



# BLUE RIDGE BREEZE

NAMED FOR A LEGENDARY CLIFF IN NORTH CAROLINA'S HIGH COUNTRY, BLOWING ROCK'S ENDEARING DOWNTOWN AND CREATIVE VIBE ARE AS COLORFUL AS ITS FALL REGALIA.

BY Ashley Shaw | PHOTOGRAPHY BY John O'Hagan



- AS SEEN IN -  
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North Carolina's Blowing Rock teems with local shops and eateries framed by postcard vistas of the Blue Ridge Mountains. (Counterclockwise from bottom left) Make your way along Main Street starting at historic art studio Edgewood Cottage, where a statue of painter Elliott Daingerfield memorializes the building's first artist-in-residence. See his work and numerous world-class exhibits at the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum. Interior designer Molly Northern offers chic home décor and gifts at The Bee & The Boxwood boutique. Next door, try the made-to-order ice-cream sandwiches at Blue Deer Cookies, owned by Molly's son and his wife.

The drop of a single leaf high over Johns River Gorge is all it takes to experience the phenomenon that's mystified Blowing Rock visitors for centuries. Instead of falling, the foliage sweeps up and away on a gust of cool mountain air, a sight that lures travelers off the Blue Ridge Parkway for a jaunt through the artsy, inviting village christened to honor the natural landmark.

"Blowing Rock has a wonderful small-town feel. It's a gorgeous area, and I think one of the reasons people here are so nice is because of how pretty it is," says North Carolina native Willard Watson III, director of

programs and outreach at the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum (BRAHM).

Not only does BRAHM illuminate the history of this small Appalachian hamlet and showcase regional handicrafts, but it also displays a world-class American Impressionism collection. Museum admission is free, and rotating exhibits prompt enrichment programs and interactive demonstrations. In September, a presentation on the science of fall color will intrigue anyone fascinated by autumn's main event, which contributes to Blowing Rock's population surge this time of year.

"The leaf season is the big draw, but downtown is as appealing as the natural beauty," says Molly Northern,

an interior designer who has called Blowing Rock home for nearly 20 years. When a space on Main Street came up for sale in 2021, Molly purchased it to house the second location of her home décor shop, The Bee & The Boxwood. Her son Austin and his wife, Callie, opened their first Blue Deer Cookies storefront in the same building, serving locally made ice cream sandwiched between fresh-baked cookies.

Both businesses contribute to downtown's eclectic array of boutiques and eateries run by affable residents. "The locals are friendly, authentic, and down-to-earth, and you feel welcome," Molly says, noting the community's long history as a sanctuary from the Southern







A pillar of Blowing Rock's culture of creativity, Bolick and Traditions Pottery (bottom right) presents a treasure trove of ceramics crafted by High Country artisans. The Speckled Trout Restaurant and Bottle Shop (above) serves impressive takes on classic dishes from fresh catch to chicken and dumplings. (Opposite) Located at The Inn at Ragged Gardens (top), The Best Cellar Restaurant's must-try Banana Cream Pie has been on the menu since it debuted as a basement café and bookshop in 1975. The Mountain Thread Company's signature rope baskets feature multihued zigzag stitchwork, a modern spin on Appalachian craftsmanship. Peruse custom fine jewelry, as well as larger sculptural pieces, at metalworker Gaines Kiker's downtown storefront.



heat and metropolitan bustle. "What people love about Blowing Rock is that it's still so quaint. It hasn't lost that over the years. Even though it brings a lot of people, it doesn't feel touristy. It's just charming."

Specialty stores along the main thoroughfare appeal to shoppers of every age and taste, as do "cute side streets" that Molly encourages visitors not to skip. Many places reflect the area's thriving artisan community, including quilter Katherine Lile's craft emporium, The Mountain Thread Company, and metalworker Gaines Kiker's studio and jewelry gallery. Bolick and Traditions Pottery stocks goods handmade by multiple families whose roots in ceramics span six generations.







“It’s wonderful to be in an area that not only supports art but helps nurture artists,” says Willard, whose great-grandfather was known around Blowing Rock for his toy-carving craftsmanship. Willard recommends following up your tour of BRAHM with a stroll through Edgewood Cottage next door, painter Elliott Daingerfield’s first home studio. The historical society has restored the circa-1890 building to host a different High Country artist-in-residence weekly.

At the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, browse myriad creations featured by the Southern Highland Craft Guild at the beautifully preserved Flat Top Manor (above and opposite). Once at the helm of the largest denim mill in the world, Moses Cone built the Colonial Revival mansion in 1901 and planted the forests surrounding the estate, where trails allow for horse-drawn carriage rides and easy hiking.







At Finley House Couture (above), find gorgeous fashions from estate accessories to designer apparel. Enjoy seasonal bistro fare and decadent desserts at Storie Street Grille (below, left). Fall's color show is a top reason to hike the Glen Burney Trail (below) and visit the town's namesake attraction. (Opposite) Experience the wind tunnel created by the natural landmark (top) that causes leaves and snow to "fall upside down." Opened in 2021 by Jan and John Winkler, The Manor hotel (bottom) promises laid-back luxury in spades.



If you're up for a slightly more strenuous trek, the Glen Burney Trail at Annie Cannon Park offers rewarding sites like three waterfalls and architectural ruins dating to the early 19th century. Those less inclined to ramble through the woods can relish a breathtaking view from the observation deck at the city's namesake attraction, the Blowing Rock, which is wheelchair accessible. See towering Mount Mitchell and Grandfather Mountain in the distance and the winding valley more than 3,000 feet below.

From every angle, the village of Blowing Rock is as enchanting as its illustrious ancient boulder. "It's a nice place to slow down," says Willard. "Take in the scenery, enjoy the breeze, come to BRAHM and look at some art, hang out with old friends, and make some new ones."

