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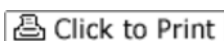
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By Larry Olmsted, Special for USA TODAY

Asheville, N.C., has no ski resort. No ocean, either. Other than that, it's hard to think of anything the city and its surroundings are lacking. The appeals are so numerous that tourism is the No. 1 employer. Even the minor league baseball team, with its charming downtown ballpark, is named the Tourists.

Basically created by the ultra-wealthy Vanderbilt family, Asheville is steeped in history and tradition, yet effortlessly mixes old with new. The old is represented by Biltmore Village and the Biltmore, the largest private home in the United States and a popular attraction offering guided tours. The new is a number of residential developments surrounding the city, mixing themes such as wellness, boating and golf. Even the golf offerings span the ages: Four courses are by the renowned classic designer, Donald Ross, and construction is underway on the first U.S. design by Tiger Woods. The downtown showcases classic facades and preserved architecture, while the past decade has seen a renaissance with an influx of cafes, art galleries, shops and restaurants. The cultural scene is enhanced by a University of North Carolina campus.

Despite the city's charms, escape to the surrounding protected wilderness is an ever-present lure.

The highest peak east of the Mississippi, Mount Mitchell (6,684 feet), is nearby. Access to the mountain is easy via one of the USA's most famous scenic drives, the Blue Ridge Parkway.

"Almost every day, we get people walking in here off the street looking for second homes," says Terry Horner, owner of Preferred Properties of Asheville and president of the city's Board of Realtors. "There is just so much here and so much to do within an hour's drive. My retired parents moved here from Nebraska because they love all the one-day adventures."

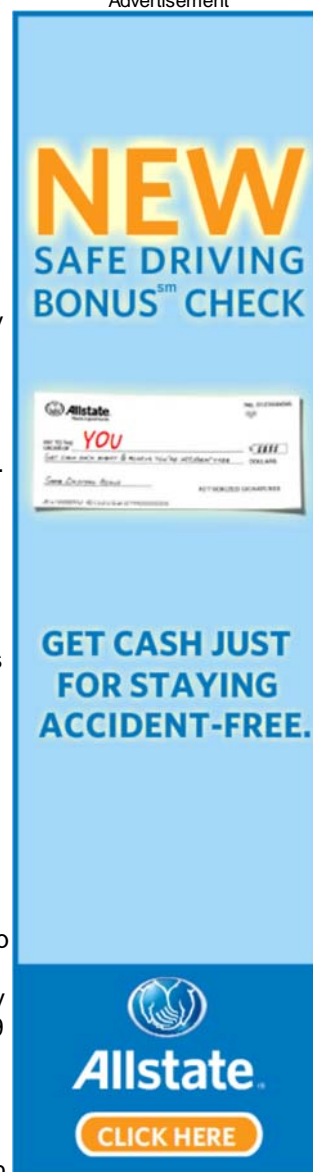
Jim Anthony is a booster/developer who capitalized on second-home demand by creating Cliff Communities. "Asheville is essentially in the middle of a park, surrounded on three sides by national forest. Vanderbilt gave 300,000 acres that are protected, and that is the city's claim to fame."

A look at three Asheville neighborhoods:


•**Biltmore Forest.** Carved from the original Biltmore Estate and encircled by the city, this township is one of the oldest parts of Asheville and is built around a Donald Ross golf course. "There are a wide variety of homes from 2,000 to 18,000 square feet on lots averaging an acre, including many original 1920s Tudors," says real estate agent Terry Horner. "Prices range from \$600,000 to \$6.9 million with most in the \$1 million to \$2 million range."

•**Grove Park.** Another original neighborhood built around another Donald Ross golf course, this area boasts the luxury hotel the Grove Park Inn. More urban than the quiet, wooded Biltmore Forest, Grove Park features tree-lined streets with bars, restaurants and shops easily reached on foot. House prices range from the mid-\$300,000s to about \$2 million.

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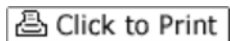
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•**The Cliffs Communities/Walnut Cove.** Each of the eight Cliffs Communities has a golf course by a top designer and unique amenities, such as marinas, stables and hiking trail systems, all for use by owners in any development. Closest to Asheville is The Cliffs at Walnut Cove, 10 minutes away, with a Jack Nicklaus course. The newest, The Cliffs at High Carolina, will be home to a Tiger Woods golf course and is 20 minutes away. Prices of lots in all Cliff Communities range from \$300,000 to \$3 million; custom homes from \$700,000 to \$5 million.

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