

SYLVA, N.C. — Just a short drive from the Southeast's major cities, Jackson County is the perfect destination for fall getaways, complete with scenic fall foliage views, seasonal outdoor activities, autumn-themed craft beers and much more. Below are ways to celebrate the fall season in the great outdoors of Jackson County, NC with some breaks for brews along the way.

Bordering 45 miles of Jackson County, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the must-see scenic drive in the fall with an explosion of color as far as the eye can see. Jackson County is home to the highest point on the parkway with the Richland Balsam Overlook at 6,047 feet above sea level. Travelers can trek to the summit by foot via a 1.5-mile loop. The Waterrock Knob Parking Overlook provides another spectacular view, offering a four-state panorama of the Great Smoky Mountains. Leaf-seekers can also take the short hiking trail to the top of the knob to find even more breathtaking views.

A natural phenomenon, "Shadow of the Bear," is visible from mid-October through mid-November during the fall travel season. Visitors can head to Rhodes Big View Overlook off Highway 64 between 5:30-6:00 p.m. each evening for the best view of the sun setting behind Whiteside Mountain, casting a stunning shadow image of a black bear over the mountains' fall colors.

With more visitors each year than any other national park in the country, the popular Great Smoky Mountains National Park presents visitors with 520,000 acres to explore. Choose nearby Jackson County as a home base for affordable, family-friendly accommodations close to the park. The Oconaluftee Visitor Center in Cherokee, NC, and all entrances to the park, offer free admission, making this a budget-friendly bucket list travel experience, especially in the fall colors.

Known as the "Yosemite of the East," Panthertown Valley is a hiker's paradise with more than 30 miles of backcountry trails and 12 waterfalls to discover along the way. The hiking trails offer rewarding views of the fall colors with stops overlooking valleys and 360-degree views of the stunning landscape coated in red, orange and yellow. Mountain bikers can also navigate the designated trails throughout Panthertown.

Those looking for a challenge will also enjoy a hike at Pinnacle Park, which boasts 1,000 acres of natural landscape. The park features a seven-mile roundtrip hike with significant elevation gain and rocky terrain that peaks at Pinnacle Bald. The 270-degree view of the neighboring mountains and the valley where the town of Sylva is located are a sight to see in the fall splendor.

Hikers can also trek along the trails on Whiteside Mountain, estimated to be one of the oldest mountains in the world. Scope out the fall foliage from a two-mile trail that crosses the Eastern Continental Divide, providing incredible views of the Appalachian Mountains with vibrant autumn shades.

Jackson County is a hotspot for fly fishing, notably in the fall when its rivers and streams are stocked with more fish than anywhere else in the state. This accolade is just part of the reason why Jackson County is home to the Western North Carolina Fly Fishing Trail and also recognized as the North Carolina Trout Capital. The WNC Fly Fishing Trail is made up of 15 spots that are easily-accessible pristine waters. One of the most popular areas along the trail is the Tuckasegee River where fly fisherman of all levels can test their skills in search of brook, brown, rainbow trout and more. Adding to the perfect fishing conditions, fishermen can take in the beauty of the fall colors along the county's 4,600 miles of streams. Jackson County also has the state's longest contiguous stretch of Mountain Heritage Trout Waters with three points throughout Sylva, Dillsboro and Webster. Through the Mountain Heritage Trout Waters program, visitors can fish in the designated areas along the trail with a three-day permit for just \$5. Several outfitters throughout the county are experts on fishing in the area and rent equipment, or even lead excursions to help fishermen find the best spots and perfect their technique.

The Jackson County Ale Trail satisfies beer lovers' palates and those looking to imbibe. Fall is the perfect time to taste test flights of beer with the cooler weather and complex flavors of autumn's seasonal brews. Travel down the Ale Trail in Sylva to experience three unique breweries with the third, Balsam Falls Brewing Co., just opening this Summer 2017.

Balsam Falls Brewing Co.'s plans include 16-20 beers on tap with six staple beers, along with a rotating selection of different styles for all beer drinkers. The husband and wife team make distinct brews by using fruits, herbs and vegetables in their brewing processes, focusing on seasonal recipes with local ingredients. The family even grows their own blueberry bushes, apple and cherry trees, and grapevines to add into their varying beer flavors. Homegrown hops are also in the plans to enhance visitors' beer tasting experience.

Innovation Brewing averages 32 beers on tap at one time, featuring their 12 signature brews along with rotating seasonal options and experimental beers that show off the unique skills and talents of the brewery's masterminds. Past fall creations include an Apple Butter Brown Ale made with local apples, Pumpkin Chai, Cranberry Hibiscus Wheat and many more. With a welcoming environment and spacious indoor and outdoor areas, brewery-goers can settle in with the Cosmic Carryout food truck on-site every day, as well as live music on Saturdays.

Just down the road, Sneak E Squirrel offers a well-balanced selection of 13 beers, including their interpretations of classic styles. The brewery also highlights a "Beer of the Week" that tests creativity and explores the limits of beer brewing. A sampling of beers includes the Cherry Vanilla Stout and the Parrot Porter, a combination of a pale ale and a stout. Sneak E Squirrel also operates a full kitchen with delicious snacks and sharable plates, ideal for making a fall afternoon or evening out of a brewery visit.

When planning their stay, visitors in Jackson County will find a number of accommodations and dining with eclectic and authentic offerings that range from a budget mountain retreat to a high-end luxury getaway. Come see why Jackson County is the place to be to experience the majestic mountain brilliance of the fall's colors and other traditions of the season.

About Jackson County, NC:

Cashiers, Cherokee, Dillsboro, Sylva, Balsam, Cullowhee, Glenville and Sapphire are the distinct locales that make up Western North Carolina's Jackson County. Each of these Blue Ridge Mountain towns provide natural beauty that invites visitors to experience the North Carolina Mountains. Jackson County is also home to the nation's first and only fly fishing trail, The Western North Carolina Fly Fishing Trail. The majestic mountains harbor miles of hiking trails and waterfalls while charming downtowns are known for shopping, dining, culture, and hometown atmosphere. For more information, visit www.DiscoverJacksonNC.com.

CONTACT:

Jessica Ennis
Jessica@pineapple-pr.com

404-237-3761

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