

ALABAMA  
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OKLAHOMA  
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WEST VIRGINIA



Roanoke Valley CVB

**INSIDER'S GUIDE** By T. Wayne Waters

# Blue Ridge Mountains

One of the most beautiful regions of America's Southern landscape is that which extends from western Virginia to western North Carolina—the Blue Ridge Mountains. Sandwiched between the Appalachian Mountain range to the west and the Piedmont regions of the two states to the east, the Blue Ridge Mountains offer scenic beauty and outdoor recreation that's easily accessed. In Virginia, the city of Roanoke is a central point along this Mountain Range and in North Carolina, the city of Asheville is the hub of the region. ■

## Roanoke Is A Blue Ridge Magnet

Roanoke and the surrounding Roanoke Valley is growing in popularity as a destination for meetings as well as for leisure travelers with more rooms sold in 2012 and 2013 than at any time in our history, said Roanoke Valley CVB President Landon Howard. "We continue to see significant growth in visitation as well as new product offerings coming online, including new hotel properties, new restaurants and galleries, and renovations such as Center in the Square in the heart of Roanoke," he said.

Much of the attention that Roanoke is getting is due to Center in the Square, Roanoke's historic downtown cultural hub. The attraction cele-

brated its grand re-opening in March following a \$30 million year-and-a-half renovation. The building now houses the city's major museums and a 340-seat theater. It also boasts an open-air rooftop green space that can accommodate up to 600 (standing), and features gardens, a koi pond and an overlook deck. The ground floor atrium offers a 6,000-gallon living-coral reef saltwater aquarium, two 500-gallon jellyfish aquariums, a seahorse estuary and considerable function space. Center in the Square has a community room and a high-tech boardroom. The facility is now registered with the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Rating System. ■



Several aquarium tanks are now housed in the atrium of the newly renovated Center in the Square attraction in Roanoke, Va.

## Gathering Spaces In Virginia's Roanoke Valley

The Roanoke Civic Center is the city's primary convention facility and is undergoing a five-year capital improvement program that will upgrade energy-efficiency and Internet functionality, according to Cathy Ring, sales manager. The civic center sits on a multi-facility campus that contains the 46,000-square-foot Roanoke Special Events Center that is able to host a meeting for up to 10,000 people, the 10,500-seat Coliseum and the 2,150-seat Performing Arts Theatre.

Nearby is the historic, 331-room Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, a DoubleTree by Hilton hotel. The hotel has a new chef, new menu items and a new dining space at its signature Regency Room restaurant, which is marking its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The IAAC-approved conference center offers 63,000 square feet of meeting space.

At The Holiday Inn Tanglewood – Roanoke, a renovation to all guest rooms wrapped up last year, and the 9,000 square feet of meeting space just finished an upgrade, according to Director of Sales James R. Montgomery.

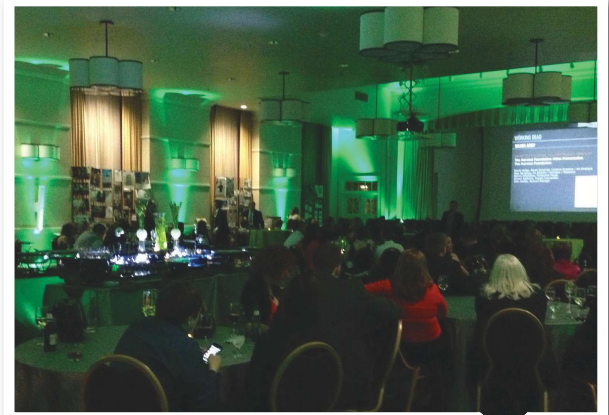
Roanoke's major downtown public park, Elmwood Park, is being renovated. The park will

hold about 4,800 people. The project, due for end-of-August completion, includes an amphitheater for occasional public performances.

In Roanoke, or Star City, groups will also find the 320-room Sheraton Roanoke Hotel and Conference Center with 17,000 square feet of meeting space, and the 153-room Holiday Inn Roanoke Valley View with 11,500 square feet of meeting space, as well as numerous smaller hotels.

A couple of hours north of Roanoke in the foothills wine country of Orange, Va., The Inn at Willow Grove recently opened three new suites on its grounds, all dog-friendly. Four of the luxury property's 14 suites are in The Mansion while the three new Overlook Suites and seven others are in cottages out on the luxury property's 37-acre historic plantation. The Barn can accommodate 150 and the Hall, 50. Also on site is a 60-table restaurant and a first-class spa.

