

September 30, 2007

## 36 Hours in Asheville, N.C.

By CHRIS DIXON

[Asheville](#) is an Appalachian Shangri-La. This year-round resort town, tucked between the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains, draws a funky mix of New Agers, fleece-clad mountain bikers, antiques lovers and old-time farmers. And what's there not to like? Charming yet surprisingly cosmopolitan for a town of about 73,000, Asheville has a Southern appeal all its own. There are lazy cafes and buzzing bistros, Art Deco skyscrapers and arcades reminiscent of [Paris](#), [kayaking](#) and biodiesel cooperatives and one of the world's largest private homes — the [Biltmore Estate](#), a French Renaissance-style mansion with 250 rooms. No wonder so many locals first started out as tourists.

Friday

5 p.m.

## 1) GATHER AT THE GROVE

For a taste of Asheville's urbane and crunchy sides, start at the Grove Arcade (1 Page Avenue; 828-252-7799; [www.grovearcade.com](#)), a giant market built in 1929 and beautifully restored a few years ago. It now anchors downtown Asheville. The Grove Corner Market (corner of Battery Park and O. Henry; 828-225-4949) has fresh bread, wine tastings and live [music](#). Imladris Farm (828-628-9377; [www.imladrisfarm.com](#)) sells heavenly jellies and jams (\$7). And Dogwood Digs (828-337-0541) carries batik-pattern dresses starting at \$32. Or just stroll along the sidewalk outside the arcade and mingle with the Bugaboo pushers and artists buying honey, jewelry and handmade soaps from local merchants.

8 p.m.

## 2) INDIAN SALSA

Asheville's eclectic dining scene varies from backwoods barbecue joints to sumptuous ethnic hideaways like [Mela](#) (70 North Lexington Avenue; 828-225-8880; [www.melaasheville.com](#)), an Indian restaurant that blends imported spices with local ingredients. The dark, wood-paneled space draws a mixed crowd with dishes like Chowpatty ragada, potato patties topped with curried chickpeas, tamarind yogurt and mint chutney (\$5.95), and shrimp bhuna, cooked with ginger, tomatoes and green chilies (\$13.95). Wash it down with a Chimay beer, brewed by Belgian Trappist monks (\$7), or a glass of Champalou Vouvray (\$8). After 10, dining tables are cleared to make way for a salsa club.

10 p.m.

## 3) PICK ME UP

The [Old Europe Bistro](#) (41 North Lexington Avenue; 828-252-0001; [www.oldeuropeasheville.com](#)) is what you might expect from Asheville night life: couples sipping espressos and sharing a plate of tiramisù (\$4). But if you feel like dancing to hip-hop and electronica, played by "the region's hottest D.J.'s," head to the back, which the bistro owners have turned into the Z Lounge. The low-ceilinged space, with red sofas and faux flagstone walls, is popular with Asheville's young professionals.

Saturday

10 a.m.

## 4) EARLY TO RISE

Grab a hearty but healthy breakfast at the [Early Girl Eatery](#) (8 Wall Street; 828-259-9292; [www.earlygirleatery.com](#)), a friendly haunt of hip Ashevilleans for the past six years that culls its ingredients from local farmers. Try the sausage and

sweet potato scramble (\$7.75), a delicious mix of eggs, sausage (vegan or pork), shiitake mushrooms, spices and sweet potatoes.

Noon

#### 5) SOUTH PARISIAN

It's easy to see why downtown Asheville is nicknamed "Paris of the South." On weekends, you'll find buskers, flaneurs, artists and shoppers strolling along the historic downtown district, lined with Art Deco buildings and tree-shaded squares. Quirky shops include the [Mast General Store](#) (15 Biltmore Avenue; 828-232-1883; [www.mastgeneralstore.com](#)), which sells wooden toys, Gore-Tex parkas and gummy bears, and Voltage Records (90 North Lexington Avenue; 828-255-9333), which carries 50,000 vinyl records including an import of Iron Maiden's, "Number of the Beast" (\$20). If you're in the market for art, head to [Woolworth Walk](#) (25 Haywood Street; 828-254-9234; [www.woolworthwalk.com](#)), a former Woolworth store from 1938 that showcases about 160 artists and that recently resurrected the original soda fountain.

3 p.m.

#### 6) GO WEST

Asheville's grittier west side is home to the up-and-coming River Arts District (828-252-9122; [www.riverartsdistrict.com](#)), where local artists are colonizing old factories and warehouses along the French Broad River. Notable studios included Northern Crescent Iron (828-775-2865; [www.northerncrescentiron.com](#)), where Matt Waldrop fashions whimsical butterfly sculptures from salvaged copper, and Cotton Mill (122 Riverside Drive; 828-252-9122; [www.cottonmillstudiosnc.com](#)), which houses nine artists. Wedge Gallery (111-129 Roberts Street) shows works from students and other artists and plans to open a brewery in December.

