

travel AWARDS

Hitting the road for work needn't be a loathsome chore. Our picks for the best cities for business travel have it all—entrepreneurial culture, stylish hotels, great eats and the elusive “fun” factor. Put these destinations on your itinerary, and you just may not want to go home.

How do you identify the best destinations for business travel? We've all heard friends and colleagues detail their plans: “I need to go to Albany,” they might say, “but next week I get to go to Portland.” Clearly, some cities are more desirable than others.

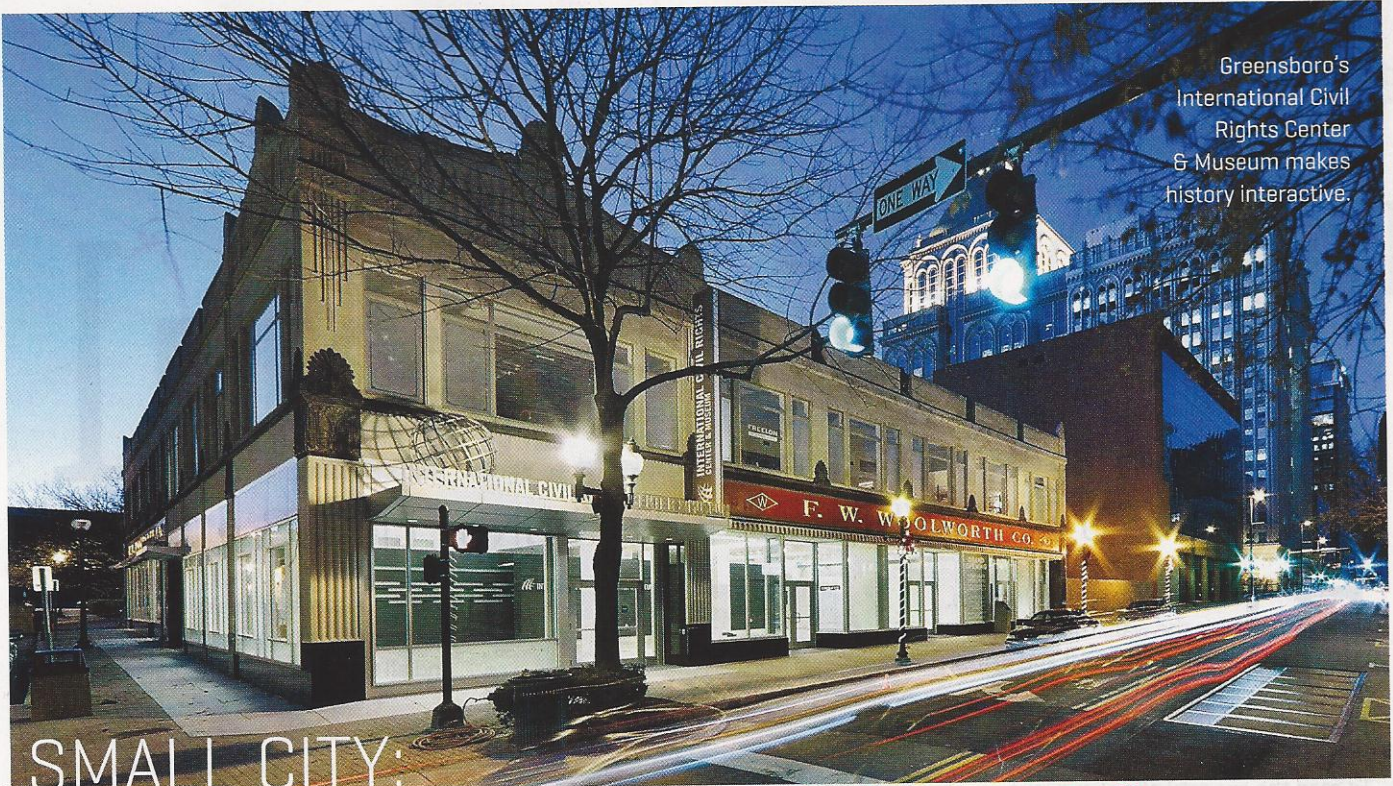
Part of it is the ease of doing business. Is the airport accessible from other cities and close to downtown? Are companies and meeting spaces within easy reach from the best hotels?

