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GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



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American Park Network® publishes Oh, Ranger! ParkFinder™, OhRanger.com, and Oh, Ranger!® guides—a collection of visitor guides for public lands all across America—and operates Oh, Ranger! Wi-Fi in parks and public lands. American Park Network is an official partner of the National Forest Foundation, National Parks Conservation Association, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, American Hiking Society and the Student Conservation Association.

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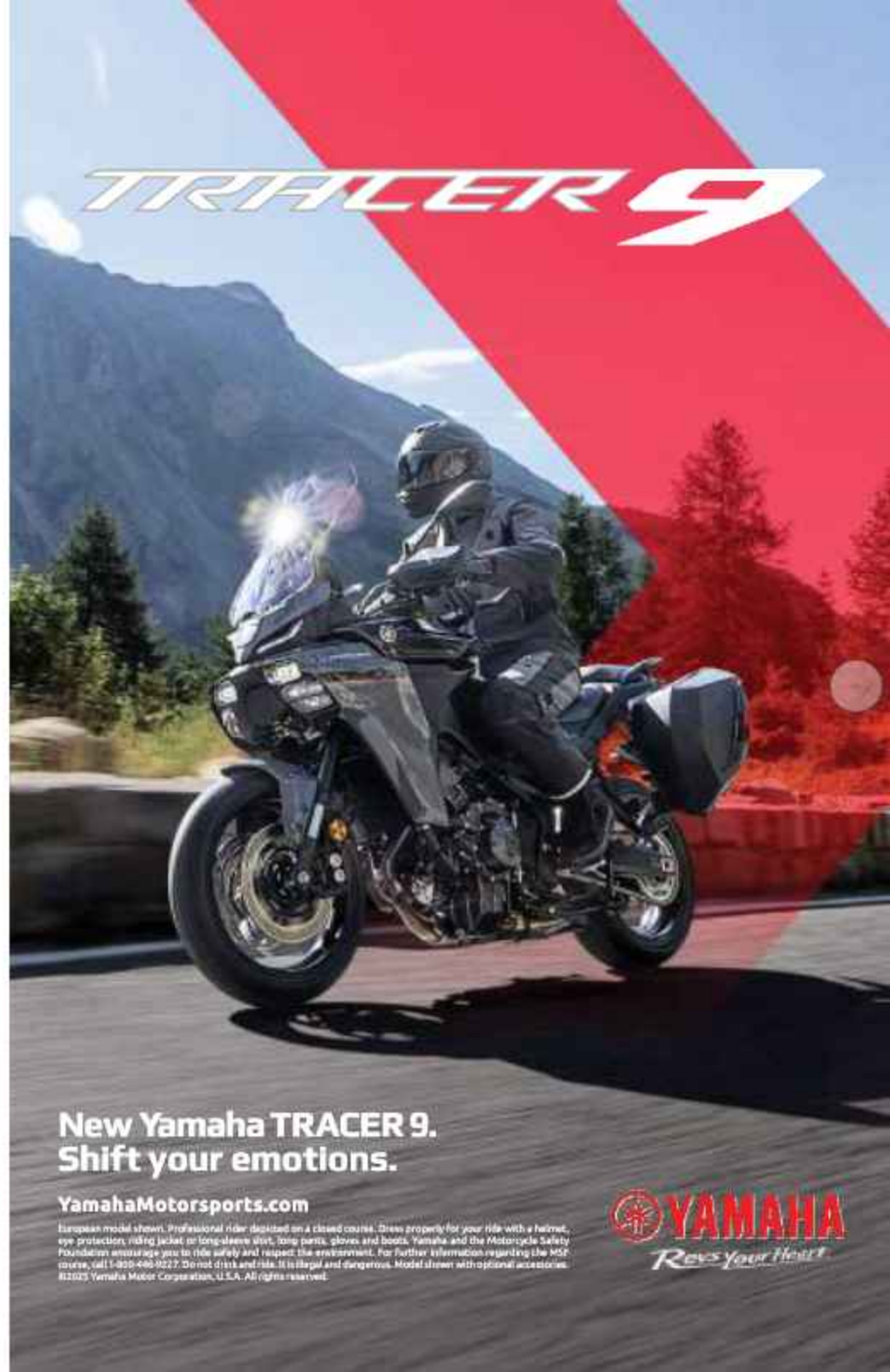
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Cover: A cow elk with her calf grazing in Cataloochee Valley in the southeastern region of the park. | RC Keller



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Welcome



Blanketed in lush forests and shrouded by mist, the Great Smoky Mountains beckon visitors to explore the mysteries of its ancient landscape. Walk in the woods and stand beneath towering hemlocks. Feel the cool spray of a waterfall splashing against moss-covered boulders. Gaze upon a landscape of gentle blue ridges stretching to the horizon.

