





# BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN GETAWAY

*by Sarah Henderson*

## **STRETCHING FROM THE TIP OF NORTHERN GEORGIA**

all the way to South Mountain in Pennsylvania, the Blue Ridge Mountains make up a 469-mile section of the massive Appalachian mountain range.

The towns that are sprinkled across the Blue Ridge have always been known for their incredibly lush landscapes—made up of olive, pine, walnut, and maple trees that mingle with all manner of azaleas and laurels—and lately, a new breed of craft breweries, hiking trails, quiet streets, and winding rivers have revitalized the area into the ultimate home away from home.

## **Spotlight: Asheville, NC**

Arguably the region's most vibrant town, Asheville is a short drive northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina. Hop on I-85 to I-26 or take Highway 74 through Shelby and Kings Mountain, and about two hours later, you'll find yourself in a mountain town that's home to a lively restaurant scene that runs the gamut from top-notch tapas to cozy al fresco bakeries. Local, or-

ganic food is right around every corner, which makes it easy to eat with the season. Asheville is known for nurturing its artists; and is a haven for health enthusiasts and spiritual seekers. Inspiration is found in the scenery, the music, the art, the beer, everywhere. The town embodies the essence of a thriving arts community with world-renowned artists, bustling art galleries, and nightly downtown drum circles. And when it comes to outdoor activities, Asheville does not disappoint.

Whether you're looking for a short day hike or a month-long trek, the Blue Ridge offers hundreds of favorite hiking trails close to Asheville. Hiking near Asheville offers several different perspectives on the surrounding mountains—from wildflower-lined paths and easy nature walks perfect for families, to summit hikes with magnificent views and trails that route you alongside majestic waterfalls, there's an Asheville hike for just about everyone. Speaking of waterfalls—one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Blue Ridge Mountains is also one of the easiest to

experience. A little more than 30 miles from downtown Asheville, the 75-foot Looking Glass Falls waterfall is located along the scenic U.S. Highway 276 in Pisgah National Forest. You can admire it roadside from the observation deck, or head down the stairs for a closer look. In the summer when the sun is high and the water level is low, it turns into the local hangout for swimming.

“I especially love Asheville in the summertime,” says Marjorie Redding, Realtor®/Broker with Dickens Mitchener. “There’s a lot going on and it’s a bit cooler than Charlotte—but not too cool. Asheville stays lively during the summer as opposed to other second-home towns like Blowing Rock and Linville which tend to close down around 9:00 or 10:00 at night.”

After a long day of hiking along the Blue Ridge, shopping fine retail at Biltmore Village, or antiquing your way through downtown, it’s time to kick back and relax with a nice, cold beer. And there’s almost no better place to do it than Asheville. The town boasts more breweries per capita than any other U.S. city and was first named Beer City USA in 2009. To make the most out of an Asheville “beercation,” hop on one of the town’s several beer tours. You’ll most likely grab a pint at Green Man Brewery’s taproom on Buxton Avenue before turning the corner on Collier Avenue to visit Burial Beer, which is where you’ll find locals who can give you tips on dozens more breweries to visit later.

Another must-visit is New Belgium Brewing Company. Joan



The Tap Room at Green Man Brewery.

Goode, Realtor®/Broker with Dickens Mitchener, says, “My favorite Asheville brewery is New Belgium Brewery—they have a fantastic outdoor space with cornhole and frisbee.”

Put the final stamp on your Asheville brewery passport at Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. Their 185-acre campus attracts

beer culture enthusiasts from throughout the Southeast. At their taproom and restaurant, you’ll find award-winning ales and lagers among their 19 beers on tap that are offered alongside artfully prepared meals and dishes made with local, seasonal, sustainable ingredients. Fresh produce is grown in the Sierra Nevada Estate Garden



Incredible views from the Blue Ridge Parkway.

and bread is baked onsite with spent grain for a true farm-to-table experience.

No visit to Asheville would be complete without the town's crown jewel: Biltmore Estate. Built between 1889 and 1895, George Vanderbilt's 250-room French Renaissance Biltmore House is a true marvel. Biltmore House is a Gilded Age chateau-style mansion that was constructed to be the estate's main residence. It contains more than four acres of floor space, including 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, and 65 fireplaces. The estate's vineyard, winery, retail shops, restaurants, ice cream parlor, and horseback riding program make Biltmore Estate a can't-miss for any time of year. That being said, there are two seasons

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that Biltmore shines particularly bright: spring and winter. Beginning in early April, hybrid tulip varieties begin filling up the estate's two-and-a-half-mile Walled Garden, along with forsythia, spirea, magnolia, and flowering cherries. Later in the month, you'll see poppies, snapdragons, dogwoods, spring bulbs, and redbuds, not to mention more than 250 varieties of roses. "What really amazes me about the Biltmore house is the scale of the home and property, states Vicky Mitchener, Dickens Mitchener Founder and Owner. "We are incredibly fortunate to have this icon in the North Carolina mountains to



Guitarist performing in an open-air restaurant in downtown Asheville.

attract visitors and locals year-round. The festive Christmas open house is a family tradition for many North Carolinians." Indeed, in the winter, from November through January, thousands of glittering ornaments and oversized candy canes weigh on the bows of more than 55 Fraser fir Christmas trees throughout the estate for *Christmas at Biltmore*. Once the sun goes down, you can enjoy the flicker of candlelight, firelight, and twinkle lights as

live performances of Christmas music round out *Candlelight Christmas Evenings*.

Whether you find yourself drawn to the splendor of the foliage, the rich artistic culture, or the buzzing food and beer scene, the natural beauty and laid-back vibe of Asheville make it the perfect setting for a quick day trip or seasonal retreat in your second home.

The next time you hear the mountains calling, go.



Mountain vista.