

# The New York Times

October 21, 2010

## 36 Hours in Asheville, N.C.

By SHAILA DEWAN

WHETHER it's culture, the great outdoors or homegrown food and beer, Asheville takes its pleasures seriously. Playgrounds are equipped with rock-climbing walls. Bumper stickers exhort the locals to buy local. There's even a fund-raising drive under way to erect a museum named for Bob Moog, the synthesizer pioneer, who lived in Asheville, that will trace the intersection of science and [music](#). All this connoisseurship unfolds, to the benefit of the casual visitor, against the backdrop of the seriously beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains.

### Friday

#### 3 p.m.

##### 1) SECRET (EDIBLE) GARDEN

A small amphitheater, an interactive fountain and public sculpture adorn the newly redone Pack Square Park ([packsquarepark.org](http://packsquarepark.org)) at the pink Art Deco-style city hall. But a quick walk away is another, almost secret, park that embodies the scruffy, idealistic side of Asheville: George Washington Carver Edible Park. There, the public can graze on apples, chestnuts and other delectables. To find it, take the outdoor stairway behind Pack's Tavern, go left on Marjorie Street and cross the pedestrian bridge by the corner of Marjorie and Davidson.

#### 5 p.m.

##### 2) CHAI TIME

Asheville residents love their Indian food, and they are particularly taken with a bright, year-old cafe called [Chai Pani](#) (22 Battery Park Avenue; 828-254-4003; [chaipani.net](http://chaipani.net)) for its fresh, cilantro-strewn takes on Indian street food. For a late afternoon snack, pop in for a nimbu pani, or salty limeade (\$2.25), and bhel puri, a snack of puffed rice and chickpea noodles in fresh tamarind chutney (\$4.25).

#### 7 p.m.

##### 3) DOWNTOWN DRUMMING

There may be 10 onlookers for every drummer at the long-running Friday night drum circle in triangular [Pritchard Park](#) (College Street and Patton Avenue) — and there are plenty of drummers. The congas, doumbeks, tambourines and cowbells provide an ecstatic soundtrack for families, college couples and dreadlocked nomads. The drum circle is the throbbing heart of downtown, a district of shops, bars, buskers and street magicians that spring into action as the weekend begins.

#### 9 p.m.

##### 4) MICROBREW AND A MOVIE

In recent years, Asheville has come to rival Portland, Ore., as a center for craft beer, and the city now claims to have more microbreweries per capita — from places like Green Man Brewery ([greenmanbrewery.com](http://greenmanbrewery.com)) with its cask-conditioned beers, to the hip Wedge Brewing Company ([wedgebrewing.com](http://wedgebrewing.com)) in the River Arts District. You can try a few on an Asheville Brews Cruise tour ([brewscruise.com](http://brewscruise.com)), or linger at the cozy, student-friendly Asheville Pizza and Brewing Company (675 Merrimon Avenue; 828-254-1281; [ashevillebrewing.com](http://ashevillebrewing.com)), which has a bar, arcade and movie theater (tickets \$3). Settle down in front of the large screen with a pint of Rocket Girl or Ninja Porter and a quite respectable pizza (toppings include Spam, as well as smoked Gouda and artichoke hearts).

## Saturday

9 a.m.

### 5) WOOD-FIRED BREAKFAST

The East-West fusion and wholesome rusticity in Farm and Sparrow's wood-fired pastries seem to sum up Asheville. The croissants stuffed with kimchi (\$3.25) and an open-faced pear, Gorgonzola and bee pollen confection (\$3) are made at the bakery ([farmandsparrow.com](http://farmandsparrow.com)) in nearby Candler, N.C., and are available at some of Asheville's tailgate markets, a kind of hyper-local version of a farmers' market. The North Asheville Tailgate Market (828-712-4644; [northashevilletailgatemarket.org](http://northashevilletailgatemarket.org)), held in a parking lot on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, is where you'll also find locally made kombucha from Buchi, trout dip from the Sunburst Trout Company and fresh goat cheese with lavender from Three Graces Dairy.

10:30 a.m.

### 6) MOUNTAIN STRETCH

Like any bohemian resort worth its coarse-ground Himalayan salt, Asheville has its share of healing arts. Find spa treatments, colonics and "affordable acupuncture" at the Thrifty Taoist in the town of Black Mountain (106 Black Mountain Avenue; 828-713-9185; [thriftytaoist.com](http://thriftytaoist.com)), about 15 minutes from downtown. Black Mountain Yoga offers one-on-one yoga therapy sessions with Martia Rachman and her husband, Brad, a naturopath, \$75 (202 First Street, Black Mountain; 828-333-5123; [blackmountainyoga.com](http://blackmountainyoga.com)). While you perform stretches and poses, one of the Rachmans will identify problem areas and massage and manipulate stubborn muscles. An hour later, a looser, more relaxed you will emerge from their clutches.

