How will Cherokee affect you?
Let us count the ways.
Cherokees begin a story the way their people have for generations. It’s only fitting to start the story of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians the same way.

Chapter I: A Long Time Ago

The Cherokees were hunters and gatherers, foraging the Great Smoky Mountains and the lowlands of the Southern Appalachians for food while hunting, fishing, and trapping game.

By 2000 BC, Cherokee culture had spread over hundreds of miles of mountains, governed by their clan system and town leaders. They passed on their history and religious beliefs through storytelling, ceremonies, and dances. Their agriculture, families, traditions, and way of life sustained them.

The Cherokees formed one of the largest tribes in the southeastern United States and controlled a vast land base.

Chapter II: Strangers

In 1540 AD, Spanish explorer and conquistador Hernando de Soto came through looking for gold, demanding food, fighting, enslaving—despite what you may have heard, he wasn’t a great guy.

Worse were the diseases that came with him. Lacking the immunity to combat these afflictions, indigenous peoples were nearly eradicated, victims of plagues such as smallpox, measles, and influenza.

Nevertheless, the Cherokees continued to work through diplomacy with the newcomers for the next 200 years.

By the late eighteenth century, seventy-five percent of Cherokee land had been lost through treaties with England and America. Encroachment by settlers forced the Cherokees to fight for their territory through statesmanship with both the new American government and colonial powers.

Chapter III: Nineteenth Century Brings Tears

Gold was discovered in Georgia in 1828, leading to America’s first gold rush while shifting the entire perception of the region. Peace made alliances irrelevant, and mounting pressure from land speculators made the Cherokees an inconvenience.

In 1830, US President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act offering the Cherokees territory out west in exchange for their homeland. Five years later came the Treaty of New Echota, ceding to the federal government most of the Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi, resulting in what is now referred to as the “Trail of Tears.”

Sixteen thousand Cherokees were gathered, removed, and made to walk six months and 1,200 miles west. Roughly 4,000 Cherokees died of hunger, disease, exposure, or exhaustion. The North Carolina Cherokees worked against removal. Along with other Cherokees who escaped removal or who came back, the group established the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Chapter IV: The Renaissance

Today’s Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians stands strong and healthy. The success of Harrah’s® Cherokee Casino Resort has provided important income for the Western North Carolina region and draws millions of visitors to Cherokee annually. Cherokee’s economic vitality can be seen across the Qualla Boundary. As the Tribe looks out into the twenty-first century, its bright future emanates a light for other tribes to follow.

This is what the Elders told me.
It's time for the Fire Mountain Trails. Ready to ignite your inner warrior.

This multiuse trail system is made to mountain bike, hike, or run. More than 10.5 miles total, the Fire Mountain Trails are designed so everyone can recreate safely together. It's also built with fun berms and quick hits of elevation, including tables, rock gardens, and blinds, along with single-track and wider sections. The trailhead is about 100 yards from the Oconaluftee Indian Village here in Cherokee, and shares a parking lot. The trails interlace through the nearby Great Smoky Mountains, and are free of charge—open every day, all day.

Floaties?

Whether it be by kayak, canoe, raft, or tube, you’ll find yourself transported to a place where worries simply drift away. Oconaluftee Islands Park is a central hub for water lovers. From a cooling, relaxing wade with the little ones to picnics full of laughter, the Islands Park even includes stories around a bonfire at night.

Cherokee is for the birds.

This area is host to over 200 species of birds and six trails listed in the North Carolina Birding Trails Guide, making it one of the best bird-watching sites in the Southeast. So, if you haven't seen a rose-breasted grosbeak in a while... keep your fingers crossed; you might also catch a glimpse of a black bear or two—real or made of fiberglass.

At the end of the day.

You've gone outside and seen a lot. The bonfire warmed you into a sleepy haze, and your head is now filled with amazing stories of wonder. Time for a comfortable bed in Cherokee for the evening.

