

The African-American History & Heritage Trail

African-Americans are a major part of North Carolina's history and heritage, and there are several significant sites in NC that pay homage to those contributions and the people who made them. This five-day journey will give you highlights of African-American contributions to the state's culture, from the mountains to the sea.

5-Day Itinerary

Day 1

Journey from Asheville to Charlotte as you get a taste of some incredible African-American art and culture.

Day 2

Tour some of the Triad's historic treasures, including the state's oldest standing African-American church building and the lunch counter where the sit-in movement helped end segregation.

Day 3

Enjoy Durham, a city full of African-American history and culture.

Day 4

Experience Somerset Place, a historic site offering a comprehensive and realistic view of 19th-century life on a large NC plantation.

Day 5

Explore a museum dedicated to the first African-Americans to ever serve in the US Marine Corps.



With so much to see and do in the area, we recommend the following 5-day itinerary. Enjoy your visit by mixing and matching events to your particular interest. Be sure to check days and hours of operation for each venue.

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Day One

We begin our journey in beautiful downtown **Asheville** at the **YMI Cultural Center**. Housed at the corner of Eagle and Market Streets, this landmark building was commissioned by George Vanderbilt in 1892 and built by and for the hundreds of Negro craftsmen who helped construct the nearby **Biltmore House**.

Today, the YMI Cultural Center is the most enduring African-American socio-cultural institution in Western North Carolina, with a gallery hosting traveling and permanent exhibits dedicated to the black experience in the NC mountains, an artist-in-residence, and an annual August street festival called "Goombay!" The YMI Center itself is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Head east to **Charlotte**, North Carolina's largest city and home to the **Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts & Culture**. The Center (formerly the Afro-American Cultural Center) has been in Charlotte for more than 35 years and is the centerpiece of the community's music, dance, theater, visual art, film, literature, and community outreach. The organization moved into its brand-new building uptown in 2009, and showcases an ongoing lineup of exhibitions and programs that highlights the contributions of African-Americans to American culture.

For dinner, stay uptown and try **Mert's Heart and Soul Restaurant**, one of the locals' favorites for down home Southern cooking, as well as low country and Gullah specialties.

Day Two

Today, we head north to **Winston-Salem** and begin our day in **Old Salem**, specifically at **St. Phillips Moravian Church**. This reconstructed log structure is the oldest standing African-American church building in the state, now serving as an interpretive center to tell the story of the triumphs and struggles of African-Americans in Salem.

When Moravians originally settled in Salem, they were an egalitarian society, and African and European Moravians worshipped together and were buried together in **God's Acre**. However, social pressures of the times convinced the sect to adopt segregation and slavery, and by 1822, Africans in and around Salem were worshiping separately. In

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1823, the log structure standing on South Church Street was built as the African Moravian Church, and in 1861, the congregation moved to the larger brick building behind it. It was re-named St. Phillips in 1914.

After you've explored the history of the church and toured all of the **Old Salem Museum and Gardens**, grab lunch at the **Winkler Bakery** or the **Old Salem Tavern**, then make the short trip east to **Greensboro**.

Here, on South Elm Street the middle of downtown, you will find the site of a seminal moment in the struggle for civil rights. On February 1, 1960, four freshmen from nearby North Carolina A&T sat down at a whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter and waited for service they knew would not come. Their small, peaceful protest soon became a movement, and would eventually change American society forever.

The Woolworth's closed in 1993, but the site is now the **International Civil Rights Center & Museum**, a lasting tribute to the courage and tenacity of the "Greensboro Four" and other foot soldiers in the Civil Rights Movement. Here, you'll find the lunch counter and stools from that historic day in 1960, as well as a bus seat signed by Rosa Parks and other mementos of the struggle. There is also a Hall of Shame detailing the horrors of the Jim Crow era (which may be too intense for younger visitors), a Hall of Courage honoring heroes of the movement such as MLK and Frederick Douglass, and a Remembrance Wall that pays tribute to those who died in the fight for equality.

Just to the east of Greensboro is the town of **Sedalia** and the **Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum**. The museum is on the site where Brown established the Palmer Memorial Institute in 1902, which became a nationally recognized preparatory school for African-American students from throughout the nation, graduating more than a thousand students during Brown's 50-year presidency. The school closed in 1971, but was re-opened in 1987 as a State Historic Site dedicated to preserving North Carolina's African-American heritage.

The old Palmer campus contains about a dozen 20th-century buildings, ranging from houses to dormitories built between the 1920s and 1960s. Archaeological remains of the Alice Freeman Palmer Building, at the center of the campus, also survive. The museum also hosts several special events throughout the year, including commemoration of African American History Month, Brown's birthday, an African American Heritage Festival, and a Christmas Open House.

