



Todd Bush Photography, www.bushphoto.com



Photo by Amanda Lugenbell



Todd Bush Photography, www.bushphoto.com

Where to Leaf Peep

- **Grandfather Mountain:** The best time for foliage viewing is in the early part of the season. Due to elevation differences, the trees near Grandfather Mountain change sooner than those in town. In October, you can attend a guided foliage-viewing walk as part of “The Colors of Grandfather” series. More information can be found at grandfather.com.
- **Price Lake:** The colors of the trees surrounding the lake will be reflected on the waters during a calm day.
- **The Blue Ridge Parkway:** Take a drive down a stretch of this 469-mile road, and stop at many of the scenic overlooks.
- **Bass Lake:** Right outside of downtown Blowing Rock, the 1-mile loop walking trail around the lake makes this a favorite viewing spot all season long.
- **The Blowing Rock:** This attraction provides excellent views of late-fall color, as the view is of the gorge below where leaves change a bit later. In the early part of the season, the view of Grandfather Mountain from The Blowing Rock allows folks to see the color line moving down the slopes.

A Flavorful Fall Visit to Blowing Rock

Nestled in the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, you’ll find the little town of Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Named the prettiest town in the state, Blowing Rock offers a quaint downtown, cuisine that highlights the region, and a range of activities for nature lovers, families, and outdoor adventurers.

One of the best times to visit Blowing Rock and the High Country is in September and October, when the fall foliage is at its peak. The area around Blowing Rock offers a number of great vantage points for viewing the orange, red, and yellow blanket that drapes the Blue Ridge Mountains in the autumn months.

After you’ve done a little “leaf peeping,” you can satisfy your appetite at many of the local restaurants in town. You’ll find a variety of regional foods and Southern favorites, from fresh mountain trout to fried catfish, BLT Mac and Cheese to Beer-Boiled Peanuts. It’s a small town with big flavor and an absolute must-visit fall destination. By Julia Sayers



Tommy White Photography

Homemade with Care Village Café

In downtown Blowing Rock, look for a stone pathway off of Main Street. Follow it, and you’ll find a charming historic home and an open patio area and garden, lovingly referred to as “the secret garden” by regulars. Built in 1907, the house is now home to The Village Café and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The café was originally established in Foscoe, North Carolina, in a space of 525 square feet that sat 26 people inside and 14 people on the patio. Eventually, the café was bought by Annie Whatley and moved to its current location in Blowing Rock in 1990. Due to the harsh winters in Blowing Rock and the building’s age, the café is operated seasonally from late April through the first weekend of November, aligning with the

schedule of most seasonal residents.

Now in its 25th season in Blowing Rock, the café is open for breakfast and lunch, with the breakfast menu available for both meals. If you’re going for breakfast, order the Belgian Waffles, one of the four varieties of Eggs Benedict with homemade hollandaise, or a specialty crêpe. On the lunch menu, you’ll find everything from Pan Sautéed Pecan Crusted Chicken Breast to Pawley’s Island Crab Cakes to a Pan Sautéed Trout Sandwich.

The Village Café also prides themselves on their soups. You’ll be able to choose from a few options each day, all of them made from scratch. Some of the most popular soups include Mushroom Hazelnut, Tomato and Smoked Gouda, Spring Pea, Gazpacho, and Lemon Chicken. Annie says she has regulars who will order pints of soup to go or drive from 45 minutes away to come to the café if it’s featuring their favorite soup. In fact, Annie

even has a list of regulars that she will call to notify them of specific soups.

With serving only two meals a day, Annie and her staff at the café are able to form relationships like that with the customers. She knows which of her regulars are allergic to a certain spice, don’t like a specific herb, or just have a favorite dish they always order. She emphasizes how important it is to be caring in everything you do, whether it’s focusing on the customers’ needs or taking the time and attention to make almost every aspect of the meal homemade. “I always say, if a restaurant has good breads, soups, and desserts, I know everything else will be just fine since they’re paying attention to even the smaller things,” Annie says. So if you’re looking for a good meal, a quaint atmosphere, and a place where you’ll be treated like family, you’ll find it at The Village Café.

What’s in a Name?

Blowing Rock gets its name from one of the main attractions in the area—The Blowing Rock, where a perpetual wind blows up from the valley, sometimes causing the snow to blow upside down in winter. Legend tells the story of the daughter of a Chickasaw chief who fell in love with a Cherokee brave. One day, though, the brave was called to return to his tribe. Feeling conflicted of duty and heart, he threw himself off the rock, but the wind carried him back up to his love and into her arms. Today, you can visit The Blowing Rock, and it’s said that if the wind is blowing just right, you can drop a coin off the edge and it will be blown right back up to you. Visitor information can be found at theblowingrock.com.

