



BLOWING ROCK, NORTH CAROLINA

With ski slopes, stylish shops, and history walks, this four-season vacation town charms visitors at every turn

BY LARRY BLEIBERG



Appalachian Ski Mtn.

The Blue Ridge Mountains may be a billion years old, but it wasn't until the early 1960s that folks decided this region would be a good place to ski. That's when

Appalachian Ski Mtn., northwest North Carolina's first winter resort, opened outside what had been the summer holiday town of Blowing Rock. Today visitors can swoosh down runs, shred through terrain parks, and ice skate under the stars—and then shop and dine in a historic hamlet that feels straight out of a cozy village novel. (In fact, Blowing Rock inspired the fictional town featured in Jan Karon's best-selling 14-book Mitford series.) Here's how to make the most of a North Carolina winter getaway.

Friday

CHECK IN → For a comfy and convenient base, try the 18-room **Hemlock Inn**. Located half a block from Main Street, the gussied-up motor lodge opened as the city's first boardinghouse in 1872, and for the last 30 years has been run by the Summers family—and several generations of their golden retrievers. Rooms, including some with full kitchens and vaulted ceilings, have been updated with reclaimed wood paneling and handcrafted furniture. The courtyard is graced with a gazebo warmed by a gas firepit.

If you prefer something fancier, head to the **Chetola Resort**, a former private estate that's now a 42-room luxury lodge. Even if you're not staying the night, book a post-ski, deep-tissue massage at the spa and enjoy the heated pool and Jacuzzi.



Chetola Resort



Blowing Rock Brewing Company's Ale House

EVENING → You know a restaurant's a neighborhood favorite when its walls are covered with photos of residents. But at **Bistro Roca**, the featured locals have fur and four feet. The cocktail list is worth barking about too, with wry craft concoctions such as the Third Husband (tequila, chili lime mixer, and Campari) and the Barry White Sangria (prosecco, St-Germain, and vermouth-soaked local berries). For dinner, the chimichurri-marinated lamb is a winner, as are the artisan pizzas. Ward off a night chill with the bourbon pecan bar, a delightfully gooey treat served warm with vanilla ice cream and orange-maple glaze.

Saturday

MORNING → Start your day at **Hellbender Bed & Beverage**. Named for a native salamander, it happens to serve what's probably the city's best build-your-own breakfast biscuits, with bacon, egg, cheese, ham, and more.

Now it's time to head to the hills. Since **Appalachian Ski Mtn.** opened its slopes in 1962, Blowing Rock's winters have never been the same. The Swiss-inspired resort has 13 runs and four terrain parks and stays open as late as midnight. Its celebrated ski school has trained more than 1 million students in the past 60 years. Snowmaking equipment ensures dependable conditions, and the state's only Zamboni keeps the outdoor ice-skating rink slick. On Blowing Rock's snowy days, winter sports options expand to **Moses**

Cone Memorial Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The former estate, developed by a textile tycoon in 1901, is now run by the National Park Service and includes 25 miles of carriage trails, perfect for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and all-season hiking, as well as the original Cone family mansion.

AFTERNOON → Head back to town to refuel at **Blowing Rock Brewing Company's Ale House**. The Cloud Rise Hazy IPA goes down easy, as do fresh-baked soft pretzels served alongside zesty Lusty Monk "Original Sin" mustard from Asheville and house-made beer cheese. Satisfy a red-meat craving with a bison burger served on a brioche bun or topping a superfood salad.

Fully sated, exercise your credit card in the town's charming boutiques and gift stores. **Cabin Fever** specializes in North Carolina's version of hygge, selling cozy accessories such as table linens decorated with black bears and its bestselling buttered-maple-syrup-scented candles. Across the street, **Speckled Trout Outfitters** can win over the most reluctant shopper with the surprising combination of fly fishing supplies and craft beer on tap. Or head down the block to freshen up your wardrobe from head to toe. **Sunset Tee's & Hattery** has everything from wide-brimmed sun hats to 10-gallon toppers—more than 500 options at last count. Nearby, **Monkee's of Blowing Rock** has a shoe lounge with fashionable sneakers, leather boots, and stylish handmade Turkish imports.

Local makers get their due too. **High**

MEET THE MAKERS

Blowing Rock is a destination for creative artisans

THE MOUNTAIN THREAD COMPANY

Prepare to be inspired as **Katherine Lile**, a fourth-generation quilter, creates intricate rope baskets and quilts in her studio workshop located in the historic Martin House on Main Street. Pick up a keepsake or join a workshop and learn to make something yourself.

GAINES KIKER SILVERSMITH / GOLDSMITH

Watch the master at work as **Gaines Kiker** turns gold, silver, platinum, and precious and semi-precious stones into works of wearable art in his open studio, jewelry shop, and gallery downtown.



GROUNDWORKS ↑

Blowing Rock native **Hunter Allen** has been fashioning fine leather apparel and accessories by hand since 2019. From his studio shop in SouthMarket downtown, he makes and sells wallets, bound notebooks, dog leashes, clutches, and belts, customized to your specifications.

Country Candles offers elaborate, multicolor, sculpted designs that would look at home in a museum, while **McCoy Minerals'** handcrafted jewelry features North Carolina gemstones like emeralds and amethyst. There's even a vending machine selling jewels by the carat.

EVENING → On a chilly night, Blowing Rock's most romantic spot may be **Best Cellar**, an upscale eatery with dark wood walls and cozy tables. Consider the Boot Straps cocktail made with bourbon, Cabernet Sauvignon, and maple-muddled cherries. It tastes like a cousin to the Manhattan and is just as smooth and boozy. For dinner, there's elegant comfort food, such as creamy lobster bisque and slow-braised short ribs with crumbled Gorgonzola. The dessert of choice is banana cream pie with pecan cookie crust, kitchen-whipped cream, and toasted coconut. As the servers say, the only thing not made in house is the

bananas. It's clearly a recipe that works—it's been on the menu since the 1970s.

Sunday

MORNING → Grab brunch at **Cupcrazed Cafe**, a new restaurant occupying one of the city's oldest buildings, a former mountain handicraft training center run by the Episcopal Church; it later served as the town's first public library. It's built from clapboard and stone and topped with a steep gable roof. Menu options range from chicken and waffles to French toast casserole topped with a mixed berry compote and whipped cream.

Before heading home, take some time to appreciate the past. The free and smartly curated **Blowing Rock Art & History Museum** spotlights the city's artistic

heritage. Catch the introductory film and rotating exhibits, then bundle up for the history walk. A short stroll reading bronze plaques "spills the tea" on former residents, including the first mayor, who got drunk one night and stamped a herd of cattle through town. The next morning, he opened court and fined himself \$1 for disorderly conduct. Today the town celebrates him.



Blowing Rock Art & History Museum

BLOWING ROCK ART & HISTORY MUSEUM

Nature

LIVES HERE

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SAPELO LIGHTHOUSE

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SAPELO ISLAND

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