

# Carolina country *Adventures*



# Carolina Country Adventures



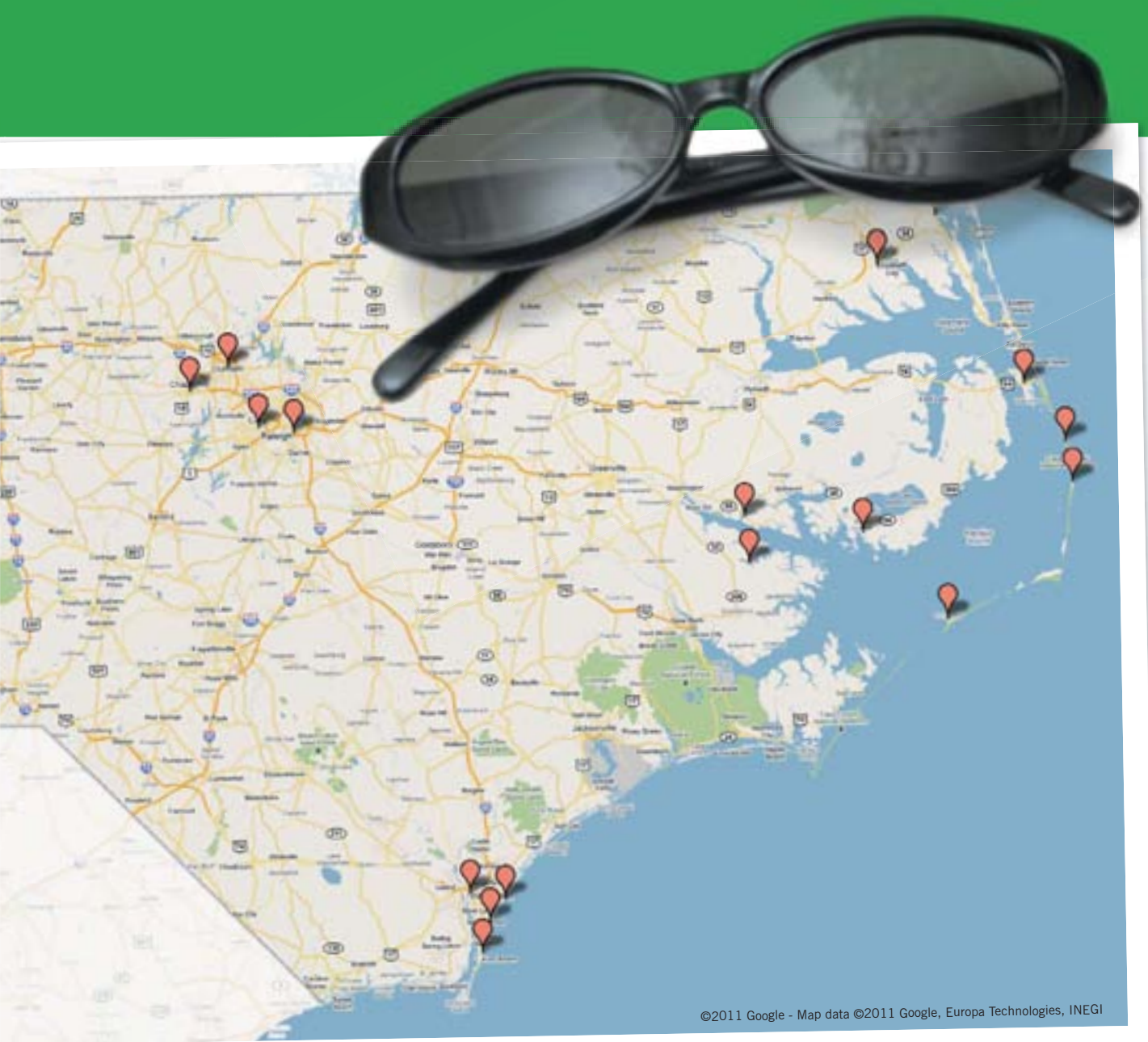
From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat and how we talk varies from one region to another.

