

GREAT SMOKY

NATIONAL PARK TRIP PLANNER

Essential
Tips To
Plan Your
Vacation



A Park
Map



National Park Trips

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GETTING THERE

Discover the best of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.




Showing ecosystems you'd find from Georgia to Maine, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is located on the border of southwestern Tennessee and northwestern North Carolina, straddling a thickly forested and a stunningly biodiverse collection of mountains, valleys and rivers. You can explore forest trails at 875 feet all the way up to more than 6,000 feet at Clingmans Dome. Living in this diverse ecosystem are bears, elk, salamanders and pileated woodpeckers.

There are so many places to explore inside the park's oval-like boundaries. Some highlights include Cades Cove on the west side, known for its abundant wildlife. Along its 11-mile loop road, you may spot wild turkeys, deer and black bears, but you'll also see historic buildings dating back to the late 1800s. Northeast of Cades Cove is the Sugarlands, the main park entrance and just south of Gatlinburg, Tenn. The park headquarters are here, as is a visitor center and hiking trails. Just east lies the popular Roaring Fork Motor Trail.

In the center of the park is the 6,643-foot Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the park and in Tennessee. It offers fantastic clear-day views. Plus, a number of hiking trails pass through here along the high ridges, including the Appalachian Trail. On the southwestern end of the park, you'll find Oconaluftee and its Mountain Farm Museum, along with a historic gristmill.

With so much to explore, turn the page to start planning your trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



DISCOVER THE LAKESIDE OF THE SMOKIES



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PARK ENTRANCES

To access the park, which spans North Carolina and Tennessee, choose between these entrances.

NORTH ENTRANCES

The majority of visitors enter through the Sugarlands Entrance on the park's north side by driving through Gatlinburg, Tenn. This entrance is an hour's drive southeast of Knoxville on US 441. Gatlinburg is the busiest, most touristy gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Full of souvenir shops, craft stores, restaurants and kitschy attractions (think Ripley's Believe it or Not!), the bustling town can be a sensory overload or a rollicking good time, depending on your perspective. You'll find plenty of lodging options, a grocery store and gear shops.

An alternate entrance on the north side is just south of Townsend on TN 73, about 25 miles west of Gatlinburg. This entrance is much quieter than Sugarlands and is most convenient for travelers heading to the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont or Cades Cove. Townsend offers lodging, dining and supplies, plus serves as a home base for several outdoor outfitters. It is closer to the popular Cades Cove, known for its preserved pioneer community and plentiful wildlife, than the Sugarlands Entrance (7.3 vs. 27 miles).

Visitors can also enter the park via several smaller entrances that may feature ranger stations but no visitor centers. They include Abrams Creek to the northwest, Big Creek and Cosby to the northeast, and Greenbrier to the north.

SOUTH ENTRANCES

The Oconaluftee Entrance on the park's south side at Cherokee, N.C., is about 40 minutes west of Waynesville on US 441. In North Carolina, Cherokee anchors the park's southern side. Located on the Cherokee Indian Reservation, it features the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Native American crafts, a casino and limited shopping, lodging and dining compared to Gatlinburg. Inside the park, tour the Mountain Farm Museum, a collection of preserved pioneer buildings, including a blacksmith shop and barn, and browse the visitor center. A historic gristmill is a couple of miles up the road.

Just west is Bryson City, a charming town that's home to outdoor outfitters, laid-back dining options, a microbrewery and coffee shops. You can access the park through Bryson City, but the road dead ends and doesn't link up with the rest of the park.

Visitors can also enter the park via several smaller entrances that may feature ranger stations but no visitor centers. They include Deep Creek to the south, and Balsam Mountain and Cataloochee to the southeast. Cataloochee is open seasonally and is more remote. It doesn't connect to Cades Cove unless you travel north on 276 to Big Creek and follow 32 to 321 west to Gatlinburg.

