



Discover The FOOT HILLS

A Picture Perfect Staycation



Discover The **FOOT HILLS**

A Picture Perfect Staycation

**Brought to you by the Western Piedmont
Council of Governments and the NC
Foothills Experience**

October, 2025
expncfoothills.com

FOOT HILLS

Burke County	6
Little Guatemala	8
Fonta Flora Trail	10
Lake James	12
Fonta Flora Brewery	14
Alexander County	16
Scotty's Hometown Grill	18
Lucas Mansion	20
The Farmer's Daughter	22
Rocky Face Park	24
Apple City BBQ.....	26
Caldwell County.....	28
The Local Bean	30
Mitford Museum & HUB.....	32
Butterfly Festival	34
Twisted Vine Winery	36
Catawba County	38
Taste Full Beans	40
Downtown Newton.....	42
Murray's Mill	44
Novel Taproom	46



Who says you have to travel far to find adventure? A staycation is the perfect way to invest in your own community, save on travel expenses, and discover incredible photo-op locations right in your hometown. Our foothills region is filled with stunning landscapes, historic downtowns, and charming local businesses that are just waiting to be explored—and captured through your lens!

This guide takes you on a four-day journey through Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, leading you to breathtaking nature spots, unique eateries, and vibrant cultural landmarks. Whether you're a seasoned photographer or just love snapping memories on your phone, this itinerary will help you create picture-perfect moments while supporting the places that make your hometown special. So grab your camera, charge your phone, and let's hit the road!

BURKE

Thursday

Who says you have to travel far to capture stunning photos and create unforgettable memories? A photo-op staycation is the perfect way to invest in your own community, support local businesses, and save on travel expenses—all while discovering hidden gems in your hometown. Burke County, NC, with its picturesque landscapes, charming eateries, and outdoor adventures, is the ideal place to start your staycation journey.

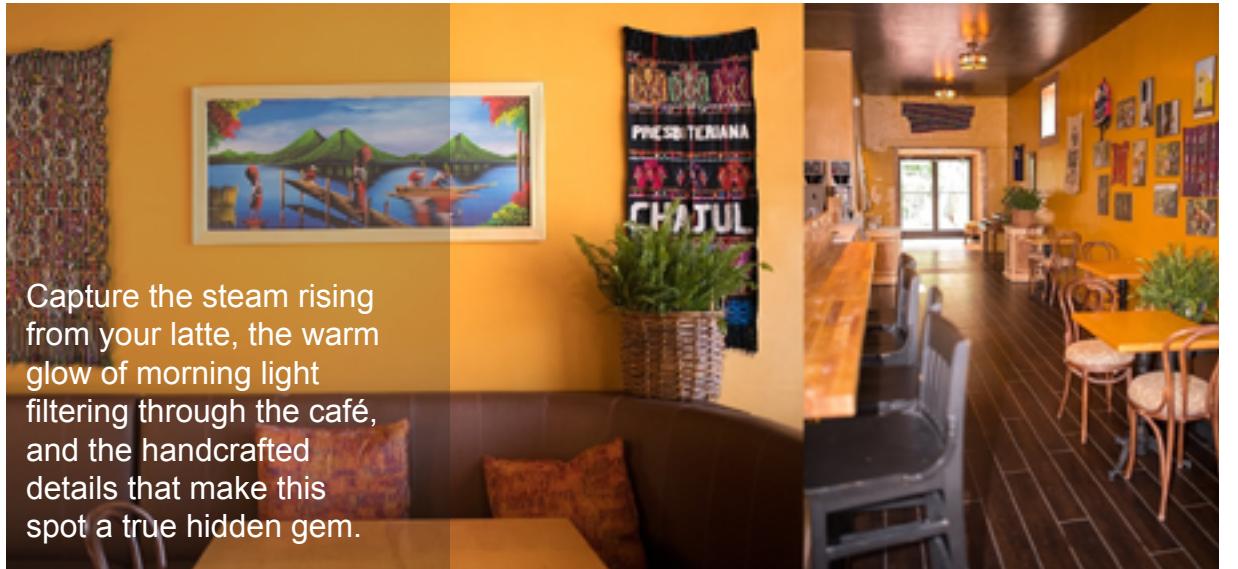


Little Guatemala



Kick off your staycation with an authentic Guatemalan breakfast at Little Guatemala in Morganton. This vibrant café is not just a place to eat—it's a cultural experience.

Savor a rich, handcrafted Guatemalan coffee while indulging in traditional pastries or a hearty *desayuno chapín* (Guatemalan breakfast plate). With its colorful murals, rustic decor, and cozy courtyard, Little Guatemala offers the perfect backdrop for Instagram-worthy shots. After breakfast, check out their indoor soccer arena—an energetic hub where the community gathers for friendly matches and lively fun.



Capture the steam rising from your latte, the warm glow of morning light filtering through the café, and the handcrafted details that make this spot a true hidden gem.

