



CELEBRATION STATION

North Carolina tourism is reporting record visitor spending. The industry keeps the party going, debuting destinations and organizing events, many celebrating the nation's 250th birthday.

North Carolina tourism officials have lots to smile about. Visitor spending reached \$36.7 billion in 2024, a 3% increase from the previous record of \$35.6 billion a year earlier, according to the N.C. Department of Commerce. Seventy-one of the state's 100 counties reported increased activity, including double-digit jumps in Ashe, Burke, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Stokes and Union counties.

"We were clearly thrilled with 2024's visitor spending and proud of our role in promoting the North Carolina travel experience," says Wit Tuttell, Visit North Carolina executive director. "The state's appeal starts with scenic beauty, but it's also due to culture, innovation and hospitable warmth. We can celebrate

all those strengths without a jaw-dropping record, which frankly might be hard to top."

North Carolina was the fifth most-visited state for domestic travel in 2024, according to the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. (Data for 2025 hasn't been released.)

"Among the satisfactions of promoting North Carolina tourism is the knowledge of how many of our travelers return," Tuttell says. "We're talking 86% of out-of-state visitors. This is more than a point of pride. It's also knowing that tourism is an engine that supports our state and local economies and saves residents money on their tax bills. I tend to see it as an unbeatable mix of business and pleasure."

But those record numbers aren't the only reasons to celebrate.

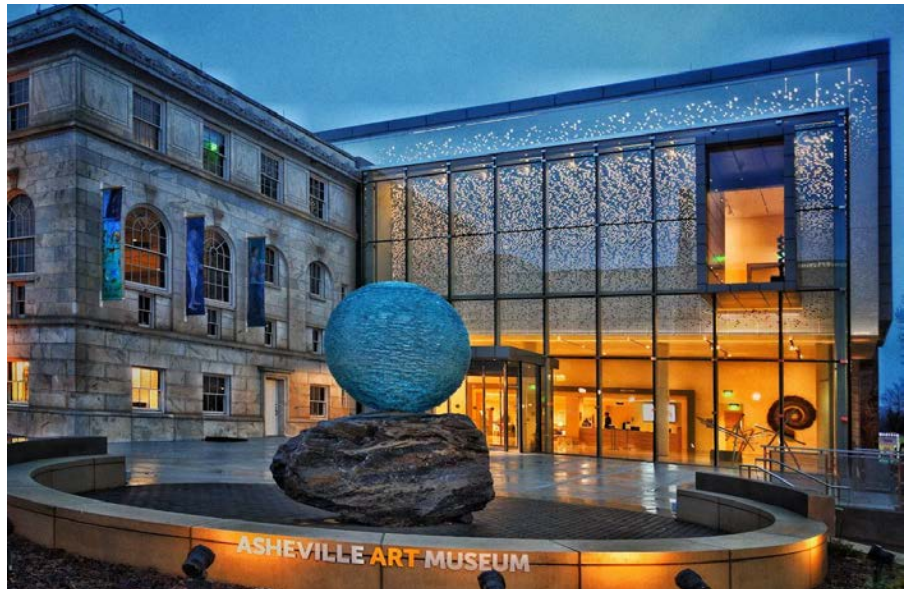
The destinations behind them are participating in the party being thrown this year for the country's 250th birthday. "America 250 creates prime opportunities for exploring stories of places that are rich in character as well as historic significance," Tuttell says. "The Halifax Resolves, for instance, is a true 'First in Freedom' moment, and visiting the site during America 250 will heighten awareness of the courage it took to stand up to powerful forces. On a lighter note, we might find more pleasure in a sip of Captain Jack Pilsner or a beer from Natty Greene's by reflecting on their namesakes."

Look for other North Carolina travel destinations, for both pleasure and business, throughout this section.

MOUNTAINS ARE RISING

Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina in September 2024. But recovery efforts launched from near and far have accomplished much, rebuilding roads, communities and industries, including tourism, across the region. “I’d say the mountains are going from recovery into growth,” Tuttell says.

The region’s growth is fueling what Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and its destination marketing organization, Explore Asheville, label “restorative journeys.” Visitors are seeing the region in a new light. “The Asheville area is back — full of that well-loved blend of entertainment, arts, food scene



Asheville Art Museum’s “In a New Light: American Impressionism 1870-1940” runs through June 29.



