

Charlotte on a shoestring

Public art, waterscapes, historic sites, and dining

by Barbara Tierney



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What does a transplanted San Francisco Bay Area librarian have to reveal about exploring Charlotte's charms on a shoestring? After a three-year trial separation from San Francisco's high cost of living, I can assure you that Charlotte offers a wealth

of public art, historic sites, waterscaped vistas, and southern dining delights that are extremely easy on the pocket book.

Getting around Charlotte

Uptown (Center City) Charlotte is a visitor-friendly, compact locale set within tree-canopied plazas and streets—easy and safe to explore on foot. If you are a fan of public transportation, you will be delighted with Charlotte's free trolley car buses. The **Center City Circuit Shuttle** provides 43 stops on a round-town-loop, with free pick up at each stop, every seven to eight minutes. For a more nostalgic mode of travel, hop aboard the **Historic Charlotte Trolley** for a 15-minute ride to **South End Charlotte**, where you'll find antiques galore, restaurants, and the **Trolley Museum**.

Photos by Carl and Barbara Tierney



One of Charlotte's free trolley car buses.

Enjoy museum hopping?

For modest entrance fees, Uptown Charlotte provides an exciting array of museums. The **Mint Museum of Craft + Design** offers a fascinating medley of glass, wood, ceramic, and jewelry art by leading craft artists. The **Tryon Center for Visual Art** (a newly constructed center of galleries and studios within the walls of a former church) celebrates visual art with exhibits, classes, and studio space for artists-

in-residence. The **Levine Museum of the New South** interprets southern regional history with inventive interactive exhibits focusing on civil rights history, NASCAR, and much more.

Discovery Place (Charlotte's 140,000 square-foot hands-on science museum) features an Ominimax Theatre, a planetarium, and a tropical rain forest.

Public and waterscape attractions

Fancy serendipitous art-focused walking amidst refreshing waterscapes? Uptown Charlotte is a wonderland of public art and waterscape attractions. Each year, Charlotte/Mecklenburg sets aside one percent of funds used to construct or renovate public buildings for public art. For a "zero budget" escapade, try the Uptown Charlotte's self-guided **Public Art Walking Tour** which features:

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• **An Oculus Reflector.** As you walk through the halls of the Convention Center, look up. Integrated into the Grand Hall ceiling is a glass and steel oculus reflector, which reflects and refracts sunlight streaming through it, creating shifting patterns and designs on the floor (artist, Jamie Carpenter).

• **Wachovia Plaza's Fountain Sculptures.** Perched amid the splashing waters of the fountains in Wachovia Bank Plaza are four bronze sculptures of children so lifelike it wouldn't surprise you if the children stepped from the water and skipped through the plaza (figurative sculptor, Dennis Smith).

• **Carillon Building Cascade.** Stroll into the lobby of the Carillon Building and you are face to face with a moving, splashing, motorized, kinetic sculpture/fountain that incorporates eclectic Charlotte memorabilia. Look for the lion's head that once graced the facade of "Hotel Charlotte," which stood on the same spot the Carillon now occupies (international artist, Jean Tinguely).

• **Transamerica Square Continuum.** Breeze through the open air rotunda of Transamerica Square and direct your eyes upward to a gorgeous circular fresco that pays homage to the "continuous cycle of destruction and rebirth" (artist, Ben Long).

Other notable public art attractions include the floor-to-ceiling Ben Long triptych frescoes in the Bank of America Corporate Center Lobby and the "Statues at the Square" at Trade and Tryon Streets (four giant bronzes by sculptor Raymond Kaskey representing Charlotte's transportation, industry, commerce, and the future).

Have a taste for gallery browsing?

Visit Charlotte's **NoDa** (North Davidson Street) District, located two miles north of Uptown Charlotte. This thriving arts and cultural center is home to one-of-a-kind art galleries with such whimsical names as the **Center of the Earth Gallery**, **New Waves of Joy**, the **Blue Pony**, and the **Light Factory**. Residents and visitors alike enjoy First-Friday Gallery Crawls, which display the work of exciting local artists.

NoDa's eclectic small shops—such as **Sunshine Daydreams** (silver, jewelry, beads, hats, candles, and clothing), **Swank** (vintage housewares, underground artwork, and clothing), and **Sit A Spell Atelier** (seating furniture)—offer an out-of-the-ordinary shopping experience.

Art appreciation making you hungry?

For low-cost dining served up with gracious Southern hospitality, sample the **NoDa** neighborhood eateries. **Fat City**, a full-service deli with inside or outside dining, offers live music by regional bands nightly; **Boudreaux's Louisiana Kitchen** features Bayou specialties such as gumbo, jambalaya, and po' boys; **Kelly's Café** offers vegetarian food in a quaint mill house setting; and **Pat's Time for One More** is a popular neighborhood bar connected to the **Studio 23 Gallery**.

Other recommended Uptown eateries for academic librarians on a budget include: **Alexander Michael's** (a casual neighborhood tavern with loads of atmosphere in the Fourth Ward residential area); **Green's Lunch** (a lunchtime tradition in Charlotte since 1926); **Mert's Heart and Soul** (a tasty soul food place); **Reid's Fine Foods** (a grocery/gourmet shop with great takeout sandwiches, salads, and sushi); and **Fuel Pizza Café** (a local chain of pizza parlors, often located in restored gas stations).

See the January 2003 issue of *C&R News* for an article that focuses on recommended Charlotte dining spots.

Don't know much about Southern history?

Try the self-guided Charlotte Uptown Historical Walking Tour that features such stops as **St. Peter's Episcopal Church** (Confederate President Jefferson Davis attended services here as the Civil War ended); **Settlers Cemetery** (Confederate soldiers, planters, politicians, and slaves were buried here from 1776 to 1884); and **Fourth Ward** (one of Charlotte's original residential neighborhoods featuring many restored Victorian-style homes decorated southern-style.) ■



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A floor-to-ceiling Ben Long triptych fresco in the Bank of America Corporate Center Lobby.