The Cherokee described these mountains as *shaconage*, meaning "blue, like smoke." The bluish mist, which clings to the mountainsides and fills the valleys gives the park its name and remains among its most distinctive features.

Among the oldest mountains in the world, the Smokies teem with a wondrous diversity of life. More than 19,000 species of plants and animals have been documented in the park! Punctuating this phenomenal biodiversity is one of the nation's largest collections of historic log buildings.

The homes, schools, mills and churches of the mountain people are preserved here for you to discover and enjoy. Experience one of America's greatest wilderness areas and discover the heritage of natural and cultural diversity it preserves for all time.



FUN FACTS

Established: The park was created in 1934 to protect the last of the southern Appalachian forest, which once covered more than 4 million acres, but was virtually eliminated by logging and fire.

Land Area: The park is 522,427 acres.

Number of Visitors: More than 12 million people visit annually—the highest visitation of any national park.

Lowest and Highest Elevations: The lowest elevation in the park is 870 feet at the mouth of Abrams Creek and the highest is 6,643 feet at the summit of Clingmans Dome.

Plant and Animal Species: The park's abundance and variety of plant and animal life have earned it the U.N. designation of International Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site. Scientists estimate up to 100,000 different

types of plants and animals live in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When Discover Life in America was founded in 1998, fewer than 10,000 had been identified; however, researchers have added more than 18,500 species to the park inventory, including 1,000 that were previously unknown to science!

Sights: Some of the more popular sights include Clingmans Dome, Mount LeConte, the sheer rock pinnacles of Chimney Tops, the 100-foot waterfall Ramsey Cascades, and the scenic and historic sites at Cataloochee Valley, Cades Cove and Oconaluftee.

Hiking and Horseback Riding:

Approximately 800 miles of horse and hiking trails crisscross the park.

Camping: The park has 1,000 developed campsites and 100 primitive sites.

5 National Parks A Million Memories



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GETTING TO GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

The beautiful **Blue Ridge Parkway** runs from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the southern entrance of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. U.S. 441, known in the park as Newfound Gap Road, is a high mountain road that cuts across the ridge near the center of the park, providing outstanding scenic views.

Car: From the north, take I-40 from Knoxville, Tennessee (about 25 miles away), to TN 66 at exit 407, then U.S. 441 South to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Drive two miles south on U.S. 441 to Park Headquarters and Sugarlands Visitor Center. Traffic along these U.S. highways is often choked with holiday and weekend travelers, causing delays of one or more hours. Consider using U.S. 321 from I-40 at exits 435 or 440 in Newport to avoid this congestion.

From the south, take U.S. 441 North to Cherokee, North Carolina, then drive two miles north on U.S. 441 to Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

From the west, take U.S. 129 South to Maryville, Tennessee, then take U.S. 321 North to Townsend, Tennessee, and then on to the park's west entrance. Drive west about seven miles through the park to Cades Cove.

From the east, take I-40 West from Asheville, North Carolina (about 40 miles away), to U.S. 19, then U.S. 441 to the park's southern entrance near Cherokee, North Carolina. Or, you may take the Foothills Parkway from I-40 at exit 443, then U.S. 321 into Gatlinburg and the Park Headquarters and Sugarlands Visitor Center.