The 155-room Natural Bridge Hotel and



Roanoke City Market Building via Facebook

**Roanoke's historic City Market has been restored and now offers nine eateries and Charter Hall, pictured here, which can accommodate groups of up to 460 people.**

Conference Center is about 40 miles north of Roanoke and has some 7,000 square feet of indoor meeting space. Nearby attractions include the 215-foot high natural stone arch; Butterflies at the Bridge, the largest indoor live butterfly garden in Virginia; The Natural Bridge Wax Museum; The Native American Village; and Caverns at Natural Bridges. ■

## Find Colorful Culture In Asheville

"Natural beauty, rich history and colorful culture are Asheville calling cards," said Asheville CVB Senior Sales Manager Brenda Taylor. "What sets us apart for meeting planners is the grand mountain backdrop, variety of meeting amenities and diversity of activities."

Asheville has something of a bohemian vibe, with music, dance and other artistry abundant. The artistry extends to foodstuffs and libations, too. Asheville has a remarkable number of excellent independent restaurants, 13 farmers' markets, and a dozen microbreweries.

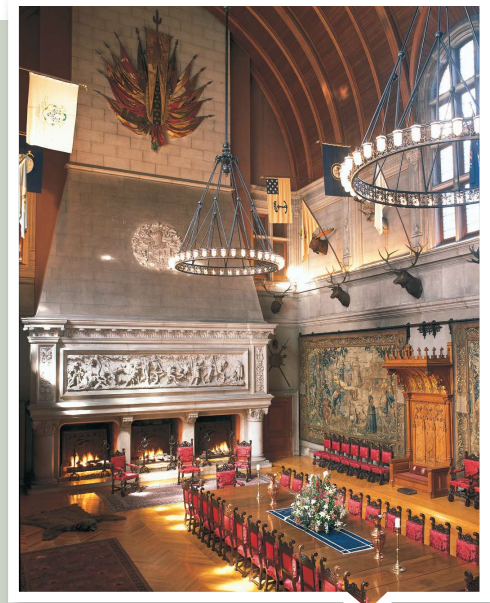
The US Cellular Center and its arena will soon begin renovations to the lobby and meeting rooms and add a new dedicated entrance to the arena. The former Asheville Civic Center and Arena along with the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium became (collectively) The US Cellular Center a few years ago.

The Capital Club of Asheville opened this March in downtown Asheville. The new upscale

event center is a nice addition for small meetings and receptions, offering 2,800 square feet of indoor space and a balcony with 1,500 square feet of outdoor space

Another large downtown Asheville hotel with substantial meeting space is the recently renovated 273-room Renaissance Asheville Hotel, which provides 21,000 square feet of meeting space. Also in the heart of the city is the 33-room Haywood Park Hotel, which boasts a surprising 12,000 square feet of meeting space.

The Crest Center and Pavilion is a nice option for smaller meetings and receptions. Located on Crest Mountain, only four miles from downtown Asheville, The Crest Center and Pavilion can accommodate up to 300 for business meetings or up to 1,000 for outside events. There is a deck that overlooks the mountains and a large stone patio with fireplace and grill, as well as a cottage and cabin for special guests to stay overnight. ■



**Biltmore Estate, former home of the Vanderbilt family, is Asheville's prized attraction and is open to groups for tours. Near-by meeting spaces include the Inn on Biltmore Estate; the Grand Bohemian Hotel – Asheville; the Hilton Asheville Biltmore Park; and the DoubleTree by Hilton Asheville – Biltmore.**

## EDITOR'S HOT PICKS

**BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS** make up part of the larger Appalachian Mountain range and run mostly through the western regions of Virginia and North Carolina.