It also has to do with the entrepreneurial mindset of a place, a sense that innovation is in the air. The best place to go for business, many entrepreneurs will tell you, is the one where they're likely to come away with a new idea or a new client.

Then there's the “fun” factor, cities that tempt you to stay the weekend. As Mark Ehrnstein, a vice president at Austin, Texas-based Whole Foods Market, says about his city: “None of our team members need to be talked into making a trip here.” Indeed, Austin is one of our selections for the best cities for business travel. We've picked three, based on metro-area population: large (2 million-plus), medium (1 million to 2 million) and small (fewer than 1 million).

Schedule meetings and retreats where logic dictates. But if a trip comes up to one of these places, don't let your VP or regional rep take it instead—they may never come back.

By Bruce Schoenfeld



Greensboro's International Civil Rights Center & Museum makes history interactive.

SMALL CITY: Greensboro/Winston-Salem, N.C.

The Proximity Hotel is just off the highway in Greensboro, but if you came across it in, say, San Francisco or London, you'd be equally thrilled. With its house-made duck-confit hash, social areas on each floor and artist-in-residence program, it's a property that plays far bigger than its market size.

So, too, does Greensboro/Winston-Salem. The area combines a rich commercial history with a broad-based economy. Vicks VapoRub and Krispy Kreme donuts were conceived here, as were Wachovia and Hanes. Local biopharmaceutical firm Targacept is developing medications to help treat Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

"I came from New York and thought, *I'm coming to a sleepy place*, but I found out that it's anything but sleepy," says John Ryan, president of Greensboro's Center of Creative Leadership.

Where to stay: Proximity Hotel. A first-class staff is eager to cater to business travelers at this 147-room property, well-positioned between downtown Greensboro and the airport. Power breakfasts at the Print Works Bistro are a local staple. [704 Green Valley Road, Greensboro; proximityhotel.com]

Where to eat lunch: Lucky 32 Southern Kitchen. Who says delicious Southern food can't be served in an upscale setting? Lucky 32 has been doing it for two decades, pan-frying chicken

and sautéing fresh collard greens for the business crowd. If you want to cross paths with one of Greensboro's corporate honchos, this is your place. [1421 Westover Terrace, Greensboro; lucky32.com]

Where to eat dinner: Meridian. With white tablecloths and a painted cement floor, Meridian is both uptown chic and downtown cool. The menu of locally sourced ingredients, such as duck with mashed sweet potatoes, changes daily. Want your local contacts to know you've done your homework? Bring

"People spend time with us, experience the area and say, 'I need to look at this place more closely.'"

The sophisticated work force supports culture that's unparalleled for a market of this size. A visitor might choose from an original production at the Triad Stage; a gallery opening on Winston-Salem's Trade Street; or a Wake Forest basketball game. The University of North Carolina School of the Arts fills the calendar with shows and recitals, while the biennial National Black Theatre Festival attracts more than 60,000 visitors.

Challenging golf courses dot the leafy landscape. The restaurant scene is thriving. And flying out of the tranquil Piedmont Triad International—perhaps on a nonstop to Chicago, New York, Dallas or Miami—feels like having access to a private terminal.

them here. [411 S. Marshall St., Winston-Salem; meridianws.com]

Where to meet for drinks: 1618 Wine Lounge. In just over a year, this sophisticated bar on the edge of the manicured Old Irving Park neighborhood has become a gathering place for an influential group of Greensboro professionals. They come for the quirky wine list and craft beers, solicitous service and acoustics that allow for quiet conversation on even the busiest night. [1724 Battleground Ave., Ste. 105, Greensboro; 1618concepts.com]

Three extra hours: At Old Salem, an 18th-century Moravian village is populated by performers re-creating colonial life. The Guilford Courthouse National Military Park immortalizes a major British victory in the Revolutionary War. Greensboro's International Civil Rights Center & Museum has transformed the site of the 1960 Woolworth lunch-counter protests into a series of interactive displays; lecture halls and a range of smaller spaces make it an ideal site for corporate seminars, board meetings and diversity training.