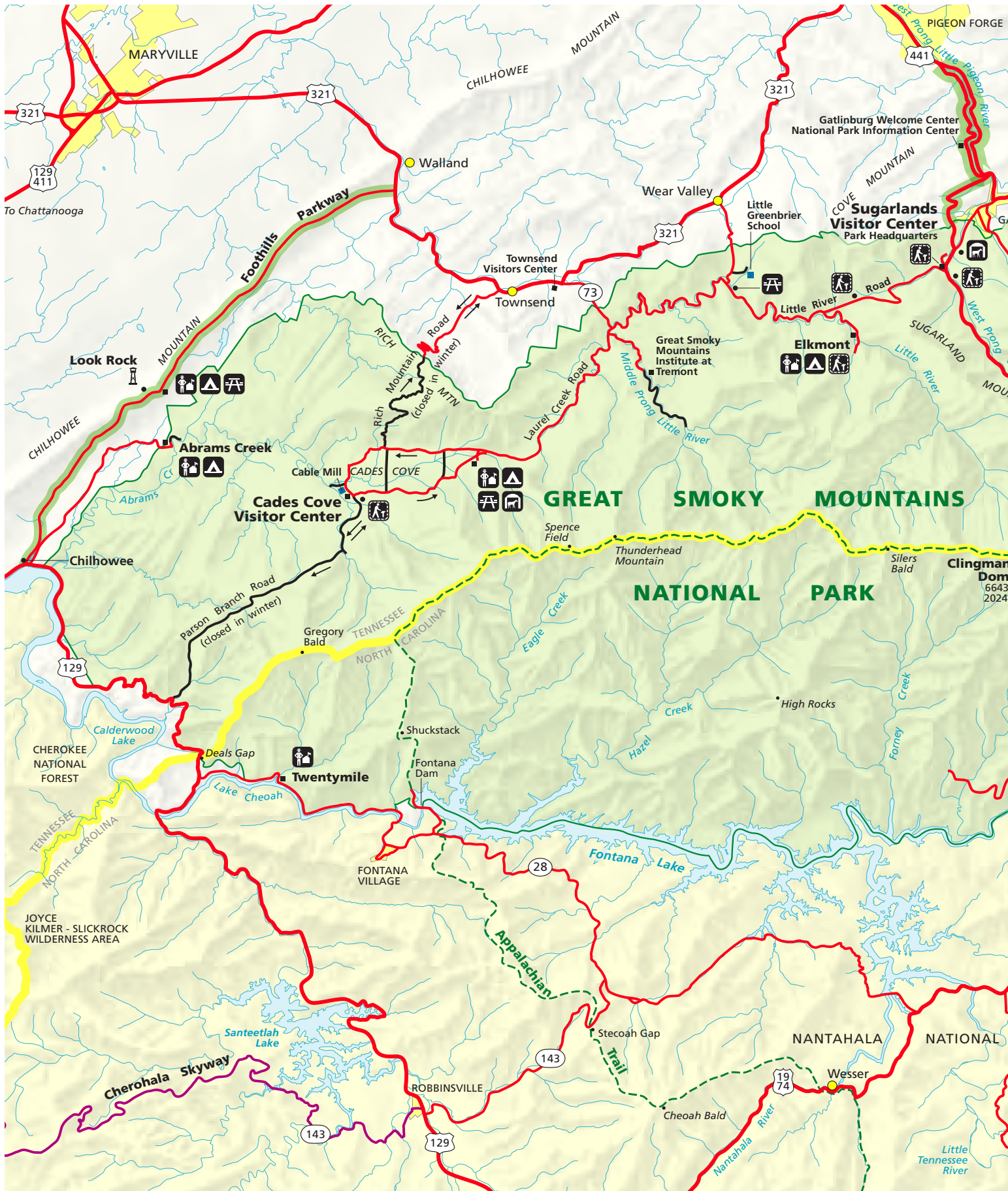
Rest and relax in the beauty of
the Great Smoky Mountains

