



INDY Best of the Best of the Triangle 2023

Welcome, *INDY* readers, to our inaugural
Best of the Best of the Triangle!

For the first time ever, we spread our annual, onetime Best of the Triangle contest into three mini contests across the year, with competitions taking place in Durham, Orange/Chatham, and Wake Counties.

For our final installment, our Best of the Triangle Reader's Poll winners went head to head, county versus county. The winners of Wake, Durham, and Orange/Chatham Counties competed against one another to determine who is the very Best of the Best of the Triangle in 2023 as determined by you, our dedicated readers.

In 139 categories that run the gamut from food and drinks to local stores and local service providers, doctors, vets, lawyers, health and fitness purveyors, museums, parks, concert halls, theaters, and everything in between, thank you for taking the time to tell us your favorites.

Our winners this year really do represent the very best of what the Triangle has to offer; they're who make us proud to work, live, and play in the 919.

Keep your eyes out next year for your chances to vote. We'll be back and asking for your favorites once again in February of 2024. And remember, shop local to support your favorites in the Triangle community.

Congratulations to all of our Best of the Best of the Triangle 2023 winners!

—The *INDY* team



Help us lose the Best Kept Secret category next year!
 Visit NC State's Gregg Museum of Art & Design
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 in the Triangle

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★ Read our review for this winner on this or a nearby page

BEST ART GALLERY

Durham Arts Council - Durham

Runners-up: FRANK Gallery - Orange/
 Chatham, Artspace - Wake

BEST ART MUSEUM

North Carolina Museum of Art - Wake

Runners-up: Nasher Museum of Art -
 Durham, Ackland Art Museum - Orange/
 Chatham

BEST COMEDY CLUB/EVENT

Goodnights Comedy Club - Wake ★

Runner-up: Mettlesome - Durham

BEST DRAG SHOW/EVENT

House of Coxx Drag Brunch - Durham

Runners-up: Cat's Cradle Music Hall "Drag
 Queens are Coming." - Orange/Chatham,
 Ruby Deluxe Drag Brunch - Wake

BEST ELECTRONIC CONCERT VENUE

The Fruit - Durham ★

Runners-up: Red Hat Amphitheater - Wake,
 The Kraken - Orange/Chatham

BEST FILM THEATRE VENUE/EVENT

Chelsea Theater, Chapel Hill - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: The Carolina Theatre of
 Durham - Durham, Alamo Drafthouse
 Cinema - Wake

BEST LOCAL/REGIONAL PODCAST

Discover Durham - Durham

Runners-up: The Hill - Orange/Chatham,
 NC F&B Podcast - Wake

BEST RADIO STATION

WUNC ★

Runners-up: WNCU, WKNC

BEST SCIENCE/HISTORY MUSEUM

The Museum of Life and Science - Durham

Runners-up: North Carolina Museum
 of Natural Sciences - Wake,
 Morehead Planetarium and Science Center
 - Orange/Chatham

BEST THEATRE COMPANY

PlayMakers Repertory Company - Orange/Chatham ★

Runners-up: Raleigh Little Theatre - Wake,
 The Durham Savoyards - Durham

BEST UNPLUGGED CONCERT VENUE

The Blue Note Grill - Durham

Runners-up: Community Church Concerts
 - Orange/Chatham, The Pour House
 Music Hall & Record Shop - Wake



We love print journalism, but even we have to put down our copies of the INDY when we get on our bikes or into our cars or need to fold laundry. That's why we are so lucky to have WUNC 91.5, the premiere public radio station serving the Triangle and beyond that delivers exceptional local, national, and international news directly into our ears. It's thriving, too: just this year, the station added two new shows (a daily show and podcast, as highlighted in our November 29 issue). -CP

WUNC BELONGS TO YOU.

It's our belief that WUNC is yours for the listening. It's why we strive to provide in-depth, factual news coverage and lifestyle programming that not only inform and entertain but also speak directly to you and your experience. As public radio, WUNC is a tapestry of voice and thought worth tuning into, connecting with and making your own.



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Arts



Goodnights Comedy Club - Wake

BEST COMEDY CLUB/EVENT

When Goodnights Comedy Club moved out of its old location in a historic ice-cream factory on West Morgan Street, many longtime fans were worried about its future. But Goodnights' move underground turned out to be a great decision for the owners, audiences, and comedians. Since relocating to the Village District earlier this year, Goodnights has hosted national headliners as well as local up-and-comers. On the main stage, comedians like Pete Davidson and Dave Attell have played to a packed house, but laughter also rang out in the back room, where Ali Macofsky cracked "Singles Awareness Day" jokes in February. -JG



The Fruit - Durham

BEST ELECTRONIC CONCERT / DANCE VENUE

Whitney says she wants to dance with somebody. ABBA says you're the dancing queen. Gaga says just dance. Find all those lovely ladies and their hip-shaking tunes—plus a lot more tunes—at the Fruit in Durham. First constructed as a fruit and produce warehouse in the 1920s, the Fruit has since been transformed into a banging bar and events/performance space. An LGBTQ+-friendly business, the Fruit has enough flashing lights and subwoofers to help you leave your troubles at the door while you shake some ass with some friends, whether on the main dance floor or in one of the many nooks and crannies. -CP



