

Fifty years after its founding in Pinehurst, the [World Golf Hall of Fame](#) comes home in 2024 as part of the U.S. Golf Association's second headquarters, called Golf House Pinehurst. The Hall of Fame's arrival will dovetail with the [U.S. Open's return](#) to the No. 2 course at Pinehurst Resort, which the USGA has designated as the tournament's first anchor site. Golf House Pinehurst will include an immersive USGA Experience, a research center, a sustainability-focused outdoor learning landscape and a longleaf pine restoration forest as well as the Hall of Fame, which relocated from Pinehurst to St. Augustine, Fla., in 1998. Inductees include Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Sam Snead, Annika Sorenstam and Babe Zaharias plus luminaries with North Carolina ties: Pinehurst founder Richard Tufts; architect Donald Ross, who began his career at Pinehurst and designed the celebrated No. 2 course; women's golf pioneer Peggy Kirk Bell, who owned the Pine Needles and Mid Pines resorts in Southern Pines; Fort Bragg native Raymond Floyd; Goldsboro-born Mark O'Meara; Wake Forest University alumnus Arnold Palmer; and Charlotte-born Charlie Sifford, the first Black golfer to play on the PGA Tour.

With its wild beauty, pirate-laced history and capitating village, Ocracoke Island claims the No. 1 spot on Dr. Beach's 2022 [Best Beaches in America](#) list, a pinnacle it first reached 15 years ago. [Ocracoke Beach](#) has long been a favorite "getaway beach" for list author Dr. Stephen Leatherman, whose 50 criteria prioritize safety, cleanliness and overall appeal. Sitting 26 miles from the mainland, Ocracoke boasts 16 miles of pristine Atlantic shoreline with the village unfolding around a clam-shaped harbor on Pamlico Sound. Accessed by [ferry](#) and private plane, the destination adds appeal with its singular shops, restaurants and inns as well as histories that include [Blackbeard's last stand](#) and a picturesque [1823 lighthouse](#). Also finding favor: [Old Lighthouse Beach](#) at Buxton also found favor with Dr. Beach, who ranked it No. 6 and called it the best East Coast beach for surfing. Ocracoke and Old Lighthouse beaches are both part of the [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#). Find the full news release and photo link [here](#).

In a grand reunion of moonshine and motorsports, [NASCAR](#) marks its 75th anniversary with a return to [North Wilkesboro Speedway](#) for the 2023 All-Star Race. The May 19-21 event will be the first sanctioned race in 27 years in the historic "moonshine capital of the world" and the place where stock car racing began. Known for its uphill backstretch and downhill frontstretch, the short track hosted more than 90 NASCAR events won by such legendary drivers as Fireball Roberts, Lee and Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, Jeff Gordon and Junior Johnson, a Wilkes County native whose white lightning runs prepared him for racing stardom. After owners Speedway Motorsports moved the NASCAR races to other tracks in 1997, North Wilkesboro hosted a few non-NASCAR events in 2010 and 2011. In August, a wildly successful Racetrack Revival grassroots event featuring Dale Earnhardt Jr. led to the decision to return the track to NASCAR glory. Between now and the All-Star Race, travelers can visit a pair of legal moonshine distilleries, [Copper Barrel](#) and [Call Family Distillers](#), owned by the son of storied bootlegger Willie Clay Call.

[**Grandfather Mountain**](#) extends its connection to natural wonder with the new [**Wilson Center for Nature Discovery**](#), the focal point of a new Conservation Campus at the UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve. The center, which opened in June, nearly doubles the size of Grandfather Mountain's Nature Museum and adds a dozen interactive exhibits and experiences that connect to the mountain's 16 natural communities. New outdoor learning spaces include a pavilion and an amphitheater with terraced seating while an ADA-accessible auditorium, classrooms and new food service facilities extend the park's capacity for hosting conferences and other events. Grandfather Mountain, a 5,946-foot peak off the Blue Ridge Parkway near Blowing Rock, is known for its walking trails, wildlife habitats and the [**Mile High Swinging Bridge**](#).

With travelers craving open space as never before, [**Visit North Carolina**](#) and the [**N.C. Outdoor Recreation Industry Office**](#) have joined with the [**Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics**](#) on a campaign to inspire outdoor experiences and manage natural assets for future generations. With Outdoor NC, North Carolina becomes the first coastal state to partner with Leave No Trace, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the outdoors and inspiring people to use it responsibly. As people seek the relative safety of fresh-air spaces to escape confinements imposed by COVID-19, the partnership will focus on ways to welcome travelers and engage them in protecting the natural places they crave. Connect with the principles and outdoor travel inspiration at [**Outdoor NC**](#).

