



New and Newsworthy

America 250 Commemorations Zoom in on Firsts, 'Outlander' Author

Diana Gabaldon, whose popular "Outlander" novels and Starz series unfold across North Carolina, will join the inaugural [NC First in Freedom Festival](#), a hallmark America250 event that takes place Feb. 21-28 in southeastern NC. The event commemorates the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge, the first significant Patriot victory with the defeat of Scottish Highlanders. "An Evening With Diana Gabaldon," complete with conversation and a backstage meet-and-greet, takes place Feb. 27, the eve of the battle re-enactment in Currie. Gabaldon will also join a guided battlefield tour before the re-enactment. In April, [Halifax State Historic Site](#) will mark the 250th anniversary of the Halifax Resolves, which made North Carolina the first colony to call for independence. The weekend of April 10-12 will include living history, tours, a military encampment, and small arms and artillery firing. Track more events at [America250.nc.gov](#).

Photos:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1icji04rlgc4KhU8k_YCdc7ve0SkOgiDu/view?usp=sharing (Moores Creek)
<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/0cc4b321-801d-42c0-846a-46caa9597fce>
(Halifax State Historic Site)

47 NC Restaurants Featured in MICHELIN Guide American South

Charlotte's [Counter-](#) tops the list of NC restaurants recognized in the inaugural MICHELIN Guide American South, which was unveiled Nov. 3. In addition to the star rating for Counter-, Colleen Hughes of Charlotte's [Supperland](#) received a Michelin Exceptional Cocktails Award, and Counter- and Asheville's [Luminosa](#) earned Green Stars for inspiring visions. Luminosa also received a Bib Gourmand designation for good food and good value as did [Mala Pata](#) and [Sam Jones BBQ](#) in Raleigh; [Prime Barbecue](#) in Knightdale; [Little Chango](#) and [Mother](#) in Asheville; and [Lang Van](#) in Charlotte. Find an interactive map with all 47 restaurants and descriptions at [VisitNC.com](#). The Guide covers Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Atlanta as well as North Carolina. See *MICHELIN-driven road trip idea below*.

Photos:

https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/e4a2827c-cd64-4eb7-9950-1cfa656a9de7?utm_source=MarketingCloud&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NC+Restaurants+in+MICHELIN+Guide+American+South&utm_content=this+link

Thomas Dambo Trolls Take Up Residence in NC Cities

Raleigh, High Point and Charlotte are becoming the forever home of the largest North American collection of Danish recycle artist Thomas Dambo's celebrated troll sculptures with this fall's creation of seven outsize figures. An additional dozen, a collection dubbed "Trolls: A Field Study," make their North



American debut in Asheville with a Nov. 15-Feb. 17 residency at the [NC Arboretum](#). At Raleigh's [Dix Park](#), the awakening has begun with five trolls crafted from natural and reclaimed materials. They'll be connected via storyline to one each in High Point and Charlotte with exact locations kept secret until the unveiling to encourage discovery and exploration. The NC seven will join more than 150 other Thomas Dambo sculptures that have transformed public spaces, forests and greenways across five continents and attracted a devoted following that pursues the artist's global [Trollmap](#).

Photos:

<https://dixpark.mediavalet.com/portals/dixparktrolls>. Credit Dix Park Conservancy

NC Trail Town Guide Expands to 23 Destinations

Forests and rivers meet sidewalks and greenways in Visit NC's [Official North Carolina Trail Town Guide](#), a collection of pathways for adventure-loving travelers and culture seekers exploring the Great Trails State. Created in 2024 through the Outdoor NC initiative, the 2025 guide has grown to include Beech Mountain, Hendersonville, Greensboro and other program partners along with such original Trail Towns as Highlands, Southern Pines and Nags Head. While inspiring outdoor lovers on places to hike, bike, paddle and climb, the guide also connects travelers to history and heritage, golf and fly fishing, night skies, public art and traditional crafts. Trip tips from local experts, details about accessibility and reminders about stewardship add more value to the guide. It's available for download at [NCTrailTownGuide.com](#).

