



REAL ID Extended to May 7, 2025

The Department of Homeland Security extended the REAL ID deadline to May 7, 2025. The REAL ID Act established minimum security standards for state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards and prohibits Federal agencies from accepting for official purposes licenses and identification cards from states that do not meet these standards. Beginning May 7, 2025, every state and territory resident will need to present a REAL ID compliant license/ID, or another acceptable form of ID for boarding commercial aircraft, accessing Federal facilities and entering nuclear plants. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) considers a current passport or military ID acceptable identification for boarding an aircraft. For more information on New York's REAL ID-compliant license, visit dmv.ny.gov.

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Publisher Teresa G. Petrick
Managing Editor..... Frank A. Verdecchia

Editorial Offices

7135 Rochester Road, Lockport, NY 14094
5900 Baum Blvd., Pittsburgh PA 15206-3854

For advertising inquires, contact
Heather Roth at 412-365-7232

e-mail: motorist@aaaec.com

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Tales spin from all directions in Asheville

Biltmore Estate center of attention in 'Paris of the South'

To no one's surprise, the city known as the "Paris of the South" long has been a refuge for the artists and writers.

This is Asheville, a North Carolina town encircled by the loftiest hills in the Appalachians and blessed with incredible scenery. Some of the U.S.'s most unforgettable architecture resides in this nook of nature.

Author Thomas Wolfe's home is a state historic site. He used Asheville as the setting for his novels, including "You Can't Go Home Again". The boarding house that Wolfe called home during his early years – known as "Dixieland" in "Look Homeward Angel" – is the centerpiece of the *Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site*.

Art Deco, Beaux Arts and Neoclassical styles highlight the city-rich architectural legacy. Exclusive boutiques, arts and craft shops and galleries are housed in charming, restored Italianate storefronts. The shops represent the city's gilded era.

The 8,000-acre Biltmore Estate is Asheville's foremost attraction. The 250-room Biltmore House is a 16th-century-style French chateau. Constructed by George Washington Vanderbilt in the 1880s, it has



BILT STRONG – The Biltmore Estate is one of the leading attractions in Asheville, North Carolina. Image: Konstantin L. Adobe Stock.

250 rooms.

It's the largest single-family home in the U.S. It's lavishly appointed with priceless art and antiques – including an ivory chess set once owned by Napoleon. Finely kept formal gardens surround this national historic landmark. Biltmore Village is located adjacent to the estate's main entrance and

is a recreation of an English country village.

Guests experience festive times of the holidays at the estate from early November through New Year's Day. Forty Christmas trees illuminate the mansion. Thousands of ornaments and miles of wreaths and garlands spark the holiday spirit. The largest

tree is a live, 38-foot Fraser fir and it's the centerpiece of the 72-foot-high Banquet Hall. The tree is adorned with lights and surrounded by gifts.

F. Scott Fitzgerald frequently visited Asheville's Grove Park Inn during the 1930s, while his wife, Zelda, spent time as a patient at Asheville's Highland Hospital. A tragic fire took his life.

Constructed from hand-hewn boulders in 1913, Grove Park Inn has hosted notables like Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The lobby is known as The Great Hall, and for good reason. Measuring 120 feet across, the hall features 24-foot ceilings and two 14-foot stone fireplaces that can burn 12-foot logs. The hotel's elevators are cleverly hidden inside the stone chimneys.

The Inn also is famous for its holiday celebrations – think eggnog, roaring fires and carols – with more than two dozen uniquely decorated trees and more than 200 gingerbread houses vying for top honors in the National Gingerbread House Competition.

Asheville spins classic yarns while sewing together the past with the present. It's a town built on creativity. Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes and no one leaves without a tale to tell of their own.

Packing for first cruise can be a challenge

Less is more, but it's difficult not to bring too much

It seems reasonable that too much is better than not enough – unless you're cruising.

Travelers rarely pack the right amount of clothing and accessories for a trip. It's like trying to count how many jellybeans are in a jar. And most often, it's too much.

Cruising can be tricky, considering the limited space in rooms. Too many items can clutter the living area. Not enough could leave you scrambling. In the end, you're likely kicking yourself for overpacking.

It's even more challenging when it's your first experience. You don't know what to expect. You ask for advice, but often stick to your original plan.

Choosing particular clothing is important when taking a cruise. Formal nights aren't required but they are recommended. You might be having dinner in a signature restaurant or seeing a show, where formal attire is preferred.

Dining rooms have a classy appeal. Formal could be an option. This makes it important to choose your wardrobe wisely if you want to dress up.

Men should plan on packing a sportcoat, a couple dress shirts and a pair of shoes to match. Women should consider bringing a dress – maybe two



CRUISE CONTROL – The enormity and many activities on a cruise ship could have you packing your entire wardrobe. Image: Princess.

– nice shoes and another outfit. Expect two formal nights. Three is a possibility, and recycling is an option.

Don't forget a hat, sunglasses, swimsuit(s), workout clothes and walking and/or running shoes. You're going to spend plenty of time at the pool and ships have fitness centers. You might

want to take an early jog.

Choose your causal wear like you plan on getting a couple days out of pair of shorts or pants – depending on the climate. Take enough tops for the whole week, don't forget a jacket and remember that formal clothing is an option, not a necessity.

Pack sunscreen and toiletries but keep them to a minimum. The room is equipped with a hairdryer. And don't forget prescribed medications and over-the-counter medicines to prevent motion sickness.

Electronic devices – smartphones and tablets – are important. Nearly all of your cruising activities will be done through an app, making charging cords essential in your packing.

This leads to the greatest challenge: How to bring everything in as few suitcases as possible? Baggage fees should help in determining what is essential and what isn't.

Packing involves strategy. Practice rolling your clothes or using vacuum bags. Both will allow you to get the most out of your suitcase's space. Put small items or bottles that hold liquids securely into zip-lock bags and pack them inside your shoes.

Getting by with a carry-on bag is the goal but couples should expect a checked bag and a carry-on. If more luggage is needed, then reevaluate. Practicality is a valuable trait that can save you money.

Your first cruise is exciting and you'll certainly overpack. Consider it a test run. There's no doubt you won't wait long to book your next one.