

LIFE

Visiting Asheville, Western North Carolina post Helene? Here's how tourists can help



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ASHEVILLE - Tourists returning to Western North Carolina after Tropical Storm Helene devastated the region on Sept. 27 can assist residents and organizations with recovery efforts through donations or voluntourism – volunteering while vacationing in the area.

On Nov. 15, Kat Carlton, executive director of United Way of Henderson County said the community welcomes visitors and encourages them to support local businesses, wineries, farms and breweries.

Biltmore Estate, a leading attraction for Asheville and the region, hosted about 2,700 visitors on its reopening day, Nov. 2, according to the company.

However, Carlton said people seeking ways to support WNC when they're in town or from afar should know that needs are different than in the early days of the aftermath.

"We had the first phase of disaster response and we're learning what that second phase looks like," Carlton said. "Our nonprofits have helped people when they need it most for a long time and that population of who needs it has significantly expanded due to Helene."

Monetary donations and volunteering are needed more than supplies.

Elisabeth Bocklet, senior director of marketing and communications for United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County, said people coming from out-of-town should contact the local organization in advance to coordinate large in-kind donation drop-offs and to inquire about volunteer opportunities.

She said Hands on Asheville-Buncombe, United Way's volunteer center, and the organization's staff can assist with finding placement. Less labor-intensive tasks may be requested and assigned.

"We can connect with some of the other nonprofits and community groups we've been working with all along to see who's got what kind of needs to be able to help direct them to the right place," Bocklet said.

Carlton said agencies may have different requests based on the immediate needs of the community they serve.

"The best thing you can do is provide funding so that the agencies can get the supplies that they need and that they have the funds to do the programming the county needs," Carlton said.

Carlton said recovery will be a long-term process, as people have lost their homes and livelihoods, so consider supporting through the holiday season and into 2025.

Some local restaurants, farms and catering services offer the option of purchasing a pay-it-forward meal for individuals and families over the holidays.

"Our small businesses have lost their busiest season. October is a huge month for our community – for our apple season, for our small businesses, for our leaf lookers and tourism – so the effects of that are going to impact our businesses for a long time," Carlton said.

In addition to patronizing businesses, consider donating to their fundraising campaigns for employee relief and rebuilding on their websites and social media platforms. Also, consider supporting individual artists and artist collectives who have lost workshops, studios, gallery spaces performance venues, equipment, tools and supplies.

Tourists are advised to be respectful of the people who have suffered losses, the businesses that are reopening at a limited capacity, and the neighborhoods and other areas that were significantly impacted by the storm and flooding.

Visit Explore Asheville for a list of businesses open and things to do, <https://www.exploreasheville.com/travel-information-asheville-area-post-hurricane-helene>.

"We've been in the relief stage which is on immediate needs of the moment – food, water and getting the mud out of the space – but building back and building back hopefully better than it was before is going to take some time," Bocklet said. "We need our country to not

forget this whole region because it's going to take a long time to build back where we were or better."

Organizations for volunteering opportunities and donations:

United Way Asheville and Buncombe County. unitedwayabc.org

Hands on Asheville-Buncombe, United Way's volunteer center. handsonasheville.org/volunteer-helene/

United Way of Henderson County. liveunitedhc.org/helene

American Red Cross. redcross.org

Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM). abccm.org

Asheville Poverty Initiative/12 Baskets Café.

ashevillepovertyinitiative.org/12baskets

BeLoved Asheville. belovedasheville.com

Bounty and Soul. bountyandsoul.org

Eblen Charities. eblencharities.org

Equal Plates Project. equalplatesproject.org

Haywood Pathways Center. haywoodpathwayscenter.org

Hearts With Hands. heartswithhands.org

Interfaith Assistance Ministries (IAM). iam-hc.org

MANNA Food Bank. mannafoodbank.org

The Salvation Army of Asheville. southernusa.salvationarmy.org/asheville-buncombe-county/

The Storehouse. storehouseonline.org

Helene relief aid benefitting WNC businesses and workers:

Always Asheville Fund. always.exploreasheville.com/always-asheville-fund

ArtsAVL Emergency Relief Fund. artsavl.org

Higher Calling Beer. highercallingbeer.com

Love Asheville From Afar. always.exploreasheville.com/love-asheville

North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association. recovery.ncrla.org

River Arts District. riverartsdistrict.com

Southern Smoke Foundation. southernsmoke.org

The Giving Kitchen. thegivingkitchen.org

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