

**RALEIGH, N.C. (Feb. 21, 2023)** — [\*\*Dream Big in Small Town NC\*\*](#), an initiative launched in 2022 by [\*\*Visit North Carolina\*\*](#), returns today with an invitation to explore Scenic Mountain counties that are primed for visitors and new residents. [\*\*Sweepstakes entry\*\*](#) is a click away for travelers interested in scoping out possibilities in a spectacular region that would welcome a boost in workforce as well as visitation.

“Spring’s approach makes this a perfect time to reconnect with travelers who are mapping 2023 getaways,” said Wit Tuttell, Visit NC’s executive director. “As an extension of Visit NC’s role as the state’s tourism marketing organization, we’re looking beyond travel inspiration per se to highlight charismatic places with appeal rooted in character and authenticity — places where travelers might settle in for longer stays by starting a business, joining the local workforce or working remotely.”

Created by the General Assembly as the Rural Tourism Recovery Pilot Program, Dream Big targets 16 counties that are considered at risk for population loss resulting from the pandemic. The initiative is designed to capitalize on interest in exploring small towns by drawing attention to the people, places and businesses in three distinct regions designated as the Scenic Mountains, the Northeast Lakes & Rivers, and the Inner Banks. Visit NC, a unit of the [\*\*Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina\*\*](#), is coordinating the program with the [\*\*N.C. Department of Commerce\*\*](#) and other private and public entities involved in growing the state’s first-in-talent workforce.

The Scenic Mountains sweepstakes features the region’s five designated counties: [\*\*Graham\*\*](#), [\*\*Haywood\*\*](#), [\*\*Madison\*\*](#), [\*\*Mitchell\*\*](#) and [\*\*Yancey\*\*](#). Travelers have until April 20 to register for one of five chances to win:

- A \$1,000 voucher from program partner [\*\*Airbnb\*\*](#).
- Three \$100 gift cards for a choice of restaurants, shops and activities including a mineral soak at [\*\*Hot Springs Resort & Spa\*\*](#), dinner at [\*\*Tapoco Lodge\*\*](#) and shopping at [\*\*Mast General Store\*\*](#).
- A \$500 gift card from Visit NC to assist with travel expenses.

Sweepstakes covering the other Dream Big regions will follow with the Northeast Lakes & Rivers ([\*\*Edgecombe\*\*](#), [\*\*Halifax\*\*](#), [\*\*Vance\*\*](#) and [\*\*Warren\*\*](#) counties) running April 21-June 20, followed by the Inner Banks ([\*\*Chowan\*\*](#), [\*\*Gates\*\*](#), [\*\*Hertford\*\*](#), [\*\*Martin\*\*](#), [\*\*Tyrrell\*\*](#), [\*\*Perquimans\*\*](#) and [\*\*Washington\*\*](#) counties) running June 21-Aug. 20. All three regions have a dedicated presence on [\*\*VisitNC.com\*\*](#), complete with links to job postings, as well as on [\*\*Airbnb’s website\*\*](#).

Funded with \$1.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the campaign is well-tuned to traveler sentiment, Tuttell said. Interest in small-town getaways rose during the pandemic, and a [\*\*January report\*\*](#) from Destination Analysts lists small towns as the top category of interest at 32.7 percent, up from 28.4 percent a year ago. Southern Living magazine even declared 2023 as the Year of the Small Town with Southerners “happy to trade in the huge crowds and popular attractions of bigger cities for the quiet charm and slower pace of small towns.”

Christy Wood, executive director of the Burnsville-Yancey County Chamber of Commerce, said her destination embraces the goals that define Dream Big in Small Town NC.

“With more than 100 miles of public hiking trails and Mount Mitchell, the highest peak east of the Rockies, Yancey County naturally attracts people who love the outdoors,” Wood said. “Yet our destination is defined by more than mountains, trails, and the rivers that elevate our vacation appeal. A thriving art scene, strong sense of community, and an openness to people make the Burnsville area supremely inviting for people who envision new possibilities for finding their happy place.”

Beyond the sweepstakes, website presence and posts on @VisitNC's social media channels, Dream Big will reach the traveling public via a content creator campaign. Selected tastemakers will visit each region to engage followers in the local culture and lifestyle appeal for people interested in a change of scenery. Airbnb, which will also promote the campaign on its website and social media channels, will use its inventory of short-term rental properties to host the creators' visits.

"We are thrilled to continue our partnership with Visit North Carolina with the launch of Spring in the Scenic Mountains campaign and hope to inspire more travelers to discover off-the-beaten-path, rural areas that have so much to offer to those looking for a new vacation destination or a new home," said Viviana Jordan, Southeast Public Policy Lead for Airbnb. "We are continuing to see growing interest in rural tourism with nights booked in rural North Carolina comprising nearly one-third of total nights booked in the state in 2022. From lush hiking trails to a vibrant art scene, the Scenic Mountains region has something for everyone, and this campaign will help us showcase its natural beauty and spread the benefits of tourism to the amazing places there are to explore in these counties."

Tuttell sees the initiative as a win for travelers and destinations alike.

"We consider so many of our towns to be hidden gems, and their value will rise with the infusion of tourism spending coupled with harmonious growth of the tax base," he said. "And the travelers who boost this economic vitality will benefit from finding a place that allows them to fulfill their dreams."

- For a quick look at enticements in Dream Big destinations, click [here](#).
- Find photos from Dream Big destinations [here](#).
- See the companion news release from Airbnb [here](#).

#### **About Visit North Carolina:**

Visit North Carolina is part of the [Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina](#). Established in 2014, the EDPNC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that oversees the state's efforts in business and job recruitment and retention, international trade, and tourism, film and sports development. The mission of Visit North Carolina is to unify and lead the state in developing North Carolina as a major destination for leisure travel, group tours, meetings and conventions, sports events and film production. For more information on North Carolina's destinations and travel assets, go to [VisitNC.com](#).

###

#### **CONTACT:**

Margo Metzger  
[media@VisitNC.com](mailto:media@VisitNC.com)

---

<https://media.visitnc.com/Visit-NC-Rekindles-Big-Dreams-in-Small-Towns>