Our annual Touchstone Energy Travel Guide encourages you to experience this variety firsthand.

This year, we offer you six great travel stories about interesting areas in the mountains, Piedmont and coast. We've also updated the primary sources of general information about regions in our resource listings. The adventures we offer may be familiar to you, or they may not. In any case, each holds the promise for a lot of travel fun.

As you make your way through this guide and through the countryside, you can be assured that a Touchstone Energy cooperative is nearby.

Thanks to everyone who helped us compile this guide, and to our sponsors: the cooperatives and the advertisers on pages 36 to 38.



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This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement. Send comments and corrections to [editor@carolinacountry.com](mailto:editor@carolinacountry.com)



# Carolina Country Adventures

By Karen Olson House

*Great Smoky Mountains Railroad*



*Great Smoky Mountains National Park*



Credit: Jackson County TTA

*Dillsboro*

## Great Smoky Mountains Railroad

Outside the historic depot, a small band of local musicians plucked old-time mountain tunes as we head toward the train. As we passed by each railcar, clutching our tickets, our sense of adventure grew. When we climbed aboard our ticketed section, families and couples were busy settling jackets on claimed seats. In short order, our train car attendant, Brenda, welcomed us, outlined our trip and answered passenger questions. (We were not likely to spot a bear, it seemed, but we were sure to see hog dogs, hamburgers and snacks in the concession car.)

The bell crossing signal began a 'clanging, the big, ol' lonesome whistle blew, and kids and adults alike immediately broke out big grins. We were off!

Welcome to the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. All train trips leave from Bryson City, N.C. (not to be confused with Bryson, Tenn.). For our trip, we chose the Nantahala Gorge excursion. This four-and-a-half-hour trip travels along the little Tennessee and Nantahala rivers and cuts across Fontana Lake. Our journey included a horseshoe curve, crossing the Fontana Lake Trestle, glimpses of houseboats on the pretty lake, and a fun, one-hour layover at the Nantahala Outdoor Center, where you can purchase gear, eat riverside at Slow Joe's café, or simply watch kayakers roll and twirl in the suds.

For 2011, the Nantahala Gorge excursion is offered almost all of this year. Another popular excursion, the

Tennessee River trip, travels to Dillsboro. The four-hour roundtrip includes an hour-and-a-half layover in the historic village, enough time to eat and visit some shops. This year, this trip's dates are May 28–29, and (Tuesdays through Sundays) June 14–July 28 and August 2–13. For the above excursions, in every month available except October, fares range from \$49 to \$92 for adults, and from free admission to \$20 for infants and from \$29 to \$54 for children. (Leaf peepers in October pay slightly more.)

GMSR offers an impressive, revolving array of other trips and events, including river raft 'n' rail packages. In past years, GSMR trips have also included special dinner theme trains, including wine and beer tastings and mystery the-

ater, for adults. Scheduled 2011 trips include the Peanuts Easter Beagle this month on April 22–23, Lone Ranger events on June 10–12 and Day Out With Thomas™ activities July 22–24 and 29–31. Fall and winter will bring the Peanuts Pumpkin Patch Express and the Polar Express.

With so many options, GSMR's trips and dates vary. Call GSMR or visit its website for specifics. [www.GSMR.com](http://www.GSMR.com) or (800) 872-4681.

## Bryson City

Since trains start and end here, this colorful town, located about an hour west of Asheville, is strongly associated with the railroad. But outdoor lovers also know it as a gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For rafting, there are a slew of outfitters. The one that partners with the railroad, Wildwater Ltd., can arrange several trips on several rivers, as well as zipline canopy tours and unique overnight lodging in yurts. For river tubing, outfitters are stationed outside the park's entrance. For hiking, many people like the Deep Creek hike for its accessible waterfalls, and the trailhead, just inside the Park's entrance, less than three miles from downtown. [www.greatsmokies.com](http://www.greatsmokies.com) or (800) 867-9246.