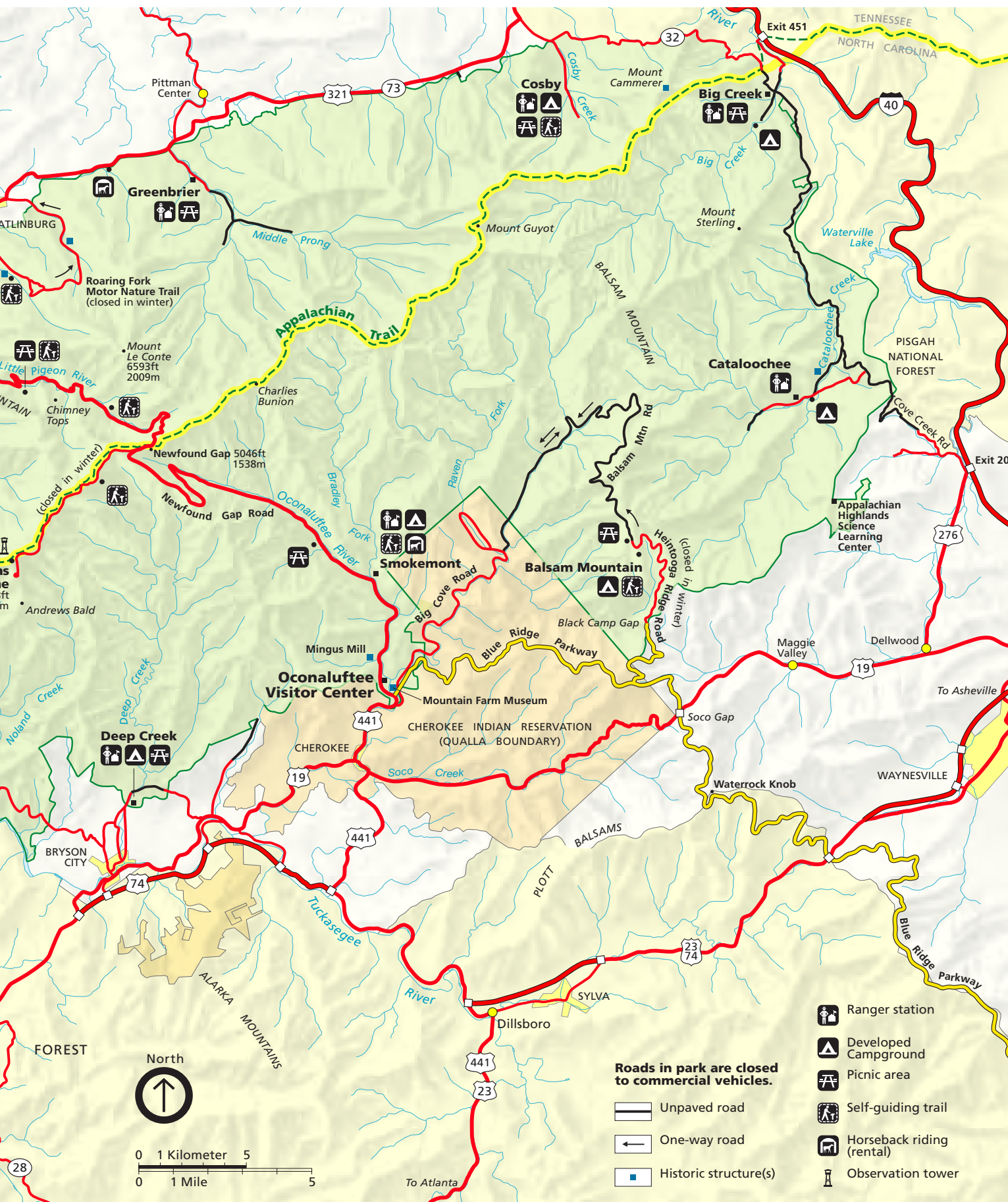


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HAYWOOD You Like To TAKE IT ALL IN?

Family time is adventure time in Haywood County. The mountains are many and activities plenty from hiking and tubing to fishing and swimming across Maggie Valley, Waynesville, Lake Junaluska, Canton, and Clyde. Everywhere you look, the great outdoors is yours.

HAY NOW →

Plan your adventure
at **VisitNCsmokies.com**



SMOKY'S TOP SIX

Here are some of our favorite things to do from hiking to exploring some of Great Smoky's most iconic treasures.



1

WATCH THE SUNRISE

Wake up early, drive the scenic access road from Newfound Gap and walk a half mile to Clingmans Dome, the state's highest summit at 6,643 feet. The spaceship-like observation tower offers incredible views.



2

HIKE TO A BALD

A "bald" is a high-elevation meadow without trees. Favorite destinations include Andrews Bald (1.8 miles one way from the Forney Ridge trailhead) or the longer Silers Bald (5 miles one way west from Clingmans Dome along the Appalachian Trail).



3

HIKE TO RAMSAY CASCADES

At 100 feet in height, these are the Smokies' tallest waterfalls. To reach it, follow the Ramsay Cascades Trail near Greenbrier through an old-growth forest for 4 miles gaining 2,000 feet of elevation.