The Cherokees view nature as inclusive of all things: animals, plants, and people—to ensure balance and harmony. It’s with that thought in mind that we take a quick tour, viewing the great outdoors with a new perspective.

We start with Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and 800 miles of the best hiking trails east of the Mississippi. Some lead to waterfalls with such cascading awesomeness you feel them flowing right through you. Like Mingo. Or Soco. Even in downtown Cherokee you see elk, successfully reintroduced only recently. It all leaves you feeling more connected, more in balance and harmony. You begin to think the ancient Cherokees were on to something.
Does a story thousands of years old require spoiler alerts? If so, consider yourself alerted.

We begin with Hernando de Soto, the Spanish conquistador who encountered the Cherokees in 1540. Already, audiences will sense that not all is well, as de Soto’s visit portends the terrible tragedy that will befall the Cherokee people during the next 300 years.

We see the Cherokee people as the peace-loving nation that they are, willing to share food and gratitude with the strange interlopers in their land. Indeed, Yonaguska, the proud Cherokee leader, attempts to build a peaceful path through a rapidly changing world. But sadly, the modern world has other ideas.

Since its debut on July 1, 1950, “Unto These Hills” has entertained over six million people, telling the Cherokees’ rich story from 1780 to the twenty-first century. And for the first time in decades, that original production—updated for cultural sensitivity and extra stage drama—is back. Yes, the original Kermit Hunter version of “Unto These Hills” is being performed live again, under the stars, at the Mountainside Theatre.

The drama concludes on a hopeful note. Through amazing imagery, and even some astounding pyrotechnics and special effects, you’ll emerge thrilled by the beauty of the Cherokee people. Today’s Cherokee is a place of natural beauty and economic triumph, and the play will send you off into the night infused with the belief that the Cherokees’ courage is the strongest you’ve ever seen.

And then, the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, where Jackson is saved by Junaluska.

One wonders if the noble Junaluska, who famously saved Andrew Jackson during this violent battle, would undo his decision if he could. Because of course it was Jackson who later, with the stroke of a pen, set in motion the horrors of the “Trail of Tears,” casting out thousands of Cherokees from their native homelands through forced removal. Many died along the way, and those who did may have been the lucky ones. Others were ravaged by disease and famine, and this performance explores their heartbreak in exquisite drama and detail.

But before the tears, there’s gold in these hills—with a very steep price.

Wrapping themselves in the premise of Manifest Destiny, white settlers descended on Cherokee Country in 1835, and this astounding play details their impact on the Cherokees’ proud land and culture. Here, we’re introduced to the noble Tsali, a hero and revered figure in Cherokee history.

Tsali’s heartbreaking personal sacrifice, made to preserve his family, his people, and their ancestral claim to the lands on which they lived, centers the drama and provides its emotional core.

But the Cherokee spirit cannot be broken.

The drama concludes on a hopeful note. Through amazing imagery, and even some astounding pyrotechnics and special effects, you’ll emerge thrilled by the beauty of the Cherokee people.

For “Unto These Hills” tickets and information, call 866.554.4557 or go to VisitCherokeeNC.com.
Today is your day, proud angler—fishing thirty miles of streams, arguably the longest stretch of managed private waters in the eastern United States, stocked to the gills with trout: rainbow, brook, golden, and brown.

Three hundred thousand fish have been added to the already existing population (including the unusual sicklefin redhorse, a species that exists almost entirely in Western North Carolina), in emerald waters that sparkle and run through the heart of Cherokee.

In 2018, the catch-and-keep enterprise waters will have an opening date of March 31.

The catch-and-keep Enterprise Waters open March 31, 2018. However, they are closed to all anglers March 17, 2018 through March 30, 2018. For those who prefer catch-and-release fly fishing, a full 2.2 miles of it has been set aside and will remain open year-round. Fishing is allowed from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

You’ve been looking forward to today for weeks. The blood coursing through your veins ripples, like freestone streams, with anticipation.

You’ll be fishing the ancient waters the first Cherokees fished, but targeting freshly stocked fish—along with a few older ones wily enough to escape the anglers who have come before you.