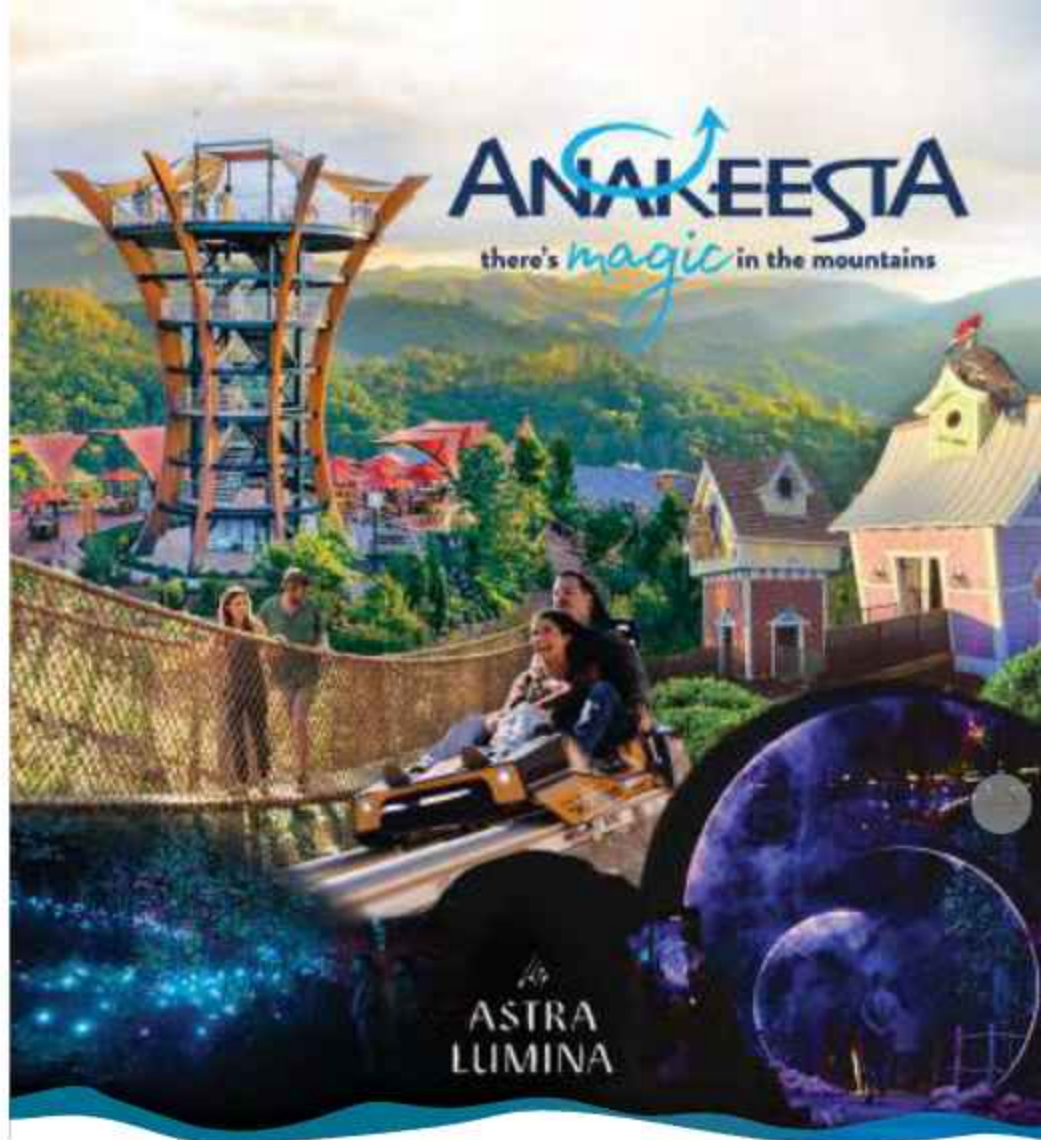
Air: McGhee-Tyson Airport (TYS), the nearest major airport to the park, is located 45 miles west of Gatlinburg, between Knoxville and Alcoa, TN. The Asheville Airport is south of Asheville, NC, and about 60 miles east of the park. The **Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Aviation Center** (GKT) is located 12 miles north of the park in Sevierville, TN and serves private aircraft.

Bus: There is no public bus service to the park. However, Rocky Top Tours in Gatlinburg provides bus tours of the park and operates shuttle service from McGhee-Tyson and Sevierville Airports to Gatlinburg.

Train: Amtrak service is not available to the area. The nearest rail station is 115 miles southeast in Greenville, SC.

GETTING AROUND THE PARK

Travel through the park by automobile, by bicycle, or on foot.



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High above Gatlinburg, Anakeesta is an award-winning outdoor adventure park where you can breathe in the mountain air, explore treetop adventures, race along mountain coasters, and relax in peaceful gardens. With sweeping views of the Smokies and activities for all ages, it's a place to reconnect with the natural world in the heart of the mountains. After dark, the journey continues with Astra Lumina, an immersive nighttime experience where the stars descend from the sky in a dazzling blend of light, sound, and wonder.



