

Blue Ridge Parkway

Three days on one of America's most scenic drives — a Gilded Age mansion and working winery in Asheville, a climb up the Blue Ridge's rhododendron-covered high country to the highest peak east of the Mississippi, a waterfall hike off a National Park Service overlook, and a swaying bridge a mile above sea level at Grandfather Mountain — with real hotels, real roadside stops, and 2026 prices for every leg.

DURATION

3 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

September - October

peak fall foliage typically sweeps down from the highest elevations (Craggy Gardens, Mount Mitchell) in early-to-mid October to Asheville and Blowing Rock by late October, with crisp, mild days in the 55-70°F (13-21°C) range; late spring (May-June), when Catawba rhododendron blooms along the ridgelines, is the other high season. Sections of the Parkway close temporarily in winter for ice and snow.

FROM

\$650 USD / person

for 2 people, incl. rental car, 2 nights' lodging, and key admissions

Day 1

Asheville & the Biltmore Estate

A rental car pickup at Asheville's small regional airport and an afternoon at America's largest privately owned home, closing with dinner in downtown Asheville.

Rental Car Pickup — Asheville Regional Airport (AVL)

~20 minutes to downtown Asheville • from \$50-\$75 USD / day

A small airport 15 miles south of downtown with National, Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise and Hertz counters on-site — the natural starting point for a Parkway drive north toward Blowing Rock.

Biltmore Estate — House & Winery

~4-5 hours, self-guided • from ~\$90 USD / person (varies by date; complimentary wine tasting included)

George Vanderbilt's 8,000-acre Gilded Age estate, its 250-room French Renaissance château still the largest privately owned home in America — a self-guided house tour is paired with the estate's own working winery, where every ticket includes a complimentary tasting; the gardens and grounds alone are worth a couple of unhurried hours.

Biltmore Estate · www.biltmore.com/visit/tickets-pricing

Dinner — Cúrate Bar de Tapas

~1.5 hours • \$35-\$55 USD / person

A Michelin Guide-listed Spanish tapas restaurant in downtown Asheville, built around shareable small plates like jamón and pan con tomate — reservations recommended, especially on weekends.

Cúrate Bar de Tapas · www.curatetapasbar.com

Overnight — Omni Grove Park Inn

From \$300-\$500 USD / night, for 2 people

A historic 1913 stone-and-timber resort on the side of Sunset Mountain with sweeping views over Asheville and the Blue Ridge — a AAA Four-Diamond property with an on-site spa built into the mountainside.

Omni Grove Park Inn · www.omnihotels.com/hotels/asheville-grove-park

Day 2 Craggy Gardens, Mount Mitchell & Linville Falls

A full day on the Parkway itself, climbing through rhododendron-covered high country to the highest point east of the Mississippi before a waterfall hike and the drive into Blowing Rock.

Drive — Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville to Craggy Gardens

~45 minutes, self-guided (Milepost 384-364) • free (no toll or entrance fee)

The Parkway climbs out of Asheville into high-elevation balds, with the Folk Art Center and Craven Gap overlooks making easy early stops — fill the gas tank before starting, since services thin out for long stretches ahead.

Craggy Gardens Visitor Center & Trail

~1 hour, self-guided • free

A high, wind-swept bald famous for its Catawba rhododendron bloom in June, with a short, steep half-mile trail from the visitor center up to Craggy Pinnacle's 360-degree summit view — in fall, the same overlook is one of the Parkway's best spots for the turning leaves below.

Blue Ridge Parkway — Craggy Gardens · www.blueridgeparkway.org/poi/craggy-gardens

Mount Mitchell State Park

~1.5 hours round trip via NC-128 side road • free, small parking fee at peak times

A short detour off the Parkway to the summit of Mount Mitchell, at 6,684 feet the highest point east of the Mississippi River — a paved path leads from the parking area to an observation tower at the very top, usually 15-20°F cooler than Asheville.

Mount Mitchell State Park · www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/mount-mitchell-state-park

Linville Falls Trail

~1.5 hours round trip, self-guided hike (Milepost 316) · free

An easy-to-moderate 1.6-mile round-trip trail through old-growth forest to a series of overlooks above a three-tiered waterfall dropping into Linville Gorge — the Erwins View Trail spur has the best full view of the falls.

Blue Ridge Parkway — Linville Falls · www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/linvillefalls

Dinner — Storie Street Grille, Blowing Rock

~1.5 hours · \$20-\$40 USD / person

A longtime downtown Blowing Rock spot serving New American comfort food with a sidecar bar attached — a reliable, casual dinner after a long day of driving and hiking.

Storie Street Grille · www.storiestreetgrille.com

Overnight — Chetola Resort at Blowing Rock

From \$180-\$320 USD / night, for 2 people

A lakeside resort on 87 acres a short walk from downtown Blowing Rock, with rooms and lodge units set around Chetola Lake at the foot of the Blue Ridge escarpment.

Chetola Resort at Blowing Rock · www.chetola.com

Day 3

Grandfather Mountain & the Drive Home

A morning crossing a swinging bridge a mile above sea level, then the drive back south along the Parkway to Asheville for the flight home.

Grandfather Mountain & Mile High Swinging Bridge

~2-3 hours, self-guided · ~\$25-\$40 USD / person (dynamic pricing by date)

A privately owned nature park (not part of the National Park Service Parkway itself, though it borders it) with a 228-foot suspension bridge swaying gently between two rocky outcrops at nearly a mile in elevation, plus wildlife habitats for black bears, elk and cougars unable to survive in the wild — arrive early, since the summit parking lot fills by mid-morning on clear days.

Grandfather Mountain · www.grandfather.com/tickets

Linn Cove Viaduct Overlook

~30 minutes, self-guided (Milepost 304) · free

The Parkway's signature engineering feat, a curving concrete bridge that hugs the slope of Grandfather Mountain without touching the ground below — the visitor center at the south end has the classic photo overlook, and the Tanawha Trail runs underneath it for a closer look.

Blue Ridge Parkway — Linn Cove Viaduct · www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/linn-cove-viaduct

Drive — Blowing Rock to Asheville Regional Airport

~1.5-2 hours via the Parkway or US-221/I-40 · self-guided

Either the slower, scenic Parkway route back over Craggy Gardens or the faster US-221/I-40 combination works, depending on how much time is left before the flight — closes the loop on three days that ran from a Gilded Age mansion to a mile-high swinging bridge.

Departure — Asheville Regional Airport (AVL)

return rental car at the terminal

Return the rental car and check in for the flight home.