

The Impulsive Traveler

Like driving a Prius down Tobacco Road

BY WILLIAM POWERS

"This is Greensboro?" my partner, Melissa, asked with surprise, gazing up at the LEED Platinum-certified Proximity Hotel, its 100 solar panels gleaming futuristically back at the sun. "When I think of Greensboro, all I picture is the KKK-masacring protesters."

True, the city suffers from a long-standing image problem. On Nov. 3, 1979, local Ku Klux Klan members shot and killed five Communist Worker Party activists during a street protest here. The incident became known as the "Greensboro Massacre" and was examined in documentaries such as "88 Seconds in Greensboro." The accused Klansmen, in the end, were acquitted by an all-white jury.

But that was then. Now, our bellhop escorted us through the Proximity Hotel's sun-filled lobby, explaining that the furniture was locally sourced and that one-fifth of the concrete walls were made of fly ash from incinerated garbage.

The elevator to our room, remarkably, was self-powered, its downward motion fueling the upward lift. The bellhop enthusiastically told us that the hotel uses 40 percent less energy and 30 percent less water than comparable hotels. Solar panels heat well over half the water for the rooms and the restaurant. No wonder this place became the first American hotel to receive the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system's highest rating.

The surprises continued in our room. "Eco" certainly didn't mean austere. Loft-style high ceilings allowed sunlight to warm our bed. A sliding door opened up the modern bathroom to natural light as well.

Later, down in the lobby, a cheery receptionist asked, "Ready for your bikes?"

"You rent them?" I inquired. "They're free for all guests," she replied. "To provide a healthy alternative to..." Was it my imagination, or was she frowning toward the parking lot?

I gradually gathered that she was suggesting that we give our car a rest from gas-gulping. Before I could even mutter a reply, the concierge appeared out front with two new bikes and helmets. Melissa shrugged and dropped our car keys into her purse, where they would remain for most of our stay.

While gliding along Greensboro's excellent bike paths, we learned that the city is busy constructing one of the country's first urban greenway loops, complete with bike and walking trails, as well as a space for public art displays.

Our stereotype of Greensboro was further undermined at our first stop: a "living museum" called Elsewhere, housed in a half-century-old thrift store where the artists use only recycled material to create interactive sculpture. "You don't see a gift shop here," one of the artists in residence said to me. "Nothing is sold at Elsewhere."

Dinner was a tough choice. I craved Montagnard food. After all, we were in Greensboro, home to the largest number of Montagnards (a collection of mountain tribes from Vietnam's highlands) outside Vietnam. But Melissa won out in the end; we hit a local bistro for some rabbit and Bibb lettuce supplied by local farms.

Over dessert, we probed our waiter on the subject of Greensboro. The city is part of the 1.5 million-inhabitant Piedmont Triad (along with the smaller Winston-Salem and High Point). The Triad grew first into a national textile and furniture-making hub and more recently added technology and biotechnology to the mix. Our waiter took pride in telling us that his city has developed a sensitivity to the environment, noting that in 2004, the Department of Energy awarded Greensboro entry to the Clean Cities Hall of



ALAMY

Greensboro, N.C., is living up to its name, with the nation's first LEED Platinum-certified hotel, miles of bike trails and greenways and the Elsewhere museum, right, where artists use only recycled materials.



LARIS KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST



NORAH HOOVER

Fame.

The next day, I was to give a lecture at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The university's Committee on Sustainability had invited me to discuss my book, "Twelve by Twelve: A One Room Cabin, Off the Grid & Beyond the American Dream," about an American physician and permaculturalist who lives Thoreau-style in a 12-by-12-foot off-grid house.

To be frank, I expected a small turnout. But again, the city surprised. The room filled up with enthusiastic readers who had chosen my book for their Green Book Club. When I asked, "What's your 12-by-12?" they showered the room with ideas on ecological living. I learned that Greensboro was the birthplace of well-known environmentalist Thomas Berry, and that the late CBS news anchor Edward R. Murrow had grown up in a log cabin outside town.

After the book-signing session, I chatted with attendees in the lobby beside a glass case holding a trumpet that Miles Davis had donated to the school. Beyond the encased horn — the very one that the jazz great had used to record "Kind of Blue" — was a footbridge over a forest, in a spot where there had once been a paved

road. A middle-aged man looked me in the eye and said proudly, "We took out the road and gave it back to Mother Nature." If Miles Davis could see Greensboro today, I chuckled to myself, he might change his tune to "Kind of Green."