Catch and release, catch and keep. Competitive cash-prize tournaments.

You’re told other annual fishing events are held here as well (look for the Talking Trees Children’s Trout Derby and the Rumble in the Rhododendron Fly-Fishing Tournament), ensuring your return.

Today, you’re fishing the Oconaluftee, host of the 2011 National Fly-Fishing Championships, and you’re feeling it.

No need to resort to old tricks from around here, like sprinkling a little walnut tree bark to stun the fish into submission.

Under secluded canopies of oak and sycamore, you sense fate is with you, because here is where you hook a 15 lb. brown with a 2 lb. leader and an egg-pattern fly. Soon thereafter you learn that the Cherokee word for fisherman is asunitohi. Your kids will later give you a T-shirt with that on it. From that point forward it’ll be your lucky shirt, to go with your lucky hat. You’ll test the duo’s power when you come back.

Visit FishCherokee.com to buy a fishing license.
As you enter, you quickly see why Kevin Gover, director of the National Museum of the American Indian, named it “one of the top ten native sites east of the Mississippi” in Cowboys & Indians magazine.

And why the Museum received USA Today’s 10Best Readers’ Choice award in 2014.

There’s plenty of bang for the buck here as there are not one but two main exhibits for you to choose from: “Story of the Cherokees: 13,000 Years,” and “Emissaries of Peace: 1762 Cherokee & British Delegations.” Being someone who likes to begin at the beginning, you move toward the Story Lodge first to take in “The Cherokee Story” and its fascinating tale of creation. You hear of the raven, the owl, the buzzard, the water beetle, and the water spider. You follow a trail through time as told through stories of a culture older than the Incan, Mayan, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian.

This museum is exceedingly thorough, visually stimulating, and not at all dry. There are the ancient rituals and lifestyle of Paleo Indians and the development of tools by “knapping” stones, along with the origins of the Green Corn Festivals. You can also take in the Cherokee story of the beginnings of both disease and medicine, as told by an ancient medicine man speaking to you through the modern technology of a hologram.

You discover the “Bat Creek Stone,” a mysterious, inscribed stone found in a Cherokee mound in Tennessee, the origins of which may never be known. There are Cherokee baskets, pottery, spears, and muskets alongside documents, pictures, books, and replicas.

You see and hear the syllabary, the Cherokee writing system invented by a man named Sequoyah.

You’re introduced to the Cherokee Seven Clans, the Chamber of Dissenting Voices, and the butterbean game. And then it’s on to the “Trail of Tears.” Though no museum can adequately express the hardship, suffering, and human triumph of the Cherokee people, this comes as close as any. You’re moved to the core.

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While you’re here, you’ll meet the Cherokee Friends, adorned in eighteenth-century clothing, available to demonstrate moccasin making and atlatl throwing, and to speak with you or answer any questions you may have. They can make fire, play the “chunkey” game, lead traditional dances, carve masks, and more.

The Museum also offers a more in-depth tour for groups who reserve the “Cherokee Experience.” Cultural immersion includes food, hands-on crafts, storytelling, dance, and more, specially designed for your group’s schedule and budget. The Museum store even allows you to take a bit of the experience home. And don’t forget the Cherokee Voices Festival, happening on the second Saturday during June. It’s sponsored by the North Carolina Arts Council, and is free and open to the public with more than twenty-five arts demonstrators, traditional dance groups, music, storytelling, food, and more.

In fact, the second Saturday of every month offers an opportunity to immerse yourself in Cherokee culture at “Cherokee Heritage Days.” Make Cherokee stamped pottery, participate in dances, hear stories, and try Cherokee food, all free of charge and, like the Voices Festival, generously sponsored by the North Carolina Arts Council.

To learn more about the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, call 828.497.3481 or visit CherokeeMuseum.org.
As you enter, a faint whiff of wood smoke greets you. You see two or three fires burning nearby. Some, just for warmth. Others, made for building and creation. In the distance, you see the hull of a canoe being formed by the burning out of a great and mighty tree. Its sacrifice will propel you and your people downstream soon.