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Take another short drive east to Durham to find accommodations for the night and grab dinner at **Elmo's Diner**, a favorite of the locals on Ninth Street. Elmo's has great comfort food and an extensive children's menu in a warm, comfortable, family-friendly setting. (Hint: you may also want to come back for breakfast in the morning).

Day Three

Start your day in Durham at **Historic Stagville**, comprising the remnants of one of the largest plantations in the pre-Civil War South. The plantations belonged to the Bennehan-Cameron family, whose combined holdings totaled approximately 900 slaves and nearly 30,000 acres of land by 1860.

Today, the site offers a well-preserved view of the past, especially that of its African-American community. Visitors are allowed to tour a variety of antebellum plantation structures, including the **Horton Grove** area, where you can find four original two-story, four-room slave dwellings and barns built by enslaved carpenters. The late-18th century **Bennehan House**, home of the original plantation owner, serves as the centerpiece of the site. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Leave the past behind at Stagville and spend the rest of the day discovering how far the Durham African-American community progressed after Emancipation. Explore the historic campus of **North Carolina Central University**, and see its extensive collection of African-American art around the campus and in the University's **Art Museum**. See the building that houses the **North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company** on West Parrish Street, which was founded in 1898 and quickly became the "World's Largest Negro Business", earning Durham a reputation as the "Capital of the Black Middle Class". Take in a performance of world-class **Chuck Davis African-American Dance Ensemble**.

When you've finished your day in Durham, head over to Raleigh and treat yourself to dinner at the **Angus Barn**, one of the best restaurants in the entire country, and home to executive chef **Walter Royal**, famous for winning the Food Network's *Iron Chef America* in 2006. The Angus Barn features classic steakhouse fare such as Prime Rib and Filet Mignon, as well as the unexpected, such as Three Cheese Ravioli and Free Range Tuscan Chicken.

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Day Four

Today we head out to the coast to tour another antebellum plantation, **Somerset Place** in historic **Washington County**. Unlike the piedmont farmland of Stagville, Somerset Place was comprised of 100,000 densely wooded, swampy acres bordering Lake Phelps.

In its 80 years as an active plantation (1785-1865) hundreds of acres were converted into fields of rice, corn, oats, wheat, beans, peas, and flax; sophisticated sawmills turned out thousands of feet of lumber. Three generations of owners lived here, as well as about 50 white employees, two free black employees, and more than 850 slaves.

The present-day historic site includes 31 of the original lakeside acres and seven original 19th-century buildings. With the goal of accurately representing the lives and lifestyles of the plantation's entire antebellum community, the Department of Cultural Resources has acquired the reconstructed Overseer's House and reconstructed representative one-room and four-room homes where enslaved families once lived, along with the plantation hospital.

Somerset Place has also earned a reputation as a great repository of genealogical information for both black and white families who passed through the plantation. In fact, in 1986, Somerset Place pioneered the idea of slave descendent "Homecomings", a practice now established at many former plantation sites across the South.

Travel down the coast and stop for an enjoyable evening in the Neuse River town of **New Bern**, a 300-year old community with many historic treasures to explore and discover.

Day Five:

Take US Highway 17 south for another 36 miles into **Jacksonville**, a city famous for its military heritage and home of the Marine Corps' Camp Lejeune.

When President Franklin Roosevelt decided to allow African-Americans into the Marine Corps in 1942, those black recruits were not sent to the USMC's traditional boot camps in South Carolina and San Diego. Instead, they were brought here, to experience a segregated basic training at **Montford Point**, a facility at Camp Lejeune.

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About 20,000 African-American recruits trained at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949, and while the original intent was to discharge them after World War II, the new Marines proved themselves as capable as any other race, color, or creed in the Corps.

Today, Montford Point is the home of the **Montford Point Marine Museum**, a place where the unique struggles and triumphs of those first African-American Marines is captured in photographs, documents, papers, and artifacts. The museum's mission is to display those memories of a segregated past and show how those experiences have influenced the Marines of today.

Now that you've finished five days of exploring significant African-American history and culture in NC, enjoy the rest of your day at one of the great beaches on nearby Topsail Island!

Where to eat:

Mert's Heart & Soul – Charlotte (lunch, dinner)

Winkler Bakery – Old Salem (lunch)

Old Salem Tavern – Old Salem (lunch, dinner)

Elmo's Diner – Durham (breakfast, lunch, dinner)

The Angus Barn – Raleigh (dinner)

For more information:

Buncombe County TDA

www.exploreasheville.com

Visit Charlotte

www.charlottesgotalot.com

Winston-Salem CVB

www.visitwinstonsalem.com

Greensboro CVB

www.visitgreensboro.com

Durham CVB

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