



ancient mountains, fresh adventure

Surrounded by one million acres of forest, Asheville is heaven on earth for outdoor aficionados. Blaze along hundreds of miles of trail through unfragmented wilderness in national forests, summit one of 40 peaks above 6,000 feet, cast for trout on a blue-ribbon stream, or cruise the Blue Ridge Parkway, the nation’s preeminent scenic byway.

The treasures you’ll find in the Blue Ridge Mountains are seldom-seen plant species, frothing waterfalls, humongous granite domes and thriving wildlife. Yet here’s the hook: what makes these precious and ancient mountains so compelling is the unshakeable connection between people and place that stretches back centuries.

The dazzling beauty of sunlight fading behind rows of ridges and valleys unfolds not just a timeline of wilderness formed by Mother Nature, but tells a story of the indomitable spirit of the people who live here too. Explore Cherokee legend, discover century-old settlements, or follow the footsteps of famed 18th century botanist William Bartram and conservation pioneer George W. Vanderbilt. In the Blue Ridge, people aren’t separated by mountains, they belong in them.

New Ways to Get Outside: Forest Bathing + Guided Ecotours

New Land & Lore Ecotours offers private natural history tour options, including hikes to waterfalls, while Ascend Adventure Wellness combines hiking and outdoor spa treatments for the ultimate forest bathing experience.

Stand Up Paddle on a REALLY Big Board

Wai Mauna - known for its Dawn Patrol SUP tours - has added a massive, six-person paddleboard and, for those looking to try one of the newest watersport trends, whitewater SUP lessons and tours. Known for their long season, the company enables folks to be on the water during the fall leaf change!



Belly Up to the River

Try a Bellyyak tour on the French Broad River. Invented in Asheville, this watersport takes place on a face-first kayak that you ride on your belly. **New River Bar:** French Broad Outfitters recently opened Riverside Bar at a popular river access spot. Made out of a recycle shipping container, this bar offers hammocks, picnic tables and food trucks in the summer.

New Trails with Hollywood Ties and Perfect Picnic Locations

The popular **Skyline Trail** that leads to the top of 404-foot Hickory Nut Falls in Chimney Rock State Park has reopened after being closed for almost 10 years. The area near the top of the falls (where the final fight scene in the 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans* occurred) will once again provide guests with incredible panoramic views. **Bearwallow Mountain Trail**, a Hickory Nut Gorge-area trail known for its Instagram-worthy views, grazing cows and spring wildflowers, has recently expanded to include a 100-foot waterfall, towering cliffs and 360-views.

Outdoor Adventure SMAC in the Middle of Asheville

The Smoky Mountain Adventure Center or SMAC is a “one-stop” destination for outdoor adventure activities offering canoeing trips, stand-up board rentals, tube rentals and bike rentals. Need a breather after all that adventure? Take a break on the elevated deck with a view of the French Broad River and a smoothie, coffee or local beer in hand.

Top Five Epic Adventures within Two Hours of Asheville

- 1. Run the Mountains to Sea Trail** - Consider a jog on a moderate section of the Mountains to Sea Trail, which runs 1,000 miles from the Smokies to the Carolina coast. A popular section in Asheville (with ample parking) begins at the Folk Art Center, Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 382.
- 2. Paddle the Nantahala River** - Visit the headquarters of the nation’s largest whitewater outfitter, the Nantahala Outdoor Center, and paddle the site of many premier competitions, like the International Canoe Federation’s 2015 World Championships.
- 3. Summit Sam Knob** - A 2.2-mile round trip to the top of this 6,050-foot peak is a hike that an entire family can conquer with easy access from Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 420 on Forest Road 816.
- 4. Climb the Daddy** - Hire Fox Mountain Guides to take you up one of North Carolina’s most famous climbing routes called the “Daddy” to experience the state’s most inspiring views from the rim of the “Grand Canyon of the east” - Linville Gorge.
- 5. Hike like Art Loeb** - Dedicated to a local trail pioneer, the 30-mile trail includes Cold Mountain, made famous by Charles Frazier’s novel. Day hike options include Black Balsam, a 6,200-foot behemoth within an hour’s walk of the Blue Ridge Parkway access point at milepost 420.