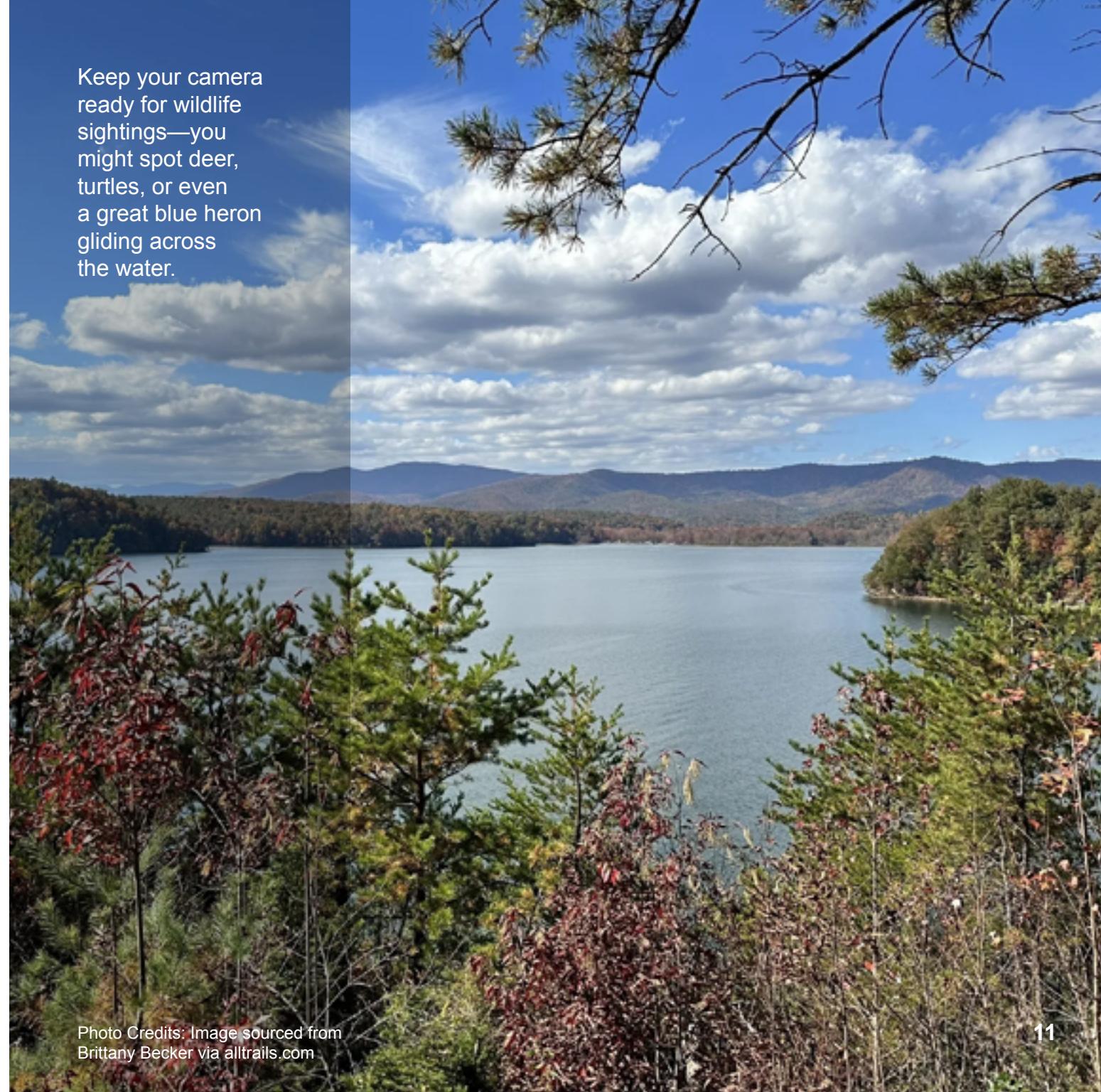


Fonta Flora Trail

After breakfast, immerse yourself in the natural beauty of the Fonta Flora Trail as it winds around Lake James. This scenic trail is a photographer's paradise, offering everything from wooded paths and wildflowers to breathtaking lake views and rolling Blue Ridge foothills. Whether you're capturing the golden hues of autumn, the fresh greenery of spring, or the mirror-like reflections of the lake in summer, this trail promises stunning photo opportunities at every turn.



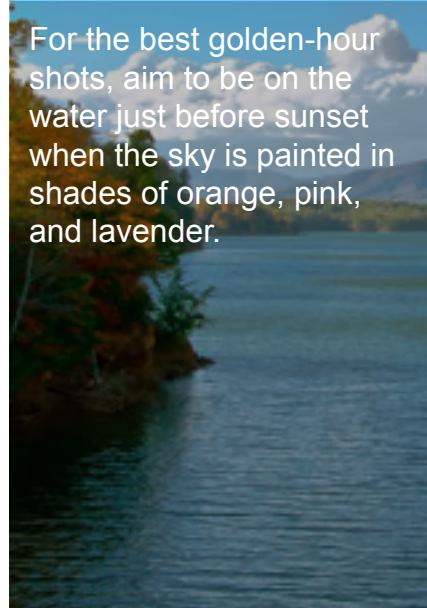
Keep your camera ready for wildlife sightings—you might spot deer, turtles, or even a great blue heron gliding across the water.