PlayMakers Repertory Company - Orange/Chatham

BEST THEATRE COMPANY

With increasingly creative concepts, new interpretations of the classics, and stunning set designs, the PlayMakers Repertory Company always puts on a few can't-miss shows every season. This year, the Chapel Hill-based theater put on an equally enrapturing and horrifying production of *Misery*, along with a version of *Much Ado about Nothing* set in post-World War II North Carolina. And there's a lot left to look forward to. With its foundations built on a resident company—albeit one that frequently shares the stage with guest artists from across the country—PlayMakers constantly seeks to push the envelope, challenging audiences in the tradition of theater while also working to break down historic barriers. -JG

Coming
Soon!

2024 INDY Summer Camp Guide

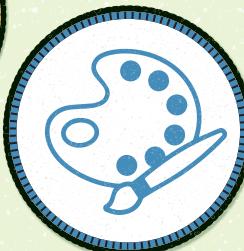
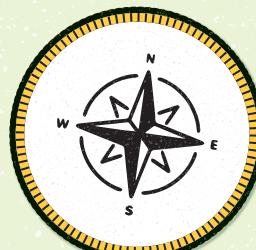


Calling all camps:
the 2024 Summer Camp Guide
is around the corner!

Two
issues!
Jan 24th &
Mar 20th

The *INDY*'s Summer Camp Guide is an annual, comprehensive guide to camps around the Triangle and North Carolina for the upcoming summer. Listings are **FREE OF CHARGE** and must be submitted by January 17th.

Please use the QR code below or email
sales@indyweek.com to provide your camp's name,
location(s), age range, and url.



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Businesses

★ Rumors Chapel Hill - Orange/Chatham

BEST CLOTHING CONSIGNMENT

Got some old clothes that used to be trendy, went out of style, and are now inexplicably so back "in" right now? Bring them to Rumors to sell! And while you're there, check out their racks and stacks of previously loved and presently reasonably priced clothing. If you can't make it out to the store, check out @rumorsnc on Instagram. While the Chapel Hill branch was the winner of this category this year, we can't help but point out that Rumors has a Durham location also full of clothes guaranteed to make your Gen Z coworkers bombard you with nonsensical but complimentary colloquialisms. (Examples: It's a slay. It's literally giving. It's Rumors.) -CP

★ Fallon's Flowers - Wake

BEST FLORIST/FRESH FLOWER

Where do you go for Mother's Day, prom, or to get a gift for your coworker when they pass their American citizenship test, as one of our own here at the INDY did recently? Where else but Fallon's Flowers? With two locations in Raleigh, this Oak City staple has the brightest and best selection of farm-fresh flowers delivered to customers since 1920. And with a helpful, knowledgeable staff that can rustle up a red-white-and-blue bouquet in a jiff (or help you design a bespoke custom order), at Fallon's, you won't feel dumb if you don't have a green thumb. From classic red roses to vibrant tropical blooms, Fallon's has the best floral selection and service around. -JP

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BEST ARCHITECT/ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

ARX Design Co

Runners-up: Maurer Architecture, PA, Ellen Cassilly Architect

BEST ATTORNEY

Cara Gibbons - Wake

Runners-up: Cedar Grove Law - Orange/Chatham, Larry Rocamora - Durham

BEST AUTO DEALER

Johnson Lexus of Raleigh - Wake

Runners-up: Southpoint Honda - Durham, Fred Anderson Toyota - Wake

BEST AUTO MECHANIC

Wasp Automotive - Durham

Runners-up: Auto Logic - Orange/Chatham, Precision Autowerks - Wake

BEST BICYCLE SHOP

Bullseye Bicycle

Runners-up: Back Alley Bikes, Oak City Cycling

BEST BRIDAL STORE/BOUTIQUE

Sofia's Boutique - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Gilded Bridal - Wake, Smitten Boutique - Durham

BEST CBD/HEAD SHOP

Carolina Hemp Hut - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: MagikCraft - Bull City Magic - Durham, Aloha Plus Cannabinoids - Wake

BEST CLOTHING CONSIGNMENT

Rumors Chapel Hill - Orange/Chatham ★

Runners-up: Rumors Durham - Durham Triangle, Dorcas Ministries - Wake

BEST COMIC BOOK STORE

Atomic Empire

Runners-up: Ultimate Comics, Capital Comics

BEST DANCE STUDIO

CC & Co. Dance Complex - Wake

Runners-up: Fred Astaire Dance Studio - Durham, 7 Dance Centre - Orange/Chatham

BEST DOG BOARDING

Green Beagle Lodge - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Sunny Acres Pet Resort - Durham, Suite Paws Pet Resort & Spa - Wake

BEST DOG GROOMING

Eno Animal Hospital - Durham

Runners-up: Woofgang Bakery & Grooming - Wake, Ooh La La Pet Spa - Orange/Chatham

BEST DOG TRAINING

Paws4ever - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Learning to Dog Training and Enrichment - Durham, Sit Means Sit Dog Training - Wake

