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72 HOURS IN ASHEVILLE WITH KIDS

This North Carolina mountain getaway was made for family fun.

BY CAROLINE EUBANKS



In between adventures in downtown Asheville and the surrounding area, families can enjoy the benefits of camping without the equipment at Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins, which has spacious A-frame cabins, board games and trail access.

PHOTO BY STEVEN FREEDMAN/WRONG WAY RIVER LODGE & CABINS

Nestled in the western side of North Carolina in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Asheville is known for its free-spirited arts vibe with some 30-plus art galleries and an abundance of breweries (in fact, one of its many nicknames is Beer City USA). But it's also a popular getaway for families, especially during the summer months when other Southeastern cities can get unbearably hot and humid.

While you'll find plenty of great hotels, a unique spot is the Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins, a family-friendly glamping resort with cozy A-frame cabins that sleep four, with ADA-accessible and pet-friendly

options. The lodge gets its name from the unusual direction—south to north—in which the French Broad River flows. You won't find televisions in the cabins; instead, you and the kids can enjoy amenities like record players, board games and hammocks. A portion of the French Broad River Greenway is across the street, so bring bikes from home or rent them from a local outfitter to explore it.

DAY ONE

Start your trip in downtown Asheville, where you can check out fiercely independent shops like Malaprops Bookstore, with a great selection of kids' books and titles

by local authors, and Mast General Store, a local chain with shelves of old-school toys and candy in barrels. If your visit falls on a Friday night, head to Pritchard Park to experience the drum circle, a time-honored local tradition where anyone is welcome to take part in the jam session.

When you're ready for a bite to eat, the whole family will likely find something they like at S&W Market, a food hall in a historic cafeteria with offerings ranging from hot dogs at Farm Dogs to Peruvian empanadas at Mikasa Criolla.

Spend the rest of the evening playing games at the Asheville Pinball Museum, where \$15 per person gets

you an all-you-can-play evening, or at Well Played Board Game Café.

DAY TWO

This morning, grab a bite to eat at one of the three locations of Biscuit Head, a popular spot for—what else?—biscuits. Opt for the sweet (biscuit donuts) or the savory (country ham or fried chicken). Then top it off with one of the many jams and jellies at the bar.

If weather permits, you and your family can float down the French Broad River. Local outfitters provide guided tours or, if you're confident on the water, everything you need to float on your own, including the

tubes and life jackets. Or, you can cool off at a swimming hole like Sliding Rock, a natural rock slide southwest of town.

Then head for the River Arts District, where warehouses have been converted into mural-covered art galleries, some offering classes open to all ages, and trendy restaurants dish up a variety of cuisines.

Spend the afternoon by getting out of town and driving about a half-hour north to roam the trails of Pisgah National Forest, an old-growth preserve originally part of the Biltmore land. Or, in nearby Barnardsville, soar above the trees at Navitat, an adventure park for

ages 5 plus with zip-line courses, rope bridges and rappelling.

For dinner, 12 Bones Smokehouse has locations in Asheville's Erskine-Walton and Arden areas. Share a few plates to sample it all, including pulled pork and chicken plus classic Southern sides like mac and cheese and green beans.

Save room for dessert at the French Broad Chocolate Lounge, which, despite its name, is a family-friendly spot. The locally owned company also offers tours by day to live out your Willy Wonka fantasies. The lounge is the perfect spot for a post-dinner sweet treat, including cakes, brownies, cookies and ice cream.



PHOTO BY MATTHEW KARSTEN/EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

Biltmore Estate, the largest private residence in America, was a vacation home for the Vanderbilt family during the Gilded Age. Today, it's Asheville's top attraction. Inset: Biscuit Head has multiple locations in town, with heaping breakfast dishes on offer.



PHOTO BY STEPHAN PRUITT/EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

DAY THREE

Take a drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is easily accessible from downtown Asheville. While the parkway is too long to drive its entirety in a day, you can get a feel for its beauty going from the parkway's visitor center near Asheville south to Pink Beds, a family-friendly hiking area with easy boardwalk trails and views of blooming wildflowers, and Graveyard Fields, where you can spot waterfalls and hunt for wild blueberries.

Give yourself plenty of time to pull off at the many overlooks for photos. Detour to the North Carolina Arboretum, located at Milepost 393 on the parkway. It was established

in 1986 after being envisioned by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted almost a century before. Highlights of the 65 acres of themed gardens include a bonsai garden and one that focuses on species from Appalachia.

No trip to Asheville would be complete without a trip to the city's most famous landmark: Biltmore Estate. Built as the second home of the Vanderbilt family, the French chateau-inspired mansion is still the largest private family home—175,000 square feet in total—in America (not to mention the location for the 1994 kid's movie *Richie Rich*; watch it before your visit). It's also a place you could easily spend the entire day

exploring the home, gardens, and a village full of shops and restaurants.

Reserve a kids' audio guide tour of the home, narrated by the Vanderbilts' St. Bernard, to avoid the lines. And make sure to give the kids time to roam the sprawling grounds, especially the quiet trails that can be explored on foot or on horseback from the on-site stables.

The property also has a playground and offers naturalist talks about the four-legged and winged inhabitants of the Biltmore Forest. The home may have started as a testament to the Gilded Age but now welcomes all to explore. It's just one more treasure that makes Asheville an extra-special find for families.