Lake James



Next, take to the water with a boating adventure on Lake James. Whether you rent a kayak, paddleboard, or pontoon boat, the lake's crystal-clear waters and mountain backdrop create an idyllic setting for photography. Snap shots of rippling reflections, dramatic cloud formations, and the sun glistening on the lake's surface. If you're feeling adventurous, capture some action shots—paddleboarding at sunset, fishing off the dock, or a candid moment of laughter as you cruise across the lake.



For the best golden-hour shots, aim to be on the water just before sunset when the sky is painted in shades of orange, pink, and lavender.



Fonta Flora Brewery



End your day with a relaxing evening at Fonta Flora Brewery, known for its locally sourced, farmhouse-style craft beers and rustic-chic atmosphere. Settle into the outdoor beer garden or the cozy interior, where exposed brick, wooden beams, and twinkling lights create a warm, inviting ambiance. With a seasonal beer menu inspired by local ingredients, each drink tells a story of the region. Capture the rich hues of a freshly poured pint, the textures of the wooden tables and hops decorations, and the candid joy of friends toasting to a great day.



As your first staycation day in Burke County comes to a close, take a moment to scroll through your photos, edit your favorite shots, and relive the memories you made. From colorful coffee shop vibes to serene lakeside moments, today has been proof that you don't have to travel far to experience adventure, beauty, and creativity.

Stay tuned for Day Two, where we'll explore even more hidden gems right in your own backyard!



Image and Logo courtesy of Fonta Flora Brewery via Facebook.

ALEXANDER

Friday

Today's adventure takes you to the heart of Alexander County, where small-town charm meets natural beauty in unforgettable ways. From a cozy local breakfast spot to historic landmarks, scenic trails, and a farm-fresh picnic, this day blends culture, flavor, and fresh air into a relaxing and photo-worthy itinerary.

Whether you're sampling house-made Southern dishes, discovering the stories behind a grand Victorian mansion, or hiking rocky ridgelines with panoramic views, you'll find that Alexander County offers a peaceful pace and authentic experiences that stay with you long after the day is done.



Scotty's Hometown Grill



Start your day with a hearty breakfast at Scotty's Hometown Grill, a beloved local spot where warm smiles and generous portions greet you at the door. Known for its friendly, small-town atmosphere and classic Southern comfort food, Scotty's serves up all your breakfast favorites—from fluffy pancakes and biscuits with gravy to perfectly cooked eggs and crispy bacon. It's the kind of place where the coffee keeps flowing and the locals gather to catch up on the morning news.

Whether you're fueling up for a day of exploring or just craving a cozy start, Scotty's sets the tone for a satisfying and welcoming Alexander County experience.



Lucas Mansion

Afterward, head to the Lucas Mansion in Hiddenite, a beautifully preserved three-story Victorian home that offers more than just a glimpse into the past. In addition to its historical significance, the mansion features rotating art exhibits, antique displays, and a charming gift shop filled with local crafts.

It also houses the Alexander County Visitors Center, where you can gather maps, tips, and insights to help you explore the area like a local. This stop offers a perfect blend of heritage, creativity, and hospitality, all under one roof. It's a must-visit for anyone interested in the rich heritage of Alexander County.



Step Into History at the Lucas Mansion

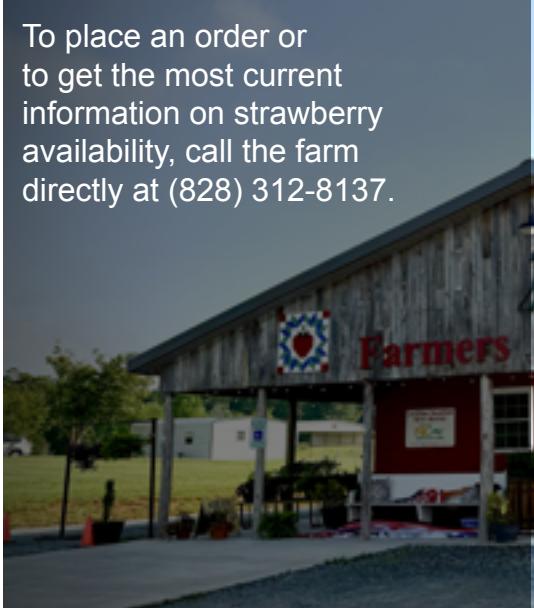
Originally built in the early 1900s, the Lucas Mansion is a striking three-story Victorian home that reflects the elegance of a bygone era. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it features period furnishings, vintage toys, and a dazzling display of minerals and gemstones. Each floor tells a unique story, blending art, history, and culture in a way that captivates all ages.



