

# THREE DOG-FRIENDLY TRIPS FROM THE TRIANGLE



When you tell people you're from North Carolina, they become lit from within. They tell you about a magical trip through our mountains. Or how their family travels faithfully to our beaches. "Yes, but I live in Raleigh," I tell them. "It's hard to find perspective here."

Situated hours from any mountain or coast, the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle is populated by leafy trees and lazy hills that, while beautiful, make it hard to breath. There are few mile-long views that make you feel tiny and the world seem wide. Getting out of town now and then gets your eyes off of what's pressing and back to what's possible. Sometimes, it's the only way I know how to love my life again.

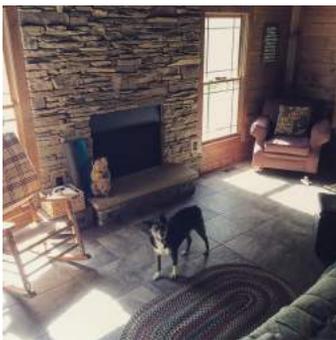
And if you can get out of town with your dog? Even better says a growing group of people who see their pet as part of the clan. When setting out to explore three perspective-getting trips from the Triangle, I insisted ours be invited. (I also insisted that a rental big on dogs didn't have to be short on style.) The beauty of a good dog, like good travel, is that it ultimately brings you home to yourself.

*Gin Lane*

# Meadows of Dan, Virginia

## THE DRIVE

The roughly 3hr-drive from Raleigh to the idyllically named Meadows of Dan is a pleasant one. Most of the drive on I-40 W through the Piedmont region is flat until you hit Mount Airy and exit off US-52 N. The final forty minutes is marked by cow farms and crumbling churches before you hit the Blue Ridge Parkway. Beware if motion sickness runs in your canine; my eleven-year old mutt Amelia came along for this one and careened about the car for the last leg. You're not on the Parkway long before turning off near Mile Marker 184 and coming upon the long gravel drive toward The Cabin at Magic Tree Sanctuary.



## THE DIGS

The Cabin at Magic Tree Sanctuary is a doglover's dream. The newly built 2-bedroom and 2-bathroom home sits on 53 acres of forest, field, and stream where your dog can roam free without fear. The interior of the house is equally accommodating. I shared the space with my mom and her fourlegged friend, Lucy, and found the stone floors and homey furniture made for easy living. If staying in the lofted bedroom, you and your dog can relax; the stairs leading up to it aren't open-air. Dogs on the neighboring property could be heard in the morning - and greeted during the day - but

silence and solitude is plentiful here.



## THE DAY

Travel fifteen minutes north on the Blue Ridge Parkway to Chateau Morrisette Winery where well-behaved dogs on leash can enjoy the view from the patio with you while you sample a variety of easy - drinking wines. The winery's label even features a distinguished looking dog named Blue that makes a great gift for fur-loving friends back home. Split a tasting with a friend to save on cash - and a post - wine headache.

From \$200; <https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/14746172>

## THE DRIVE THE DIGS

The all-interstate all-the-way drive to Asheville will be familiar to most from the Triangle - and is the longest of these three overnight trips. The theme here continues: the last bit is the best bit. Around mile marker 70 off I-40 W, the road begins to writhe and the Blue Ridge Mountains begin to rise. Exit 55 to Lower Grassy Branch Road will wind you through East Asheville's Riceville Valley and drop you off at the Little Sun Bird Studio. Alvin almost made it the whole way without retching. Almost.



The Little Sun Bird Studio was a bright, clean, lofted space with one queen bed and one couch. It's full of special touches, like a tub deep enough for soaking and a kitchen stocked for cooking. Alvin - who traveled solo with us this time - especially enjoyed the extra towels and sheets provided so he could hop up on the bed with us while we watched movies on the Roku. The surrounding area was noisier than we expected - dogs barking throughout the night and people riding dirt bikes during the day - and less private than we imagined. There was also lots of poop in the yard which made it hard to roam freely. On the bright side, the suggestions for places to eat and things to do while we were there were spot on.