BEST DOG WALKING

Kate's Critter Care - Durham

Runners-up: Pack&Pride - Wake, Walk & Wag - Orange/Chatham

BEST ELECTRICIAN

Bonneville Electric - Durham/Orange/Chatham

Runner-up: Chris Lee Electric - Wake

BEST EROTIC GIFT STORE

Frisky Business Boutique

Runners-up: Cherry Pie, Adam & Eve

BEST FLORIST/FRESH FLOWERS

Fallon's Flowers ★

Runners-up: Blossom and Bone Florals, Pine State Flowers



Businesses

BEST GARDEN STORE

Southern States Carrboro

Runners-up: Logan's Garden Shop, Stone Bros & Byrd

BEST GIFT SHOP

WomanCraft Gifts

Runners-up: Vaguely Reminiscent, Parker & Otis

BEST HARDWARE STORE

Triangle Ace Hardware - Durham

Runners-up: Fitch Lumber & Hardware, Ace Hardware, Burke Brothers Hardware

BEST HVAC COMPANY

Boer Brothers Heating & Cooling - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Air Innovations Heating and Cooling - Durham, Wake Heating and Air - Wake

BEST INSURANCE COMPANY

State Farm Insurance - Durham

Runner-up: American Farm Bureau, Federation - Wake/Orange/Chatham

BEST JEWELER/JEWELRY STORE

Jewelsmith - Durham

Runners-up: WomanCraft Gifts - Orange/Chatham, Bailey's Fine Jewelry - Wake

BEST LANDSCAPER

TROSA Lawn Care - Durham

Runners-up: Bombadil Homesteads - Orange/Chatham, Triangle Environmental - Wake

BEST LOCAL BOOKSTORE

Flyleaf Books - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: The Regulator Book Shop - Durham, Quail Ridge Books - Wake

BEST NEW BUSINESS

The Cheese Shop - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Auroraflow - Durham, Longleaf Swine - Wake

BEST PAINTERS

Gonzalez Painters & Contractors Inc. - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Zarazua Painting - Durham, Anderson Painting - Wake

BEST PLACE TO BUY LOCAL CRAFTS

WomanCraft Gifts

Runners-up: My Muses Card Shop, Hillsborough Arts Council, Freeman's Creative

BEST PLACE TO BUY LOCALLY MADE ART

My Muses Card Shop, Carrboro - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: The Artisan Art Market at 305 - Durham, Artspace - Wake

BEST REAL ESTATE COMPANY

Triangle Key by Flex Realty - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Raleigh Realty - Wake, Urban Durham Realty - Durham

BEST REALTOR

Justin Burleson - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Marie Brockenbrough - Durham, Autumn DuBois - Wake