Not Your Average Dish

Foggy Rock Eatery and Pub

One of the first restaurants you'll see as you drive into Blowing Rock on Highway 321 is Foggy Rock Eatery and Pub. Opened in 2010 by Burt Myers, Foggy Rock quickly became a favorite on the Blowing Rock restaurant scene. An experienced restaurateur, Burt previously owned a café in the neighboring town of Boone, North Carolina, and now runs Foggy Rock with his wife, Yvonne, and son, Andrew.

Living by the mantra "a twist on the ordinary," Foggy Rock presents dishes with a fresh take on how they are usually prepared. Peruse the menu and you'll find BLT Mac and Cheese; Appalachian Fish 'n' Chips featuring fried catfish; Avocado Egg Rolls; and the Notorious P.I.G. sandwich, piled high with smoked pork, pulled ham, diced bacon, pepper jack, and Sriracha aioli. But if you really want to get a taste of the High Country, order the Trout, Trout, Trout, one of the most popular dishes. A trio of mountain trout cooked three ways—blackened, Parmesan encrusted, and fried—this dish celebrates the area and embraces Foggy Rock's mantra.

Foggy Rock is also known locally as the best spot for grabbing a Philly cheesesteak; they've sold more than 37,000 since the restaurant opened. Take your pick of the Foggy Rock Philly with roast beef, jalapeños, and Cajun ranch dressing, a Reuben Philly, Portobello Philly, Chicken Philly, Smoked Pork



Photo by Amanda Lugenbell

Philly, or Ham Philly with pineapple and raisin relish. Whichever you choose, wash it down with a beer from the restaurant's large selection of North Carolina craft brews.

What keeps customers coming back to Foggy Rock, though, is Burt's willingness to customize any dish, any time. He even offers a full gluten-free menu. Regulars know that they will always get exactly what they feel like eating, and it's this type of small-town welcoming service, along with a twist on the ordinary, that has made Foggy Rock a favorite restaurant in Blowing Rock.

Something's Brewing

Blowing Rock Ale House

In Blowing Rock's oldest existing inn, you'll find one of the town's newest restaurants: The Blowing Rock Ale House, a combination restaurant and brewery. The town's only brewery restaurant, the alehouse opened in summer 2013 and serves a menu influenced by their variety of craft beers brewed in the building behind the inn.

Owners Todd Rice and Jeff Walker wanted to achieve a mountain artisan feel with the menu, which means food artistically

crafted from the local region and beer that captures the feel of the area—clean, crisp, and refreshing, just like the mountain air. With 12 brews on draft and one-third of those rotating seasonally, Chefs Erick and Jenny Virt are inspired to create dishes that not only pair well with the beer but incorporate the beer into the food.

Almost every menu item has an element of beer to it, like the Beer-Boiled Peanuts, Prince Edward Island Mussels steamed in garlic-pilsner broth, Ale-Braised Pastrami Sandwiches, and Grilled Ale House Flatbread, which uses the brewery's flagship beer, High Country Ale, in place of water in the dough. One of the most popular items on the menu is the Grilled Bison Burger—a juicy, 7-ounce patty topped with a stout glaze, sweet-and-smoky charred tomato jam, grilled onions, thick slices of peppered bacon, and smoked mozzarella. The bison is sourced from a farm just down the road, the tomato jam is made in-house, and the stout glaze is, of course, made from the alehouse's own stout brew. The flavors work perfectly together to accomplish a dish that is complex, satisfying, and truly representative of the mountain artisan feel.

To keep things updated for regular customers, Erick and Jenny also feature a daily special. The inspiration for this special comes from what can



Tommy White Photography



Tommy White Photography

be sourced locally and what is in season, as well as how the husband-and-wife chef team feels that day. Erick and Jenny's passion for food comes from their travels. Having worked all over the country, from Austin to Alaska to Vermont to Indianapolis and finally to Blowing Rock, the couple express where they've been through the menu. They are constantly coming up with new ideas and are currently working on incorporating mash grains from the beer into homemade breads.

And speaking of the beer, if you visit the alehouse, you can also pop into the brewery for a tour, chat with the master brewer, or fill a growler with the local brews. The quality of fresh mountain water allows for a heightened sensory experience in the beer. Since the water is naturally soft and pure,

the brewers can focus more on the creativity of the beers. And the more creative the brewers get, the more creative the chefs get with their dishes. This symbiotic relationship is what makes Blowing Rock Ale House a pioneer on the Blowing Rock restaurant scene.

Fall Events in Blowing Rock:

For the adults:
Art in the Park—This seasonal event showcases the work of more than 90 local artisans and craftspeople. September 6 and October 4.

For the kids:
The Ghost Train Halloween Festival at Tweetsie Railroad—Enjoy rides on the old-fashioned steam engine Ghost Train and Halloween activities. Weekend nights September 26–November 1. Details and tickets at tweetsie.com.