BEST RESORTS IN NORTH CAROLINA FOR 2026

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. The Ballantyne, a Luxury Collection Hotel
<i>Charlotte</i> | 9. The Sanderling
<i>Duck</i> |
| 2. The Inn on Biltmore Estates
<i>Asheville</i> | 10. The Holly Inn
<i>Pinehurst</i> |
| 3. Old Edwards Inn & Spa
<i>Highlands</i> | 11. The Horse Shoe Farm
<i>Hendersonville</i> |
| 4. The Ferrington House
<i>Pittsboro</i> | 12. High Hampton Resort
<i>Cashiers</i> |
| 5. The Omni Grove Park Inn & Spa
<i>Asheville</i> | 13. Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort
<i>Cherokee</i> |
| 6. The Swag
<i>Waynesville</i> | 14. Hilton Vacation Club Beachwoods
<i>Kitty Hawk</i> |
| 7. Pinehurst Resort
<i>Pinehurst</i> | 15. Sonesta Charlotte Lower South End
<i>Charlotte</i> |
| 8. Grandover Resort & Spa, a Wyndham Grand Hotel
<i>Greensboro</i> | |

Source: US News and World Report

and outdoors that so many North Carolinians have come to savor,” says Vic Isley, Explore Asheville president and CEO. “Our creative community always has a way of unlocking your spirit and encouraging you to experience life at your own pace in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We invite folks to come see for themselves in 2026.”

New attractions are awaiting visitors. Lower Ghost Town, which caters to climbers, is near Chimney Rock State Park and is slated to open in April. Beacon Bike Park in Swannanoa is transforming the grounds of a former blanket factory, once the world’s largest, into walking trails, bike park and concert venue; it’s scheduled to open this spring. At the Asheville Art Museum, “In a New Light: American Impressionism 1870-1940” traces the movement’s evolution in the U.S through the work of more than 75 artists. It runs through June 29.

The 114-mile stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway between Asheville and Cherokee, almost half of the route’s North Carolina mileage, reopened in September, just in time for the region’s busiest tourism season.

DESTINATIONS
NC TRAVEL



Top left, Biltmore Estates in Asheville remains one of the region's top attractions. Left, a climber tackles Lower Ghost Town, near Chimney Rock State Park. Below left, the 114-mile stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway between Asheville and Cherokee, almost half of the route's North Carolina mileage, reopened in September.

Visitors can follow it on their way to several America 250 destinations, including Oconaluftee Indian Village, which recreates life in the 1760s, when Europeans first settled on Cherokee land. If they head east to McDowell County, they'll find the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, which traces the route militia took to the Battle of Kings Mountain, a decisive patriot victory that Thomas Jefferson said turned the tide of the American Revolution.

Tourism infuses nearly \$3 billion to the Asheville region each year, according to Explore Asheville, and its No. 1 attraction is Biltmore.

The country's largest private home welcomes about 1.4 million visitors annually. On select evenings through mid-October, many will enjoy "Luminere." It will turn the grounds into an immersive outdoor art exhibit. Photos from the estate's past and Vanderbilt family will be projected onto the house and other spots. Visitors can enjoy them during a self-guided tour while listening to a custom score written by Julian Grefe and performed by the Asheville Symphony.

The Biltmore name is attached to the PGA Tour's upcoming tournament at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove in nearby Arden. The mid-September Biltmore Championship, the start of a four-year run, is the tour's first stop in Buncombe County in more than 80 years. Famed golfer Jack Nicklaus designed the course.



GRAYLYN
Meetings Feel Less Like Work
and More Like Inspiration







**Retreats, Accommodations,
Team-Building, and Events**

336-758-2415
graylynmeetings.com

Submit RFP: 

PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID SHARRATT / BILTMORE ESTATES AND EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

Experience It All

IN ONE PLACE



Grandover Resort & Spa

The Best of the Piedmont Triad

Luxury Accommodations

Dining • Golf • Tennis

Spa • Entertainment • Art Gallery



Greensboro, NC | 336.294.1800

**WYNDHAM
REWARDS**

grandoverresort.com

PIEDMONT IS SWINGING

The Moore County communities of Pinehurst, Southern Pines and Aberdeen are the Home of American Golf. Their 19 courses were among the state's top 100 last year. This year they'll host major tournaments, including the men's and women's North & South Amateur Championships from June 28 to July 4. The men's and women's U.S. Opens will return to Pinehurst No. 2 in 2029, a repeat performance of 2014, the first and only other time the tournaments were staged on the same course in consecutive weeks.

