

The Perfect Asheville Weekend

A 2-day itinerary for first-time visitors: one big hike day, one Parkway day, and a downtown evening done right. From Mountainer Journey.

Day 1 — Hike in the Morning, Downtown at Night

Morning: Craggy Pinnacle (about 2 hours on the trail)

Drive the Blue Ridge Parkway north from Asheville to the Craggy Gardens area (about 30 minutes). The Craggy Pinnacle Trail is short, steep in spots, and ends at one of the best 360-degree views in the Southern Appalachians. Go early: the lot fills by mid-morning on fall weekends.

- **Drive:** Asheville to Craggy Gardens Visitor Center, roughly 20 miles on the Parkway.
- **Trail:** Craggy Pinnacle, about 1.4 miles round trip, moderate.
- **After the hike:** stop at the Craggy Gardens Visitor Center and the nearby overlooks on the way back down.

Afternoon: Lunch + a Second Short Stop

Head back to town for lunch, then pick one easy add-on: the Folk Art Center (MP 382, free), the North Carolina Arboretum, or a walk through the River Arts District. Keep the afternoon light. You will want energy for the evening.

Evening: Downtown Asheville

Park once and walk. Start on Patton Avenue, cut down to the Basilica of St. Lawrence, then wander the Lexington Avenue and Wall Street blocks. Dinner first, then a brewery or live music. Downtown is compact, and everything below is within a few blocks.

Parking tip: use a downtown garage (Wall Street or Rankin Avenue) instead of hunting for street parking. Garages are cheaper than a parking ticket and put you right in the walkable core.

Day 2 — Parkway Drive + Brewery Evening

Morning: Mount Mitchell + Graveyard Fields

Drive the Parkway north again, this time past Craggy Gardens to Mount Mitchell State Park (about 1 hour from downtown). Walk the short summit trail to the highest point east of the Mississippi (6,684 feet). On the way back, stop at Graveyard Fields for the short waterfall loop (about 3 miles round trip if you do both falls).

- **Drive:** Asheville to Mount Mitchell, roughly 35 miles on the Parkway.

- **Summit:** short paved path from the parking area; allow 30–45 minutes.
- **Graveyard Fields:** MP 418.6, south of Asheville on the return leg if you loop, or pair it with a Pisgah afternoon.

Afternoon: Pisgah Forest or the Biltmore

Two good options, pick one. **Option A:** Pisgah National Forest via US-276 — Sliding Rock, Looking Glass Falls (roadside), and a short forest walk. **Option B:** Biltmore Estate — the house tour plus the gardens and winery. Book Biltmore tickets ahead; same-day slots sell out on fall weekends.

Evening: Breweries + a Farewell Dinner

Asheville has more breweries per capita than almost any US city. Pick one or two in the South Slope brewery district, then dinner. If you still have energy, catch live music downtown. Full guides: mountainerjourney.com.

Packing Checklist

- ☐ Layers: base layer, fleece, rain shell (mountain weather changes fast; summits run 10–20°F cooler than downtown)
- ☐ Sturdy shoes with grip (not new shoes — break them in first)
- ☐ Water: at least 1 liter per person per hike, more in summer
- ☐ Snacks: bars, nuts, fruit
- ☐ Sun protection: hat, sunscreen, sunglasses
- ☐ Phone + portable charger (service is spotty on the Parkway)
- ☐ Cash or card for parking, Biltmore, and brewery stops
- ☐ Printed copy of this itinerary (cell service drops in the mountains)

Good to Know Before You Go

- **Parkway status:** check the NPS road status page the morning you drive. Sections close for construction and weather.
- **Altitude:** Asheville sits at about 2,130 feet; Mount Mitchell is 6,684. Take it slow on the summit trail if you are coming from sea level.
- **Best months:** late April–June for wildflowers, October for fall color, December–February for quiet trails and snow-dusted views.
- **Full guides:** What to Do in Asheville, Where to Stay in Asheville, Where to Eat in Asheville, and the Blue Ridge Parkway fall status guide — all at mountainerjourney.com.