From \$125; <https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/20268605>

## THE DAY

The Warren Wilson River Trail is spectacular and requires only a five-minute drive from the studio to begin. Turn right out of the driveway onto Riceville Road and follow it until you see Berea Baptist Church on your left and a dirt parking lot on your right. There will be signs that the property belongs to Warren Wilson College. Less than ten minutes into the hike there is a big open field that the studio owner lets her dog run wild in. (Alvin was still too stubborn to be trusted.) Once the field is square-

ly on your left, take the first wide path that splits off to your right. This winds you along the outside of a couple country backyards before descending into the trees. Cross one road before ending up in what looks like a tropical rainforest. After about ten more minutes of this terrain, the Swannanoa River can be seen gurgling through. From here, the trail is about 2.5 miles one-way. Alvin enjoyed a brief leash-less respite on the sandy river bank.



# Asheville, North Carolina

## THE DRIVE

There's not much scenic about driving to the coast from the Triangle unless you count the green wine on the Duplin billboards. The good news is it's just over two hours from Raleigh and makes for an easy getaway if you can only spare one night. I-40 E will get you to Wilmington. US-421 S will carry you to Carolina Beach. This last stretch can be tricky during rush hour; the stop-and-go traffic makes even the humans among you antsy. Our four-month old puppy, Alvin, joined Amelia this time and nearly lost his lunch. The scenery is surreal though, as trailer homes and storied mansions sit side by side. The Modern Beach Container Home strikes a creative compromise.



From \$125; <https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/12148992>

## THE DIGS

The Modern Beach Container Home was by far the most stylish of the dog-friendly rentals we visited. Its minimalist exterior was matched by a well-designed interior with a double bed, daybed, bathroom, and kitchen that was still spacious enough for two adults and two dogs to move freely in for one night. Natural light was plentiful, even in the dark of winter, but it took some time for the home to heat up with only an electric wall unit. While the listing says the lot is private, the home is one of two containers that sit across the yard from one another.

# Carolina Beach, North Carolina



## THE DAY

For room to roam, it's less than a five minute walk through a residential neighborhood to the beachfront. We experienced freezing rain the day we explored which meant the shore was nearly empty and our dogs could wrestle on the sand. Dogs on the beach are technically required to be on leash at all times and during high season - April 1st - September 30th - are not allowed between the hours of 9am-5pm. Be sure to bring something with you to pick up after them.



# Not Able to Get Out of Town?

**Eno River Trail (Durham):** In less than fifteen minutes from the heart of Durham, you can begin a peaceful hike along the much-loved Eno River. Take the Cole Mill Road exit off I-85 and park on the left just as soon as you cross the bridge over the water. (On your way, you'll pass the phenomenal barbecue joint Picnic. If you hit the official Eno River State Park sign, you've gone too far.) Hop the guardrail and head down the wooden steps to begin your hike under the bridge. We start here to avoid the crowd and get the dogs going. The Pea Creek Trail makes about a one-mile loop from here but you can add the 1.8-mile Dunnagan Trail to make an almost three-mile, figure-eight hike that ambles along the river and through the woods. A few of the sandy "beaches" provide good ground for a picnic lunch or quick dip.

**Johnston Mill Nature Preserve (Chapel Hill):** The diversity of this hike in the heart of the Triangle is stunning. We park at the lot located at 2713 Mount Sinai Road in Chapel Hill and start on Robin's Trail. From there, turn off to the right on Bluebird Trail (.3 miles) - my favorite for its grassy greenway - and then keep on the Old Field Bluff Trail (1.8 miles). Near the end you'll add one side of the Beech Loop Trail (.3 miles) to reconnect with Robin's Trail (1 mile) and head back to the parking lot. By the end of the day, you and your pup have hiked just over three miles of field, forest, and stream. The diversity of terrain is matched only by its diversity of resting places; look for uniquely designed benches to sit on throughout.

**Lake Johnson (Raleigh):** For a quick change of perspective, head to Lake Johnson, just ten minutes from downtown Raleigh. Park in the lot off Lake Dam Road for a quieter pace. From here you can walk the paved 2.8-mile east loop around the water with only distant sounds of swooshing traffic. Dogs are required to be on-leash at all times but I let Amelia roam free in a few coves off the official trail. End your walk with a short rest along the concrete incline of the dam where you and your dog can catch your breath - and a sunset if you're lucky.