Noon

### 7) ARTISTS' UTOPIA

Short-lived but enormously influential, Black Mountain College ([blackmountaincollege.org](http://blackmountaincollege.org)) was evidence of Asheville's pull on the unconventionally creative. John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller and Josef Albers were among the teachers at this oft-re-examined intellectual utopia that closed, after a quarter-century, in the late 1950s. The campus at Lake Eden (375 Lake Eden Road, Black Mountain) is now a Christian boys' camp, but when it is not in session you can still inspect the Bauhaus-inspired main campus building and fading murals by Jean Charlot. Twice a year, the Lake Eden Arts Festival (828-686-8742; [theleaf.org](http://theleaf.org)) unfolds there.

2 p.m.

### 8) ROBOT VS. MERMAID

Western North Carolina is known for pottery, and you can find some of the artists themselves at work at [Curve Studios](#) in the River Arts District (6, 9 and 12 Riverside Drive; 828-388-3526; [curvestudiosnc.com](#)). At the showroom-cum-studios, browse robot vases by Patty Bilbro (\$165), a mermaid figurine by Fran Welch (\$35) or sophisticated tableware by Akira Satake and Maria Andrade Troya.

**3 p.m.**

### **9) OLD-TIME ARCHITECTURE**

On the Obamas' Asheville vacation last spring, they joined a long line of presidents and celebrities who have stayed at the Grove Park Inn (290 Macon Avenue; 800-438-5800; [groveparkinn.com](#)), a giant pile of rocks, topped by a red roof that looks like melting snow. The inn retains a Craftsman-era grace, despite some remodeling involving a good deal of wood paneling. Take in the splendor of the Great Hall — and a Great Hall Bloody, the definitive bloody mary (\$11.26) — accompanied by the local bands that play mostly old-time, Americana and bluegrass music on Saturday afternoons.

**5 p.m.**

### **10) TOAST TO LITERATURE**

The [Battery Park Book Exchange and Champagne Bar](#) (1 Battle Square; 828-252-0020; [batteryparkbookexchange.com](#)) is not a place to find shabby paperbacks. Instead, think never-read leather-bound volumes of Dickens (\$435 for a set), an edition of "The Catcher in the Rye" with the carousel horse cover (\$200), acres of gardening and art hardbacks and a glass of fizzy Heidsieck & Co. Monopole (\$15). The Mission-style sofas and leather armchairs in book-lined alcoves bring the cozy nook idea to a new level.

**8 p.m.**

### **11) GASTRO-DIVE**

What are truffles, steak tartare and imported oysters doing in a cinderblock dive bar amid the cool haunts of West Asheville? One bite of dinner at the [Admiral](#) (400 Haywood Road; 828-252-2541; [theadmiralnc.com](#)) and such questions subside into flavor combinations like balsamic pears with honey cap mushrooms or foie gras with Nutella. Since new owners bought the old B&D Bar three years ago, renamed it and installed a gastropub with an ever-changing menu, the Admiral has been one of Asheville's hottest tables; reservations recommended. Late on Saturday nights, the tables are cleared away for a crowded and sweaty dance party.

**Sunday**

**9 a.m.**

### **12) TREETOP ZIP**

Leaf peeping is a serious sport in Asheville — hence the weekly "fall color report" from the local visitor's bureau ([exploreasheville.com](#)). Experience the foliage from a whole new angle on the three-and-a-half-hour zipline course at [Navitat Canopy Adventures](#), about 20 minutes north of town (242 Poverty Branch Road in Barnardsville; 828-626-3700; [navitat.com](#)). Wearing a hard hat, you'll be strapped in and hooked up with a series of reassuring clicks for each of the 10 zips, the longest at 1,100 feet (\$85). They take you from chestnut oaks to tulip poplars, soaring over valleys with a bird's-eye view that will remind you, once again, of the Blue Ridge bedrock of Asheville's eternal appeal.

## THE BASICS

Several airlines including Delta and US Airways fly nonstop to Asheville from New York. A recent Web search found round-trip fares starting at \$349 for travel in the next few weeks.

The year-old **Hotel Indigo** (151 Haywood Street; 828-239-0239; [hotelindigo.com](http://hotelindigo.com)) offers midpriced contemporary design near the action at the Grove Arcade, with a locavore restaurant, iPad rentals, fitness center and rooms from \$149.

The 104-room **Grand Bohemian Hotel** (11 Boston Way; 828-505-2949; [bohemianhotelasheville.com](http://bohemianhotelasheville.com)) features sumptuous built-yesterday-but-looks-antique lodge style with hand-carved inlaid columns and a four-sided stone fireplace in the lobby. Rooms from \$199.