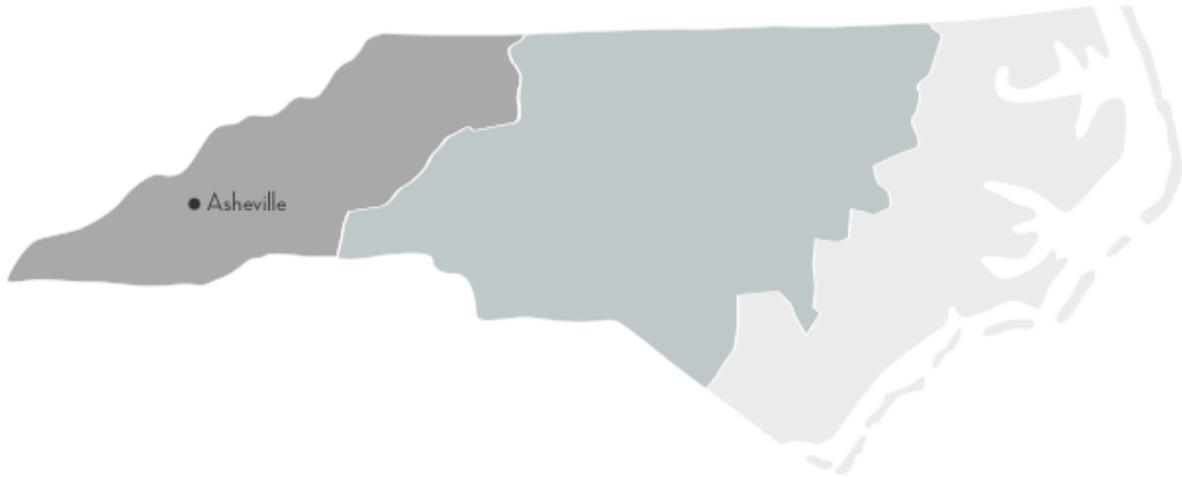


Mountains of Flowers

Are you a romantic who dreams of beautiful, breath-taking views? Are you an outdoor enthusiast who is always ready for your next encounter with nature? There are places where romance and nature meet – along the garden paths and wildflower trails in the **Mountains of North Carolina**.



Three-Day Itinerary

Asheville snuggles between the graceful Blue Ridge Mountains and the Great Smoky Mountains in the western region of North Carolina. Asheville is conveniently accessed at the junction of Interstate 26 and Interstate 40. Visitors may also arrive via the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway.

There are three inspiring gardens to visit in Asheville! Historic **Biltmore** boasts beautiful formal and informal gardens and miles of walking trails. The **North Carolina Arboretum** offers wildflower paths that range from easy to challenging. If high-tech is your style, take a guided *Segway Trail Tour* at Biltmore or the North Carolina Arboretum. For a downtown garden retreat, visit the **Botanical Gardens of Asheville** to stroll among native mountain wildflowers.

Off the garden path, downtown Asheville has a fun, vibrant nightlife! When it comes to dining, great local flavor is served at the many Farm to Table Restaurants that use locally grown, farm fresh products.

Asheville is quite accommodating with mountain cabins, bed and breakfast choices, hotels and fine resorts. Your best friend is welcome at many places in Asheville. It is one of the most pet-friendly resort areas in the country!

Three-Day Itinerary Highlights

Day One

Biltmore, Biltmore House, Estate and Gardens

Day Two

North Carolina Arboretum, 434-acres of gardens and trails

Day Three

The Botanical Gardens at Asheville, over 600 species of native plants

Enjoy all the area has to offer by mixing and matching the garden tours and other activities to suit your particular interest. Be sure to check the website or call ahead for visitor information and hours of operation.

Day One

A Sweet Breakfast (1/2 hour)

West End Bakery & Café is a great place for handcrafted muffins, scones, cinnamon rolls and coffee cake. How about a few brownies or cookies to go? This local hangout is located on Haywood Road in West Asheville. Don't miss this funky little neighborhood that is just over the French Broad River from downtown.