The Farmer's Daughter



Mid-morning, stop by The Farmer's Daughter, a delightful country market known for its warm hospitality and locally sourced offerings. You'll find a mouthwatering selection of house-made sandwiches, fresh sides, and baked goods that make assembling a perfect picnic basket quick and easy. From classic deli favorites to seasonal specials, everything is made with care and Southern flavor. It's a favorite stop for both locals and visitors looking to enjoy a hearty lunch on the go. (*Tip: Call ahead to place your sandwich order so it's ready when you arrive!*)

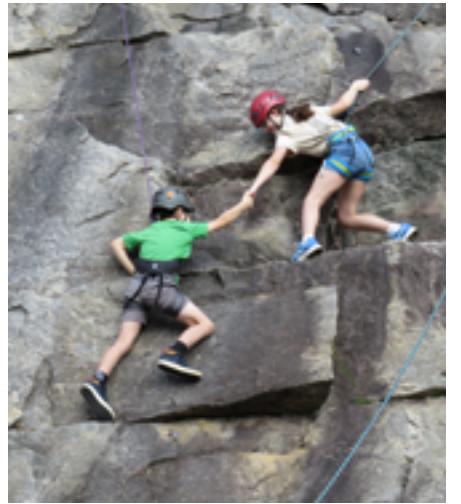


To place an order or to get the most current information on strawberry availability, call the farm directly at (828) 312-8137.

The Sweetness of the Season
If you're visiting in spring or early summer, don't miss the chance to pick up a basket (or two!) of fresh-picked strawberries. These juicy gems are hand-harvested at peak ripeness and bursting with flavor—ideal for snacking, baking, or topping your picnic dessert. Whether you enjoy them on their own or with a dollop of whipped cream, they're a sweet reminder of the simple joys of local farming.



Rocky Face Park



Spend the afternoon immersed in the natural beauty of Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area, a hidden gem offering stunning views and outdoor adventure. Well-marked trails wind through forests and rocky outcrops, making it a perfect destination for a peaceful hike or an energizing climb. If you're an experienced climber and have your gear with you, stop by the park office to pick up a permit and take on the challenge of rock climbing, rappelling, or bouldering on the park's rugged granite face.

Whether you're scaling cliffs or simply soaking in the panoramic scenery, Rocky Face offers a refreshing escape into nature. It's a must-see for anyone looking to connect with the wild side of Alexander County.



Apple City BBQ

End your day on a delicious note with a visit to Apple City BBQ, a local favorite known for its mouthwatering, slow-cooked meats and welcoming atmosphere. This beloved barbecue joint serves up tender pulled pork, smoky ribs, and juicy brisket—all cooked low and slow over wood for that authentic Southern flavor. Each dish is paired with classic sides like hush puppies, baked beans, and creamy slaw, making for a hearty and satisfying meal. It's a must-try spot for BBQ lovers and a perfect way to cap off a day of adventure and exploration.



Dine in or grabbing a plate to go; either way, the rich aromas and bold flavors at Apple City BBQ are sure to leave a lasting impression. Not only will your taste buds be satisfied, but the vibrant colors and fresh presentation make this a meal worth capturing for your staycation photo album.

CALDWELL

Saturday

Day Three of your photo-op staycation takes you to Caldwell County, NC, a place rich with literary history, artistic inspiration, and natural beauty. Today's itinerary blends cozy cafés, storytelling landmarks, vibrant festivals, and a relaxing winery experience—all offering incredible photo opportunities that showcase the unique charm of this region.



Photo Credits: Image sourced from explorenc.com.

The Local Bean



Start your day at The Local Bean, a beloved coffee shop in Hudson, known for its warm ambiance and community feel. This charming café is perfect for capturing moody, rustic coffee shop aesthetics. Snap a shot of your latte art, the glow of morning sunlight streaming through the windows, or the inviting atmosphere of books, local art, and comfy seating. Whether you're enjoying a flaky pastry, a hearty breakfast sandwich, or a perfectly brewed espresso, this stop sets a relaxed and cozy tone for the day ahead.



Mitford Museum & Hub

Next, step into the world of Jan Karon's beloved Mitford series with a visit to The Mitford Museum & Hub. Fans of the bestselling books will love exploring the rich history, handwritten manuscripts, and artifacts that bring the fictional town of Mitford to life.

The museum's quaint, book-filled aesthetic provides a wonderful backdrop for storytelling-inspired photography. Capture details like vintage typewriters, book-lined shelves, and exhibits showcasing the journey of Jan Karon's writing career. If you're lucky, you might even find a cozy reading nook or literary quote wall that makes for the perfect Instagram-worthy moment.



Butterfly Festival



After soaking in Mitford's literary magic, head to the Butterfly Festival, a lively event filled with music, vendors, and, of course, butterflies! This festival is a dream for photographers, with endless chances to capture delicate butterflies in flight, bright festival decorations, and joyful candid moments. Wander through the booths, enjoying handmade crafts, local goods, and live entertainment, while snapping vibrant festival scenes.



Lunch is part of the experience here, so grab a plate from one of the many food vendors offering delicious local eats. Whether it's a fresh, colorful salad, a hearty BBQ plate, or a sweet festival treat, your meal is sure to be as photogenic as it is tasty!

