

Suggested Itinerary: Memphis, Nashville and the Mountains of Southeast Tennessee and Western North Carolina

Visit the music capitals of Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, where historic studios, music museums and live performances may inspire you to dance or sing along. Then retreat to the mountain towns of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Asheville, North Carolina. Classic attractions, scenic drives, breath-taking mountain vistas and craft beer await.

Memphis, Tennessee

Suggested: 2-4 days

In this pilgrimage city for music-lovers, tour Sun Studio to stand where Blues and Rock legends such as B.B. King and Elvis Presley recorded some of their earliest hits. For an intimate look at Presley's life, tour his Graceland estate. At the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the rhythm shifts to Soul and Gospel. View memorabilia from Stax artists including Otis Redding and Isaac Hayes, whose gold-plated Cadillac is displayed. For a sampling of Memphis' contemporary sounds, walk Beale Street, where live music seems to drift from every open door. The aroma of barbecue fills the air, too. At about 100 restaurants, savour local specialties that include dry-rubbed ribs and smoky pulled-pork sandwiches. Spend a pretty day at Memphis Zoo, home to two of the giant pandas found in the USA.

Nashville, Tennessee

Suggested: 2-4 days

Tennessee's music story continues in Nashville. At the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, recordings, touch screens and memorabilia trace Country music from its roots to the present. The museum also offers tours of RCA Studio B, where artists such as Dolly Parton recorded songs. The Grand Ole Opry is the place to see today's Country music stars perform. For a variety of genres, catch a concert at the Ryman Auditorium, the historic church building that was once the home of the Opry. Nearby, new art flows regularly into the Frist Center for the Visual Arts (its Art Deco-architecture is worth a stop for its own sake). Hungry? Find a 'meat-and-three' restaurant, where you'll select one meat and three side dishes from a list of homespun choices (try golden-fried chicken, creamy mashed potatoes, corn, and collard greens studded with pork).

Chattanooga, Tennessee

Suggested: 2-3 days

Lookout Mountain is a trio of Chattanooga attractions: Rock City, gardens and fairy-tale vignettes leading to a panoramic view of seven states; Ruby Falls, where cave tours reveal an underground waterfall; and the Incline Railway, a brief but thrillingly steep ride. Chattanooga's Tennessee Valley Railroad offers longer rides along historic rail lines and through a pre-Civil War tunnel. Indoors, stroll from a butterfly garden to a lemur forest at the Tennessee Aquarium. Consider visiting the Hunter Museum of American Art. Its eclectic architecture - combining a century-old mansion with a modernist structure of steel and glass - hints at what's inside: an impressive collection of artwork spanning the Colonial period to the Pop movement of Andy Warhol.

Asheville, North Carolina

Suggested: 2-3 days

Asheville is headquarters for the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the USA's most scenic drives. Follow it to find spectacular mountain views, trailheads for hiking and other outdoor adventures, such as horseback riding. The Parkway connects Asheville attractions including the Biltmore Estate, a 250-room French Renaissance-style chateau, gardens and winery, and the Folk Art Center, where members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild demonstrate and sell their work. Nearby, Asheville's city centre is ideal for experiencing the city's renowned food-and-beverage culture. Locally owned cafés - many emphasizing organic ingredients - are tucked between galleries and craft breweries. In fact, Asheville is one of the top three cities in the USA with the most breweries per capita. Sample from more than 100 local brews on tap, and inquire into brewery tours while you're onsite.

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