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Asheville Wine & Food Festival showcases all that makes Asheville a culinary hotspot

***Sip, savor, shop at 4th annual event, August 23-25, in downtown Asheville,
named a Top 10 Food and Wine Destination***

JUNE 2012 – When millions of food and wine lovers chose Asheville, North Carolina, among their Top 10 food and wine destinations in the U.S., the secret was finally out: this vibrant and eclectic mountain city is a must-visit, must-taste culinary hotspot. The Travelers' Choice® Food and Wine Destinations awards, announced in October 2011 by the world's largest travel site, TripAdvisor, ranked Asheville among larger cities such as New York City, San Francisco, New Orleans and Chicago.

In 2010, *The Huffington Post* named Asheville one of the "Top 10 Undiscovered Local Food Cities." But with high-profile visits by luminaries ranging from President and First Lady Obama to globe-trotting chef and TV personality Anthony Bourdain to the cast and crew of the blockbuster film "The Hunger Games" (what an irony), Asheville is on everyone's lips.

August brings a celebration of recent accolades, with the 2012 Asheville Wine & Food Festival, featuring the finest regional, national, and international wines, exceptional local restaurants, craft beer and spirits, and handcrafted artisanal foods for three days of palate-pleasing indulgence. This highly anticipated event, recognized by the *New York Post* as one of the best of its kind, will be held in the heart of the city's lively downtown, where festivalgoers will find a treasure of independent restaurants and shops.

"We are very excited about the 2012 event, as it will undoubtedly be the biggest and best yet," said festival Founder and Director Bob Bowles. "We have a great group of wineries, vendors and sponsors signed up and have expanded to three full days. Thursday is the culmination of the Chefs Challenge naming the Best Chef in Western North Carolina. On Friday, our popular Sweet event with desserts, wine and spirits is sure to be another sell-out. Best of all, these events as well as the Grand Tasting on Saturday will all be held in downtown Asheville. We thank the Asheville community for its support and look forward to seeing everyone at the festival."

For more information and tickets, visit www.ashevillewineandfood.com.

A hot competition among the area's top chefs kicks off the weekend

The epicurean adventure starts with a bang on Thursday, August 23, as two culinary teams face off in a contest to crown the Best Chef in Western North Carolina. After months of Chefs Challenge competitions, the last teams standing will have one wild and frenzied afternoon to create and prepare dishes using a secret local ingredient, revealed only hours earlier, to win the coveted award. The suspense and excitement will make for a fun and delicious time for attendees while the panel of top culinary experts makes their decision. Doors open at 6, with festivities starting at 6:30. The event will take place in the Century Room at Pack's Tavern, a stunning turn-of-the-century ballroom overlooking Pack Square Park downtown. Tickets for this exclusive event are limited to 100 diners.

Delicious decadence on Day 2 of the Festival

On Friday, August 24, prepare for delicious decadence at Sweet, an after-dinner fête featuring sips and samples of luscious desserts and confections, sparkling and dessert wines, and specialty cocktails and spirits. Held from 7:30 to 10 p.m. at the elegant Grove Arcade downtown, the event includes live music and the opportunity to enjoy the charming shops of this historic architectural wonder. Want to make an evening of it? Take the opportunity to dine locally at any participating member of the Asheville Independent Restaurant association – but save room for dessert at Sweet, with tickets only \$35 each. Members of AIR will commemorate this celebration with banners outside their restaurants.

The Grand Tasting: Largest gathering of its kind in Asheville

On Saturday, August 25, from 1:30 to 5 p.m., the festivities continue with the Asheville Wine & Food Festival Grand Tasting, inside the newly renovated U.S. Cellular Center. Featuring a smorgasbord of more than 300 wines, creations prepared by Asheville's celebrated and internationally recognized chefs, and samples of local artisan food products, the affair promises to be the largest culinary gathering Asheville has seen. Come ready to spend the afternoon strolling, sipping, savoring and shopping.

The festival also features a mixologist contest, a wine competition, cooking demonstrations, countless opportunities to meet, greet, and learn from area culinary experts, and plenty of tasty products to purchase and take home – plus, a fashion show of designer culinary apparel.

Sample craft brews that have earned Asheville its status as Beer City USA. Or discover spirits from the region's newest distilleries – this ain't your grandpa's moonshine. (And don't worry: limo and taxi services will be close at hand, and special lodging packages are available, too.)

General admission is \$45 and a limited number of VIP passes will be available for \$65, providing access at noon before the event opens for regular ticket-holders at 1:30 p.m. Besides beating the crowds, VIP tickets provide exclusive entry to the VIP Lounge where full pours of wine and delicious food samplings will be served in high style.

Proceeds from Asheville Wine & Food Festival benefit the nonprofit Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and its Growing Minds initiative, a program that works to connect farms and schools and to provide children positive experiences with healthy foods, including farm field trips, nutrition education, school gardens, and local food in cafeterias.

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