BEST SALVAGE/REUSE COMPANY

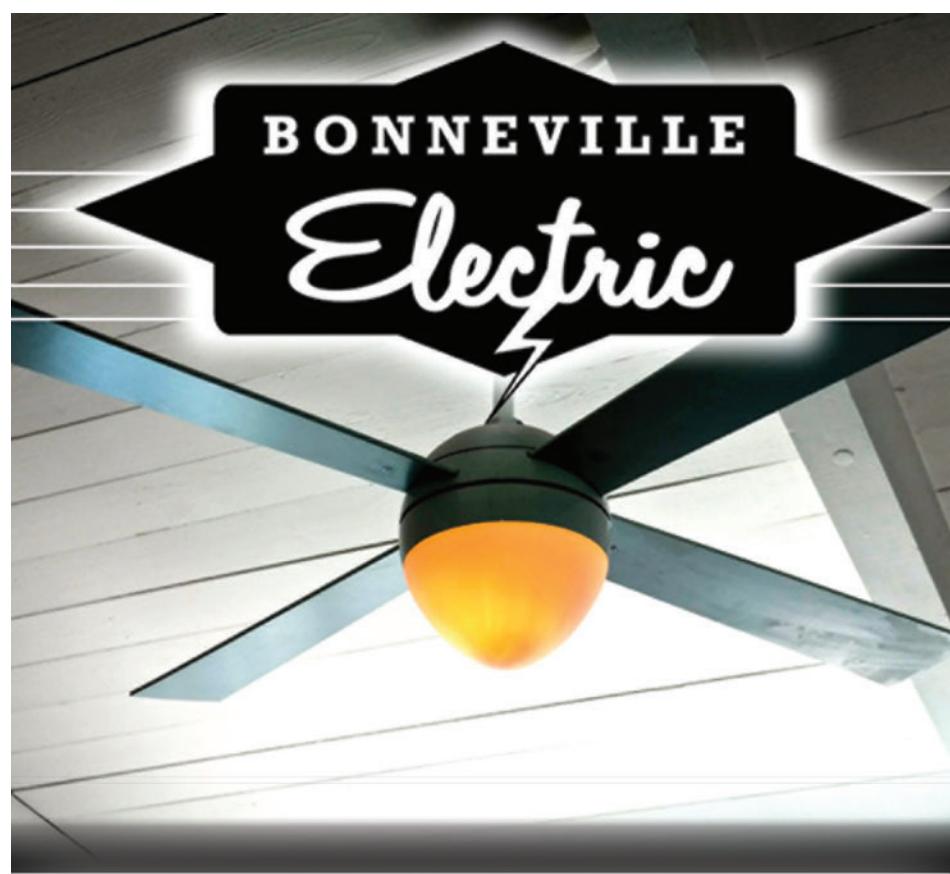
The Scrap Exchange

Runners-up: Habitat for Humanity ReStore, TROSA Thrift Store and Donation Center

BEST VINTAGE STORE

TROSA Thrift Store and Donation Center - Durham

Runners-up: Rumors Chapel Hill - Orange/Chatham, Father & Son Antiques - Wake



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Food & Drink

★ Ponysaurus Brewing Company - Durham

BEST BREWERY

Ponysaurus, whose flagship location is in east downtown Durham on Hood Street, is at the center of the brewery Venn diagram: The brewery offers beers to entice connoisseurs and satisfy casual drinkers. Kids are allowed but not empowered to run without supervision. It has a TV that sometimes plays sports but is decidedly not a sports bar. With a menu that features tasty pizza, Swedish fish, and wasabi peas, as well as ample heated outdoor seating, it's no wonder that Ponysaurus is packed most nights of the week, even during the colder months. Ponysaurus also has a long-standing history of supporting LGBTQ rights with its Don't Be Mean to People golden saison beer, which the brewery created in 2016 in response to NC House Bill 2, a.k.a. "the bathroom bill." -JL

★ The Cheese Shop - Orange/Chatham

BEST CHEESE SHOP

Finding the Cheese Shop for the first time might be a little tricky, since it's tucked away in the corner of a Carrboro wine bar. But once you're in front of the chilled deli counter, a whole world of cheese opens up. Cofounder Stevie Webb has a wealth of knowledge about regional cheeses and a true love of sharing unique flavors and favorites. Originally from the UK, he guides visitors through a rotating selection of cheeses in his distinctive accent, gently steering even skeptics into trying something new. Before relocating to North Carolina, Webb worked at a specialty grocery store in Brooklyn—and he's brought that corner-store energy with him to the Triangle, lucky for area cheese lovers. -JG

★ Cosmic Cantina - Durham

BEST LATE NIGHT MEAL - PAST 10 P.M.

Cosmic Cantina has had lots of different eras during its 28 years in business. For a time, the Mexican joint offered burritos wrapped in nori. During a fleeting period in the early 2010s, the (now sealed-off) staircase inside the Durham location descended into an eclectic open mic space called Crazy Camp Music Park. And for nearly a decade, there was a third Cosmic location in the Bronx that *The New York Times* once described as selling "well-nigh perfect" chicken burritos. What hasn't changed about the restaurant in decades, though, are its extraordinary hours: in the barren late-night foodscapes of Durham and Chapel Hill, Cosmic is an oasis, open most days until 4 a.m. -LG

BEST ALCOHOLIC COCKTAILS

Alley Twenty Six - Durham

Runners-up: The Crunkleton - Orange/Chatham, Bittersweet - Wake

BEST BAGEL

Brandwein's Bagels - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Isaac's Bagels - Durham, Benchwarmers Bagels - Wake

BEST BAKERY

Guglhupf Bakery & Restaurant - Durham

Runners-up: La Farm Bakery - Wake, Guglhupf Bake Shop - Orange/Chatham

BEST BARBECUE

The Original Q-Shack - Durham

Runners-up: The Pig - Orange/Chatham, Longleaf Swine - Wake

BEST BEER RETAIL STORE

Sam's Bottle Shop - Durham

Runners-up: Beer Study - Orange/Chatham, State of Beer - Wake

BEST BISCUITS

Sunrise Biscuit Kitchen - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Rise (Downtown) - Durham, Rise (Village District) - Wake

BEST BREWERY

Ponysaurus Brewing Company - Durham ★

Runners-up: Steel String Brewery, Pluck Farm - Orange/Chatham, Trophy Brewing - Wake

BEST BRUNCH RESTAURANT

Guglhupf Bakery & Restaurant - Durham

Runners-up: Breakaway Cafe - Orange/Chatham, Hummingbird - Wake

BEST BURGER

Al's Burger Shack - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Bull City Burger & Brewery - Durham, MoJoe's Burger Joint - Wake

BEST CATERING

Mediterranean Deli, Bakery, and Catering - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Foster's Market - Durham, Catering Works, Inc. - Wake

BEST CENTRAL AMERICAN RESTAURANT

Luna Rotisserie and Empanadas

Runners-up: El Chapin Guatemalan Grill & Catering, Taqueria La Vaquita, Blue Corn Cafe

BEST CHEAP EATS

Mediterranean Deli, Bakery, and Catering - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Cosmic Cantina - Durham, Cook Out - Wake

BEST CHEESE SHOP

The Cheese Shop - Orange/Chatham ★

Runners-up: Durham Co-op Market - Durham, Wegmans - Wake

BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT

Gourmet Kingdom - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Happy China - Durham, Five Star Restaurant - Wake