George W. Vanderbilt: Captain of Conservation

Conservation has deep roots in Asheville, but perhaps no one has had as deep an etching as George W. Vanderbilt. Although he is best known for his 250-room Biltmore House and country estate, don't forget the tens of thousands of acres around it, once part of his domain and a credit to a stewardship ethic far before his time. That history is at your fingertips. Hikers and bikers will adore the trails and paths on the 8,000-acre Biltmore Estate where his enlightened land ethic is still in practice. Visitors can also explore the vast backcountry of Pisgah National Forest for a sense of why Vanderbilt was so enamored with the lush landscape. A gateway to the historical forest, multiple trailheads dot the Blue Ridge Parkway along the 17.8-mile Shut-In Trail. In fact, portions of the route are bygone grades sanctioned by Vanderbilt himself to shuttle guests to the mountain heights. Or visit the Cradle of Forestry, a 6,500-acre historical site that celebrates the beginning of forestry conservation in the U.S.



Soft Adventure with Elite Athletes

Outdoor adventure in the Blue Ridge is fit for all abilities, but the region is a playground for world-class athletes, too. Jennifer Pharr Davis is one of them. She's a 2012 National Geographic Adventurer of the Year and broke long-distance hiking records on the Appalachian Trail—2,100 miles in 46 days. Learn a bit of her trekking craft by taking a customized trip suitable for novices or groups with Davis's biz, Blue Ridge Hiking Company. Runners and bikers can venture up the hills and trails that are the training routes of champions like ultra-running distance champion Anne Lundblad and hometown hero cyclist Lauren Tamayo, a 2012 London Olympics silver medalist. And get your yin and yang in order on a stand-up paddle board "SUP" yoga session or learn whitewater basics from a former champion, Canadian kayak team member and founder of Girls at Play Anna Levesque.



Winged Things

Lace up your boots and grab your binoculars. One of the most biologically diverse places in the world, Western North Carolina is a playground for a fabulous array of winged creatures. Listen to the eerie whine of the screech owl or watch for the unmistakably powerful peregrine falcon thriving among cliffs and rock outcrops. Birding is especially fine during the spring and fall when the French Broad River and the mountain chains are corridors for migrating birds. Flock to the Rock is the region's premier fall migration birding event at Chimney Rock State Park. Catch the monarch migration at the Pink Beds, a rare high elevation valley and mountain bog, or the annual monarch release at the Hop'n Blueberry Farm. You might also enjoy A Swift Night Out, an annual viewing event of chimney swifts swirling over city rooftops as they prepare to roost each fall.

Beer & Blue Skies

Enjoying fabulous mountains and five-star pints is easy in Asheville. Outdoor pursuits punctuated by a fresh pint are more than a local tradition. Laid back beer lovers will dig the chummy backyard vibe at the Wedge in the River Arts District or a float to the waterside pub, the Bywater, on the French Broad River. New outdoor music venue Salvage Station also offers local beers and riverside lounging. Enjoy craft ales and small plates with a sunset mountain view at Edison at the Omni Grove Park Inn or enjoy the sunny street-side patios and firepits at Wicked Weed Brewing. Music fans can sip a pint of a wickedly tasty Gaelic Ale created by Asheville craft brew pioneer Highland Brewing while listening to music, from bluegrass to reggae, at their recently unveiled outdoor venue. And Fairview brewery Whistle Hop offers an antique train caboose taproom, disc golf course and sweeping mountain views.

Picnic in a Precious Place

Pack a picnic, and your kite. Among the loveliest places in the southern mountains are dozens of grassy balds that adorn the region's high ridges. These treeless mountaintops encompass one of the richest collections of biodiversity on the planet. The high elevation habitat are home to seldom seen plant communities, rare bird species and elusive animals. These ecological anomalies are among the area's most beautiful places, many easily accessible along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Local favorites are within striking distance in every direction, from the blueberry patches of Graveyard Fields; to the pink, lavender and purple blooms of Carolina Rhododendrons on Craggy Mountain; or the 360 degree views from the grassy summit of Max Patch. **Have Your Picnic Packed:** The Rhu, by James Beard Chef John Fleer, offers packed picnic baskets with local cheeses, sweet and savory scones, local jams and more.