6 p.m.

#### 7) SUNSET IN THE SMOKIES

For great views of the Art Deco skyline framed by the Smoky Mountains, take the rickety old elevator to the top of the Flatiron Building. (Don't forget to tip the operator.) The World Coffee Cafe (18 Battery Park Avenue; 828-225-6998; [www.worldcoffeecafe.com](#)) recently opened three rooftop balconies, where you can savor a glass of pinot grigio as the sun sets.

7:30 p.m.

#### 8) TABLE TALK

You'll find modern American cuisine in a minimalist room at [Table](#) (48 College Street; 828-254-8980; [www.tableasheville.com](#)), a casual but upscale restaurant opened by a husband-and-wife team who moved back from Brooklyn. The menu changes frequently and might include fried green tomatoes with quail egg and romesco sauce (\$10), and a grilled [North Carolina](#) tuna in a black sesame and soy glaze (\$25).

9:30 p.m.

#### 9) BLUEGRASS TO ALT ROCK

Scores of talented acoustic musicians call Asheville home. To hear some of the best, drive out to the [Root Bar No. 1](#) (1410 Tunnel Road; 828-299-7597; [www.rootbar.com](#)), a dive bar with a great beer selection that includes Mahr's Ungespundet (\$6), a dark lager from [Germany](#). Look for a huge illuminated "R" across from a BP station. If you're not into the band, head to the backyard for a game of rootball, a cross between horseshoes and boccie invented by the bar's former owner, Max Chain (sets are \$32). For big-name acts, check out the schedule at the Orange Peel Social Aid and Pleasure Club (101 Biltmore Avenue; 828-225-5851; [www.theorangepeel.net](#)), where [Bob Dylan](#), Sonic Youth and, more recently, Smashing Pumpkins have played.

Sunday

10 a.m.

## 10) PICNIC PALACE

Load up for a picnic at the [Western North Carolina Farmer's Market](#) (570 Brevard Road; 828-253-1691), a bright and cavernous space where you can chew the fat (literally) with the drawling farm folk. In the fall, you'll find stands overflowing with ripe heirloom tomatoes, orange bell peppers and crisp Granny Smith apples. At the Mountain Sunshine Farms (828-258-5358; [www.msffarm.com](http://www.msffarm.com)) sample the one-year cured ham (\$4.99 a pound), muscadine jelly (\$2.96 a jar) and Amish Gouda cheese (\$6.95 for three-quarters of a pound).

Noon

## 11) INTO THE WILD

Take your provisions to western North Carolina's beautiful wild lands. In the autumn, the mountain air clears of its summertime haze and hardwoods explode with color. Drive south (and uphill) along the Blue Ridge Parkway, until you reach milepost 407.6 for the Mount Pisgah Trail. This three-mile trek is steep, rising 500 feet to a 5,721-foot peak. Unpack your picnic and soak in the grand panorama, which includes the gothic spires of Asheville, the Shining Rock Wilderness area and 6,684-foot Mount Mitchell, the highest peak east of the [Mississippi](#).

## VISITOR INFORMATION

US Airways has flights from Newark to [Asheville](#), with a change in Charlotte, starting at \$329 for travel next month. It is often easier to fly directly to Greenville, S.C., about an hour by car to Asheville. Delta has nonstop flights from La Guardia Airport to Greenville, starting at about \$360. A car is a must to get around; major rental companies can be found at both airports.

The plushiest spot in Asheville is the [Inn on Biltmore Estate](#) (1 Antler Hill Road; 800-411-3812; [www.biltmore.com](http://www.biltmore.com)), where the lavishly appointed rooms are \$299 to \$2,000 a night. Set on the grounds of the 8,000-acre Biltmore Estate, the inn also offers Land Rover excursions, horseback riding and fly-[fishing](#).

Mountain Vacation Rentals (828-398-0712; [www.asheville-cabins.com](http://www.asheville-cabins.com)) offers rustic-style cabins starting at \$100 a night, with choices ranging from simple cottages with kitchenettes to luxurious log cabins with Internet and huge decks.

Cedar Creek Cabins in the nearby town of Weaverville (70 South Main Street; 828-645-5531; [www.cedarcreekcabinsnc.com](http://www.cedarcreekcabinsnc.com)) also has nicely appointed log cabins for \$150 to \$225 a night.

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