The [**U.S. National Whitewater Center**](#) in Charlotte, home of the world's largest artificial whitewater river, takes on the natural rapids of Western North Carolina with [**Whitewater Pisgah**](#). Located in Mills River, the new adventure hub offers a range of paddling options plus climbing, mountain biking, gravel biking, hiking and backpacking, trail running and flatwater paddling. Guests can also find accommodations and hospitality services as well as rentals, instruction, guides and events. Whitewater Pisgah is part of an expansion of the center, which has hosted USA Canoe/Kayak Team trials for four Olympic games and boasts the first-of-its-kind Deep Water Solo Climbing Complex. The expansion includes Whitewater Santee in South Carolina and Whitewater Grayson, opening in Virginia in 2023.

Mayland Community College's [**Earth to Sky Park**](#) adds another enticement for stargazers to visit the Blue Ridge Mountain campus in Burnsville: the 60-seat [**Glenn and Carol Arthur Planetarium**](#), opening June 25. A certified International Dark Sky Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the 6-acre Mayland park is home to the [**Bare Dark Sky Observatory**](#) and its 34-inch telescope, a viewing terrace, walking trails and gardens. Under the planetarium's geodesic dome, visitors can gaze at a 36-foot screen to view the skies from around the world, watch laser light shows and enjoy other experiences.

Born Dec. 24, 1922, Ava Gardner gives movie lovers and hometown fans a century's worth of moments to celebrate throughout her centennial year. At the [**Ava Gardner Museum**](#) in Smithfield, which unveiled a major renovation in 2021, a new 32-foot mural by [**Jeks**](#)

One adorns an exterior wall with 18 Hotel California tea roses (yellow roses were the actress's favorite flower) planted beneath. As a main event, the **[Ava Gardner Festival](#)** returns Oct. 7-9 with new museum exhibits, film screenings, video presentations and **[heritage tours](#)** reflecting an extraordinary life from the early years in tiny Grabtown to worldwide celebrity for “Mogambo,” “The Night of the Iguana” and other films and marriages to Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw and Frank Sinatra. Special programs will continue into 2023 to encourage visitors to see the museum’s array of costumes, photos and memorabilia and learn more about Gardner as a role model and humanitarian as well as a movie star and style icon.

Two blocks from the state Capitol in Raleigh, work is under way on **[N.C. Freedom Park](#)**, which will honor the Black struggle to achieve freedom for all. With completion targeted by the end of the year, the park was designed by Phil Freelon, the late Durham architect known for the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington as well as the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture in Charlotte. The centerpiece of the 1-acre park will be a towering sculpture called "The Beacon of Freedom," which will shine a light toward the sky to reflect the fire for freedom.

Oyster farmers, restaurants, markets and educators invite travelers to indulge and learn along the **[N.C. Oyster Trail](#)**, which highlights an industry whose colorful history includes a **[war](#)** against out-of-state poachers. Stops extend from the Outer Banks to Bald Head Island with oyster farm tours, exhibits, excursions and dining with inland markets and restaurants sharing the delicacy with their customers. The Outer Banks Seafood Festival and other events will also elevate oysters at their 2021 celebrations. The Oyster Trail is administered by the N.C. Coastal Federation and N.C. Sea Grant in partnership with the N.C. Shellfish Growers Association.

The nation’s first roadside food hall invites travelers to exit Interstate 95 at the timeless railroad town of Selma for a bite and a craft beverage. **[Old North State Food Hall](#)**, which opened in August on the East Coast's main north-south corridor, features fare from such area kitchens as Barley and Burger, Aroma de Cuba and Luna Pizza along with David Chang’s Fuku. At the heart of the 15,000-square foot space, a full-service bar called Longleaf Tavern features North Carolina beer, cider, wine and sprits as well as national brands.

[Nantahala Outdoor Center](#), one of the nation’s largest outdoor recreation companies, celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2022. With more than 120 river- and land-based itineraries at its main location on the Nantahala River in Bryson City and along seven other Southeastern rivers, NOC is best known for whitewater adventure on the Nantahala River, where more than 20 Olympic paddlers have trained. Beyond rafting for all levels, the main campus offers zip lines and treetop adventures, tubing, kayaking, hiking and biking. Training (including wilderness survival), multi-day events and multi-activity packages are available, as are on-site lodging, camping and dining. **[noc.com](#)**