Photos: <https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/5e3d6652-aa6a-4e6e-94f5-959864406f0d>

Catawba Nation Casino Resort Rises at Kings Mountain

The first phase of the Catawba Indian Nation's \$1 billion [Catawba Two Kings Casino](#) is on track to open in March in Kings Mountain. The initial development will feature more than 1,300 slot machines, 22 table games and sports betting kiosks plus a 40-seat restaurant and bar. When completed in 2027, the 16-acre complex will include more than 2 million square feet with a 24-story, 385-room hotel. In 2021, the tribe opened a temporary casino space. The resort's name pays tribute to 18th-century Catawba Chief King Hagler and the city of [Kings Mountain](#), which is off Interstate 85 west of Charlotte.

Photos:

<https://delawarenorth.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/c28037fe-6a16-41cc-af09-8f9970aa37d8> CREDIT Catawba Two Kings Casino

Charlotte Takes Lead Role as 'Top Chef' Location

Competition heats up in the Queen City with Bravo's production of Season 23 of "Top Chef" centered in "the emerging and diverse culinary hub of Charlotte" with episodes also shot in Greenville, SC. Kristen Kish, Tom Colicchio and Gail Simmons have tasted and deliberated about who will be crowned when the series airs starting in March. Several NC-based chefs have competed in the series, among them Jamie Lynch (Church & Union and La Belle Helene, Charlotte), Keith Rhodes (Catch, Wilmington), Ashleigh Shanti (Good Hot Fish, Asheville), Savannah Miller (M Tempura, Durham) and Katsuji Tanabe (Flour & Barrel, Raleigh, and the soon-to-open High Horse, Durham). Guest judges have included Raleigh's Ashley



Christensen, a James Beard Outstanding Chef (Poole's Diner, Death & Taxes, Beasley's Chicken & Honey).

Photos:

<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/23a5b78b-0a72-4e5a-96dc-a8ce638fe26f>

NC Zoo Adds Asia to Its Continental Lineup of Displays

The [North Carolina Zoo](#), the world's largest natural habitat zoo, adds a third continent to its realm with an 8-acre Asia exhibit, targeted for a summer 2026 opening. Tigers, red pandas, Komodo dragons and Chinese alligators are among the species expected to occupy the space, which will also include a glass-walled restaurant overlooking the tiger habitat and an overhead tiger walk. With 500 developed acres, the Asheboro zoo currently features Africa and North America displays plus desert habitat and an aviary with exotic birds and tropical plants. Visitors can opt to stroll 5 miles of trails through the main property or take a free tram to explore the wonders.

Photo: <https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/762e15c2-3365-4644-8897-cf1099f2e5a1>

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Expected to Reopen by Summer

Climbers can plan on scaling the nation's tallest traditional lighthouse with the expected completion of a major restoration that began in late 2023. Rising 198.49 feet, the [Cape Hatteras Lighthouse](#) in Buxton will boast a newly crafted replica of its original first-order Fresnel lens, repairs to deteriorated masonry, restoration of the lantern and marble flooring, and a fresh paint job. Landscape improvements include improved walkways and interpretative features, including restoration of the stones etched with the names of lighthouse keepers. The date for reopening for the 257-stair climb is TBD.

Photo: <https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/b94998a7-5e1c-4d14-ae75-cdf3f98e0cd8>

PGA Tour's Biltmore Championship in Asheville to Debut in 2026

After eight decades, the PGA Tour returns to the Land of Sky with the inaugural [Biltmore Championship in Asheville](#), set for Sept. 17-20 at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove in Arden. As part of a four-year agreement, Biltmore Estate and Explore Asheville will serve as co-title sponsors for the event, part of the FedExCup Fall. The 7,167-yard Jack Nicklaus-designed course, which appears on Golf Digest's list of NC's best, sits in a valley that borders Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway on former farmland laced with streams and mountain laurel woodlands. The PGA Tour's last Asheville stint ended in 1942 with the Land of Sky Open, which ran for four years with Ben Hogan winning the final three. The new event is expected to draw more than 100 players and thousands of spectators.