North Carolina Butterfly Festival

Hudson, NC

2025



Saturday, May 3, 2025

9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Festival Information & Vendor Application Forms available online at www.ncbutterflyfest.com, www.townofhudsonnc.com, or at Hudson Town Hall, 550 Central Street, Hudson NC

Twisted Vine Winery



Wrap up your staycation day with a picturesque dinner at Twisted Vine Winery. Nestled in the countryside, this family-owned vineyard offers stunning sunset views over the rolling hills, charming rustic décor, and a cozy patio perfect for unwinding. Capture the golden-hour glow over the vineyard, the rich hues of red and white wines in the glass, and the intimate ambiance of string lights and fire pits. Savor a locally sourced meal, pairing your dish with a house-made wine, and toast to another successful day of hometown exploration.



36 Logo and photo sourced from twistedvinewinerync.com.

Today's adventure through Caldwell County has proven that some of the most beautiful, memorable moments can be found right in your own backyard. From literary inspiration and fluttering butterflies to cozy cafés and vineyard sunsets, this staycation is about reconnecting with your hometown, supporting local businesses, and capturing the magic of everyday places.

Stay tuned for Day Four, where we'll explore even more hidden gems and photo-worthy spots in the region!



Photo Credits: Image sourced from tripadvisor.com.

CATAWBA

Sunday

Your final day of this photo-op staycation takes you to Catawba County, NC, where the blend of historic downtowns, charming cafés, scenic trails, and gourmet dining makes for a picture-perfect itinerary. Today is all about slow exploration, small-town charm, and savoring local flavors, with plenty of opportunities to snap beautiful architecture, nature, and food photography.



