

# TRAVEL: FROM MARCH MADNESS TO DOWNTON ABBEY COSTUMES

An important part of March Madness in the Mid-Atlantic is the ACC Basketball Tournament, which most years showcases some of the top teams that will play in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Tournament that follows.

To be played in Greensboro, N.C., the ACC tournament begins March 12 and runs through the championship game on March 16. If the games are sold out, you can watch the tournament on television.

ACC fever usually runs so high in Chapel Hill, N.C., that the town turns Carolina Blue when the Tar Heels play. There are many places to get in on the action here, but an all-time favorite is The Carolina Inn on Pittsboro Street. Established by UNC alumnus John Sprunt Hill in 1924, the inn has been dubbed "the university's living room" by Dr. Kenneth Zogry, the inn's official historian and author.

The inn is an ideal place to celebrate special events and to get a sense of Chapel Hill's rich history, which dates to 1795 when the university was founded. Upon your arrival, pick up a copy of the inn's Historical Walking Tour brochure, featuring 12 stops on the main floor and a map of more than 700 displays and photographs featured in the guestroom corridors.

Every UNC athletic team since 1924 to win an NCAA championship is featured in displays at the inn, as is the original sheet music of school and fight songs from the 1920s to 1940s. You can also see reproductions of drawings made by John

White in the 1500s during the Roanoke settlement on the Outer Banks and reproductions of prints of North Carolina's flora and fauna in colonial times by British naturalist Mark Catesby.

A member of Destination Hotels & Resorts and recipient of AAA's Four Diamonds for 16 consecutive years, the inn features 185 beautiful guest rooms with period furnishings and luxurious linens. The inn's Carolina Crossroads, winner of Forbes Travel Guide's Four Stars for the past 13 years, is one of Chapel Hill's premier restaurants. Menu selections (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) are based on sustainability, incorporating local produce and organic ingredients, when available. Come April, Fridays on the Front Porch, featuring food and live music, returns to the inn and continues through summer. This will be followed by Tailgate Inn on the Front Porch during football season. (carolinainn.com)

While you're in town, be sure to stroll down Franklin Street to see its many galleries, shops, and restaurants. Don't miss the Carolina Basketball Museum (the first of its kind in the country), Morehead Planetarium & Science Center, and Ackland Art Museum. Also worth the short drive is Historic Hillsborough, which dates to colonial times. (visitchapelhill.org)

## In the Mid-Atlantic

Winterthur in Wilmington, Del., is hosting an exciting new exhibit, *Costumes of Downton Abbey*, March 1-Jan. 4, 2015. Featured are 40 exquisite costumes (on loan from Cosprop) from the award-winning television series, plus photographs and vignettes inspired by the fictional program and by real life at Winterthur. In addition to the exhibit, Winterthur will host a wide range of lectures, workshops, and events for adults and families focusing on entertaining and country house life in Britain and the United States.

A co-production of Carnival Films and Masterpiece, *Downton Abbey* depicts life in the aristocratic household of the fictional Earl and Countess of Grantham. Winner of a number of prestigious awards, the series is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed period dramas ever produced.

Advance purchase of tickets is strongly recommended. Timed tickets are required for this exhibition, which is included with general admission. (winterthur.org/downtonabbey)

*Objects from Country Living: The Elizabeth John-*

*ston Prime Dollhouse Collection* (one of the largest antique dollhouse collections in the country) will run through June 22 at the Kemerer Museum in historic Bethlehem, Pa. The exhibit invites guests to explore extravagant country houses, verandas, and gardens, patterned after German villas and French estates. (historicbethlehem.org)

## European travel

If you're planning a trip to Europe this year, consider purchasing a special Eurail Early Bird pass, available to non-European residents through March 31, with a six-month, pre-booking window. The offer applies to first- and second-class Eurail Global Passes in all travel categories (adult, child, and youth), plus Saver Passes for groups of two to five persons are reduced an additional 15 percent. The 15-day pass includes two extra travel days; the 21-day pass, three extra days; and the one-month pass, five extra days. The Eurail Global Pass covers 24 participating countries, nearly all of Europe (including free or discounted travel on some major shipping lines), and gives travelers the largest variety of countries to visit. (eurailgroup.org/eurail)

French Country Waterways, the only American-owned company that offers luxury barge cruises along France's 17<sup>th</sup>-century canal system, will embark on its 30th season this spring, with daily motor coach excursions to historic towns and castles and other points of interest included in the itineraries.

Six-night trips on each of the company's four barges depart on Sundays, April through October, with rates starting at \$5,495 per person (double). Each barge comes with air conditioning and Wi-Fi, and guest rooms feature private baths and individual temperature controls.

A crew of six operates each barge, which can accommodate eight or 12 passengers. An on-board chef combines classic French cooking techniques with lighter, healthier fare, including a continental breakfast, buffet lunch, and four-course, candlelit dinner each day of the cruise.

Guests are offered more than two dozen wines, with half coming from Grand Cru or Premier Cru vineyards, and have access to the complimentary bar on board.

Meals also include an array of French cheeses, fresh croissants and baguettes, chocolates, and

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The Carolina Inn is a fixture in Chapel Hill, N.C., and features food and music on the front porch beginning in April each year.