You walk a path carved in the earth, where you are greeted by a Tribal Elder teaching a younger woman the ancient art of beadwork. Meticulously, the old woman instructs, chuckling to herself as she sees the younger woman's mistakes and mini-triumphs. All around them, examples of their work lie nearby. The colors are dazzling; the artistry, immaculate. You see them teaching others.


You wander down paths to see their historic dwellings, and learn of their ancient arts and crafts—even their weapons. The Cherokee were very accomplished warriors and hunters. History passes right before your eyes.

There is a seven-sided Council House to visit—seven-sided to commemorate the mighty clans that once were the ruling bodies of the Cherokee Nation. But the young Cherokees nearby aren't old enough yet to enter, or to care. Their game of marbles is their only concern this afternoon.


It’s like a history book come to life. Only history books never seemed this engaging.

A nature trail beckons you toward beautiful botanical gardens, filled with indigenous plants, trees, and shrubs, many of which once helped Cherokee medicine men, artisans, and craftsmen create and cure.

Oconaluftee is a village of intrigue and action.

It teems with adventure and possibility, pulling at you to explore this, do that. As such, the savvy traveler will be sure to arrive early and plan to leave late.

You depart with a “Denadagohiyu,” or “until we see each other again.” Because that’s what the Cherokees say, and you suddenly feel much, much closer to them.

For Oconaluftee Indian Village tickets and information, call 866.554.4557 or go to VisitCherokeeNC.com.
The only course that envelops you in Cherokee history.

But today, you intend to make some of your own. The conditions are idyllic: a bare, bright, blue sky and a forgiving sun.

You take a moment to acknowledge this vacation is special. Harrah’s® Cherokee Casino Resort has been kind and you’re feeling good. It’s as if the same Smokies the Cherokees believe were created by the flaps of the Great Buzzard’s wings, dripping with mud from the earth below, stand before you, pleading, “You can’t miss.”

Unobstructed views of the Great Smoky Mountains surround you. It’s just you, the ball, and the hole.

As you walk to the tee, you take a deep breath. It’s the first hole at Sequoyah National Golf Club. A tree-lined, five hundred thirty-nine yard, par 5. You have 6,517 yards of groomed bentgrass greens and bluegrass fairways in front of you—eighteen exciting puzzles still to solve.

Sequoyah National was designed by the famed Robert Trent Jones II.

His architectural signature is building courses sensitive to their particular environment, “of the earth…for the spirit.” It means each hole feels like it’s been there since the dawn of time.

Lined with oak and fir trees and interlaced with flowered valleys, the course feels like it was designed for you.

Or, your occasional slice, anyway. Today, it’s more of a gentle fade, and you feel like you could re-create it with your eyes closed.

Intriguing plaques on each tee offer bits of Cherokee legends, each silently noting that your round is as hot as the gentle breeze is cool. The time you spent on the immaculate driving range and putting green before the round is paying off.

Today feels effortless.

Feel the history of Cherokee on every hole—and maybe make a bit of your own—by booking your tee time today.

For more information about Sequoyah National Golf Club or to book a tee time, call 828.497.3000 or visit SequoyahNational.com.
Cultural Adventure #29

You make several discoveries today about something you’ve always had. Your hands.

You stand there, slightly stunned. You’re literally holding history in your hands, and you thought you were just out for a little shopping trip. Cherokee’s allure is not limited to its rivers, mountains, and forests.

It’s also found under the roof of Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc., woven into the spirit of the artifacts that make Cherokee history tangible.

Born in 1946 out of a newfound market brought by the highway explosion of post-World War II growth and the 1934 opening of Great Smoky Mountains National Park next door, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc. was conceived to preserve and promote some of the most exquisite aspects of Cherokee culture. More specifically, it preserves the craftsmanship, artisanship, and age-old techniques inherent to the authenticity and value of the items exhibited here. And it commercially promotes, via these same pieces, the quality, inventiveness, talent, and creativity of Cherokee handiwork for the whole world to admire.