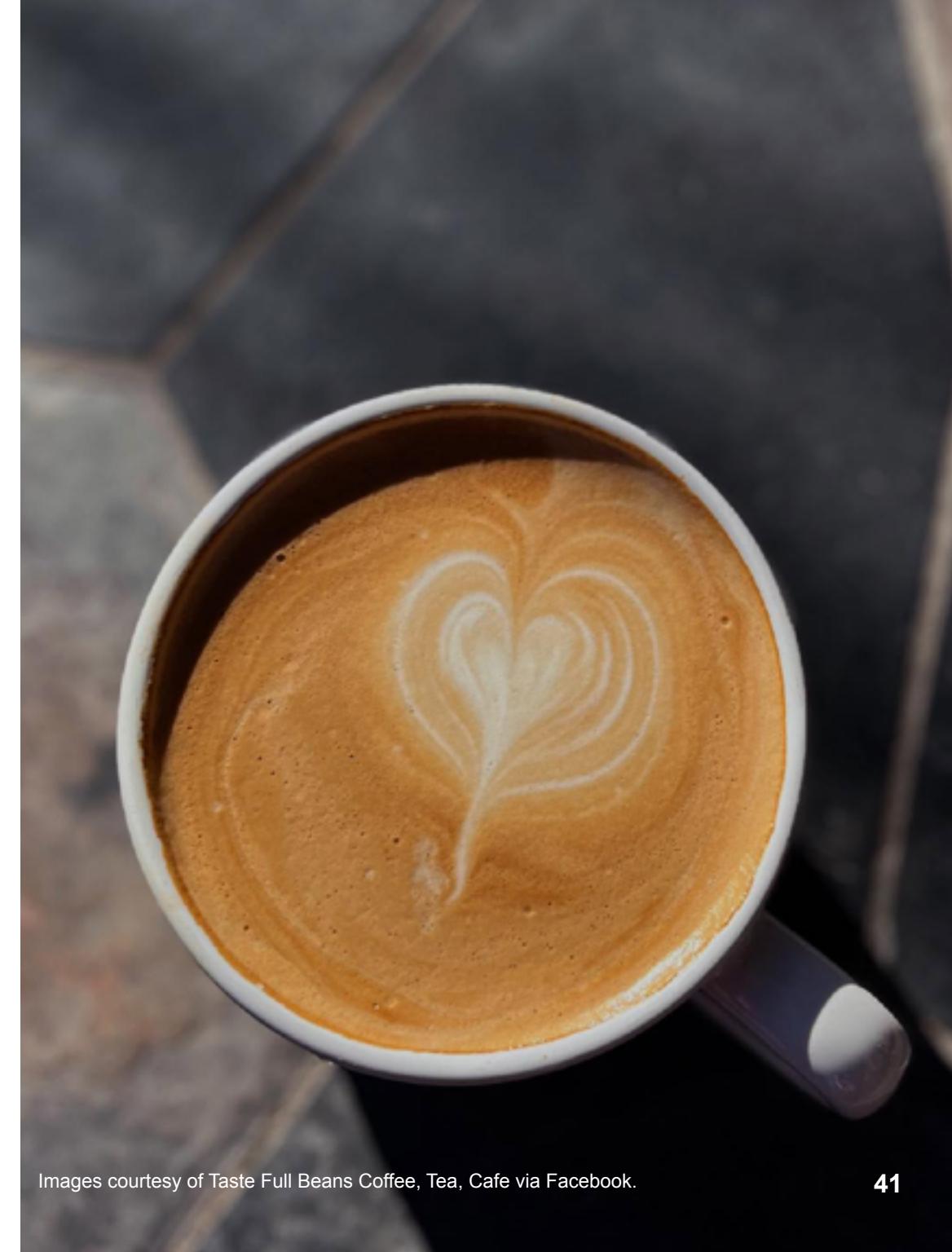
Taste Full Beans



Begin your day at Taste Full Beans Coffeehouse & Gallery in downtown Hickory, a cozy spot that's both a café and an art gallery. This stop is a dream for coffee lovers and creatives alike, offering a bohemian aesthetic, local artwork, and a warm, welcoming atmosphere. Capture shots of your handcrafted espresso drink, the intricate latte art, or the colorful local art on display. Whether you go for a savory quiche, a fresh-baked scone, or a hearty breakfast burrito, your meal will be just as photogenic as it is delicious!



After breakfast, take a leisurely walk through downtown Hickory, where the blend of historic buildings, modern boutiques, and public art makes for an eclectic and visually interesting background. Look for colorful street art murals that add a creative flair to your shots. Peek into boutiques, bookstores, and antique shops for unique details and hidden gems.



Downtown Newton

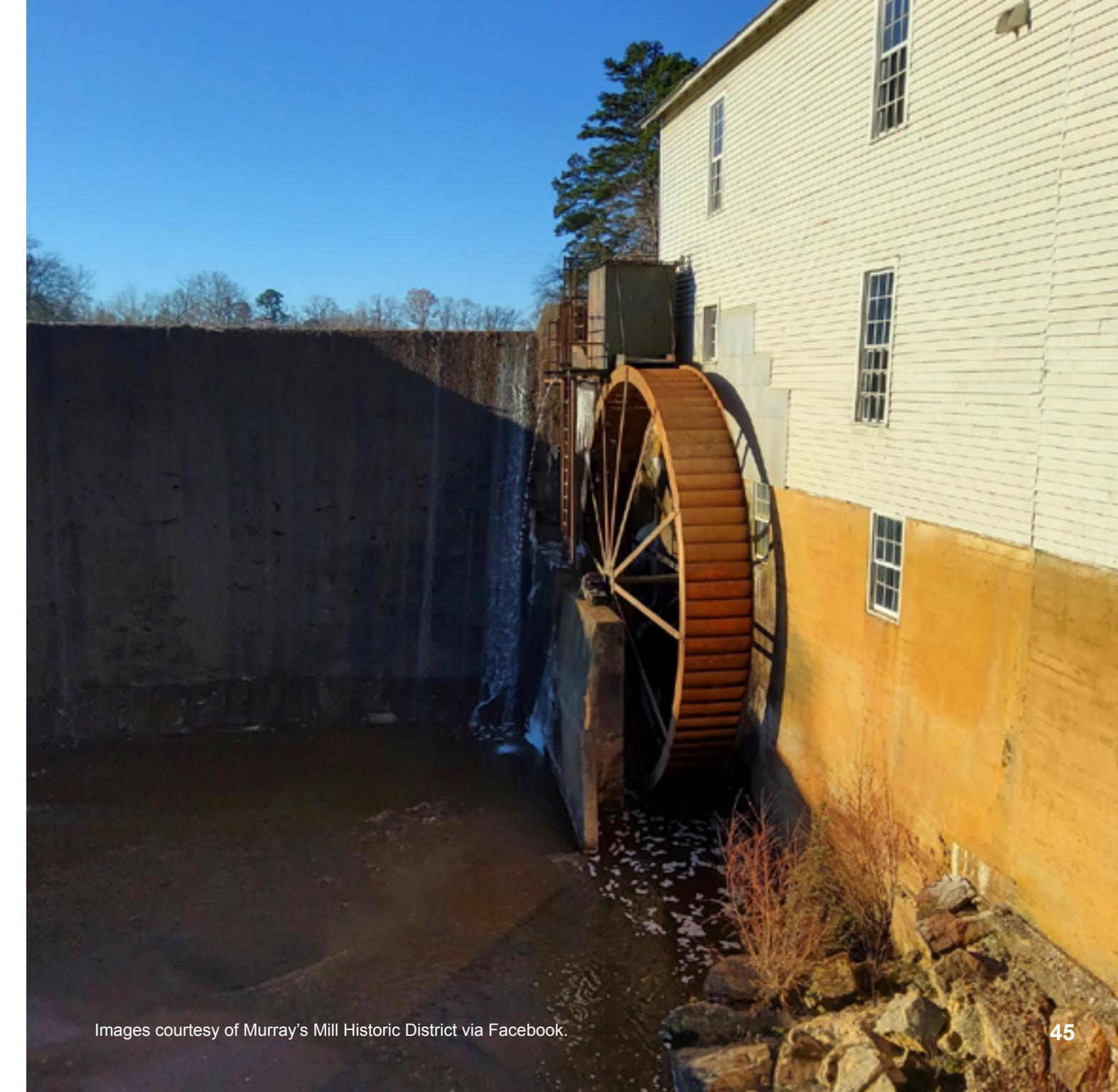
Next, take a short drive to Historic Downtown Newton, another gem packed with Southern charm and stunning architecture. The 1924 Courthouse Square, brick-paved streets, and vintage storefronts create a quaint, small-town ambiance that feels like stepping back in time. Photograph the historic landmarks, snap a few artistic window displays, and capture the essence of Newton's relaxed atmosphere. For lunch, grab some fresh-baked treats, cheeses, and local goodies from one of Newton's specialty shops.



