



Opinion

## My Turn: Summer tourism climbs in Gaston County

By Michael Applegate

Posted Sep 22, 2018 at 9:17 AM

Fall is on the horizon, but in the Travel and Tourism office, we're still celebrating summer: This season, tourists couldn't get enough of Gaston County. In the past five years, over 1.7 million hotel rooms have been booked in Gaston County, and, not surprisingly, summer is historically the strongest season.

On average, during this season our hotels book 33,500 rooms per month and welcome more than 100,000 visitors to Gaston County. Smith Travel Research data shows that total summer visits during the months of May, June and July were up more than 5 percent in the county this year compared to last year. That's something everyone should be excited about.

Our summer attractions rely on the natural charms of our county and luckily, we're bountiful in natural wonders around every corner. From gardens to charming downtowns, our wide range of activities for both residents and tourists to enjoy, like hiking Crowders Mountain State Park, kayaking, fishing and standup paddle boarding the Catawba River, and the miles of Carolina Thread Trail that run throughout our county, continue to draw people in from around the country.

The communities that make up Gaston County are growing rapidly, and tourists from around the region are reacting to our growth positively. Of course, we know that without the welcoming and engaging residents of Gaston County, we wouldn't continue to see this increase in growth in travel and tourism. Our people are what set us apart from other cities in our region and keep tourists coming back season after season. Nature may draw tourists in, but we know it's the people of Gaston County that make them glad they came.

Summer may be our busiest season for visitors, but many visitors enjoy our cooler seasons just as much. Special events in November and December like Christmastown in McAdenville, Santa Hustle Half Marathon and 5K through Belmont and Cramerton, and Holidays in the Garden at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden will also draw large crowds to our cities and towns.

We can't wait to welcome them, and we're excited to see how 2018 finishes. We hope everyone who calls Gaston County home is proud to live in a place where so many people want to visit. We're proud to call it ours.

*Michael Applegate is director of Gaston County Travel and Tourism.*