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LIST

# DISCOVER UNUSUAL FESTIVALS AND EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Natives and visitors alike favor festivals and events that revel in local flavor, films, oddities and the chance to celebrate something you never have before.




Calling all Andy Grouch lovers: Mayberry Days in Mount Airy is the festival for you

From *The Wizard of Oz* and woolly worms to whirligigs and hot sauce, North Carolina is full of festivals you can't find anywhere else since so many of our eclectic small towns have been celebrating heritages, collections and the downright unusual for years. So save the date: Here's your chance to plan a trip and see some truly one-of-a-kind events that'll make your friends' and family's eyes widen in wonder.

# AYDEN COLLARD FESTIVAL

(/)  
Sept. 9-10, 2022, Ayden

See on map 

More than 40 years ago, the local newspaper held a contest to determine an annual festival, and collards won out over cucumbers to become the centerpiece in this town (<https://www.aydencollardfestival.com/>) outside Greenville. In addition to one of the largest parades in our state featuring more than 100 entries such as marching bands, classic cars and live animals, there is an art show and a collard-eating contest.

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://WWW.AYDENCOLLARDFESTIVAL.COM/](https://www.aydencollardfestival.com/))


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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.4726626,-77.41552030000003](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.4726626,-77.41552030000003))

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## AUTUMN AT OZ

Sept. 9-11, 16-18, 23-25, 2022; Beech Mountain

See on map 

Travel back in time to 1939 at the Land of Oz Theme Park high atop Beech Mountain to attend this popular festival (<https://www.landofoznc.com/>) – now featuring three full weekends of magic – that celebrates the all-time classic film *The Wizard of Oz*. Children and adults alike will be enchanted as they experience the re-creation of Dorothy’s trip from her farm home through the twister and down the yellow brick road to the Land of Oz. Bringing everything to life are the Emerald City fair, live shows, a petting zoo, vendors and more. Plus, make new friends with the stars from the film such as Dorothy and Toto – and you might even run into a munchkin or flying monkey.

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://WWW.LANDOFOZNC.COM/](https://www.landofoznc.com/))

DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=36.1946784,-81.87799510000002](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=36.1946784,-81.87799510000002))

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## NORTH CAROLINA HOT SAUCE CONTEST & FESTIVAL

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([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdFCduX\\_kZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdFCduX_kZQ))

*Sept. 10, 2022, Oxford*

See on map 

From rich and smoky to sweet and tangy to fruity and zesty, the North Carolina Hot Sauce Contest & Festival (<https://nchotsaucecontestandfestival.com/>) is filled with flavors that have kept thousands coming back for years. The one-of-a-kind event in Oxford (<http://www.visitgranvillenc.com/>) – about an hour north of Raleigh (<https://www.visitraleigh.com/>) – features more than 200 vendors selling sauces, food and goods throughout the streets of downtown, all with the promise of being uniquely North Carolina. Try sauces with flavor combinations you’ve never tasted but will quickly fall in love with, sample those in the running for honors such as N.C.’s Hottest and Most Unique, and take home your favorites to share with friends. Bold and brave types, think you can handle the heat? The Pepper Eating Contest is sponsored by Bailey Farms, one of the largest pepper producers in the East. Best of luck – winner gets \$1,000 and bragging rights.

**WEBSITE ([HTTPS://NCHOTSAUCECONTESTANDFESTIVAL.COM/](https://nchotsaucecontestandfestival.com/))**

**DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=36.3107004,-78.59083450000003](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=36.3107004,-78.59083450000003))**


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**BUGFEST**

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*Sept. 17, 2022, Raleigh*

See on map 

Look at insects in a whole new light at The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences' BugFest (<https://naturalsciences.org/calendar/bugfest/>), a celebration of bugs with more than 100 interactive booths and displays. For 20+ years, tens of thousands of visitors have attended to learn all about insects that creep and crawl. Feeling brave? Sample dishes made from insects and bugs at Café Insecta, then vote on your favorite dish. Don't worry, they're all safe to eat – and given that Raleigh-area (<https://www.visitraleigh.com/>) chefs create many of the dishes, they're actually tasty.

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://NATURALSCIENCES.ORG/CALENDAR/BUGFEST/](https://naturalsciences.org/calendar/bugfest/))

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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.7821824,-78.63929739999999](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.7821824,-78.63929739999999))

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**BENSON MULE DAYS**

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Sept. 16-25, 2022, Benson

See on map 

This popular event (<https://bensonmuledays.com/>) every September draws nearly 30,000 people from across the U.S. and around the world. Activities include an annual parade, rodeo, food, arts, concerts and – new in 2022 – the "Mules Got Talent Contest," where mules perform and the the winner receives prize money. You can even camp at Chamber Park throughout the event.

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://BENSONMULEDAYS.COM/](https://bensonmuledays.com/))

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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.3821067,-78.54862100000003](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.3821067,-78.54862100000003))

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MAYBERRY DAYS



Sept. 19-25, 2022, Mount Airy

See on map 

You can almost hear the famous whistle in the air every September in Mount Airy as the city classically celebrates *The Andy Griffith Show* and Andy's hometown of Mayberry. The weeklong festival (<http://www.surryarts.org/mayberrydays/>) will fill your soul with nostalgia with events such as apple-peeling and pie-eating contests, live music featuring songs from the show, a parade that often includes special guests and, of course, The Andy Griffith Museum.