New Gateway to Enhance the Duke Gardens Experience

[Sarah P. Duke Gardens](#), one of the nation's premier public gardens, will enrich the experience with its new Garden Gateway. Scheduled for completion in spring 2026, the project will feature a new welcome center with a café, lobby, gallery space, outdoor plaza and upgraded restroom amenities. The project also includes enhanced learning and event facilities, a more accessible entrance and expanded green spaces for events. The 55-acre site on Duke University's West Campus is celebrated for its original



Terraces, the H.L. Bloomquist Garden of Native Plants, the W.L. Culberson Asiatic Arboretum with its iconic red bridge, and the Doris Duke Center Gardens.

Charlotte to Host MLS All-Star, Military World Summer Games

The Queen City adds a new jewel to its sports crown as host of the [2026 Major League Soccer All-Star Game](#). It will be played at Bank of America Stadium, home of the Carolina Panthers and the Charlotte Football Club, which debuted in 2022. In 2027, the city will make history as the site of the Military World Summer Games, being played in the United States for the first time. A unique blend of Olympic and military-specific competition, the International Military Sports Council event will include 10,000 athletes from 140 countries. The competition elevates the city's standing as a sports hub with professional teams (Carolina Panthers, Charlotte Hornets); a dominant NASCAR presence with the NASCAR Hall of Fame, nearby Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord, and major race teams based in the area; and major PGA Tour and USGA tournaments played at Quail Hollow Club.

New Queen City Museum to Elevate Nature

Nature lovers can walk through treetops in the heart of NC's largest city when the [Charlotte Museum of Nature](#) opens next year in Freedom Park. The Canopy Walk, which will sit 20 to 40 feet above the forest floor, will be the outdoor signature of the museum, which aims to inspire deeper connections to the natural world. Part of the Discovery Place museum family, the new nature hub will feature a state-of-the-art naturalist lab, a woodlands garden with Fog Bog and live frogs, and different turtle species. Freedom Park is a 98-acre expanse with a lake, trails, recreational amenities and a playground. It has been seen on screen in "Homeland," "Shallow Hal" and the 2025 crime comedy-drama "Roofman."

New hotels

Balladeer Hotel Will Strike Local Chords in Mount Airy

Musical heritage will be woven into the experience at [The Balladeer Hotel](#), a 65-room boutique property opening in early 2026 in downtown Mount Airy. The hotel, which will be affiliated with Marriott's Tribute Portfolio of indie hotels, is part of the redevelopment of the historic Spencer's Mill industrial site in the city best known as Andy Griffith's hometown and the inspiration for Mayberry. In addition to on-site dining, a self-serve wine bar and event space, amenities will include a recording booth, which connects to Mount Airy's musical heritage. Those claims to fame include Griffith with his Grammy-winning gospel album; birthplace of Donna Fargo; Round Peak old-time music; and the weekly "Merry-Go-Round," America's second-oldest live music radio broadcast behind the Grand Ole Opry. Plans for the Spencer's Mill complex also include a convention center.

Photos:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1G1vVotDzmlxM998t-4ZZcm4rbJUzwVsf?usp=drive_link

Compass Hotel Sails Into Beaufort

Margaritaville Resorts & Hotels will add the 103-room [Compass Hotel Beaufort](#) to the lodging options in this historic Intracoastal Waterway town. With its 103 rooms and marina, the hotel will cater to boaters traveling along the nearby Cape Lookout National Seashore. Food and drink options include Sunrise at



Compass and 5 o'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grill plus snacks and beverages at the Welcome Cabana throughout the day. The Compass brand is designed to bring the flavor of Margaritaville's full-scale resorts to a more boutique concept. Opening is March 1.

Photos: https://margaritavilleenterprises-my.sharepoint.com/personal/scarter_margaritaville_com/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fscarter%5Fmargaritaville%5Fcom%2FDocuments%2FDocuments%2F1%20%2D%20Margaritaville%2FCompass%20Hotels%2FBeaufort%2FRenderings&ga=1

Historic Raleigh Shopping District Adds Destination Lodging

[The Oberlin Raleigh](#), opening in April, extends a welcome in option in a downtown-adjacent neighborhood known for shopping and dining. Amenities include a high-end restaurant and cocktail bar with city views, a large courtyard and soundstage for live music, a market-style café with breakfast service, and meeting and event space. Guests can cross the street to the Village District, the Southeast's first shopping center, which remains a retail hub with destination shops. The 153-room Oberlin Raleigh will be the second North Carolina property in Hilton's upscale Curio Collection of indie hotels.