BEST COFFEE SHOP

Cocoa Cinnamon (Geer Street) - Durham

Runners-up: Caffè Driade - Orange/Chatham, Sola Coffee Cafe - Wake

Food & Drink

BEST DESSERTS

Guglhupf Bakery & Restaurant - Durham

Runners-up: Guglhupf Bake Shop - Orange/Chatham, Hayes Barton Cafe & Dessertery - Wake

BEST DONUTS

Monuts

Runners-up: Duck Donuts, Krispy Kreme

BEST DRAFT SELECTION

Wooden Nickel Pub - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Raleigh Beer Garden - Wake, Growler Grlz - Durham

BEST ETHNIC GROCERY STORE

Li Ming's Global Mart - Durham

Runners-up: H Mart - Wake, Mediterranean Deli, Bakery, and Catering - Orange/Chatham

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Chirba Chirba Dumpling Truck - Durham

Runners-up: Bulkogi - Orange/Chatham, Gym Tacos - Wake

BEST HOT DOG

Snoopy's Hot Dogs and More

Runners-up: King's Sandwich Shop Durham, Jimmie's Famous Hot Dogs

BEST ICE CREAM

The Parlour

Runners-up: Two Roosters Ice Cream, Maple View Farms Ice Cream

BEST INDIAN RESTAURANT

Vimala's Curryblossom Cafe - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Lime & Lemon Indian Grill & Bar - Durham, Cheeni Indian Food Emporium - Wake

BEST ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Gocciolina - Durham

Runners-up: Tesoro - Orange/Chatham, Bella Monica - Wake

BEST JAPANESE RESTAURANT

M Sushi - Durham

Runners-up: Akai Hana Japanese Restaurant - Orange/Chatham, Waraji Japanese Restaurant - Wake

BEST JUICE BAR

Raleigh Raw Juice Bar & Cafe

Runner-up: Juicekeys

BEST LATE NIGHT MEAL - PAST 10 P.M.

Cosmic Cantina - Durham

Runners-up: Cosmic Cantina - Orange/Chatham, Cook Out - Wake

BEST LIQUOR

Durham Distillery - Connexion American Dry Gin

Runners-up: Young Hearts Distilling - Vodka, Grandma Scalabrino's - Oak City Amaretto

BEST LOCAL CIDER/WINE/MEAD

Bull City Ciderworks

Runners-up: Botanist & Barrel, HoneyGirl Meadery & Tasting Room

BEST MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Fiesta Grill Restaurant - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Taqueria La Vaquita - Durham, Dos Taquitos - Wake



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Sincerely,

Kelly Alexander
Kathleen Jasinskas
Carla Sartor

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The Entire Triangle!**



Food & Drink

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN RESTAURANT

Mediterranean Deli, Bakery, and Catering

Runners-up: Sasool, Neomonde Mediterranean

BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR

Wooden Nickel Pub - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Players Retreat - Wake, Growler Girlz - Durham

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Bluebird - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Mezcalito - Durham, Longleaf Swine - Wake

BEST NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Alley Twenty Six - Durham

Runners-up: Caffé Driade - Orange/Chatham, Sitti - Wake

BEST PIZZA

Pizzeria Toro - Durham

Runners-up: Pizzeria Mercato - Orange/Chatham, Oakwood Pizza Box - Wake

BEST SEAFOOD

Saltbox Seafood Joint - Durham

Runners-up: Tom Robinson's Carolina Seafood - Orange/Chatham, 42nd Street Oyster Bar - Wake

BEST SMALL PLATES/TAPAS

Mateo Bar de Tapas - Durham

Runners-up: Glasshalfull - Orange/Chatham, Barcelona Wine Bar - Wake

BEST SOUTH AMERICAN RESTAURANT

Luna Rotisserie and Empanadas ★

Runners-up: Alpaca Peruvian Charcoal Chicken, Mi Perú Peruvian Cuisine

BEST SOUTHERN FOOD

Mama Dip's Kitchen - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Bullock's Bar-B-Cue - Durham, Beasley's Chicken + Honey - Wake

BEST SUSHI

M Sushi - Durham

Runners-up: Akai Hana Japanese Restaurant - Orange/Chatham, M Sushi Cary - Wake

BEST THAI RESTAURANT

Thai Cafe - Durham

Runners-up: Cham Thai Cuisine - Orange/Chatham, Lemongrass Thai Restaurant - Wake

BEST VEGETARIAN EATERY

Mediterranean Deli, Bakery, and Catering - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Irregardless - Wake, Luna Rotisserie and Empanadas - Durham

BEST WINE LIST

Vin Rouge - Durham

Runners-up: Angus Barn - Wake, Glasshalfull - Orange/Chatham

BEST WINE RETAIL STORE

Wine Authorities - Durham ★

Runners-up: The Raleigh Wine Shop - Wake, Rocks + Acid Wine Shop - Orange/Chatham