Golfers and fans alike fuel tourism spending in the county, which was \$860 million in 2024, according to Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen. Tourism was the county's second-largest employer with nearly 6,300 workers that year, and it saved \$546.46 in taxes

per capita. It generated \$28.1 million in local taxes and \$32.2 million in state tax revenue.

Swing up to Greensboro, and Grandover Resort & Spa offers 36 holes of golf, spa, tennis courts, art gallery, live entertainment and outdoor pool.

Follow the North Carolina Civil Rights Trail through Guilford County, and visit sites connected with the movement, beginning with the F.W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, site of lunch-counter sit-ins in 1960. The trail also includes International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro, Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex in Fayetteville, Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, Earl Scruggs Center and Buffalo Creek Gallery in Shelby, High Point's Blair Park Municipal Golf Course, Raleigh's Village District and John Chavis Memorial Park, and



It all started more than a century ago, with the North & South Amateur — the first championship to be played in what has become renowned and revered as the Home of American Golf. Since then, many other professional and amateur tournaments have been held on the storied courses of the Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen Area, including some of the golf world's most prestigious events.

REQUEST A FREE TRAVEL GUIDE and experience a getaway with Moore.

HomeofGolf.com

- OUTDOOR ADVENTURE
- DINING
- SHOPPING
- GOLF

RESERVOIR PARK, SOUTHERN PINES



Meetings here deserve an encore.

You'll see



It sounds too good to be true—a business trip worth extending. But then you dig in and discover a lively downtown, arts and culture, historic architecture, amazing food, and outdoor experiences that make staying the night feel less like extra effort and more like the best decision you made all week. An amazing trip to Sanford, NC for business and pleasure? Not so far-fetched after all.



DENNIS A. WICKER
CIVIC & CONFERENCE
CENTER

visit
sanford

dawcc.com | visitsanfordnc.com

Durham's Whistle Stop Tours and Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice.

The Michelin Guide recognizes nearly 50 restaurants across North Carolina. Some are in Charlotte, which British General Cornwallis called a "hornet's nest of resistance" in 1780.



Today, the state's most-populous city makes it easy to couple a top-notch meal with top-notch entertainment.

"Bank of America Stadium anchors a year of marquee moments, from the return of the ACC Football Championship to a lineup of top-tier concerts, including Bruno Mars, Zach Bryan and Ed Sheeran," says Shawn Flynn, Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority director of corporate communications. "The stadium will also host the U.S. Men's National Soccer

Team in one of its final international friendlies ahead of the FIFA World Cup, underscoring Charlotte's growing stature as a soccer city on the global stage."

The lineup at nearby Spectrum Center includes Nine Inch Nails, Eric Church and RUSH alongside WWE Friday Night SmackDown. Truist Field hosts Charlotte Knights baseball games and the return of Banana Ball in early June, when the Firefighters will play the Texas Tailgaters. "The energy, the fans, the city — it's the perfect place to keep growing Banana Ball to 1 billion fans," Jesse Cole, founder of the touring Savannah Bananas traveling baseball games, says in a news release.

While NASCAR races its Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway in May, NFL's Panthers play through the fall and NBA's Hornets play through winter, the Queen City offers plenty of non-sporting events year-round. "Spring brings Charlotte SHOUT!, a multiweek festival celebrating

art, music, food and ideas across Uptown, while September welcomes the Charlotte International Arts Festival, which transforms the city through global and local artistic expression," Flynn says.

"Culinary experiences remain a major driver of visitation in 2026, building on national recognition from the Michelin Guide, James Beard Award-honored chefs and Charlotte's role as host city for Bravo's "Top Chef Season 23." Signature events, like Savor Charlotte, further spotlight the city's food culture through chef-driven experiences and special menus."

CRVA's 2025 Impact Report detailed the industry's importance to the region. "Visitors delivered \$6.4 billion in economic impact for Mecklenburg County and supported nearly 38,000 local jobs, fueled by stronger hotel performance, record-breaking conventions and a world-class calendar of events," it said.



OUT OF OFFICE, INTO THE EXTRAORDINARY

Experience the timeless charm of The Graylyn Estate in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Set on 55 stunning acres, our boutique hotel features 85 guest rooms and offers 15,000 square feet of meeting and event spaces. Elevate your next gathering with team-building activities and themed events. Enjoy the feeling of home with unlimited ice cream and the personalized service of our butler team.

