

RALEIGH, N.C. — From a thrilling new roller coaster to a new passenger ferry route, summer kicks off across [North Carolina](#) with fresh experiences and old favorites. Weekend events, summer-long festivals and come-when-you-please options lead travelers to remarkable destinations for relaxing vacations and weekend getaways.

“Summer ignites our sense of adventure,” said Wit Tuttell, executive director of Visit North Carolina. “It stirs our desire to reconnect with people and travel to places that inspire us to live in the moment. If you’ve always wanted to hang glide or catch a foul ball or hike a new trail, follow the impulse and check a first off your wish list in North Carolina.”

Start with the ideas below to find firsts and other inspirations for summer travel. And remember to refresh your knowledge of how to stay safe exploring the terrain from [waterfalls](#) to [beaches](#).

Feel the Summer Music Vibe

As North Carolina celebrates 2019 as the Year of Music, connect with a tuneful heritage that embraces the spectrum of genres past and present.

Put your fingers to the frets at the [Earl Scruggs Center](#) in Shelby, where a star-spangled summer offers free admission for active-duty military and their families from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Dance barefoot in the sand at the [Carolina Beach Music Festival](#), which brings fans together for the 34th time.

Unpack a picnic under the stars and enjoy a star-studded lineup at the Brevard Music Center’s [Summer Festival](#). Led by Artistic Director Keith Lockhart, the 80-performance program runs through mid-August with classical superstars and rising talent sharing the stage in a stunning setting.

For more tunes and talent through summer and beyond, check out the N.C. Arts Council’s [Come Hear NC website](#).

Immerse Yourself in Tradition and Culture

If you like fast cars, experience racing at Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord with Sunday’s 60th running of the [Coca-Cola 600](#). The pre-race Salute to the Troops pays tribute to all five branches of the U.S. armed forces. Take an additional day to visit the nearby [Mustang Owner’s Museum](#), which opened this spring and displays Mustangs from all 55 years of production.

To find extra sparkle, check out the [NC Gold Festival](#) and celebrate America’s first gold rush. The June 1 event at Old Fort features gold and gem panning, games, and live music and storytelling.

The [Asheville Art Museum](#) reopens this summer in a transformed space that honors its landmark building while welcoming the future with new light-bathed galleries, theater space, and a rooftop sculpture terrace and café.

Celebrate the return of the [Ava Gardner Festival](#) in her hometown of Smithfield. The event will feature free movies, heritage tours and the new “Ava: My Real Story” exhibit, a look at the actress’s personal side known to close friends and family.

Experience the first flight at the enhanced visitor center at the [Wright Brothers National Memorial](#) in Kitty Hawk. New interactive exhibits reflect the journey and achievement of first flight alongside a life-size replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer.

Catch a Game in a New or Classic Ballpark

Catch a ballgame at one of [11 Minor League ballparks](#). Intimate venues, catchy promotions, lovable mascots, unique food and beverages, and affordable prices mean the minors serve up major fun.

The season adds two new ballparks to the landscape. In Fayetteville, Seagra Stadium downtown becomes the home of the [Woodpeckers](#), a Class A affiliate of the Houston Astros. In High Point, the [Rockers](#) play at BB&T Point. The new team is a member of the independent Atlantic League of Professional Baseball, which has pioneered rules to speed up play.

Experience Summer Thrills

Roller-coaster junkies and thrill-seekers add [Carowinds](#) as a must-visit this summer to board a double-launch coaster called Copperhead Strike. It anchors a new Blue Ridge Mountains-themed area inspired by Western North Carolina's landscapes and lore.

Experience an elevator inside a 315-foot granite peak at [Chimney Rock Park](#), lifting riders for a sweeping view of Hickory Nut Gorge and Lake Lure.

If animal encounters are more your speed, be dazzled by the colorful [Lorikeet Landing Exhibit](#) at the N.C. Aquarium Fort Fisher. Or immerse yourself in *Expedition AFRICA—A Virtual Reality Experience* at the [North Carolina Zoo](#) in Asheboro, where you can come nose to nose with elephants, rhinos and giraffes on the plains of Africa. Venture to Plymouth on the banks of the Roanoke River for the fifth anniversary of the [NC Black Bear Festival](#).

Try a [new route](#) to Ocracoke aboard the N.C. Ferry System’s 98-seat Ocracoke Express Passenger Ferry. The reservable service takes passengers from Hatteras to Ocracoke’s Silver Lake Harbor. Visitors can explore the 4-square-mile village on foot, rent bicycles or golf carts, or board a free shuttle. Ocracoke, the southernmost stretch of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, is known for its beach, which has topped [Dr. Beach’s annual list](#), and as Blackbeard's last hangout.

For more ideas to fill your summer, find inspiration and trip-planning information on [VisitNC.com](#). To keep the moments coming, follow Visit NC on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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