4

TOUCH PIONEER HISTORY

Head to Oconaluftee to tour the Mountain Farm Museum, a collection of structures from the late 1800s or visit Mingus Mill, a turbine-powered gristmill from 1886.



5

VISIT THE CHEROKEE INDIAN RESERVATION

Stop in the Museum of the Cherokee Indian to discover 13,000 years of Cherokee history.



6

PADDLE FONTANA LAKE

Fontana Lake is a long skinny lake with 240 miles of shoreline that beckon kayakers, anglers and stand-up paddleboarders. Rent a boat in Fontana Village or from the Nantahala Outdoor Center for a day.

NOTE: In 2023 a parking permit is required for those stopping for longer than 15 minutes in Great Smoky's parking lots.

PHOTOS: Sunset over Smoky Mountains, Clingmans Dome, Bald, Mountain Farm Museum, Fontana Lake (Depositphotos), Ramsay Cascades (Kelly Stewart/Flickr), Sequoyah statue (John Perry/Flickr)

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WILDLIFE GUIDE

Look for these animals as you explore Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



COYOTE

This member of the dog family is highly adaptable, surviving in many different habitats across the country. In the park, coyotes are most active at night, hunting rodents, rabbits, fish and frogs. Coyotes can reach about 4 feet in length and weigh up to 50 pounds. Their larger cousin, the red wolf, used to live in the Smokies but was hunted to extinction in the area by the 1980s. These days, coyotes are the top dog in the park. In the evening, you may hear them howling.



BLACK BEAR

About 1,500 black bears live in the national park. Females usually weigh about 100 pounds and males weigh 250 pounds, though bears as large as 600 pounds have been found here. Bears are primarily vegetarian, munching on berries, nuts, insects and plants such as squawroot. Though attacks are extremely rare, bears can be dangerous. If you see one, back away calmly. If the bear approaches, yell and throw rocks to scare it away. Never run from a bear.



SALAMANDER

Thirty species of salamanders can be found in and around the creeks in the park, from the 3-foot-long hellbender to the 2-inch-long pygmy salamander. Some, like the red-cheeked salamander, can only be found in the Smokies. Many of these brightly colored amphibians are known as lungless salamanders. Instead of using lungs, they have evolved to "breathe" directly through their skins. Turn over stones and logs in wet areas near creeks, and chances are you'll find salamanders (make sure to replace their homes just as you found them).



DEER

White-tailed deer are common throughout the park's woods and meadows where they graze on grasses, fruits and acorns. Bucks grow fuzzy antlers every spring. By fall, they are polished, smooth and ready to be used to fight other bucks for mating rights. Each winter, deer drop their antlers and begin the cycle fresh the next year. Fawns are born in late June. Their spots help camouflage them from predators in their vulnerable first few months.



BOBCAT

Bobcats, thought to be the only felines that live in the park, are solitary, reclusive creatures. Weighing up to 70 pounds, bobcats have spotted coats, stubby tails and ears with hairy tufts. Their preferred prey is rabbits, but bobcats also hunt rodents and birds. Individual cats establish their own home territories, which can be as large as 30 square miles and use their scents to mark their territory and protect against intruders.



ELK

The park's largest animal, elk can weigh 700 pounds and reach 5 feet at the shoulder. They spend most of their day browsing on grasses and forbs in open meadows. Elk were hunted to extinction in the area by the mid-1800s, but a successful 2001 reintroduction project brought them back to the park. Now, the population numbers as many as 200 elk. Most of the park's elk population sticks to Cataloochee. Visit at dawn or dusk to catch them at their most active.



VISITOR CENTER

MUSEUM | CAFE | GENERAL STORE



EXPLORE THOSE BEAUTIFUL BEAN BEGINNINGS

Head to the Bush's Visitor Center, located in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in Chestnut Hill, Tennessee! Here, you can experience the Bush's story right in the place where it all began, with a completely renovated museum dedicated to our family, our company history and, of course, the humble little bean. You can also shop our general store and have lunch at our on-site cafe.