BEST WINGS

Heavenly Buffaloes - Durham

Runners-up: Wooden Nickel - Orange/Chatham, My Way Tavern - Wake

Food & Drink

Bull City Ciderworks - Durham

BEST LOCAL CIDER/WINE/MEAD

If you hate friendly bartenders, two dozen delicious ciders and beers on draft, and a dog-friendly ambience in downtown Durham, you should steer clear of Bull City Ciderworks. With themed holiday parties, Thursday night trivia, and a side room with a pool table and arcades, Ciderworks is a great spot to bring a friend or to go alone and find a friend. Check online for the food truck schedule, and we recommend you try the blueberry-forward Bludacris for a refreshing sip. -CP

Luna Rotisserie and Empanadas - Durham

BEST SOUTH AMERICAN RESTAURANT

Luna does the impossible. Somehow, the restaurant, conveniently located on Durham's and Carrboro's Main Streets, routinely delivers upscale taste and quality at fast food speeds. Order from your office, and food will be ready almost as soon as you walk in the door. Luna's menu, billed as "South American meets American South," keeps things simple, and even the pickiest eaters can satisfy their limited palates with one of Luna's jam-packed empanadas or the savory collard greens, while more exploratory eaters might try the arepas or the jackfruit, an excellent meat substitute. The staff at Luna were also some of the first to act during the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, working with neighboring local businesses like Ninth Street Bakery to provide meals and other support for families in need. -JL

Wine Authorities - Durham

BEST WINE RETAIL STORE

To shop at Wine Authorities is to indulge in an experience: Here, crate-shaped shelves offer wines sourced from small farms at truly reasonable price points (it is possible to buy either a \$60 or \$10 bottle). Friendly staff are on hand to provide expertise, but they don't hover or—for the slightly wine-uneducated among us—shame. In fact, if you create a membership profile, your history of funky orange wines or affordable cabernet sauvignons can be saved and pulled up for future reference. Other assets worth highlighting: Wine Authorities, which has locations in both Raleigh and Durham, hosts tastings, sends customers off with bottles wrapped in that deliciously thick brown paper (perfect for making a good dinner-party-guest impression), and has a sweet curation of cheeses and treats on hand to round things out. -SE



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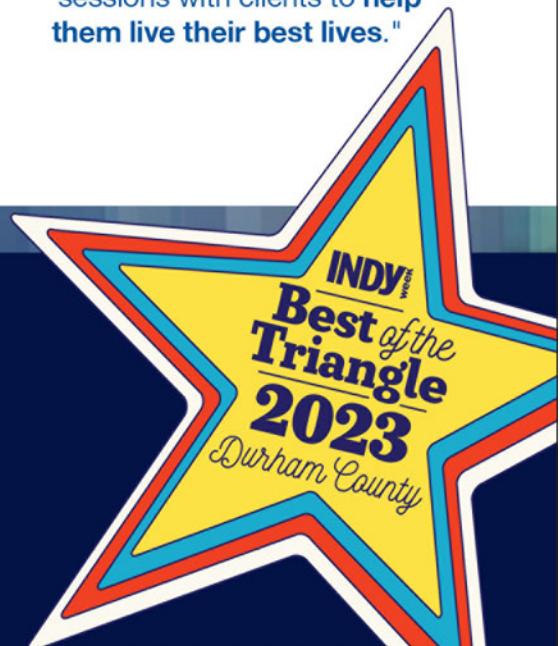
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Learn More



Places

BEST ARBORETUM OR GARDEN

Sarah P. Duke Gardens - Durham ★

Runners-up: North Carolina Botanical Garden - Orange/Chatham, JC Raulston Arboretum - Wake

BEST CAMPSITE

Jordan Lake State Recreation Area

Runners-up: Falls Lake, Shinleaf Campground at Falls Lake

BEST CHARTER SCHOOL

Raleigh Charter High School

Runners-up: Central Park School for Children, Discovery Charter

BEST DANCE VENUE

The Fruit - Durham

Runner-up: Legends Nightclub - Wake

BEST FARMERS' MARKET

Durham Farmers' Market

Runners-up: North Carolina State Farmers Public Market, Carrboro Farmers Market

BEST GOLF COURSE

Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club

- Durham

Runners-up: UNC Finley Golf Course - Orange/Chatham, North Ridge Country Club - Wake

BEST HIKING TRAIL

Eno River State Park Trails

Runner-up: William B. Umstead State Park

BEST HOTEL

The Umstead Hotel and Spa - Wake

Runners-up: Carolina Inn - Orange/Chatham, Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club - Durham

BEST HOTEL LOUNGE

The Roof at The Durham - Durham

Runners-up: The Umstead Hotel and Spa - Wake, Colonial Inn - Orange/Chatham

BEST LGBTQ+ BAR

Pinhook ★

Runners-up: Legends Nightclub, Ruby Deluxe

BEST KARAOKE PLACE/EVENT

Pinhook - Durham

Runners-up: The Northside District - Orange/Chatham, Flex - Wake

Pinhook - Durham

BEST LGBTQ+ BAR

Has it only been 15 years since the Pinhook opened on Main Street? The bar/venue feels indelible to the Durham community, as if it's always been there. But of course these places take grit and a lot of hard, unseen work to stay open—especially as certain North Carolina GOP politicians do everything they can to dim the lights of queer spaces like this—so we raise our glasses high this year to owner Kym Register and their team and a decade-and-change of glittery, effervescent concerts, drag shows, dance parties, and good times at the Pinhook. May its doors always stay open. -SE