Over lunch at the vegan cafe Boba House, a student environmentalist told me: "In my free time, I slay vampires." She and dozens of other students dress up as "vampire slayers" to alert fellow students to "vampire energy" — like leaving a computer on when you're not using it. And the entire university was undergoing a major energy audit.

Throughout our discussion, I discovered other reasons why Greensboro was in the Clean Cities Hall of Fame: for instance, 700 of the city garbage trucks have switched to biodiesel fuel.

That afternoon, local resident Charlie Headington gave us a tour of his urban permaculture homestead near the university. Wearing a smile, he led Melissa and me through a marvelous backyard brimming with lettuce and grape trellising. As I looked around, I thought: This is what utopia most look like. Luscious hues of kelly and peacock green — a mix of fruit trees — rose over a clean pool of water stocked with fish. Brightly colored flow-

ers sprouted from their pots, and Charlie's perky crops felt a little like a welcoming committee.

"My whole life revolves around gardens," Charlie said. "I have no lawn, no grass, just fruit trees, food beds, ponds and bee hives." It became apparent to us that these organisms were more than just plants to this man: They were his family.

He graciously offered us some fresh persimmons off his tree. "Scrumptious!" Melissa said, pocketing a couple for the road.

Back at the Proximity Hotel, I reluctantly packed up my belongings. I found myself wishing for more time in Greensboro. Time to enjoy its 17-acre Bog Garden, a boardwalk of trails that wind through a garden of plants and wildlife that thrive in a wetland ecosystem. Time for the the International Civil Rights Museum and the Greensboro Arboretum.

But I found comfort in the fact that there was still enough time left to enjoy the last of Charlie Headington's persimmons — until the next visit to the new green Greensboro.

travel@washpost.com

Powers is a New York-based freelance writer. His Web site is www.williampowersbooks.com.

IF YOU GO

Want to take a spur-of-the-moment trip to Greensboro, N.C.? Here's what you need to know for the weekend of April 8-10:

GETTING THERE

US Airways flies nonstop from Reagan National to Greensboro with fares starting at \$266 round trip.

WHERE TO STAY

Proximity Hotel
704 Green Valley Rd.
336-379-8200
www.proximityhotel.com
This LEED Platinum-rated hotel uses 100 solar panels to heat water. Rooms from \$189.

O. Henry Hotel
624 Green Valley Rd.
336-854-2000
www.ohenryhotel.com

Proximity's sister property inspired in part by one of the same name built in 1919. Rooms from \$189.

WHERE TO EAT

Dran Restaurant
3113B Summit Ave.
336-621-0341
Vietnamese and Japanese options. Entrees from \$5.50.

Boba House
332 Tate St.
336-379-7444
www.bobahouse.com

Eco-conscious locals gravitate here for tasty, inexpensive vegan fare. Dishes from \$7.49.

Print Works Bistro

336-379-0699
www.printworksbistro.com
In the Proximity Hotel. Entrees from \$10.

WHAT TO DO

Elsewhere Living Museum
606-608 S. Elm St.
336-549-5555
elsewhereelsewhere.org
Wednesday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$1.

Greensboro Trails
336-373-3816
www.greensboro-nc.gov
More than 90 miles of trails and greenways.

International Civil Rights Center & Museum
134 S. Elm St.
336-274-9199
www.sitmovement.org
Tuesday-Thursday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday-Saturday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 1 to 6 p.m. Adults \$10; students and seniors \$9; children 6-12 \$6.

Greensboro Arboretum
401 Ashland Dr.
336-373-4334
www.greensborobeautiful.org/Arboretum.htm

Take a permaculture course with Charlie Headington (336-334-4597, charlie.headington@gmail.com) or ask him for a tour of his urban permaculture homestead.

INFORMATION

www.greensboronc.org

— W.P.

All flight and lodging info valid as of press time Thursday.

More Travel this week



FRIDAY
Escapes succumbs to the lure of Havre de Grace, Md., in Weekend.

NEXT SUNDAY
The Impulsive Traveler reconstructs the origins of Boca Raton, Fla., in Travel.