### VIRGINIA:

**Roanoke Valley CVB**  
(800) 635-5535

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

*"Book 500 total room nights or more by Dec. 31, 2013 & receive \$1,000 toward your meeting."*

See Ad On Page 23

**The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center**  
(540) 985-5900  
[www.hotelroanoke.com](http://www.hotelroanoke.com)

**The Inn at Virginia Tech & Skelton Conference Center**  
(540) 231-8000  
[www.innatvirginiatech.com](http://www.innatvirginiatech.com)

*"The premier hotel in Blacksburg, Va., & the only hotel located on the campus of Virginia Tech."*

**Roanoke Civic Center**  
(540) 853-6860  
[www.roanokeciviccenter.com](http://www.roanokeciviccenter.com)  
*"Book a new event with us by Dec. 31, 2013 & receive a 25% meeting rental discount."*

**Salem Civic Center**  
(540) 375-3004  
[www.salemciviccenter.com](http://www.salemciviccenter.com)  
*"In the Roanoke Valley for functions of 25-5000 the Salem Civic Center is just the place!"*

### NORTH CAROLINA:

**Asheville CVB**  
[www.exploreasheville.com](http://www.exploreasheville.com)

**Boone Area Visitors Bureau**  
[www.exploreboonearea.com](http://www.exploreboonearea.com)

## BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS IN-DEPTH

Visit [www.ConventionSouth.com](http://www.ConventionSouth.com) for more about the Blue Ridge Mountains through our interactive Insider's Guide with maps, videos & more.



## Retreat To Western North Carolina

The Four-Star Old Edwards Inn and Spa in Highland, N.C., is located about 75 miles southeast of Asheville. The property completed major enhancements in June. The new Falls Cottages at Old Edwards add 22 new guest rooms. Plus, the property now has a new café and bar, and the lodge lobby now sports a new porte cochère and connecting covered walkway.

Boone, N.C., is about 85 miles northeast of Asheville and is home to Appalachian State University, the recently opened Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park, and Grandfather Mountain, a popular attraction and outlook viewing area with a mile-high walking bridge. Boone is also home to the Blowing Rock Conference Center and Valle Crucis Conference Center. ■

## Meet On The Hilltop At Grove Park Inn

On-Site Report From Wayne Waters

I recently had the opportunity to visit one of Western North Carolina's retreats, the 512-room Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa in Asheville. The historic property, which opened 100 years ago, sits high on a hilltop near Sunset Mountain and has hosted 10 presidents over the years, including Barack Obama.

The property was recently acquired by KSL, a prominent travel and leisure services company, which is investing \$25 million into renovations, most of which are complete, including tech upgrades in the meeting spaces. The sales department has been restructured and the nine-member sales team is now led by Director of Sales Tryg Brody, who has served in similar capacities at West Virginia's The Greenbrier resort.

"Grove Park Inn is a destination within itself but has the advantage of being in a wonderful destination city like Asheville," Brody said. "You can experience a lot of good things here at Grove Park Inn—being pampered in our spa or challenged on the golf course or in another outdoor activity—and you can experience a lot of good things in Asheville."

The facility's striking stacked-stone structure is built from local granite quarried close by. Cool Jazz is often heard in the magnificent Great Hall. The dining is truly special. Horizons Dining Room, Asheville's only Four-Diamond restaurant, has won an award from the Distinguished Restaurants of North America. The resort has two other acclaimed restaurants and exceptional banquet offerings for business meetings. The food operations overall have received the American Culinary Federation Achievement of Excellence and the Sunset Terrace got a Top 10 award from The Daily Meal in its "Best U.S. Restaurants to Watch a Sunset" category.

You'll also find 55,000 square feet of meeting space within 42 rooms and 27 different venues—all of it with gorgeous views. The Grand Ballroom in the Vanderbilt Wing has nearly 18,000 square feet. Ample outdoor spaces provide opportunities for year-round events.

In Asheville, you'll find a small-city oasis of cool art deco architecture, funky shops, a burgeoning river-side arts district, more than 250 independent restaurants, lots of artisan food producers, and 10 craft breweries sitting in the midst of the rocky wilds of Western North Carolina. ■



Grove Park Inn

The Grove Park Inn in Asheville has a subterranean spa that's an elegant stone sanctuary with waterfalls.

## Blacksburg: Home Of Virginia Tech

Blacksburg is some 40 pretty miles west of Roanoke and home to The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center, an IACC-approved facility with nearly 24,000 square feet of meeting space, 11 dedicated conference rooms, more than 2,000 square feet of pre-function space, additional outside space and state-of-the-art technology. The Inn at Virginia Tech has 147 guest rooms and is constructed of more than 80,000 individual "Hokie stones," locally mined gray limestone.

The 137-room Holiday Inn University – Blacksburg sits close to the Virginia Tech campus. ■