

Explore Highlands, NC's New Boutique Hotel

When I pulled up to [Highlander Mountain House](#), I felt right at home — and immediately wished to trade my two-night reservation for a month-long one. It was as if I had entered a perfect pastoral blend of Appalachian folklore, a Jane Austen novel, and a Wes Anderson film. Every vintage cloth texture, every dusted brass fixture, every treasure-filled corner is steeped in history and magic. The 18-room boutique hotel in Highlands, North Carolina, opened in late 2020 in an elegantly restored 150-year-old house.



Nestled in the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains, [Highlander Mountain House](#) celebrates eclectic, warm design and a unique connectedness with nature.



With two distinct lodging options, travelers can book the elegantly furnished main house (pictured here) or the more rustic, cabin-like Highlander Bunkhouse at the back of the property.

To fully grasp Highlander Mountain House's design narrative is to appreciate the area's unspoiled natural beauty and rich cultural heritage ... from the Cherokee tribes to the Scots-Irish homesteaders to the moonshiners and the avant-garde artists who studied and taught at nearby [Black Mountain College](#). This picturesque mountain town hasn't always just attracted the big-city, second-home types. Highlander Mountain House is a place for guests as curious and lively as its spaces and amenities.



Quirky art and artifacts like Victorian-era taxidermy fill the inspiring and inviting common areas of the inn. Highlander Mountain House is like a museum to Highlands' storied past. It's a microcosm of Southern hospitality mixed with Appalachian artistry and English decorum. Cherokee Nation art hangs alongside Josef Albers and Sally Mann originals. Yes, *originals*. Books on every topic from David Bowie to Cottages of the Cotswolds to local hikes are at guests' disposal. I found an old copy of *Ulysses* on my bedside table. Bespoke furniture, mismatched antiques, and whimsical wallpaper from [Morris & Co.](#), [Mulberry Home](#) and [House of Hackney](#) flank every nook and cranny of the common areas and each uniquely adorned guest room.



The hotel's owner, Jason Reeves, hopes to open a cluster of HMH-type hotels all over Western North Carolina, citing his love of these lodges in New York's Catskills and their general absence in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

I met the mastermind behind the project, Jason Reeves, at breakfast, and we immediately marveled that he spent his early childhood in the tiny town of Lexington, VA (where my alma mater, Washington and Lee University, is). From undergrad at Sewanee, Jason worked with a high-end restoration contractor in Charleston and was inspired to keep learning. After earning two master's degrees at Harvard — first in historic preservation, and then in design studies with a concentration in real estate development — Jason worked for the [Society of the Preservation of New England Antiquities](#) (now Historic New England) and then in real estate in New York before joining a boutique hotel company with three other partners. Highlander Mountain House was his first solo venture. People are *eating up* what he has created, and so was I as he showed me around.



The room where I slept — room 3, shown here — boasts a bird-patterned velvet headboard that somehow just *clicks* with the equally daring wallpaper.

Real vintage portraits of once-important characters hang throughout the halls. The room I stayed in has a peaceful balcony and a small writing desk that made me wish quill and ink were still a thing. I flipped on the record player and thumbed through a stack of vinyl, finally landing on Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* with Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* on deck. The bathroom, lined with Moroccan Zellige tiles, was stocked with luscious [Malin + Goetz](#) products. Local snacks by [Poppy Handcrafted Popcorn](#) and [French Broad Chocolates](#) topped the vintage dresser. Smooth-but-strong [La Colombe](#) coffee starts brewing down at the bar each morning beginning at 8 a.m. ... the fire crackling soon after. Life moves a little slow on the Highlands Plateau. Mornings are as quiet as the after-dinner hours.



The friendly bartenders can whip up an assortment of cocktails and espresso drinks any time of day.



An espresso martini kicked off a cozy evening in the dining room. Image: Zoe Yarborough

After a day of hiking the [Glen Falls Trail](#) and popping into shops (my favorite is the home interiors jungle [Bardo 49](#)), Highlander Mountain House beckoned me back to the roaring wood-burning stone fire and a glass of wine. When I sat down to write in the late afternoon, I felt an effortless inkling toward creativity and connectivity to the pastoral landscape that envelops the property on all sides. I spoke — from a safe distance — to other visitors I saw around town that day and eavesdropped on locals who all seemed to know each other.



On nice days, the patio is peppered with diners, readers, and people-watchers.

The walk to dinner that night was down the wood-lattice-lined staircase into the dining room of the inn's elevated, all-day tavern. Teeming with locals and travelers cuddling up or exchanging stories and smiles, [The Ruffed Grouse Tavern](#) offers a small-but-mighty menu of mountain fare. My mother, who met me at Highlander Mountain House, and I shared bacon-wrapped dates (cutely titled "Devils on Horseback"), roasted squash, steak frites, wild boar ragout, and a dark chocolate pot de crème.



Call [The Ruffed Grouse Tavern](#) for a reservation in advance, as the restaurant has become wildly popular and is only open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday.



The Ruffed Grouse Tavern was reminiscent of my trip to the Cotswolds and their classic English pubs.

While I could have spent every hour on the property, the surrounding area offers no shortage of hiking trails, trout-filled streams, majestic waterfalls, pristine forests, and nearby towns to explore. Just out the back door of the hotel, you'll find a trailhead for the famous five-mile [Highlands Plateau Greenway](#), which boasts the highest floral and faunal diversity in North America.

Highlander Mountain House is truly the perfect home base for both the adventure seeker and those looking for an emotional recharge. Renovation, community, location and design were the cornerstones of Jason's vision, and the result is nothing short of a labor of love. He's created an aesthetically enchanting place to unwind, dine, imbibe, and connect in one of the country's most bucolic and restorative geographical locales. I can only hope your post-pandemic travels take you to its doorstep.