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Store/Museum: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

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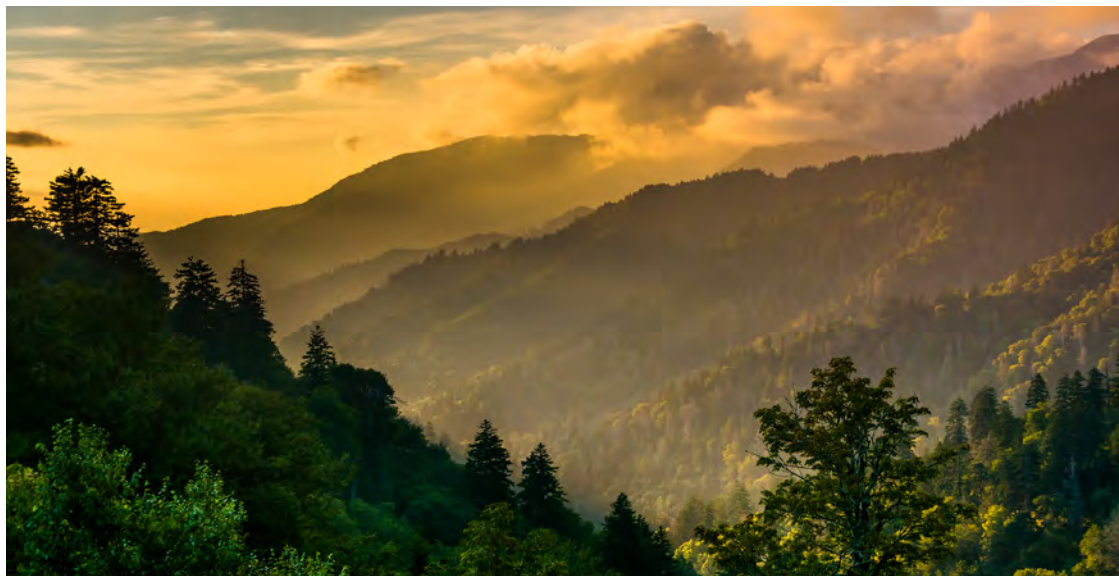
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SCAN TO PLAN
YOUR VISIT



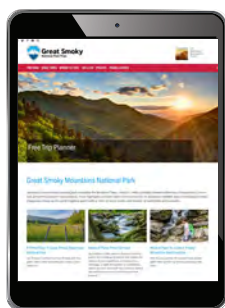
INSIDER'S TIPS

From what to pack to entrance fees, here's the scoop.



ONLINE

Visit MySmokyMountainPark.com to find out where to stay and what to do during your vacation. Interested in exploring other national parks? Check us out at NationalParkTrips.com.



OUTSIDE+ MEMBERSHIP

Become a member of Outside+ to get access to a year of Gaia GPS Premium for trail maps and weather and topo overlays, plus get exclusive content online and on Outside TV. Learn more at MySmokyMountainPark.com/OutsidePlus.



PACKING LIST

- ☐ Refillable water bottles or a hydration system
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ Clothing layers to accommodate temperature fluctuations of 30-40 degrees in one day.
- ☐ A sun hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- ☐ Rain jacket & bug spray
- ☐ Sturdy hiking boots
- ☐ Daypack



Learn more at MySmokyMountainPark.com/park/what-to-pack.

GREAT SMOKY ENTRANCE FEES

\$0

While Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most visited in the United States, it is free to enter.

WEATHER AND WATER SAFETY

Elevations in the Smokies vary by almost 6,000 feet, so the weather you'll find up on the high peaks can be very different from the lower valleys.

Summer is hot and humid at the lower elevations and warm up high, with frequent thunderstorms. Air quality often takes a dip in the warmer months, with hazy days more common. Fall is an excellent time to visit the park, with its warm days (60-80-degrees), cooler nights and drier weather. Expect freezing temps and even snow at the higher elevations by November.

In winter, the weather is usually mild in the lower valleys, with highs in the 50s. Nights are colder, and subfreezing days are also a possibility. By April, snow gives way to 70 and 80-degree days.

Water is everywhere in the park. Although beautiful, these waters can be dangerous. Never attempt to climb a waterfall. Swimming, kayaking and tubing in rivers are not recommended. Every year, an average of five people get seriously injured while tubing in the park. Drowning is one of the leading causes of park death, second to motor vehicle accidents.