Photos: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tiCz2bWz9XmkZU1pDfCz3Fn6NyZg3s7-?usp=sharing>

Historic Jarrett House Will Again Welcome Dillsboro Guests

[The Jarrett House](#), a stately 23-room inn, will again become the talk of a town known for its artistic leanings and Great Smoky Mountains setting. The new owner has undertaken a meticulous restoration that honors a history dating to 1884 and the heyday of railroad hotels. Starting this fall, Jarrett House will open Hartbarger Hall, an event space with bar; Desserts at Jarrett House, a simple desserts café; and 1884 Gallery, featuring handmade works that could have been made in 1884. Still to come: the restored rooms, which will feature prized antiques, and a restaurant loved by locals as well as travelers for its family-style meals with a true Southern focus.

1920s Motor Court to Return With Stylish Remake

Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Tift Merritt partners with the Early Bird Night Owl hotel-restaurant management group on [The Gables](#). The project reinvents a 1928 boarding house as an 18-room bohemian-style boutique hotel near downtown Raleigh. The new inn, which will include a coffee and cocktail bar, is on track to open in summer 2026.

Century-Old Charlotte Tower to Find New Life as Hotel

A 17-story office building in the heart of Uptown Charlotte will find new life as [The Beckworth Hotel](#), a 245-room luxury property. The hotel will feature a ground-floor restaurant and coffee shop, a 35,000-square-foot ballroom, and a rooftop bar with views of Romare Bearden Park. The Neoclassical steel-framed Johnston Building dates to 1924, when it was the Queen City's tallest building. A late 2026 opening is targeted.

Road trip ideas

MICHELIN driven:



With [47 NC restaurants](#) recognized in the inaugural MICHELIN Guide American South, it's time to plan a trip. Breadcrumbs don't get any tastier than the ones you'll follow on this east-to-west trail.

RALEIGH

- **Culinary stars:** The Capital City boasts a pair of MICHELIN Bib Gourmand barbecue spots: [Sam Jones BBQ](#) for classic whole hog and [Prime Barbecue](#) for Chris Prieto's combo of NC tradition plus Texas brisket. [Mala Pata](#), Angela Salamanca's masa-fueled ode to Latin American street food, also reached Bib Gourmand status.
- **Where to stay:** [The Umstead Hotel and Spa](#) in Cary, a Five-Star property across the board that's renowned for its marriage of art and the outdoors. Enjoy breakfast crafted by Steven Devereaux Greene at Herons to add another Michelin notable to your list.
- **Things to do:** Feast your eyes on the hotel's art (including a commissioned Dale Chihuly lobby sculpture) and pedal a loaner bike through the property. Explore the [NC Museum of Art](#) and its 164-acre trail-laced [park](#), whose namesake benefactors Ann and Jim Goodnight own The Umstead. Take a class at [The Bittery](#), a specialty shop and tasting space dedicated to cocktail making.

DURHAM

- **Culinary stars:** Oscar Diaz's elevated Mexican-American fusion and live-fire cooking puts [Little Bull](#) on the "must" list. For a special dinner, head to [Nanas](#), a newly reimagined favorite from Matt Kelly. Giorgios Bakatsias' [Nikos](#) makes memories with its Mediterranean fare.
- **Where to stay:** The Washington Duke Inn, an AAA Four Diamond property loved for its Fairview Dining Room and Robert Trent Jones golf course.
- **Things to do:** Walk off a few calories on Duke University's West Campus, home of the renowned [Sarah P. Duke Gardens](#) and the [Nasher Museum of Art](#). Plan a make-your-own-scent session and shop for candles at [Bright Black](#). Find your favorite new shop ([Parker & Otis?](#) [Casa Bella Market?](#) [Vert & Vogue?](#)) as you explore downtown neighborhoods.

PITTSBORO

- **Culinary star:** [The Fearnrington House Restaurant](#), a dining landmark that dates to 1980. Chef Paul Gagne presides with changing prix-fixe menus that include the chocolate souffle Edna Lewis created here.
- **Where to stay:** [Fearnrington](#), a Relais & Châteaux property, which like its restaurant rates Four Stars from Forbes.
- **Things to do:** Start with the Fearnrington Village shops (including [McIntyre's Books](#), [Dovecote](#) and [Nest](#)) and the [spa](#). Head to Lorax Lane and explore [The Plant](#), a food and beverage campus with beer, spirits and mead. Tour the [Carolina Tiger Rescue](#) sanctuary, whose rescued occupants include from Netflix's "Tiger King."

