



Undeniably Coolsville: ASHEVILLE

BY LYNNE BRANDON



Architecture greets newcomers with majestic buildings standing against a mountain backdrop. The 13-story Jackson Building near downtown Pack Square is a neo-Gothic structure dating to the 1920s. It is the state's first skyscraper in western North Carolina.

Aside from their tourism amenities Biltmore Estates and Grove Park Inn are both known for stunning architecture and sculpted gardens. Biltmore is North Carolina's number one attraction with more than one million guests annually. Spend the day touring the 250-room French Renaissance chateau with original collections of antiques and art. Omni Grove Park Inn blends southern charm and sophistication to appeal to the modern traveler. The famed resort is a 100-year old Arts and Crafts structure carved in native granite stone and surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Scenic mountain vistas entice adventure lovers with activities from hiking and biking trails, white water rafting, parks, zip lines and much more. Travel down one of the oldest rivers in the world—by kayak, raft or Stand-Up Paddleboard—in the city recognized as one of 'America's Best River Towns' by *Outside* magazine.

It's easy to spend the night in Asheville with luxurious accommodations. In the next two to three years, hotel inventory in Buncombe County is projected to increase by 25 percent and downtown hotel rooms will more than double. Biltmore will welcome the estate's second onsite overnight accommodation, opening in fall 2015.

At Aloft Asheville, beautiful accommodations take a back seat to the canine adoption program with Charlie's Angels Animal Rescue. Guests are greeted at the hotel lobby's front desk by pooches needing a home. The pet-friendly hotel is always welcoming to guests with dogs but these particular four legged friends are looking for a permanent owner and shelter. "Our guests' responses have been overwhelmingly positive, generating almost one adoption per week," said John McKibbon, chairman of McKibbon Hotel Group. "We are uniting families with new best friends."

The farm-to-suds industry is in high gear in the mountain city with 21 craft breweries and counting. The city is the reigning Beer City USA king for the fourth straight year with good cause. The city has more micro-breweries per capita than any city in the nation (roughly one brewery per 8,000 people).

The brew scene in the city is riding high with five annual beer festivals and brewery tours. On any given day, about 50 local beers can be enjoyed in Asheville, each with its own unique personality. Founded in 1996, the Brewgrass Festival is western North Carolina's original craft beer festival featuring more than 50 breweries offering a diverse assortment of national and regional craft beers. >>

Asheville is fast becoming one of the coolest cities in North Carolina. It is a city where you can adopt a dog at a hotel, drink some of the best craft beer in America and experience a city that is now part of an iconic board game.

City and tourism officials are excited about Asheville landing a spot on the king of board games, Monopoly, in 2015. "I do think it will bring a lot of awareness for Asheville," said Landis Taylor with the Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Maybe for folks who haven't heard of us, or maybe for folks who have heard of us and are now intrigued that we've made the list of the top 20."

The move to include Asheville in the Monopoly Here and Now: US Edition makes sense. The city is on the nation's short list for cities to see for many reasons. It is the home of the largest private resident in the U.S., Biltmore Estates, an outdoor lover's paradise and film maker's haven (*Hunger Games* and other famous movies have been filmed in Asheville), a foodie utopia and a place where industry is growing alongside small businesses.

ASHEVILLE

Industry giants New Belgium and Sierra Nevada call the city home alongside smaller local craft operations. Highland Brewing is Asheville's oldest brewery and celebrated 20 years in 2014. It is a destination in itself located next door to an artisanal moonshine distillery.

Asheville's South Slope is the city's unofficial brew district. Growth is on the rise with plans for Catawba Brewing to put down roots in the district and a \$4 million expansion by Green Man Brewery. Wicked Weed's Funkatorium is the first and only sour and wild beer dedicated tasting room in the southeast. Wicked Weed also bucks convention with a 'hop-tail' hour with beer cocktails.

The 'foodtopia' city has nationally acclaimed chefs that dish up fresh, local foods that pair well with the brew and sprit scene. Three Asheville chefs received nominations for Best Chef in the Southeast in 2015: Chef Katie Button at Curate tapas bar and speakeasy Nightbell; Chef John Fleer of downtown favorite Rhubarb; and Chef Meherwan Irani of Chai Pan and MG Road.

Music goes with the artistic town like peas go with carrots. Artists flock to the thriving music community that embraces traditional bluegrass, 'newgrass,' and

'no-grass' as locals call their unique flavor. A favorite gathering spot is the Orange Peel Social Aid and Pleasure Club, rated one of the 'Top 5' rock venues in the nation according to *Rolling Stone*.

Growth is a natural overflow of the city's lifestyle. The Asheville area has seen strong growth year after year in professional and business services, health services and private education jobs, as well as leisure and hospitality. Over the past five years, 6,200 new jobs (direct, indirect and induced) and \$1 billion in capital investment have been announced by the Asheville Area Chamber's Economic Development Coalition.

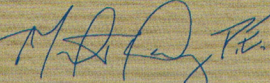
New technologies and innovations, combined with the region's legacy of handcraft businesses are driving increased activity across a diverse economy, from local startups to expanding advanced manufacturers like GE Aviation, Thermo Fisher Scientific, BorgWarner and others.

Public spending on greenways, road rerouting and other infrastructure upgrades in and around in the city's River Arts District will reach approximately \$50 million in the next six years.

Asheville has an estimated population of 85,000 (2013 figures). The Asheville metro unemployment rate was 4 percent, the lowest of any metro area in North Carolina. []



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