Murray's Mill



Head to Murray's Mill Historic District for a picturesque picnic. This idyllic spot features a 1913 gristmill, a peaceful pond, and a scenic walking trail. Walk the trail and photograph rustic wooden bridges, wildflowers, and tranquil nature views. Enjoy a relaxing, slow-paced afternoon as you soak in the beauty of this hidden gem.



Images courtesy of Murray's Mill Historic District via Facebook.

Novel Taproom



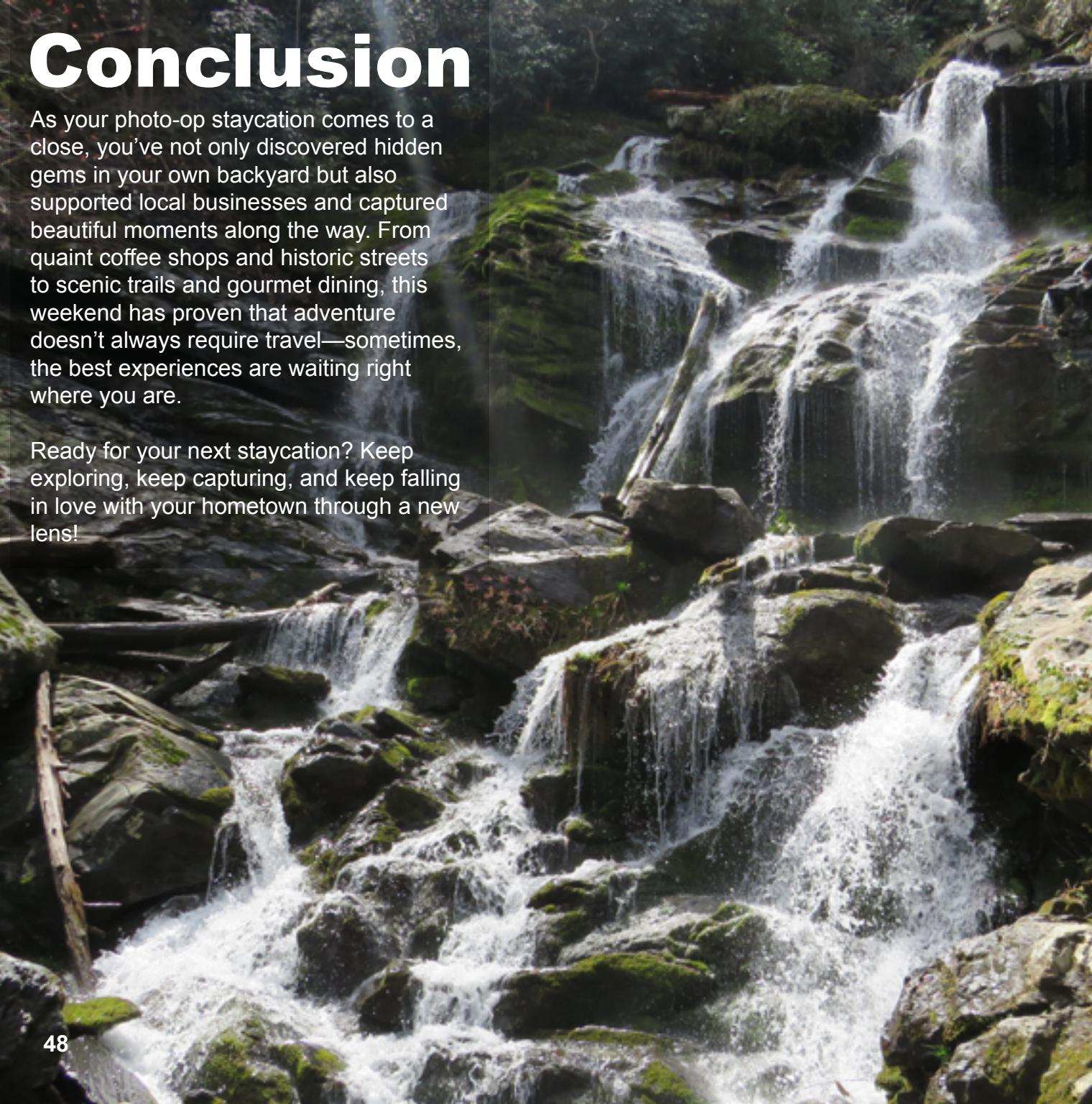
Wrap up your staycation with a memorable dinner at Novel, a stylish, modern restaurant in downtown Newton. Known for its artful plating, seasonal ingredients, and intimate atmosphere, this is the perfect place for sophisticated food photography. Photograph the moody, cozy ambiance of the dining space. Toast to the end of your hometown adventure with a craft cocktail or glass of wine.