CHARLOTTE

- **Culinary stars:** Sam Hart's [Counter-](#) is distinguished by a traditional Michelin star plus a Green Star for its immersive tasting menu, which draws on nostalgia, music and storytelling. At [Supperland](#), a Southern steakhouse with a menu inspired by the former church building it occupies, beverage director Colleen Hughes merited a Michelin Exceptional Cocktails Award. And [Lang Van](#), Dan Nguyen's Vietnamese restaurant, netted a Bib Gourmand for its menu, presentation and generous portions.



- **Where to stay:** [The Ivey's Hotel](#), the luxurious reinvention of a legendary Uptown department store that boasts a Michelin key and Four Stars from Forbes.
- **Things to do:** Get a feel for the Queen City with a [guided tour](#) tailored to your passions. Score an [Attractions Pass](#), which covers nine signature spots, including the [NASCAR Hall of Fame](#) (passion for motorsports not required) and art museums. Shop for top brands at [SouthPark](#) mall or hunt for bargains at [Charlotte Premium Outlets](#). Treat yourself to [spa time](#).

ASHEVILLE

- **Culinary stars:** Graham House's [Luminosa](#) at the Flat Iron Hotel earned Bib Gourmand status plus a Green Star for its modern Appalachian roots, Italian wood-fired tradition, and its commitment to local sourcing. Round out the dining musts with the city's other Bib Gourmands: Iris Rodriguez's [Little Chango](#) with Latin American-inspired dishes and [Mother](#), Brett Watson and Heidi Bass's European-style café specializing in sourdough specialties and natural wines.
- **Where to stay:** [The Radical Hotel](#) in the resurgent River Arts District, which embodies Asheville's spirit with its posh-punk attitude and creative energy. You'll find Jacob Sessoms' Michelin-recommended [Golden Hour](#) here.
- **Things to do:** The 250-room [Biltmore House](#) and its 8,000-acre garden-rich estate top the list with tours, a winery tasting, shopping and outdoor activities. Immerse yourself in the [River Arts District](#) scene, check out the [Asheville Art Museum](#) or explore the [Folk Art Center](#) on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Book a saltwater soak at off-the-Parkway [Soji Spa](#) or treat your toes at [Wake Foot Sanctuary](#) while checking out downtown's indie shops.

Photos:

<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/894c88a3-601d-4ce4-af0b-ac673ec7b9b9>

Family travel

From mountain adventure to Thomas Dambo trolls and oceanfront frolics, family fun reigns across North Carolina. Consider these starting points.

FRANKLIN

Forget "hidden gems" and go for the mine: This mountain town's claims to fame include veins of rubies and sapphires that can be dug or sluiced as take-home treasures. It's also the original [Appalachian Trail town](#), where families can join thru-hikers on challenging trails, opt for an amble to [Wayah Bald Lookout Tower](#), and find paths to impressive [waterfalls](#), including one you can walk behind and remain dry. Find thrills on the [Scaly Mountain Screamer](#) or a [giant mountain swing](#), and take to the water at Lake Nantahala, where [Lake's End](#) offers boat and kayak rentals, UTV tours, and luxury yurts and cabins. Dine at the [Lake's End Café & Grill](#), where we once saw a grown man order the skillet cookie à la mode as an entrée, or at [Caffe Rel](#), a celebrated gourmet gas station stop.

HIGH POINT

A city known for its creative streak, High Point scores with local attractions and easy excursions. Start with Little Sally, one of NC's seven newly installed [Thomas Dambo sculptures](#), or the top-flight [Nido & Mariana Qubein Children's Museum](#) with its double-decker carousel. Daytrip to the [world's largest natural habitat zoo](#) in Asheboro, where Zoofaris, meet-the-keeper sessions, giraffe feeding and hikes are among the options. Other quick trips include [Winston-Salem](#) to explore living history (and sample



Moravian sugar cookies) at Old Salem Museum & Gardens and [Greensboro](#) for the Greensboro Science Center's Skywild adventures and encounters with African penguins. Oh, and if we had you at Thomas Dambo, consider car or Amtrak trips to Charlotte and Raleigh to meet Little Sally's entire family.

