

rock of ages, for all ages

Exploring the mountains surrounding Asheville is an immersion in millions of years of natural history. Nowhere in North America is the biodiversity matched. Nowhere east of the Rockies are the summits higher and the gorges deeper. And nowhere on the continent are the mountains and streams more ancient. Formed three hundred million years ago, these timeworn mountains are a haven for wildlife and a botanical paradise.

For families that appreciate the natural world, the possibilities are endless. The staggering assortment of life is a delight for experts, too. Consider this: Biologists estimate more than 100,000 living organisms in the Smokies including 500 varieties of spiders and 2,500 species of beetles.

If tiny creepers unnerve you, consider a day trip to Cataloochee Valley, home to a herd of antlered elk; marvel at tiny bonsai replicas of famous mountain landscapes at the North Carolina Arboretum; or get up-close, but not too personal, with native black bear at the WNC Nature Center or Grandfather Mountain. Downtown Asheville also offers an array of kid friendly activities from museums to electro bike and segway tours.



Exploring the Natural World

The Cradle of Forestry began in the 1800s when George W. Vanderbilt purchased land near Asheville for his Biltmore Estate. Vanderbilt became the first private landowner in the country to hire a forester to restore and manage his land. Today, 6,500 acres is a historic site within Pisgah National Forest with trails, interactive exhibit hall, historical buildings and demonstrations of traditional Appalachian crafts. The Pisgah Field School guides families around the original playground and classroom of the Vanderbilt family through programming such as astronomy nights, falconry programs and hikes that incorporate painting or yoga.

Top Five Creeks to Wade, Swim & Explore

Hike to a waterfall, paddle a river, fish a remote stream, or just watch and listen. Refreshing and clear, visitors will see why the scenic waterways of Western North Carolina are, as many locals believe, sacred and purifying. Oh, and fun! Visit the prized waterfalls of film at DuPont State Forest or wade over age-old wedges of polished rock on the crooked waterways in Panthertown Valley.

1. **Little River** - Take a dip below one of dozens of waterfalls at DuPont State Forest that are so impressive you'll hardly notice the chill.
2. **Davidson River** - Float down in a tube, cast a fly, or dream along this broad watershed of the Pisgah National Forest.
3. **Bent Creek** - Hike or cycle to the perfect spot on the creek on this favorite destination just minutes from downtown.
4. **Skinny Dip Falls, Yellowstone Prong of the Big East Fork** - A cascading stream with a five star swimming hole and just a short stroll from the Parkway.
5. **Headwaters of the Tuckaseegee River, Panthertown Valley** - The creeks, granite domes, and bogs here offer a lifetime of footpaths, streams and waterfalls to explore.

Family Adventures in Foodtopia

With over 250 independent restaurants, an array of locally made artisan food products and 17 tailgate markets, the Asheville area is known as Foodtopia. ► **The tour most likely to be led by a goat?** The Asheville area is home to dozens of mountain creameries, honoring the time-honed traditions of Appalachian artisan cheese production. These farmstead cheese operations craft everything from savory chevre, to soft-ripened, to aged raw milk cheeses. The WNC Cheese Trail connects a number of creameries open to receiving visitors. A great journey for kids, many of these farms let you get hands-on with their cows and goats. Other local farms like Hickory Nut Gap Farm offer tours of their operations as well as chances to pet the animals.

► **Looking for something for a sweet tooth?** Take the kids to the Asheville Bee Charmer for a tasting at the honey bar. Enjoy trying to guess the unique flavors and worldly origins of each sweet sensation. ► **Asheville's Willy Wonka** Parents and kids alike will enjoy a stop into the French Broad Chocolate Lounge for handcrafted treats. Or, head over to their Factory & Tasting Room for special tours of the production process.



Try it Here First

From ziplines to paddleboards, taking in the outdoors in Asheville may mean testing a cutting edge way to get around. Perform yoga on a stand-up paddle board, zip line over paradise or paddle whitewater on your belly, and you'll see that funky outdoor pursuits are a fitting reflection of this open-minded mountain town. Imagine surfing rapids in a **Bellyak**—a locally designed watercraft that makes getting on the river quick and easy. Or ... imagine surfing in a kayak, mid-air, harnessed to a cable three-stories high, then climbing a rock wall suspended in a mammoth oak tree. You can do that, too, at North Carolina's first full scale aerial adventure course, Asheville Treetops Adventure Park at the **Adventure Center of Asheville**, just minutes from downtown. The park has also recently added KidZip, one of America's first zipline adventures designed for kids 4-10 years old Quick Jump - a 65-foot jump with a 15-20-foot free fall! Coming this winter at the Adventure Center of Asheville - snow tubing! Want to race through the sky? Consider venturing just north of town to experience **Navitat Zipline Canopy Tours**, the nation's premier tree-top adventure reaching speeds up to 65 mph. Navitat opened the Blue Ridge Experience last year, a side-by-side "racing style" journey from mountain peak to mountain peak that offers endless views from more than 350 feet above the ground.



Flora, Fauna & Family

Kids love scat. They really do! Animal poo is totally a laughing matter as you follow the interactive hiking exhibits with scat map in hand at Chimney Rock State Park. Amateur naturalists and curious kids can also help experts tally the thousands of critters, large and small, on a "fern forray" or "snail survey" at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Junior rangers take a pledge and earn their official ranger patch as they tour the Blue Ridge Parkway. On the edge of town, pick up a Discovery Day Pack or take in a Wee Naturalist Class for your tiny one before a trail or garden expedition at the North Carolina Arboretum. Wildlife lovers of all ages will adore the indigenous otters, owls and wolves of the WNC Nature Center. Learn about life as a salamander or the art of fly fishing for mountain trout (or, heck, just feed the fish!) at the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education.



One of America's Largest Backyards

While "don't touch!" may come to mind when thinking about the grandeur and elegance of Biltmore, the property is actually very kid friendly. Every restaurant has a children's menu, the winery offers grape juice for kids (don't forget the Grape Stomp during Live After Five events) and there's a fun treasure hunt that you can use while you explore with your family. The activities and opportunities at Antler Hill Village allow children to "be a farmer for a day." Here they can pet barn animals, climb aboard tractors and try their hand at butter making and grinding corn on the weekends! The estate also offers hiking and biking trails, horseback trail rides, segway tours, river float trips and fly fishing lessons for kids.

Family-Friendly Breweries

With more breweries per capita than anywhere else in the nation, parents don't have to leave their children behind to experience Beer City USA. Many Asheville breweries incorporate family-friendly elements like kids' menus, cornhole and ample space for children to run around. Asheville Brewing Co. is part brewery, part pizza business with a movie theater regularly showing children's movies and a giant UFO on the roof. There's a game room with foosball, pool, ping-pong and vintage pinball and arcade games. Highland Brewing Co. also embraces wee ones with an inviting atmosphere for kids. On summer weekends, the brewery's adjacent lawn is filled with families listening to live music and enjoying local food trucks. Other spots to check out are The Wedge in the River Arts District, Wicked Weed Brewing and the just opened Sierra Nevada brewery and taproom in Mills River.

Additional Family Fun

- **Dance your cares away** at the Friday night drum circle in Pritchard Park.
- **Cool off** in Splasheville, an interactive water fountain in Pack Square Park.
- **Forage** for mushrooms and edible plants with No Taste Like Home. Then enjoy them at a local restaurant.
- **Take a ride** down Sliding Rock, a 60-foot natural waterslide in the Pisgah National Forest.
- **Explore** the Asheville Art Museum and Colburn Earth Science Museum downtown.

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