Inns, Lodges & Villas

www.washingtonpost.com/innsandlodges

<p>MARYLAND</p> <p>AWESOME</p> <p>Spring Skiing!</p> <p>Deep Creek Lake, MD</p> <p>Long & Foster Resort Rentals</p> <p>One more week of skiing left!</p> <p>3rd night stay & 3rd lift ticket free when you stay 2 nights & buy a multi-day lift ticket! Ski-in/ski-out and ski access homes, townhomes & condos.</p> <p>800.336.7303</p> <p>www.DeepCreekResort.com</p> <p>OXFORD WATERFRONT</p> <p>Exquisite! Upper end, 3 BRs, 3 BAs, Fireplace, Pool, tennis court & dock. Availability weekly, weekends & holidays. 410-745-5255</p> <p>Home delivery makes good sense.</p> <p>1-800-753-POST</p>	<p>NEW YORK</p> <p>RIVERSIDE TOWER HOTEL</p> <p>\$129 for 2 persons</p> <p>Singles \$124, Suites \$139-\$159</p> <p>Lincoln Center area, Hudson River views, 18 floors, kitchenette, 5 minutes to Mid-town, safe, quiet, luxury area. RIVERSIDE TOWER, Riverside & 80th St. For more info or brochure call 800-724-3136 or visit www.riversidetowerhotel.com</p> <p>NORTH CAROLINA</p> <p>Waves, sand, sun and fun!</p> <p>Adventure is Calling at the Crystal Coast!</p> <p>Bluewater 800-826-6226</p> <p>BluewaterWPILV.com</p> <p>Home delivery is convenient.</p> <p>1-800-753-POST</p>	<p>NORTH CAROLINA</p> <p>Book your northern Outer Banks vacation rental today and start relaxing right away.</p> <p>CorollaClassic.com</p> <p>866.626.1295</p> <p>COROLLA CLASSIC VACATIONS</p> <p>deliberately and selectively smaller</p> <p>VIRGINIA</p> <p>FUNNY FARM INN Open All Yr & Holidays!</p> <p>75-acre horse farm. Large pool, Hiking, Kids & pets ok. Breakfast. Just 1.25 hours D.C.</p> <p>540-547-3481 www.bbonline.com/va/funnyfarm</p>	<p>VIRGINIA</p> <p>The MIMSLYNN INN</p> <p>Shenandoah Valley</p> <p>Getaways!</p> <p>Stay three nights and we buy your guest Spa and Escape Packages too.</p> <p>800-296-5105 www.mimslynn.com</p> <p>WEST VIRGINIA</p> <p>BAVARIAN INN</p> <p>Historic Shepherdstown, 1 hour from Washington, D.C.</p> <p>STAY AND PLAY!</p> <p>10 minutes from Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races. Table Games.</p> <p>Elegant Rooms - Potomac River Views, Whirlpool Baths, AAA Four Diamond Award.</p> <p>Fine German & Continental Cuisine.</p> <p>www.bavarianinn.com</p> <p>304-876-2551</p> <p>West Virginia Wild and Wonderful</p>	<p>WEST VIRGINIA</p> <p>CABINS IN THE WOODS!</p> <p>WV getaways, only 90 miles from DC. 36 holes of Golf, Spa, Swimming, Tennis, more.</p> <p>888-699-2221 or www.TheWoods.com</p> <p>CARIBBEAN</p> <p>BARBADOS OCEANFRONT VILLA</p> <p>On Bluff...Overlooking Ocean!</p> <p>4 bedrooms, 4 baths, a/c, 2 pools & private stairs to beach! dianeshk@aol.com</p> <p>ST. MAARTEN www.beachsidevillas.com</p> <p>OCEANEDGE, upscale 1, 2, 3 BR A/C Villas. Fully Equipped Kitchen, BBQ. Daily housekeeping, free WI-FI cable TV. Perfect vacation all year!</p> <p>Call Owner Yolanda 313-884-7706</p> <p>COSTA RICA</p> <p>LUXURY OCEAN VILLA</p> <p>4-5 BR Dream villa with breathtaking views. Perfect for luxury vacations, romantic honeymoons, & weddings. Close to beach, restaurants, town activities. www.casalumenez.com</p> <p>PUERTO RICO</p> <p>Oceanfrnt Apts! NO PASSPORT needed!</p> <p>At Mar Chiquita Beach. Enjoy easy day trips to San Juan & more! Sunny! Pristine beaches. Free WiFi. Stay 3 days or longer. www.ElFaroOceanFront.com 301-251-8897</p>	<p>FRANCE</p> <p>PROVENCE Rent our 'little house', 'sunflower residence' or 'atelier' in ancient hilltop village. 540-554-9242 www.LaMaganerie.com or email to: UVLaMaganerie@aol.com</p> <p>ITALY</p> <p>ITALY RENTALS 202-333-6247</p> <p>Quality villas, farmhouses & apts. Also Rome, Florence, Venice apts. Personalized service from Italy specialists. Free catalogs. ITALIAN VACATION VILLAS www.villasitalia.com</p>
---	--	---	---	--	---

Inns, Lodges & Villas

A year-round advertising marketplace!

202-334-7003

1-800-627-1150

boucharda@washpost.com