Now, decades later, the success is evident.

With more than 350 artisan members, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc. is the oldest and foremost Native American cooperative in the country, celebrating the journey of Cherokee arts from where it was, to what it is, to what it will be. Discover impeccable baskets painstakingly woven out of river cane and impressive masks carved out of buckeye. Find masterful pottery made of Kaolin clay indigenous to these parts and of such high quality it made its way, in 1767, into the first porcelain ware in the British Empire.

Be it the utility of weaponry, the decorative beauty of beadwork, the intricate skill of finger weaving, or the sublime self-expression of wood and stone carving—your walk through the gallery gives you context.

The one-of-a-kind, handmade, traditional pieces are representative of a society that once spread over eight states, including North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Virginia.

You look again at your hands, now filled with shopping bags. And you think, “It’s probably time I took on a hobby that’s more than just shopping.” Yes, today’s been inspiring in a lot of ways. Time to explore some of the outdoor beauty that surrounds and has long inspired the artists you’ve just met through their crafts.

Visit QuallaArtsAndCrafts.com to learn more.
Music on the River
This free summer concert series is a celebration of all sorts of musical genres, with different lineups each weekend. The stage is conveniently located downtown near restaurants and Cherokee’s river features. Kids, and kids at heart, can cool off in our fountains while experiencing intimate, entertaining performances.

Cherokee Voices Festival
It’s all things Cherokee: living history, traditional dances, music, singing, crafting demonstrations, and food. It’s hosted on the grounds of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, featuring NC Arts Council Heritage Award winners and Elders who typically don’t travel, yet appear here. Fun doesn’t get more authentic than this.

106th Annual Cherokee Indian Fair
For over 100 years, the Cherokees have gathered to celebrate the harvest, family, and friendship. In addition to traditional carnival rides and concerts, you can experience authentic examples of Cherokee art, crafts, and food. This five-day event celebrates a different aspect of Cherokee life each day.

Talking Trees Children’s Trout Derby
The centuries-old practice of teaching our young ones to fish is the foundation for this free, family-oriented event. Registered participants are invited to a pre-Derby celebration, followed the next day with a full morning of fishing fun. Parents do the teaching, and kids do the catching at Cherokee’s Oconaluftee Islands Park.

Open Air Indian Art Market
Fine Cherokee art, made right before your very eyes by master artisans, using age-old techniques, in broad daylight. Shop for the piece that speaks to you. Purchase the genuine article, made by the real deal.

Cherokee Blue Ridge Run
If you think life is simply better on two wheels, join us for this Cherokee motorcycle rally. With a planned ride that weaves through the Great Smoky Mountains and along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and three days filled with music, bike builders, a bike show, and top vendors to check out, it’s the ride of a lifetime. All bikes and ages welcome.

Cherokee Bonfire
This is your chance to come inside the bonfire circle and hear authentic Cherokees share the stories that make their culture so rich. Discover the Cherokee language, songs, dance, and history. You’re invited to come close, interact with the Cherokees (dressed in seventeenth-century attire), and even roast a marshmallow or two. No admission fee and all are welcome!

7 Clans Rodeo
It’s time to see cowboys pay for hundreds of years of beef jerky. There’s bull ridin’, bronco bustin’, and a corral full of skills competitions. You might even see a cowboy get hurled into the stands. You know, fun for the whole family.

43rd Annual 4th of July Powwow
First Nation dancers from tribes across the country gather in Cherokee to compete for prizes, bragging rights, and fun. Dance categories include Traditional, Jingle, and Grass Dances, and a native drum competition is sure to get your toes tapping. Don’t miss this three-day event filled with amazing regalia, singing, drumming, food, and dancing.

Go to VisitCherokeeNC.com for times and dates, as well as a complete events schedule.
From Asheville, NC - approximately one hour.
From Knoxville, TN - approximately two hours.
From Atlanta, GA - approximately three hours.