



# the splendor of the mountains

*He lowered the window, and looked out at the rising sun. There was a ridge of ploughed land, with a plough upon it where it had been left last night when the horses were unyoked; beyond, a quiet coppice-wood, in which many leaves of burning red and golden yellow still remained upon the trees. Though the earth was cold and wet, the sky was clear, and the sun rose bright, placid, and beautiful.*

*-Charles Dickens, "A Tale of Two Cities"*

**A**s summer melts into fall, the world around us transforms. Sticky air ripe with humidity turns crisper, cooler. Landscapes of emerald morph into multi-colored canvasses of eye-catching golds, ambers

and maroons. We trade shorts and T-shirts for sweaters to pull tightly 'round us. Suddenly it's never been a better time to curl up with a good book and a mug of hot tea.

Fall provides the perfect opportunity for ►



**Story and Photography by MARY DOLAN**

discovery or rediscovery. Of self, of relaxation, of vacation, of nature, of a higher being.

We look for ways to escape, ways to get away. While summer vacations often feel hurried and go by in a flash of sun and sweat, fall somehow feels different. It feels like a time of year we can allow ourselves to relish in the moment.

Autumn is perhaps the best time to plan a mountain getaway. In South Carolina, most of us are within an afternoon's drive of the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina – an earthen treasure of hills and valleys of the Appalachian Mountains.

Within that mountain chain are must-sees like

the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Nantahala River.

The beauty of Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina is such that it can be dabbled in with a weekend stay or truly soaked up in a week or longer.

Among the destinations to choose from: Asheville, Hendersonville, Waynesville, Boone, Highlands, Beech Mountain, Chimney Rock, and our pick for somewhere a little more under the radar, a little less commercial, untouched by tourist attractions and pageantry: Bryson City. ►



### Our experience

*We opted for a weekend in Bryson City, N.C. and a stay at the new mountain lodge the Sabbath House. We couldn't have asked for a better, more blissfully perfect experience.*

The Sabbath House is an option for small or large groups looking for a mountain getaway. Proprietors Jim Strickland and Rachel Lackey opened the house on top of a mountain, originally for clergy and other church groups, but over time they have broadened its guest base to anyone simply looking to get away and experience the Sabbath. Though Jim and Rachel are devout Christians with backgrounds in ministry, for them, Sabbath has two meanings: the traditional religious one of being a day to stop work and worship the Lord and another, a time of rest.

Jim talks eloquently about everyone's inherent need for Sabbath, a need to relax, unwind, refocus. He hopes the Sabbath House can be a place to achieve that.

The lodge is nestled in the side of a mountain peak in the tiny town of Alarka, adjacent to Bryson City. The wood cabin haven is at the end of a quarter-mile gravel driveway so steep it feels as though you're trying to reach Heaven itself.

After the ascent of a lifetime, the Sabbath House awaits. Eight rooms without televisions or computers are ready for



guests who will likely only sleep in them. A wilderness of possibilities blooms outside to occupy the time the electronic devices usually do. A sprawling porch overlooking a breath-taking drop off waits for guests to sit in wooden rocking chairs and rock their cares away. Sounds of birds and crickets are amplified. No cars can be heard whizzing by. No Wal-Mart, no chaos, no interruptions, and yes, no cell phone service. It seems remarkable to be so close to cities and towns and civilization and yet feel so far away. It feels as though for a brief moment, you're able to be alone in the world with your thoughts or with God or with your significant other.

Jim and Rachel have perfected the notion of a serene getaway to experience Sabbath. They provide all the trappings for one to truly get lost in the tranquility of their surroundings. Special friends and guests who have left a lasting impression on the duo are immortalized in tongue-in-cheek plaques affixed to the back of wooden rocking chairs: The Betty and Canon Thomas H. Conley Chair of Intelligent Faith, The Canon John Edward Day Chair of Fly Fishing Theology, The Donna Susan Mote Chair of Porch Theology, The Gail Day Chair of Love for Nature. These seem to capture what it's all about.

And sunrises viewed from the front porch of the Sabbath House are a little different than any other. A hand somewhere above paints the sky pink and throws in a few puffy white clouds for good measure. The pink meets a vibrant shade of orange and swirls



together and grows brighter, more intense. Finally the first rays of a sun hoisting itself in the East wave like fingers above the mountaintops. The fingers reach higher and higher and a crescent emerges. The gold fire of the crescent continues to rise higher until the glowing ball pours down sunlight on all it sees.

It's breathtaking, it's magical, it's awe-inspiring.

### Bryson City

If you feel the need to make your way down from the mountain, Bryson City offers a dose of small-town charm anyone can appreciate.

Take a walk down Main and Everett streets. Grab a bite from Jimmy Mac's or Pasqualina's. Stop for ice cream at Soda Pop's. Peruse a number of general, consignment and gift stores. And consider hitching a ride on the Great Smoky Mountain Railway.

Bryson City remains one of a dwindling number of small towns with a bustling downtown, with people who walk around seeming to appreciate their surroundings and one another and their conversations.

Go by the Chamber of Commerce for additional information, stop for a cold soda at Na'Ber's Drive In, and tell the folks you meet hello.

Other possibilities:

• Drive to Cherokee, the home of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. If you're feeling adventurous, check out Harrah's Cherokee Casino. Or just stop at one of the many roadside shops or stands selling Indian memorabilia.

• Go whitewater rafting on the Nantahala.

• Take advantage of hiking trails and inner tube-worthy rapids in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

• Stop at Barber's Apple Orchard in Waynesville for perfectly-ripened apples or a variety of fresh-baked apple goods: pies, cakes, muffins, turnovers and fritters.

• Take time to stop in downtown Waynesville to peruse shops and restaurants. Stop for pizza at Nick and Nate's Pizzeria. Take a gander at all the goodies inside the famed Mast General Store.

### See for yourself!

Web sites with helpful information:

[www.ncmountains.com](http://www.ncmountains.com)

[www.visitnc.com](http://www.visitnc.com)

[www.brysoncitync.info](http://www.brysoncitync.info)

[www.sabbathhouse.com](http://www.sabbathhouse.com)

[www.asheville.com](http://www.asheville.com)

[www.ashevillenc.gov](http://www.ashevillenc.gov)

[www.exploreashville.com](http://www.exploreashville.com)

[www.noc.com](http://www.noc.com)

[www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm)

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