ATLANTIC BEACH

Surf and sand set the stage with more fun and wonder awaiting along the Crystal Coast. Set sail to [Shackleford Banks](#), a sweet spot on [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#), to see wild Spanish Colonial mustangs and collect seashells (including prized Scotch bonnets). Explore history and nature at [Fort Macon State Park](#), which offers tours, small arms demonstrations and beach scavenger hunts. Take a behind-the-scenes tour at the [NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores](#), which also schedules kayak trips and other outdoor adventures. Cast a line at [Oceanna Fishing Pier](#) and enjoy a bite between catches at its Pier House Restaurant. If your family includes a four-legged member, [Atlantis Lodge](#) ranks among the pet-friendliest places to be found.

Photos:

<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/bcdec2e8-4451-4c0f-a15c-304d1bb66efb>

For ghost seekers

Consider yourself warned: The state known famous for First in Flight stakes a claim to being First in Fright. Whether for Halloween or Valentine's Day with your boo, Visit NC invites seekers to tune into its "[First in Fright](#)" podcast, a 12-part fear fest, and to envision themselves in destinations on the Haunted Trail. Here are options with [ghostly lodging](#) and year-round tours.

- [Asheville](#). Stay at the grand [Omni Grove Park Inn](#) in Room 545, which is [haunted](#) by a guest who wore pink on the century-ago night she tumbled from the balcony. Among the ghost tours: [Haunted Asheville](#) and the comedy-laced [Ghosted from LaZoom](#).
- [Winston-Salem](#). Stay at [The Historic Brookstown Inn](#) in Room 401, believed to be [haunted](#) by a woman who was killed in a dispute during the inn's time as a cotton mill. Tour the city with [Carolina History & Haunts](#).
- [Chapel Hill](#). Stay at the stately [Carolina Inn](#) in Room 256, which was Room 252 when fun-loving physician [William Jacocks](#) lived there ... and he might yet. The [US Ghost Adventures](#) tour departs from Ackland Art Museum, where its [namesake](#) is entombed.
- [New Bern](#). Stay at [The Harvey](#), a newly restored 1789 mansion in the Colonial NC capital. The Harvey's most frequently cited haunting centers on a woman in Victorian attire seen on the second and third floors. The [Ghosts of New Bern](#) tour covers historic homes and burial grounds.
- [Manteo](#). Stay at the [Roanoke Island Inn](#), where the ghost of former owner and Manteo postmaster Roscoe Jones is reported to gently make his presence known. You can see the inn from the Roanoke Marshes Lighthouse, an [OBX Ghost Tours](#) stop.

Photos:

<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/c62fa772-e739-437f-94a5-0887064b58b1>

Major cultural events



International Black Theatre Festival

July 27-Aug. 1, Winston-Salem

Held in alternate years since 1989, the six-day festival transforms Winston-Salem into a mega-performing arts center with more than 100 performances of commissioned premieres and other works on multiple stages. Workshops, films, seminars, poetry slams and a star-studded celebrity gala complement the performances to create the world's largest Black theater event. Among the major figures who have contributed to the festival's success: Maya Angelou, August Wilson, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, Denzel Washington and Ruby Dee. 2026 details TBA.

MerleFest

April 23-26, Wilkesboro

Fans around the world find their way to the Blue Ridge foothills for one of the planet's finest traditional music festivals. Late guitar master Doc Watson created the four-day event in memory of his music partner and son, Merle, who died in 1985. [2026 headliners](#) include Alison Krauss & Union Station featuring Jerry Douglas, Old Crow Medicine Show, Blackberry Smoke, Molly Tuttle, Peter Rowan, Steep Canyon Rangers and Sam Bush. The lineup of about 100 acts also includes the [Kruger Brothers](#), who relocated from Switzerland to Wilkes County after their first performance at the festival in 2003 and becoming friends with Watson.

Photos:

<https://ncdt.widencollective.com/dam/externalorderpickup/5f663883-f4ff-4316-8421-fe5857ab79a4>