocoa beans as dark chocolate, but it simply has more milk and sugar. Oh, and that if you are craving chocolate per se, go for the cocoa-rich dark chocolates for more satisfaction per bite. Escazu’s bars, made with Venezuelan and Costa Rican beans, include those flavored with chipotle chilis and pumpkin seeds. Its confection flavors include tamarind habanero and even bacon. Before we left, we savored tangy samples of goat’s milk chocolates.

Spize Cafe

We then caught the R Line bus toward Spize Cafe, a Thai and Vietnamese restaurant on Fayetteville Street. There, we downed a delicious concoction of chicken, carrot and peanut sauce and a flavorful soup with galangal root, mushrooms, cilantro and tofu. The chef, Meechai Kowae, has a dual mission: serving fresh pan-Asian fare while remaining eco-friendly. Spize’s tabletops are made of repurposed marble that he reclaimed from a nearby building, and its recycled paper trays and tableware are made of corn byproducts. With no mechanical dishwasher in its kitchen, the restaurant’s monthly water bill of \$200 a month is low, indeed.

Busy Bee Cafe

Our last stop was Busy Bee Cafe on Wilmington Street, a block from where the tour began. There, staff gave us tater tots (yum!) and a choice of stout beer or mocha hot chocolate. As we polished off our treats, we received one last surprise: cupcakes, including carrot and lemon flavors, sent from the Cupcake Shoppe Bakery on Glenwood Avenue. The pretty cupcakes were delightfully dense with a real sense of heft, and a sweet ending to our tour.



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Tour info

The Raleigh tour costs \$41. Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tours has similar tours in Durham, and Chapel Hill/Carrboro, as well as themed tours with titles like Brews Cruise and Sweet Indulgence Stroll. www.tastecarolina.net or (919) 237-2254

For more information see Eastern Piedmont travel resources starting on page 54.



Other Triangle tour operators

At least one other company, Triangle Food Tour, also offers culinary tours in the Triangle area. Its website lists tours at \$30 per person, including two in Raleigh (a global cuisine tour on Saturday afternoons and a comfort food tour on Thursday mornings); along with tours in Durham, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Cary. www.trianglefoodtour.com or (919) 319-5674.

Asheville, Charlotte tours

Asheville Food Tours offers tours in downtown Asheville and Biltmore Village. (828) 273-0365 or www.ashevillefoodtours.com. In Charlotte, there are two food tours, one of which combines bicycle riding with food tastings. www.charlotteurbanadventures.com or (704) 962-4548.