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BEAUTY IN BLOWING ROCK

Once considered a sleepy mountain town, today Blowing Rock is booming with a thriving arts scene, outstanding dining, and plenty of shopping.

Written by Blake Miller

One might think they'd arrived at the entrance to the sky as they summit the switchback turns leading to the small town of Blowing Rock. It is, after all, 3,500 feet high, perched atop the glorious Blue Ridge Mountains overlooking some of the state's most magnificent valleys and mountain ranges. The views—from the overlooks to the secluded wooded back roads bursting with azalea blooms in the spring and a bold palette of oranges, reds, and yellows in the fall—have served as inspiration for artists for centuries. Acclaimed twentieth-century American artist Elliott Daingerfield set his roots in Blowing Rock and was easily the trailblazer for Appalachian artists to follow.

And follow they did. Today, Blowing Rock is less a sleepy mountain town and more an emerging arts and culture scene. The Artists in Residence at Edgewood Cottage—Daingerfield's former home and Main Street's first art studio—hosts High Country artists

weekly from May through September. The rotating selection of artists features a variety of media and celebrates its tenth anniversary this summer. And there are more arts to be had. Created by a handful of area artists in 1962, the popular Art in the Park showcases the work of more than ninety artisans from May through October. Because of its high standards and professional jury, Art in the Park features some of the Southeast's top artists, who display everything from handcrafted jewelry and pottery to photography and painting. If that weren't enough to solidify Blowing Rock as a prominent fixture in the South's art scene, the Plein Air Art Festival, where top artists set up their easels and paint "en plein air," coupled with the new Sculpture Walk Weekend at Chetola Lake, should be.

There's more to Blowing Rock, of course, than its art scene. Here's a look at where to go, what to do, and places to dine while in town.



Westglow Resort & Spa

COURTESY OF WESTGLOW RESORT & SPA

STAY

Part of the beauty of Blowing Rock is its intimacy. Small, early twentieth-century homes have been restored and transformed into exclusive resorts and inviting bed and breakfasts. These charming places are not just places to lay your head, but rather destinations unto themselves. Such is the case with Westglow Resort & Spa. This Relais & Châteaux property is the former home of Daingerfield and was lovingly restored to its circa-1917 splendor during a massive renovation in 2005. Daingerfield camped out on the forty-three-acre property for two weeks before building the Greek Revival mansion to ensure that the home had the best views and morning and afternoon sunlight. White rocking chairs line the side porch of the home, which overlooks the Blue Ridge Mountains, while the front of the home, with its stunning manicured drive, features



Westglow Resort & Spa

expansive views of the mountains and beyond; both settings are ideal for a morning coffee or pre-dinner glass of wine.

DO

Blowing Rock's proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Pisgah National Forest makes it a favorite with nature- and adventure-lovers alike. A light hike on Cone Trails is great for the beginner, while the experienced hiker will want to head to Ship Rock, which



Pisgah National Forest

is home to some of the area's most epic rock climbing.

For something less active, a stroll down Main Street is a must. Wander in and out of antique shops and clothing boutiques before settling in at one of the restaurant bars to have a pint of a local North Carolina beer from places like

Wicked Weed, Booneshine Brewing, and, a favorite, Blowing Rock Brewing Company.

With Blowing Rock's arts scene blowing up, a gallery crawl through town is ideal. Start at Edgewood Cottage at the end of Main Street where you'll find free weekly art shows featuring a variety of High Country artists. Be sure to wander down the side streets where other smaller art galleries are, as well.

Unwind after a long day of hiking with a spa treatment at Westglow Resort & Spa. Choose from an array of menu treatments such as an aromatherapy massage. The best part of the spa, though, is its view. Relax in a lounge chair in the common area, which features an astounding, near 180-degree view of the Blue Ridge Mountains—breathtaking during the fall color season.



EAT

High Country Boil at Rowland's at Westglow Resort & Spa

This elevated take on a traditional Southern dish is easily one of Rowland's best entrees on the menu. Featuring a tender grilled lobster tail and claw over a "high country boil" of soft, local red potatoes, shrimp, and clams with a buttery roasted squash cream and Old Bay aioli, this dish cannot be missed.



New Public House

Habi Mac & Cheese at Bistro Roca

There are four signature mac & cheese options, but if you're going to pick, opt for the Habi mac & cheese. This indulgent "side" dish is creamy and spicy due to the Habi (habanero) sauce drizzled atop crunchy pieces of bacon and onion and smooth cheese.

French Toast at New Public House

Sure, dinner is fantastic here, too. But New Public House's breakfast is simply outstanding. The perfectly grilled French toast is served with a slightly sweet anglaise and fresh berries and is excellent when coupled with a side of crispy bacon.