

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](#), opened in June 2022. 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.

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[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](#).

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Raggiana birds-of-paradise, green pygmy geese and plum-headed parakeets are among the residents of a new aviary at [Sylvan Heights Bird Park](#) in Scotland Neck. The "Birds of Paradise" aviary, which houses more than 300 birds native to New Guinea and the South Pacific, is a collaboration with California's Pandemonium Aviaries, which shares Sylvan Heights' commitment to preserving rare and endangered species by maintaining sustainable breeding populations. The new aviary, which opened in October, will allow Sylvan Heights guests to experience close-up encounters with the colorful birds, whose breeding will be supported in a separate propagation facility. Sylvan Heights, home to more than 2,000 birds, features the world's largest collection of waterfowl as well as parrots, flamingos and other exotic species in an 18-acre setting that includes paved trails and a wheelchair-accessible treehouse.

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Jackie Robinson slept here. So did James Baldwin, James Brown, Gladys Knight, Ike and Tina Turner, and other Black travelers who needed a place to stay in the Jim Crow South. The Magnolia House Motel, whose listing in "The Negro Motorist Green Book" was starred as a recommended Greensboro site, faded after it closed in the 1970s. After four decades and a consummate restoration of the 1914 structure, [Historic Magnolia House](#) now hosts weddings, concerts and other events, and in December, it again welcomed overnight guests to the second-floor rooms, whose decor honors the celebrated travelers. Guests can check out history displays that showcase the motel's history from its prior ownership and that of the Pass family, the current owners, whose relatives figure into the region's civil rights history. Plans for the next phase call for construction of an adjacent museum.

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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.

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