

## Tourism provides opportunities for locals



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Since moving to Asheville six years ago, I watch as the number of tourists visiting every year rises. More and more people show up downtown during the city's busy seasons and every season new attractions pop up to greet them. This aspect is a big part of the city's unique character and adds to its culture and sustainability.

Tourism is nothing new to Asheville. The city has been a destination for tourists for well over a century. At the start of the 20th century it was a place where the wealthy elite would travel to as a resort in the mountains. This idea gained so much traction that George Vanderbilt even built his vacation home here, the most massive private residence in the country and also Asheville's current largest attraction.

People are drawn to Asheville because of its natural beauty paired with a juxtaposition of progressive ideas and artistic catalyzation. The city differs compared to its other southern neighbors. I was drawn to Asheville because I thought the city had that "it" quality which couldn't quite be described. The people, the atmosphere and the mountains add up to a sort of ideal community. Tourists are drawn to all of these same facets that give Asheville residents reason to live here.

Asheville had a resurgence in the late '90s that led to a new identity for the city. The drive was for a community focused on creating art and culture in a place that deserved it. Surrounded by beautiful scenery, the people of Asheville set out to rebuild and expand. This initiative focused on bringing tourists into the city so they could share in the experience while empowering local people to create businesses and to support each other.

This city has a way of attracting tourists without losing its innocence and without sacrificing its history of genuine people. When I go out with friends in Asheville, we have so many local restaurants, shops, attractions and breweries to choose from. The tourists that have come to our city and pumped money into it. This let local residents follow their own

dreams and open businesses which add to our city's collective culture. I've personally met many local business owners who owe their livelihood to the visitors that come to Asheville.

Asheville is a great place to live and a great place to visit. We as Ashevilleans need to understand; sharing our culture isn't a bad thing. Sure, there are going to be larger crowds downtown on the weekends and larger hotels built to accommodate; but it all adds up to a thriving economy that we get to take advantage of. And maybe these tourists will one day settle down in our city and make a contribution to the culture, filling Asheville with even more of what we love.



The Aloft Asheville Downtown is a great example of a symbiotic relationship between local businesses and national chains.

## Asheville experience robs locals of integrity



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Without tourism Asheville would not be the town that it is. Revenue generated from the tourism industry helps the town maintain such a renowned reputation. While this is beneficial for the town and its citizens, the negatives are far more detrimental. From the destruction of whole forests to the crowding of streets and roads, tourism is doing more harm than good.

Asheville's vibrant downtown with a renowned beer culture is surrounded by gorgeous mountainscapes. Because of

these plentiful attractions more tourists are choosing to travel from out of state and live here permanently. From what I have seen these changes have only disfigured the Asheville I have lived in since I was born. These patches of land where nature once thrived and communities gathered are being torn down to pack in more apartment buildings and hotels. Beautiful mountainsides turned barren so cookie-cutter neighborhoods or unnecessarily giant houses can be squeezed in. As more of these structures pop up, the cost of living rises.

Increases in the cost of living affect everyone, especially college students. As more graduates enter the world, few are staying due to a lack of job availability coupled with high housing prices. Many still in school find themselves working multiple jobs to merely sustain a small apartment on top of a full-time school schedule.

I find myself worrying about living on my own in the current economic state. Living in Asheville was always something I looked forward to as I got older, but as time progresses I am realizing it may not pan out exactly that way.

It is becoming too expensive to live here and middle-class job opportunities are shrinking. The tourists bringing in money continue to extrude those who have grown up here their entire lives. As a result more money is put into advertisements and low-paying hotel and accommodation jobs.

Many attractions within Asheville are centered around the outdoors. Hiking trails, inner tubing and kayaking are among the most popular. As more people enter the waterways and forests they bring in more pollution, consequently harming the wildlife. The animals are running out of room just like Asheville.

Granted this does not fall completely on tourists. But as more people visit these sites, it is likely it will continue to have a negative impact on both the environment and overall quality of life in the surrounding areas.

As more tourists pour in, Asheville continues to try and make itself stand out. This urge to always be unique is slowly homogenizing it into another tourist trap. These changes are making Asheville natives, like myself, realize the city they grew up in is a far cry from what it used to be.

Photo by Nick Haseloff