

GILDED AGE GRANDEUR

DURING THE GILDED AGE, well-heeled visitors flocked to North Carolina's Blue Ridge, their destination the small town of Asheville, an eclectic and cosmopolitan getaway known for its architecture and views. George W. Vanderbilt was so smitten that he chose the place to erect one of America's most lavish estates, a distinction it retains to this day. **BILTMORE HOUSE AND GARDENS**, completed in 1895, is just one stop on a new travel itinerary developed by the National Register of Historic Places. Part of a series of online guides that highlight historic properties, this latest addition profiles the small town that became known as the "Paris of the South." **CULTURAL ALLURE ASIDE**, the clean mountain air was beneficial to sufferers of consumption and other ailments. When the railroad arrived in 1880, Asheville's popularity increased further still. **VANDERBILT'S ESTATE**, a national historic landmark, is a French Renaissance manor designed by Richard Morris Hunt, with gardens designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. In an era when bathrooms were practically unknown, the Biltmore had 43. **VANDERBILT INTENDED** Biltmore as a country retreat and showcase for his vast art collection, which is still there. With 250 rooms, 65 fireplaces, a vineyard, a conservatory, and other extravagances, Biltmore—its banquet hall shown here—is a remarkable example of the era's prevailing tastes and high-style craftsmanship. **THE ITINERARY** takes visitors on a tour of Asheville's many architectural gems. Go to www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/asheville.