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UNDER CANVAS

Under Canvas Great Smoky Mountains—named a “Top Resort in the U.S.” by *Condé Nast Traveler* and one of the “Best Resorts in the World” by *Travel + Leisure*—offers easy access to the stunning waterfalls, tranquil woods, and ancient hills of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Spend your days exploring the magical “Land of Blue Smoke,” then return to camp for delicious food, live music, and complimentary s’mores. At night, sleep under the stars in your upscale, safari-inspired tent with king-size bed, plush linens, ensuite bathroom, and wood-burning stove.

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GLAMP AT UNDER CANVAS GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Here are five reasons why you need to make a reservation.

By *Tori Peglar*

1. SLEEP IN LUXURY ACCOMMODATIONS NEAR THE PARK

Does falling asleep in luxurious linens in a king-sized bed with the sounds of a creek and a modern crackling wood stove sound dreamy? What about sipping gourmet coffee on your private deck? Welcome to vacation at Under Canvas' Great Smoky Mountains "glampground." Just 20 minutes from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, it's the kind of place where non-campers find themselves completely enamored with tented living. From the moment you step into the West Elm-curated lobby tent, you realize luxury and the outdoors aren't mutually exclusive. Choose between six different tent configurations, three of which are equipped with a king-sized mattress, luxury linens, an in-tent flushing toilet and an in-tent private shower equipped with organic EO soap products. If you stay in the more economical Safari tents, choose between a king bed or three twins. The communal bathrooms are steps away.

2. STAY MINUTES FROM POPULAR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS BUT AWAY FROM CROWDS

Under Canvas' glamping resort is near Gatlinburg, making it easy to check off all the tourist attractions on your list. Walk one-mile round-trip to Clingmans Dome in Great Smoky Mountains

National Park to stand at 6,643 feet, the highest point in Tennessee and on the Appalachian Trail. On a clear day, you can see into seven states. Don't miss the park's Cades Cove, an 11-mile loop driving loop. It's the best place to see wildlife and the largest collection of historic structures in any national park. In Gatlinburg, peruse souvenir shops and visit Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies to see penguins and sharks. In the neighboring town of Pigeon Forge, home to Dollywood (named for Dolly Parton who grew up in the area), you can see nightly fireworks in the summer. But once you return to your tent at Under Canvas, you'll feel worlds away from the hustle and bustle.

3. DISCONNECT FROM DEVICES AND CONNECT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Under Canvas is more than a place to rest your head. It's designed to encourage guests to stay off their phones and share experiences in the outdoors with those around them. For instance, there is no WiFi at the camp, an absence which Under Canvas staffers gleefully refer to as an "intentional inconvenience."

Instead, it offers board games, a volleyball court, free yoga classes, live music and s'mores in the evening around a community fire pit. "It sets us apart from a standard hotel," says Stephen Nelson, a guest experience manager for Under Canvas. "We like to send people off with lifelong memories."

4. LEAVE BOOKING ACTIVITIES TO THE CONCIERGE SERVICE

You'll avoid hours of research and the hassle of booking daily activities when you work with Under Canvas' guest experience coordinators. With their expert knowledge of the area and a list of vetted guiding companies, they'll help you decide how best to spend your time. They can book everything from horseback riding and ATV tours to guided hikes in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

5. AVOID LENGTHY RESTAURANT LINES

Forget about battling the crowds for a seat in one of the bustling restaurants in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. At Under Canvas, you can enjoy delicious healthy breakfasts or dinners at the resort's Embers Restaurant. The diverse dinner menu includes the Under Canvas Burger, Pan-Roasted Trout or the Superfood & Quinoa Salad. At breakfast, there's something for even the pickiest of eaters from French toast to breakfast burritos. If you're planning on being in Great Smoky Mountains National Park for the day, order a gourmet box lunch by 9 p.m. the night before you go for pick-up the following morning.

Learn more about Under Canvas® Great Smoky Mountains in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., at www.UnderCanvas.com or by calling 865-622-7695.

BLUE RIDGE BEAUTY

A few days in Shenandoah National Park change all that follow. Generations have sought out this natural gem for its epic hikes and soaring landscapes. And you can stay right inside the park at Skyland, Big Meadows Lodge or the Lewis Mountain Cabins. In Shenandoah, the views go on and on — and so do the moments.

PLAN YOUR BLUE RIDGE ESCAPE.



— NATIONAL PARK —

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