8,000 Acres of Backyard at Biltmore (2-3 hours, gardens)

The creation of Biltmore began in 1895 as a dream of George Vanderbilt. Frederick Olmstead, the famous landscape designer of Central Park in New York City, also designed the Biltmore Gardens.

There are acres of formal and informal gardens to explore, and miles of walking trails on the estate. Four acres of *Shrub Gardens* are filled with 500 different plants, shrubs and trees. The 15-acre *Azalea Garden* includes 1,000 azaleas. The *Walled Garden* is a formal showcase that is planted for a progression of blooms. The glass *Conservatory* houses tender palms and ferns. It is still used to grow flowers for the Biltmore House.

Tip: Just beneath the Conservatory, you can buy garden décor as well as live plants at A Gardener's Place.

Stable Yourself With a Good Lunch (1 hour)

After enjoying the gardens, walk back to the Biltmore House to find the Stable Café (to the right of the house). The converted 19th-century stable is convenient for lunch between touring the gardens and the house. Start your casual lunch with the *Black-eyed Pea Cakes* and follow with an entree such as *Chicken Pot Pie*, or a *Fried Green Tomato BLT*. Enjoy a fabulous dessert in the café, or go back outside for an ice cream from the *Ice*

Cream Parlor!

Tip: The Conservatory Café, located behind the glass Conservatory in the gardens, sells light refreshments such as snacks, drinks and deli sandwiches. Beverage carts are located throughout the Estate. If you want to picnic on the estate, you can order a picnic basket from the Bake Shop beside the stable area next to Biltmore House.

Take the Grand Tour (2-2½ hours, house)

It took six years to build America's largest home. George Vanderbilt hired architect Richard Morris Hunt to design the house based upon three chateaux in France. The grand house was indeed a home for George and Edith Vanderbilt who graciously entertained family and friends.

A tour of the 250-room Biltmore House allows you to step back into history. Imagine the lifestyle of the Vanderbilt family in 1895 – from their bedrooms to bowling in the basement. Meander through the original kitchen, pantries and rooms of the household staff. Be sure to look out the windows at the fabulous views of the grounds of the estate and the backdrop of mountains.

Tip: When you first arrive at Biltmore, you can make reservations for the restaurants or guided garden/house tours at any Guest Services desk. If you decide you want to add a day to your visit, you can purchase a next-day admission ticket for \$10 per person.

Wine Down (1–2 hours)

Daily at 4:00 p.m., the Biltmore Winery offers a *Red Wine and Chocolate Seminar* that is included as part of your estate admission. If you arrive earlier, attend the free 3:00 p.m. cooking demonstration. Don't miss the wine tasting room or the shop full of gourmet foods and North Carolina products.

Walk, Don't Drive to Dinner (1-2 hours)

Next door to the Winery, the Bistro restaurant serves seasonal foods, fresh from the Biltmore Kitchen Garden and local farmers. Soups, salads, steaks and seafood creations are served in the casual, old world style restaurant.

Tip: If you stay at the Inn on Biltmore, you may choose to have dinner in the elegant dining room. Or, have light fare from the bar while enjoying a rocking chair on the veranda. Too tired? Order room service!

Day Two

Keep on the Sunny Side (1 hour)

Start out with a *MGB* (Mighty Good Breakfast) of free range eggs, nitrate-free sausage and a choice of roasted spuds or chipotle cheese grits served with an angel biscuit or warm focaccia. Whew – what a mouthful! Okay, if you really must eat less, then *BYOB* (*Build Your Own Biscuit*)! These breakfast wonders are served all day at Sunny Point Café on Haywood Road in West Asheville.

Happy Trails and Bonsai (2-3 hours, including lunch)

The North Carolina Arboretum is set among the natural beauty of the mountains. The 434-acre gardens are part of the inter-institutional facility of the University of North Carolina and used for education, research and conservation.

A collection of Bonsai includes over 100 display specimens while another hundred are at different stages of design. The diverse display includes Asian, as well as American designs.

