

Hickory's Not-So-Hidden Gems

The Hickory Metro area is located between North Carolina's beautiful mountains and its bustling piedmont. Here, you can enjoy the best of both worlds, from gem mining and mountain hikes to furniture shopping and stock car racing. So gear up for a fun three-day trip to discover what Hickory has to offer!

3-Day Itinerary

Day 1

Head to Hiddenite to search for emeralds and other precious gems, then explore Murray's Mill and one of just two covered bridges left in the state.

Day 2

Take a day hike in South Mountains State Park, and get revved up for some racing action at the Hickory Motor Speedway.

Day 3

Shop for furniture bargains and treat yourself to a game of golf or a luxurious spa treatment.



With so much to see and do in the area, we recommend the following 3-day itinerary. Enjoy your visit by mixing and matching events to your particular interest. Be sure to check days and hours of operation for each venue.

Day One

Start your adventure mining for riches at the **Emerald Hollow Mine** in **Hiddenite**, the only emerald mine in the United States open to the public for prospecting. You can choose between working the sluice, panning a clear mountain stream, or actually digging in the mine! The area is host to 63 types of gems and minerals, so you could come away with an emerald, sapphire, amethyst, or some other rare find. Even if you're not so lucky, you'll come away with good "clean" fun getting dirty in the great outdoors.

Now, clean yourself up a little and head down to **Historic Murray's Mill** in Eastern Catawba County. Here, you will find an authentic two-story waterwheel mill that operated from 1913 until 1967, lovingly preserved by the Catawba County Historical Association and listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. You'll also find the **Murray & Minges General Store**, still selling rock candy, wooden toys, and old-fashioned soaps and salves, and the **Wheatouse Exhibit Gallery**, which features displays on architectural elements from the area's historic homes, as well as a collection of miniature hand-carved buildings.

On your way back into Hickory, make a quick stop off of Highway 70 and admire the **Bunker Hill Covered Bridge** near the town of **Claremont**, built in 1895 and one of only two original covered bridges remaining in North Carolina.

Day Two

Put on your hiking boots and head to **South Mountains State Park**, 20 miles south of Morganton in Burke County. This park includes 40 miles of trails, an 80-foot waterfall, and elevations of up to 3,000 feet. Besides hiking, there's camping, trout fishing, a 17-mile mountain bike loop, picnicking, and other activities available here. In fact, you could spend several days exploring all that this spectacular wilderness park has to offer.

If you're here on a Saturday, you can experience another side of NC by taking in a race at the **Hickory Motor Speedway**. This short track (.363 mile) is a training ground for NASCAR's future greats, and over its 50-year history, the speedway has hosted more than its share of soon-to-be-famous drivers, including Junior Johnson, Ned Jarrett, Denny Hamlin, and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. The facility keeps a busy

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schedule, hosting races on most Saturday nights between March and November.

Day Three:

Now it's time to enjoy one of the things Hickory is famous for: furniture shopping! Head down to the **Hickory Furniture Mart**, where you'll find nearly 100 furniture outlet stores, shops and galleries with prices as much as 80% off of retail. You'll find home furnishings, accessories, lighting, art, fine rugs, and fabrics... laid out on more than a million square feet of space. Also in Hickory is the **Catawba Furniture Mall**, another one-stop-shop with more than eight acres of discount sale furniture.

Finally, treat yourself to something special at the **Rock Barn Golf & Spa** just off of Interstate 40 (Exit 133). If golf is your game, Rock Barn has two courses to choose from: the challenging Robert Trent Jones Course (named the 4th best US course in its category by *Golf Digest*), and the shorter and less demanding Tom Jackson course. If you'd rather wind down your stay with a relaxing massage or body treatment, The Spa at Rock Barn was a wide variety of ways to send you home rested and oh-so-relaxed.

Where to eat:

Friday Friends (Morganton) – lunch, dinner
Josh's On Union Square (Hickory) – brunch, lunch, dinner
Youssef 242 (Hickory) – lunch, dinner
Old German Schnitzel Haus (Hickory) – lunch, dinner

Where to stay:

Peacock Inn (Newton)
Trott House Inn Bed & Breakfast (Newton)
Councill House Bed & Breakfast (Hickory)

For more information:

Hickory Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau
www.hickorymetro.com

Burke County Chamber of Commerce
www.burkecounty.org

Alexander County Chamber of Commerce
www.visitalexandercounty.com