### Shops & restaurants

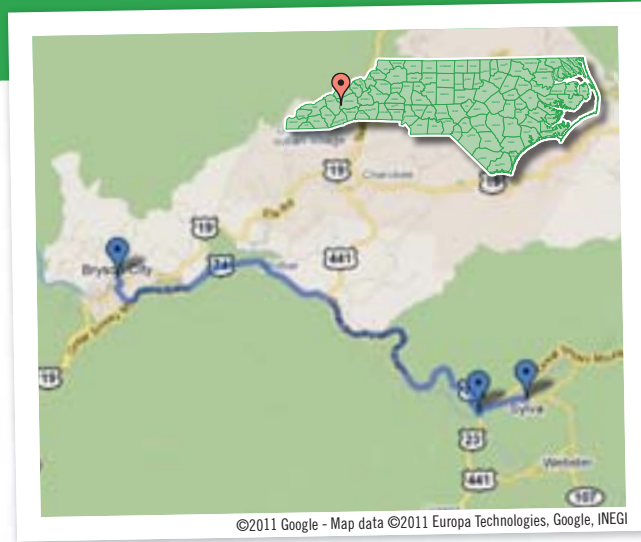
Downtown, some shops feature nature books and mountain lore while others showcase local handicrafts. Near Main and River streets, there's an especially good antique store called Charleston Station. Other enjoyable shops include Madison's (across the street), and Humanité and Appalachian Mercantile, both on Everett Street. Good food options include Jimmie Mac's for fine, fresh dining, Soda Pops, a 1950s-style shop that serves egg creams and malts, and Naber's Drive-In, an authentic car-hop joint.

### Train museum

Located next to the train depot, Smoky Mountain Trains boasts an impressive collection of 7,000 model Lionel engines, cars and accessories. You can revel in nostalgia-inducing train cars such as the 1932 Blue Comet (one of Lionel's most classic train sets) and enjoy two intricately detailed model train villages. Kids, especially, enjoy controlling moving trains on one huge interactive layout, complete with a waterfall and dark tunnels. The gift shop sells train novelties. Museum admission: \$9 adults; \$5 children. (Admission is free with almost all GSMR train trips.)

## Dillsboro

The train doesn't originate here anymore. But whether you come here by GSMR's excursion train for the hour and a half layover here, or to spend more time, this historic little village offers a lot. If you've got a free morning or afternoon head for its scenic riverfront park, where you can fish or launch a kayak in the Tuckaseegee River.



### Shops & restaurants

Or follow your nose to Dillsboro Chocolate Factory on Church Street. You'll come face to face with custom-made candies, truffles and an espresso bar, along with gourmet coffees and teas. Food lovers can also sample wine and homemade dip mixes at Country Traditions (be sure to check out its Man Cave room). On Front Street, Bradley's General Store has an old-time soda fountain, local honey and antiques, and the Kitchen Shop sells clever tools for baking and cooking. Dogwood Crafters showcases more than 80 artisans. Art lovers can also watch artisans at work at Tree House Pottery or sift through dazzling beads at Riverwood Pottery, one of the retail gems at Riverwood Shops, a short stroll away. And Nancy Tut's Christmas Shop is open year-round.

Fun eateries include the Whistle Stop Café, near the depot, and the Dillsboro Smokehouse. Food is served family-style at the relaxing Jarrett House, an historic inn fondly known for its vinegar pie.

[www.visitdillsboro.org](http://www.visitdillsboro.org) or (828) 586-1439.

For more information see Mountain Area travel resources starting on page 52.



## Sylva

The train doesn't stop here at all. But Sylva, just two or so minutes east of Dillsboro by car and about 10 minutes from Western Carolina University in Cullowee, is definitely worth a mention. Its little downtown is loaded with interesting spots, including Hookers Fly Shop & Guide Service, City Lights bookstore, Lulu's café (for gourmet dining), In Your Ear Music Emporium and Sapphire Mountain Brewing Company, which offers craft beers, wood-fired pizzas and live music in its attractive stone courtyard. Parents will appreciate the beanbag chairs and children's play space in its upstairs "Mustang Room" for families.

For more about Sylva, as well as Dillsboro visit [www.mountainlovers.com](http://www.mountainlovers.com) or call (800) 962-1911.