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Places

★ Sarah P. Duke Gardens - Durham

BEST ARBORETUM OR GARDEN

Do you ever get the urge to leave behind your spreadsheets and keyboard and skip down a wooded pathway while pretending you're a woodland fairy and not a nine-to-five office worker with carpal tunnel syndrome? If so, take an afternoon to explore the Sarah P. Duke Gardens. With miles of trails and more benches than one person could experience in just one lifetime, Duke Gardens is a beautiful place for a family picnic, a lunchtime walkabout, or a flirty first date. The gardens are open from eight a.m. till dusk, and entrance is free. (Please be respectful of plant and animal life, including any Duke freshmen who may be experiencing psychedelics for the first time.) -CP

BEST PEOPLE-WATCHING

Weaver Street Market - Orange/Chatham ★

Runners-up: Durham Farmers' Market - Durham, NCMA Park - Wake

BEST PLACE TO ADOPT A PET

Animal Protection Society - Durham

Runners-up: Saving Grace, Safe Haven for Cats, Independent Animal Rescue

BEST PRESCHOOL/EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Temple Beth Or Preschool - Wake

Runners-up: Carolina Friends School, Durham Early School - Durham, Emerson Waldorf School - Orange/Chatham

BEST PUBLIC PARK/PLAYGROUND

Pullen Park- Wake ★

Runners-up: Laurel Hills Park, Durham Central Park

★ Weaver Street Market - Orange/Chatham

BEST PEOPLE-WATCHING

The Triangle certainly has plenty of viable contenders for this category, but the Weaver Street Lawn, with its open seating and crunchy co-op snacking options, is a clear shoo-in for the best watching perch. As for the people to focus on: Whole Chekhovian dramas have played out on this grassy town square over the years as hungover students post up for breakfast gruel, Tinder matches flirt over beer, families sprawl on picnic blankets, elders pore over crosswords (likely *INDY* ones, if we may), and, all in between, locals embrace the lawn as a place to hula-hoop, play music, and get a little weird. Grab a lentil salad and kombucha from inside the market and eavesdrop away. -SE

BEST SPORTS BAR

Players Retreat - Wake ★

Runners-up: Tobacco Road Sports Cafe-Durham, Four Corners - Orange/Chatham

BEST SUMMER CAMP

Carolina Friends School Summer Programs - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Temple Beth Or Preschool - Wake, Piedmont Wildlife Center - Durham

BEST TRIVIA BAR/EVENT

Hammered Trivia @ Gizmo Brew Works - Durham

Runners-up: My Way Tavern Raleigh - Wake, Music Bingo @ Gizmo Brew Works - Orange/Chatham

BEST UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE

UNC-Chapel Hill

Runners-up: Duke University, NC State University

★ Pullen Park - Wake

BEST PUBLIC PARK/PLAYGROUND

That feeling of desperately needing to get the kids out of the house is a familiar one to parents. And for countless Triangle families, when that feeling strikes, their destination of choice is Pullen Park. Situated on the edge of NC State's campus near downtown Raleigh, Pullen Park is a veritable wonderland for children and parents alike. Antique carousel? Check. Choo-choo train? Check. Kid- and grown-up-sized pedal boats? Double check. That's not to mention all the playgrounds, tennis courts, and athletic fields, plus the aquatics and arts center. Fun fact: Pullen Park is the fifth-oldest operating amusement park in the country, and the 16th oldest in the world. Dix Park may be getting a lot of attention these days, but Pullen will always be the Triangle's true crown jewel of parks. -JP

★ Player's Retreat - Wake

BEST SPORTS BAR

What's better than a PR Hawaiian burger and a beer out on the patio on a warm spring day? Not much, though sitting inside the bar with a PR Hawaiian burger and beer and catching a football game on a cool fall evening offers some competition. This 70-plus-year-old stalwart of the Raleigh social scene is known as much for its culinary offerings and companionable staff as it is for its welcoming spirit. When it opened in the segregated South of the 1950s, the Player's Retreat opened to everyone, and that sense of community has never changed. After navigating the COVID-19 pandemic responsibly, the PR has come out on the other side as bustling as ever. And as Raleigh grows up around it, true Raleighites have high hopes for the PR to persist and prosper for another 70-plus years. -JP



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People & Miscellany

★ Luxe Posh - Wake

BEST DJ

It takes a special set of skills to be a good DJ: A deep knowledge and appreciation of music genres and styles, of course. Familiarity with your equipment and the ability to transition seamlessly. An adeptness at reading a crowd and what can only be described as an overall good vibe. Luxe Posh, a.k.a. Breniecia Reuben, the definitive Triangle DJ, has all of these skills in spades, and this accolade is a long time coming. Whether spinning tracks at City of Raleigh events at Dix Park, dance clubs like Neptunes, queer clubs like Legends, or GAG! at Durham Fruit, when DJ Luxe Posh is on deck, you can always expect to have a blast. -JP