Arboretum Trails provide the opportunity to walk, hike, bike or even ride a Segway among the native plants. Azaleas, rhododendrons and other native wildflowers grow along the trails. The nine trails vary in length and difficulty. The *Azalea Repository Trail* is easy and the *Natural Garden Trail* is easy to moderate walking.

Don't miss the beautiful flower garden planted in the pattern of a Southern Appalachian quilt. The Quilt Garden represents the rich craft heritage of the Western North Carolina Mountains.

Grab a convenient lunch at the Savory Thyme Café at the Arboretum. Soups, sandwiches and salads are served. Have your lunch in the atrium for a wonderful view of the *Bent Creek* watershed.

By the Way, Drive the Parkway (2-3 hours)

After walking the trails, take a scenic drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the top five places to see wildflowers near Asheville. The Arboretum is located just off the ramp to the Parkway milepost 393, so you are less than a mile from accessing this famous roadway.

The North Carolina segment of this famous scenic byway runs 252 miles from Cherokee to the Virginia border. (*Always check for road closures before driving the parkway.*)

The Craggy Gardens Visitor Center is at milepost 364, just 29 miles north. The beautiful, native rhododendron bloom here in June and July and fall colors are gorgeous! If you miss the summer bloom, the short 0.7-mile

hike will reward you with jaw-dropping 360-degree views of mountain peaks and valleys. Even in summer you'll want a jacket, as this 5,000-foot high elevation can be twenty degrees cooler than the lower elevations!

Tip: If you have time, drive another nine miles north to milepost 355 to Mount Mitchell State Park. Rising 6,684-feet above sea level, this is the highest mountain east of the Mississippi! A new observation deck was completed in January 2009.

Have Your Cup of Tea (1 hour)

If you prefer to drive the Parkway on another day, then have Afternoon Tea (3:30–4:30 p.m.) overlooking the gardens at Richmond Hill Inn. The beautiful Victorian gardens were featured in *Southern Living Magazine*. Be sure to make reservations for tea – or stay here for a romantic getaway at this AAA Four Diamond inn!

Dinner Downtown (2 hours)

Tonight, enjoy downtown Asheville with dinner at Tupelo Honey Cafe on College Street. Described as “southern favorites with a creative twist,” the executive chef established a 12-acre organic farm to supply produce to the restaurant. Gourmet burgers and sandwiches are available while tempting entrees include *Cajun Skillet Catfish* and *Nutty Fried Chicken*.

Day Three

Moose and Market (2 hours)

Serving country cooking seven days a week for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the Moose Café is another local favorite. The café is located on the grounds of the Western North Carolina Farmer's Market. Show up early for a great breakfast and then take your time touring the Farmer's Market. Homemade apple butter and hot biscuits are made from scratch in the kitchen and brought to every table.

The Farmer's Market is packed with Western North Carolina produce, products and crafts. The Jesse Israel & Sons Garden Center is on the grounds for those who want to shop for garden plants and bonsai.

Our Wildflowers are Tame (1-2 hours)

The ten-acre Botanical Gardens of Asheville are located within two miles of downtown. This wonderful retreat is the home of over 600 species of plants that are native to the Southern Appalachians. Bloom times vary from early March through December. The rare plants include *Mountain Camellia*, *Mountain Sweet Pitcher* and terrestrial orchids. A half-mile trail loops over streams, meadows and woodland. A “dog trot” Appalachian cabin, springhouse and a pavilion add to the authenticity and enjoyment of the native gardens.

Dine with a View (2 hours)

Linger over lunch or dinner to enjoy the Blue Ridge Mountain vistas from the fabulous Sunset Terrace at the historic Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa. Built in 1913, famous guests such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Harry Houdini and Eleanor Roosevelt stayed at the Grove Park Inn. Listed as one of the *Historic Hotels of America*, make sure you explore the massive lobby with its two gigantic 14-foot stone fireplaces. You may decide to stay!

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