Conclusion

As your photo-op staycation comes to a close, you've not only discovered hidden gems in your own backyard but also supported local businesses and captured beautiful moments along the way. From quaint coffee shops and historic streets to scenic trails and gourmet dining, this weekend has proven that adventure doesn't always require travel—sometimes, the best experiences are waiting right where you are.

Ready for your next staycation? Keep exploring, keep capturing, and keep falling in love with your hometown through a new lens!



The NC Foothills Experience is an interactive web application that showcases the rich collection of adventures, experiences, amenities, and food destinations across North Carolina's foothills region. This dynamic, map-based tool offers users immersive high-definition drone videos, photos, and engaging descriptions of various attractions, allowing them to explore and plan personalized experiences in the Unifour area. Nestled between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Piedmont, this area includes counties like Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, and Alexander—each offering its own distinctive attractions and experiences.

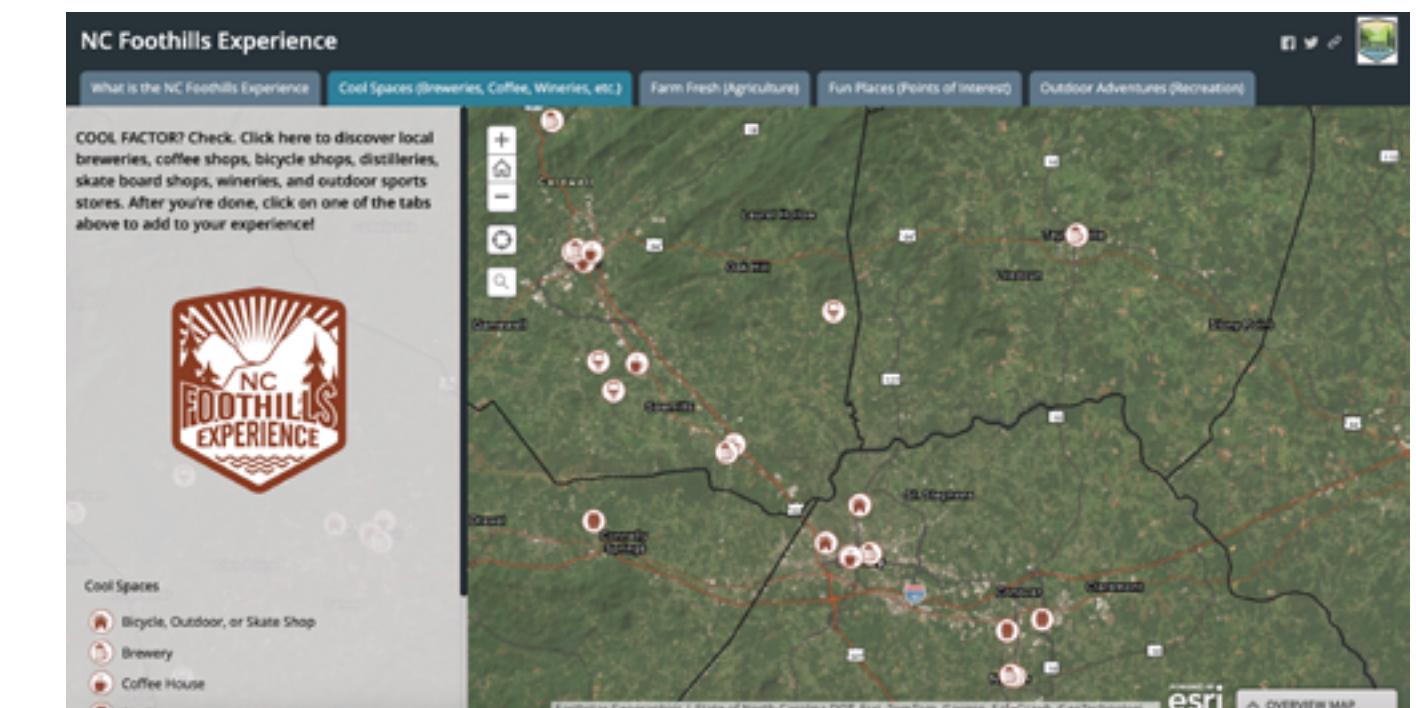


Photo credits: Left image by Jessica Frierson. Above image from NC Foothills Experience website.





Planning & Transportation

Credits & Acknowledgments

This booklet was created as part of a student project in collaboration with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments to help promote the NC Foothills Experience.

Created by
Jessica Frierson, Eric Paz-Leon, and Taylor Mapes

Special thanks to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and NC Foothills Experience team for their support and guidance in developing this resource.

Image Credits & Usage Notice

The images in this booklet were sourced from various online platforms and/or used by permission. All logos and images are the property of their respective owners and are used for informational purposes only. Learn more at expncfoothills.com