★ Gregg Museum of Art + Design - Wake

BEST-KEPT SECRET

While it's nice to keep some secrets to ourselves, the Gregg Museum of Art + Design, quaintly ensconced in NC State's leafy brick campus, is an institution that deserves all the light it can get. With more than 54,000 objects in its permanent collection, the Gregg boasts the largest collection of outsider art in the state and, bolstered by its prestigious design programs, is an especially prime spot to admire ethnographic materials. And it has range, as the kids say: museum exhibits this past year (it hosts six annually) ran the gamut from a retrospective of South Carolina shadowbox virtuoso Aldwyth to a playful contemporary exhibition of blow-up inflatables. -SE

★ Festival for the Eno - Durham

BEST TRIANGLE-WIDE EVENT

On a hot day in summer, what better way to spend your time than on the Eno River? At the Festival for the Eno, thousands gather in a 4,300-acre state park north of downtown Durham to enjoy local art, folk music, and a babbling brook. With several stages, the event always welcomes dozens of musicians every Fourth of July weekend, from locals to East Coast up-and-comers. Performers in past years have included now legendary artists such as Doc Watson and groups like Lake Street Dive. The festival isn't a place just to catch great music but to soak in the sun with family and friends. And there are always those who will take the plunge into the festival's namesake river for a refreshing dip. -JG

BEST CHEF

Vimala Rajendran - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Ricky Moore - Durham, Scott Crawford - Wake

BEST DJ

Luxe Posh - Wake ★

Runners-up: DJ Wicked - Durham, DJ Special K (House of Hops Music Bingo) - Orange/Chatham

BEST DRAFT-SLINGER

Bear (Growler Grlz) - Durham

Runners-up: James Peery at The Kraken - Orange/Chatham, Cameron Herbert at Tasty Beverage Company - Wake

BEST-KEPT SECRET

The Gregg Museum of Art and Design - Wake ★

Runners-up: Piedmont Wildlife Center - Durham, Speakcheesy Secret Supper @ Belltree Cocktail Club - Orange/Chatham

BEST KIDS NONPROFIT

Book Harvest - Durham

Runners-up: Note in the Pocket - Wake, Learning Outside - Orange/Chatham

BEST LOCAL ACTIVIST GROUP

Planned Parenthood - Orange/Chatham

Runners-up: Livable Raleigh - Wake, LGBTQ Center of Durham - Durham

BEST MIXOLOGIST

Shannon Healy, Alley Twenty Six - Durham

Runners-up: Britton Murray, Wooden Nickel Pub - Orange/Chatham, Mara Sudol, freelance - Wake

BEST NON-PROFIT

TROSA - Durham

Runners-up: Orange Rape Crisis Center - Orange/Chatham, Urban Ministries of Wake County - Wake

BEST POLITICIAN

Governor Cooper - Wake

Runners-up: Nida Allam - Durham, Graig Meyer - Orange/Chatham

BEST REASON TO LEAVE THE TRIANGLE

Greedy Developers

Runner-up: Cost of Living

BEST REASON TO LOVE THE TRIANGLE

The People/Community

Runner-up: All the Trees, Parks and Greenways

BEST TRIANGLE-WIDE EVENT

Festival for the Eno (Enofest) ★

Runners-up: Hopscotch Music Festival, IBMA World of Bluegrass

BEST USE OF PUBLIC MONEY

Public Schools ★

Runner-up: Affordable Housing

BIGGEST WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY

Incentives for Big Developers

Runners-up: Politicians' Paychecks, Increased Policing Budget



Public Schools

BEST USE OF PUBLIC MONEY

Here at the *INDY*, we heart public schools, and we can't think of any better way to spend taxpayer dollars than on ensuring that all of our Triangle kids have access to a solid, well-rounded education. Our state lawmakers are quite a bit less gung-ho on public education than we are here at your friendly, local, progressive, alternative, biweekly newspaper, and that's why it's extra important that all of our Triangle counties find the money to give our public schools what they need for our students to thrive when the state won't. Public schools are where students of all backgrounds, incomes, races, and religions come together to learn, play, and grow. In other words, public schools are "the manifestation of our civic values and ideals," to quote educator Randi Weingarten. They're the very best of what's still good about our shaky democracy. -JP

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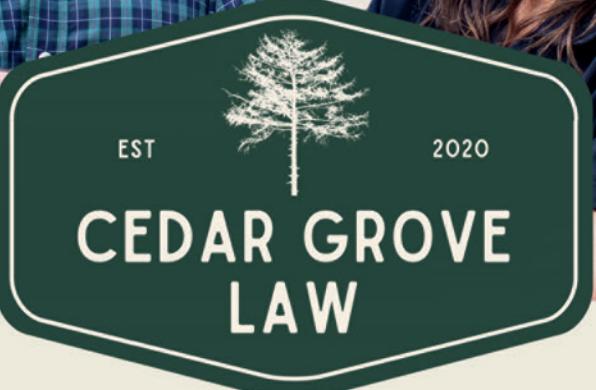
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