

Three Months In



I've lived in Chattanooga, TN for three months now. I thought I'd chronicle some of my observations.

Friendly

I always thought Chicago was a friendly town, but it pales in comparison to this place. The best part is it's not an ooey-goey fake friendly. The folks here are genuinely happy to talk and share their experiences.

Our restaurant strategy when we first got here was to sit at the bar and eat rather than get a table. That way we could pick the brain of the bartender. A bonus has been that when people sitting at the bar hear that we don't have a southern accent they jump into the conversation. They ask why we moved, how long we've been here and what can they do for us. I have more business cards, emails and phone numbers in 3 months than I thought I'd get in a year. Some folks are even becoming friends but those who are not recognize us when they see us again and the conversations just take off from where we left off. This is so refreshing! Life in a new place can be lonely. Not in Chattanooga.

Trees

People warned us about heat and humidity before moving here. It's not as bad as I was predicting. Our office is smack in the middle of downtown. The city fathers had this brilliant idea about 100 years ago and planted tons of very large shade trees. The canopy covers the whole wide sidewalk. So, when you go out for lunch for example, you can stay in the shade as you walk to a restaurant. The temperature under the canopy is about 10 or 15 degrees cooler. You don't have to walk in the sun except to cross the street. Another bonus is the birds. I have never heard so many chirping birds in the middle of a city as I do here.

My new favorite tree is the crepe myrtle. These trees are planted all over town! You can hardly look in any direction and not see one huge one or a cluster of smaller ones. If you check out this link you'll see they come in whole host of colors; some of them are my favorite colors. They bloom from Spring to Fall. I thought with the first rainstorm they'd lose their blossoms and they'd be all over the pavement. Not true. They are hearty and handle even thunderstorms. I can't believe they bloom in full glory all summer long. I'm used to crab apple trees or lilacs that bloom only a short time. Crepe myrtles make my drive down the road a pleasant one with a reason to smile every day. And now I read that they are just as beautiful in the Fall. Fall is my favorite season so I can't wait. Big crepe myrtles have a shady canopy, too!

Weather

Back to the weather. Yes, it's been around 90 degrees for weeks. That would normally make me miserable. I'm grateful I work in an office. I don't think I'd do well working outside in this temperature, but those trees I mentioned make it more bearable. And there's always at least a light breeze that travels over the Cumberland Plateau, so the air is not stagnant. It's really not bad!

Then there's winter. I'll be ready for plenty of rainy days, but I don't have to shovel it. And there won't be huge black and gray piles of dirty snow that don't melt til June.

This last winter was the first time in 36 years of running a company that I had our employees stay home from work for 3 consecutive days. The temperature in Chicago had dropped to -57 degrees. I'm done with that.

Cost of Living

Almost everything down here is about 30% cheaper than Chicago. Rent. Gas. Even a glass of wine. The sales tax is about the same as Chicago but there's no state income tax. There's no tax on retirement income withdrawals either; or Social Security. We had planned to retire somewhere mid-south, but I had no idea until now how economical this all is.

The only things I have found to be as expensive as Chicago are the cost of getting my hair cut and colored, getting my nails done and dry cleaning. There's not much competition around here for dry cleaners so they can charge more. In Chicago you could toss a tennis ball from one dry cleaner to the next. Not here.

Mountains

It's amazing to be surrounded by mountains. I am not much for beaches and palm trees. I'd much rather see lakes and greenery around me. The mountains around Chattanooga are not high. Maybe 2000' at the most but we are just a couple hours from 5000' feet if we really want to be immersed.

I come out of the grocery store most days and look up at Lookout Mountain. The novelty has not worn off. That's another thing that makes me smile just about every day.

This place is called The Scenic City. Easy to see why. The

architecture (new and old) are well kept. The city is clean, and the surrounding beauty is not to be missed. This place was dubbed the dirtiest city in America a couple of decades ago. They sure have cleaned up their act; literally!

Sports

I have not done much besides get the apartment in order but if I want to indulge in sports, we are in sporting heaven. We have everything from rock climbing and hang gliding to biking, paddle boarding, kayaking and even whitewater rafting. It's all right here. There's a race or an event pretty much every weekend. Sporting enthusiasts move here for the variety and low cost. So far, we have taken a bit of time to watch things like a paddle board race and a shell racing event that is the second biggest in the world. Over one weekend there were 9000 rowers here with 2300 shells. That's a sight!

Internet

Chattanooga has the fastest internet in North America. They built a huge company and took everything fiber optic. Zoom! Lots of entrepreneurs are moving here to take advantage of the technology. That means the city is getting younger instead of older. Welcome Millennials!

Driving

Driving is so easy around here. I marvel at how it only takes me about 10 minutes to get from one side of the city to the other and to just about anything I want. I drove on Sunday to Whole Foods at 8:30 in the morning and I was greeted by every guy in the produce department. I practically had the place to myself. You can't get that in Chicago where the Whole Foods has five restaurants, a wine bar and patrons galore. The jam in the Whole Foods parking lot in Chicago is crazy. Here I get to park right

out front and enjoy my shopping time. They even store the carts outside under an overhang. Compared to up north that makes me laugh. Works here though.

Granted, this place has some traffic problems. There are a couple of commuter routes I would not care for at all. There's also a highway that runs up Missionary Ridge. That highway connects to Hwy 75 to Atlanta. You can just imagine the car traffic, but the truck traffic makes it even worse. The trucks are trying to climb up the ridge, so they end up going into a lower gear, slow down and have their flashers on. I can see this spectacle from my patio. I just laugh and tell myself to stay away from that; far, far away.

The downtown traffic is super-manageable. I am starting to recognize hardly anyone beeps. That must be why I can hear the birds so easily.

Target and Walmart

I have to admit, I'm a Target gal. There are two Target's in Chattanooga but they are both 20 minutes away. The Walmart is less than 15. I do go to Walmart on occasion but mostly I save the "Target Run" and bite the bullet.

GPS

I thank my lucky stars for my GPS every day. I am still lost here. I do fine on the main streets but most of them are not straight. This town is not laid out in a normal grid pattern. Because of the mountains and the ridge, the streets wind around. Sometimes they cut through a tunnel. Other times they wind up and down the ridges or hills. I remember having to use my GPS in Chicago too; when I first moved there, so I'm not really complaining. Every new place takes getting used to.

Respect

I am getting used to being called "ma'am." Men and women hold open the door. People say good morning on the street; total strangers smile at you.

The clerks at stores say nice things. I was at the County Clerk's Office recently and the young woman who waited on me called me Miss Sarah. Even the bureaucrats are nice here and show their respect to all those around them.

Stress

My stress level has gone down some. I sleep pretty well. I think I am smiling more. I know for sure I am appreciating my new environment and soaking up all it has to offer.

As the months go by maybe I'll check in again and let you know of a new set of observations. I just hope they are all filled with the positivity I am feeling so far. Chattanooga has been welcoming for sure.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Zola". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.



Caramelized Onion Pie

Caramelizing onions makes the natural sugars in the onion come to the forefront. No more bold onion taste. Just dreamy flavor.