

TRAVEL

Need furniture? Take a trip to North Carolina

BY SANDIE PARRATT
SPECIAL WRITER

Hickory—a small town on the western side of North Carolina—offers some of, if not the best, furniture shopping in America.

Approximately 60 percent of the nation's furniture is produced within a 200-mile radius of Hickory. It is about an hour from Charlotte, N.C., less than a two-hour flight from Detroit Metro or about a 10-hour drive. People travel from all over the world to visit and buy furniture in this small, but growing town.

Shop-'til-you-drop

Be prepared to shop until you drop—literally. There are some 60 furniture stores in a very small area around Hickory. When I say stores, I mean mega, gigantic, multi-floored, mind-blowing stores. One popular location is the Hickory Furniture Mart. When you walk in you are given an 86-page booklet that describes the various stores within the mart and a map for the four floors of merchandise covering around 700 manufacturers. Types of furniture range from traditional to contemporary, French, or nostalgic, to iron or lodge-look, for children or grown-ups, either mass made or handmade. There are also stores that specialize in rugs, linens, lights and mirrors.

My plan was to look for a contemporary, dining room table that would expand from six to

ten people. Sounds simple doesn't it? Many ads for stores indicate that you can save 30-75 percent over regular retail prices in your home state. I wanted to see if that was true.

First I checked in at the welcome desk to get my booklet and some tips on where to look for contemporary dining room tables. The receptionist was very helpful and suggested about six possible stores to check. She also gave me a coupon for Jessica's Veranda Restaurant located in the building.

After checking the price, getting a brochure and the salesperson's card, discussing the thousand of different options for finishes, sizes, leg styles and expansion choices, I was exhausted. Furniture shopping in Hickory requires time, patience, good walking shoes and don't forget a pad and pen for taking notes.

Great Deals?

Did I find a bargain? No, but I also ended up choosing an Italian made table. Margins and deals are much less if the piece is not manufactured in the North Carolina area. Locally I can purchase the table (which is in stock) for just over \$800. The price includes tax and delivery. If I purchase the exact same table from the Hickory Furniture Mart, Intro Outlet I would pay just over \$860 total delivered, and I have to wait eight to 12

weeks to receive it.

There are still many advantages to making the trip. Many manufacturers will custom build whatever you want. I visited the Robert Bergelin Company showroom named after their father who started the business in 1960. Now they have 30 employees, including craftsmen and a restored mill used to manufacture handmade, quality wood furniture. This company begins making the piece only after you have chosen, for example, the size, type of wood, finish, legs and apron style, number and type of leaves and shape of the top. This is personal service you don't often receive from large furniture stores.

Another advantage to going to Hickory is the stores do not charge sales taxes to out-of-state residents. Many also offer deeper discounts if larger purchases are made. Shipping is an added cost; however, the furniture stores have contracted carriers to combine shipments for lower costs. You wait longer for delivery, but costs are low per pound.



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Of course the amount of furniture and accessories to choose from is another advantage of shopping in Hickory.

Save!

If you are serious about going, contact various outlet stores on

the Web or by phone and make sure you are placed on their mailing list for notice of sales, clubs and special events.

Hickory, N.C. is definitely the place to go if you are looking for furniture and accessories, and you have the time to shop for at

least a week. Take a friend or spouse with you and enjoy.

Sandie Parratt is a free-lance writer from Birmingham and writes about travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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If you are going ...

What else is there? If you haven't seen enough furniture and want to learn about its history you can visit the Catawba Furniture Museum. The museum is located on the Terrace level of the Hickory Furniture Mart.

Or, a wonderful sight is the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge dating from 1894. It is the only remaining example in the world of a 19th Century Bridge utilizing the General Herman Haupt truss design. You can even mine for precious and semiprecious stones

at Hiddenite Gems. After you pay a modest fee you can sluice, dig or go "creekin'". For sluicing you purchase buckets of vein material from mine pits and screen the findings. They list emeralds, quartz, tourmaline, garnets, sapphire and aquamarine as possible finds, but they don't guarantee anything but maybe a sore back. If you drink wine, try to visit Waldensian Heritage Vines in Valdeese. They offer tours and tastings of the same variety of wines made by the original Waldensian winemakers.

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FEBRUARY 8, 2002

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You have until Friday, January 25, 2002 to send in your entry. ♥ You must be 18 years old, limit your lesson in love to 100 words or less, and think romance! ♥ Include your name, age, address, phone, e-mail with your entry. ♥ The winning romantic couple will be announced in your hometown newspaper on Thursday, January 31. ♥ Send your entry to:

Cathy Young, Promotion Manager
"LESSONS IN LOVE CONTEST"
Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia MI 48150
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