WEBSITE ([HTTP://WWW.SURRYARTS.ORG/MAYBERRYDAYS/](http://www.surryarts.org/mayberrydays/))


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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=36.4993007,-80.6072858](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=36.4993007,-80.6072858))

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## BEAUFORT PIRATE INVASION

Sept. 23-25, 2022, Beaufort

See on map 

Ahoy, mateys! “Plan yer visit” to attend the reenactment of the 1747 Spanish Attack on Beaufort – in which the local militia finally drove the pirates away months later – at the town’s largest annual event (<https://www.beaufortpirateinvasion.com/>). Nearly 200 professional performers (including magicians,

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sword fighters and musicians), vendors, mermaids and various peg-legged pirates entertain visitors of all ages the whole weekend. Special events include a Pirate Parley (Friday movie night), and dinner and a show Saturday night.

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://WWW.BEAUFORTPIRATEINVASION.COM/](https://www.beaufortpirateinvasion.com/))


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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=34.7292485,-76.665882000000001](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=34.7292485,-76.665882000000001))

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## DENIM DAYS

*Oct. 1, 2022, Erwin*

See on map 

The town of Erwin was once hailed as “The Denim Capital of the World” thanks to its booming denim cloth business from the Erwin Cotton Mill. Although that mill shut down nearly 20 years ago, townspeople and visitors alike still pay tribute during the first weekend in October every year at Denim Days (<http://www.erwin-nc.org/denim-days/>). Turn an everyday action into a party when you put on your best pair of blue jeans and enjoy live music, carnival rides, crafts, food from local vendors and several contests, including “Baby Denim.”

WEBSITE ([HTTP://WWW.ERWIN-NC.ORG/DENIM-DAYS/](http://www.erwin-nc.org/denim-days/))

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DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.3268292,-78.676128](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.3268292,-78.676128))

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## WOOLLY WORM FESTIVAL


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*photo: Avery County Chamber of Commerce*

*Oct. 15-16, 2022, Banner Elk*

See on map 

For generations, High Country residents and visitors have been studying the black and brown bands on these fuzzy caterpillars to determine what kind of winter to expect, with the 13 bands thought to represent the 13 weeks of winter. A race up 3-foot strings is held during this festival (<http://www.woollyworm.com/>) every October to determine which crazy crawler will be crowned the official woolly worm. There's also a 10K "Woolly Worm Wace," local crafts and food, and live entertainment.

WEBSITE ([HTTP://WWW.WOOLLYWORM.COM/](http://www.woollyworm.com/))


PHONE

DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=36.1631817,-81.8715019](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=36.1631817,-81.8715019))

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## NORTH CAROLINA POULTRY JUBILEE

*Oct. 22, 2022, Rose Hill*

See on map 

Home of "The World's Largest Frying Pan" and headquarters of longtime chicken producer House of Raeford Farms, Rose Hill is a logical choice for the annual N.C. Poultry Jubilee (<https://www.thenorthcarolinapoultryjubilee.com/>), held every November. Enjoy carnival rides, shag

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music, the N.C. Poultry Jubilee Pageant and a wing-eating competition. Plus, cross an item off your foodie bucket list you didn't even know you had: Eat fried chicken out of that huge frying pan. It can fry 365 chickens at one time!

WEBSITE ([HTTPS://WWW.THENORTHCAROLINAPOULTRYJUBILEE.COM/](https://www.thenorthcarolinapoultryjubilee.com/))

DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=34.8282235,-78.0230416](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=34.8282235,-78.0230416))

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### NORTH CAROLINA WHIRLIGIG FESTIVAL



*Nov. 5-6, 2022, Wilson*

See on map



Whirligigs are large sculptures created from recycled industrial parts, bringing together both art and science for a grand effect. And every November, downtown Wilson plays host to the Whirligig Festival (<http://whirligigfestivalnc.org/home>), which honors the late local artist Vollis Simpson (his whirligigs are featured on display at the city's park). This arts festival also includes concerts, a "whirli-kidz" zone complete with rides, and a host of local vendors selling crafts, food and more.

WEBSITE ([HTTP://WHIRLIGIGFESTIVALNC.ORG/HOME](http://whirligigfestivalnc.org/home))

PHONE


DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.7212689,-77.91553950000002](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.7212689,-77.91553950000002))

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# 12 ACORN DROP

*Dec. 31, 2022, Raleigh*

See on map 


Begin your new year with a completely new experience: Watch as a 1,250-pound acorn is lowered (<http://firstnightraleigh.com/>) over Fayetteville Street in Raleigh to ring in new beginnings. The sculpture usually resides at the lawn of the city's performing arts center most of the year but is moved over for Raleigh's "First Night," which also includes live music, comedic performances, a Ferris wheel and daytime activities for the kids, as well.

WEBSITE ([HTTP://FIRSTNIGHTRALEIGH.COM/](http://firstnightraleigh.com/))

PHONE

DIRECTIONS ([HTTPS://WWW.GOOGLE.COM/MAPS/SEARCH/?API=1&QUERY=35.7672748,-78.64208580000002](https://www.google.com/maps/search/?API=1&QUERY=35.7672748,-78.64208580000002))

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 See something wrong? Tell us about it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### Matt McKenzie

Matt McKenzie is a craft beer writer based in Charlotte and has written for *Charlotte Magazine* and Charlotte Visitors Guide. He enjoys the fact he can get to either the North Carolina beaches and mountains in 3 hours' time.

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