Alexandra Collins | 336.758.2415
graylyn.com



THE HOME OF AMERICAN GOLF AND USGA'S WORLD GOLF HALL OF FAME

Looking for a golf getaway with everything? Moore County's a gimme. We have legendary courses, outdoor adventures, unique dining, cool craft breweries — and that's just for starters. So plan your visit to the Home of American Golf. We guarantee: It's Moore than you're expecting!

Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen
800.346.5362 | HomeofGolf.com

COAST AWASH IN HISTORY

North Carolina's coast stretches about 300 miles and includes beaches, quaint waterfront towns and fishing villages, wild horses and a memorial to the first successful heavier-than-air, controlled, powered human flight. All are sites of America 250 events.

Battlefields and structures from the American Revolution and Civil Wars are preserved throughout the region, including Fort Fisher State Historic Site in Kure Beach, Fort Macon State Park in Atlantic Beach, Moores Creek National Battlefield in Currie and Fort Caswell on Oak Island.

North Carolina was one of the 13 original colonies and the 12th state to ratify the Constitution. And none of its coastal destinations may be more tightly tied to America 250 than Halifax State Historic Site. It's where Halifax Resolve Days: Prelude to Revolution will be held April 10 through 12. Visitors will

take part in an interactive recreation of events from April 12, 1776, when the Fourth Provincial Congress authorized delegates to the Continental Congress to vote for independence.

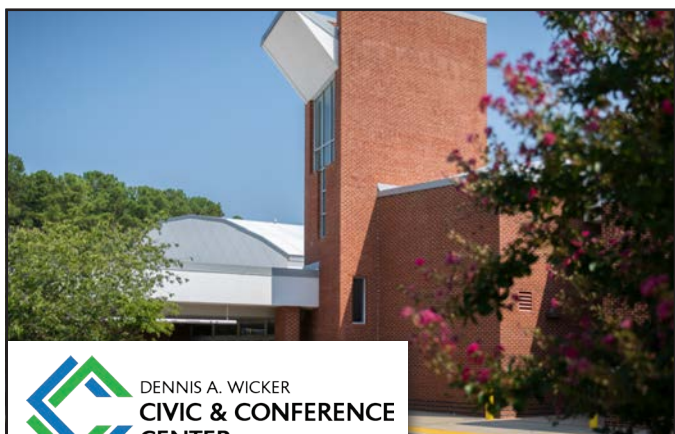
The Crystal Coast — from Harkers Island to Emerald Isle — has prepared a busy summer schedule for visitors. It includes the Beaufort Wine & Food Spring Festival in mid-April and Atlantic Beach Music Festival on May 16. "One of our bigger events is the Emerald Isle St. Patrick's Day Festival, which usually has a big turnout," says Steve Conklin, Crystal Coast N.C. information services and visitor center manager.

"And the International Dark Sky Week [stargazing from Harkers Island] is a pretty big staple as well." Other well-known events include the Newport Pig Cookin' Contest, in its 48th year, and Wooden Boat Show in Beaufort, celebrating its 50th year. ■

— Kathy Blake is a writer from



Cape Lookout National Seashore was certified as an International Dark Sky Park in December 2021 for "exceptional quality of the night skies of the park and the opportunities for astronomy-based experiences. Cape Lookout National Seashore is the first Atlantic coastal Dark Sky Place in the NPS to receive this certification," according to the National Park Service.



DENNIS A. WICKER
CIVIC & CONFERENCE
CENTER

VISIT SANFORD

Most business trips end when the meeting does. In Sanford, they're just getting started. The Wicker Center offers meeting facilities with big city quality and small market pricing. Beyond the boardroom, experience championship golf, vibrant arts, exceptional dining, and genuine hospitality. It's a business trip worth staying for—you'll see.

Faye Stone | Facility Coordinator | dston766@cccc.edu
919-776-0345 | dawcc.com



EXPERIENCE IT ALL, IN ONE PLACE

Uncover the charm and history of Greensboro while enjoying a distinctive stay at one of North Carolina's premier resorts. Featuring two challenging golf courses, day spa, tennis, an on-site art gallery, Finial Restaurant offering Southern-inspired fare, handcrafted cocktails at one of our bars, live entertainment, and a game room. The conference center features meeting rooms, unique ballrooms, and lovely outdoor venues.

100 Club Road | Greensboro, NC 27407
336-294-1900 | grandoverresort.com