

# Traveling with High Street to... Asheville, NC, Ideal Mountain Vacation Destination



Travel writer Aaron Leventhal relaxes at his Asheville Vacation Villa

"Asheville ranks in the top 50 globally for authenticity, stewardship, integrity of place."  
– National Geographic Traveler survey, 2008

Asheville, North Carolina, nestled in a valley along the French Broad River and ringed by the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains, has emerged as one of America's premier vacation destinations. Its natural beauty, year-round temperate climate, vibrant downtown, dynamic arts scene and award-winning independent restaurants draw millions of visitors annually to this remarkably diverse community of 75,000 residents. A pleasant seven-hour drive south along Route 23 from Columbus to Asheville takes you along country roads and through pristine mountain passes.

Originally inhabited by the Cherokee and settlement farmers, Asheville became a popular destination in the 19th century as sanitariums sprang up to treat individuals with respiratory ailments seeking the fresh mountain air. Asheville changed forever when George Vanderbilt fell in love with the region and built his 250-room, French-inspired Biltmore Estate, attracting a stampede of socialites from the eastern seaboard. The town boomed into the 1940s and then languished for decades until a spirited band of entrepreneurs, artists and retirees rediscovered Asheville's unique charms in the 1990s. The community has blossomed ever since.

**Attractions - Asheville Urban Trail**, a 1.7-mile self-guided downtown walking tour, passes most of the city's major landmarks. **The Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site** has hourly tours of the famous novelist's boyhood home. **The North Carolina Arboretum** features 434 acres of gardens and forest trails. **The Basilica of St. Lawrence** is an early 20th century masterpiece with the largest freestanding elliptical dome in the United States. **Western North Carolina Farmers' Market** has dozens of vendors hawking fresh produce, cheeses, raw honey and baked goods. Put aside a day to visit **Cherokee** to experience an 11,000-year-old civilization by exploring its Oconalufree Indian Village, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, outdoor drama "Unto These Hills" and Harrah's Casino. Dozens of outdoor outfitters offer rafting expeditions, zipline canopy tours and canoe, kayak, tube and fly fishing rentals. Primitive hiking trails abound, along with dozens of scenic and challenging golf courses.

**Arts and Festivals-** The visual and performing arts flourish in what *American Style* magazine cited as one of the top 10 small arts destinations in the nation. Not to be missed is the **River Arts District**, where once dormant warehouses and factories have been converted into more than 100 galleries and studios, including Odyssey Center for Ceramic Arts, CURVE studio and gardens featuring encaustic painter Constance Williams and Wedge Studios with galleries, a brewery and tasting room. In the summer, there are outdoor



Encaustic painter Constance Williams at CURVE, 9 Riverside, River Arts District

festivals downtown practically every weekend, including Bele Chere in July, with four stages of free live music, and Goombay in August.

**Food and Brew** - More than a hundred nearby sustainable family farms, greenhouses and orchards provide fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, natural corn-fed beef and free-range poultry and eggs to tailgate markets and more than a hundred independently owned and operated restaurants in the area. Among my favorite restaurants are **Mayfel's** for authentic Louisiana specialties, **Mela Indian Restaurant** with a daily all-you-can-eat lunch buffet, **Doc Chey's Noodle House** for Thai dishes, **Laughing Seed Cafe** for exotic vegetarian food and **Luella's Barbecue**, for the best ribs in town. For a complete listing of Asheville independent restaurants (AIR), log on to [www.AIRasheville.org](http://www.AIRasheville.org). Recently Asheville was voted "Beer City USA" in an Examiner.com national poll. It has seven craft breweries, many open for tastings.

**If You Go** - Begin your visit at the Asheville Visitors Center (36 Montford Ave., Exit 4C off I-240) and hop on the Asheville Historic Trolley Tour for an informative, 90-minute trip around the city (888-667-3600). I stayed at **Asheville Vacation Villas** (800-733-3211) in one of its 30 furnished cabins in a wooded area with access to Crowne Plaza Resort's outdoor swimming pool, golf course, tennis courts, fitness center, restaurant and bar. Also recommended is the 1891 **Cedar Crest Victorian Inn** ([www.cedarcrestinn.com](http://www.cedarcrestinn.com), 800-252-0310), with 17 rooms, a carriage house and guest cottage. Also, **Grey Beard Realty** (888-228-8008) manages more than 200 rental locations in the area.

**WIN a trip to Asheville!** Log on to [www.highstreetmoneysavers.com/nc](http://www.highstreetmoneysavers.com/nc)

**For more information:** Contact the **Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau** at [www.ExploreAsheville.com](http://www.ExploreAsheville.com) or 800-257-1300.

Travel writer Aaron Leventhal is editor and publisher of *High Street Neighborhoods*. Photos by Dani Leventhal.

## Asheville Vacation Villas

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