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HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

The park is open daily, year-round. Entrance to the park is free! However, as of March 1, 2023, visitors who spend more than fifteen minutes parked at any one location must purchase a Parking Tag. Parking Tags may be purchased online or in-person at Visitor Centers. The cost of Parking Tags are as follows: **Daily: \$5 | Weekly: \$15 | Annual: \$40**

PARK ROADS

Ramsey Cascades Road is closed Monday through Thursday to allow for trail rehabilitation work on Ramsey Cascades Trail. Seasonal road closures include the following: Heintooga Round Bottom, Kuwohi, Forge Creek Rd., Rich Mountain Rd., Roaring Fork Mountain, and Straight Fork Mountain. Sparks Lane and Parsons Brand Rd. closed due to high water. Hyatt Lane is closed until further notice for visitor and wildlife protection. Cades Cove Loop Road is open from sunrise to sunset daily, but is closed to motor vehicles every Wednesday for Vehicle-Free Day from June 18 through September 24, 2025. For updated road and weather information, please visit nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm or call (865) 436-1200 or

WEATHER

Always be prepared for changes in weather by dressing in layers and carrying rain gear. Rain falls frequently throughout the year; March and July are usually the wettest months. Higher elevations in the park are cooler. Late spring and early fall bring mild days and cool nights, with temperatures in the low 70s during the day and mid-40s at night. Summers in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are warm and humid. At lower elevations, high temperatures range from 55 to 90°F. At higher elevations, high temperatures are in the low 50s to the mid-60s. Winter is often cold, dropping below zero at higher elevations, and occasionally snowy.

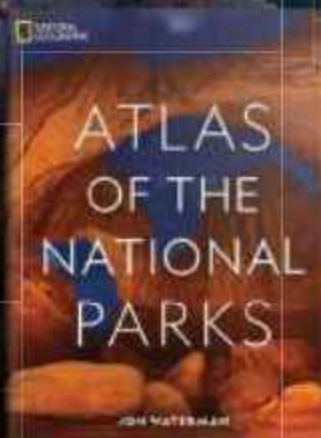
PARK VISITOR CENTERS

Three year-round visitor centers and one seasonal visitor contact station are located within the national park. At the two main visitor centers, Sugarlands and Oconaluftee, park rangers are on hand to answer questions and provide information on roads, weather, camping, backcountry conditions, backcountry camping permits, and first aid. Ranger-guided walks, maps, and books are available at all visitor centers. The Sugarlands, Oconaluftee, and Cades Cove visitor centers are all open year-round. The Kuwohi Visitor Center (formerly Clingmans Dome contact station) is open April to November. For more information, please call the park's main phone number, (865) 436-1200.

Sugarlands Visitor Center is located near the park's main northern entrance, two miles south of Gatlinburg along Newfound Gap Road (U.S. 441). This remodeled center offers a free 20-minute orientation film that provides an in-depth look at the Smokies and the many recreation opportunities available. Natural history exhibits include mounted specimens of park animals in recreations of their habitats and reproductions of journals kept by the first park naturalists. 📖

EXPLORE THE WILD

YOUR GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL PARKS



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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Oconaluftee Visitor Center is located at the park's main southern entrance, two miles north of Cherokee on Newfound Gap Road (U.S. 441). This state-of-the-art visitor center provides interactive exhibits and a museum collection of artifacts and stories that connect people to the human history of the Smokies. ♿

Cades Cove Visitor Center is located off U.S. 321, about 12 miles southwest of Townsend, Tennessee. The visitor center, which is situated among numerous preserved 19th-century farms and historic buildings, emphasizes the cultural history of the Smokies. A bookstore and information on programs and services are provided. There is no telephone service. From April to November, the **Kuwahi Visitor Center** at **Kuwahi** (formerly Clingmans Dome) offers park information, a bookstore and shop, and public restrooms. ♿

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS

Several tourism information centers outside the park provide national park information in partnership with the National Park Service and feature Great Smoky Mountains Association-managed bookstores. The **Gatlinburg Welcome Center**, better known as "The Spur," is on U.S. 441, at the entrance to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Park information is also available at the **Sevierville Visitor Center**, located at 3099 Winfield Dunn Pkwy. in Kodak, Tennessee, and the **Townsend Visitor Center**, located at 7906 East Lamar Alexander Pkwy. in Townsend, Tennessee.

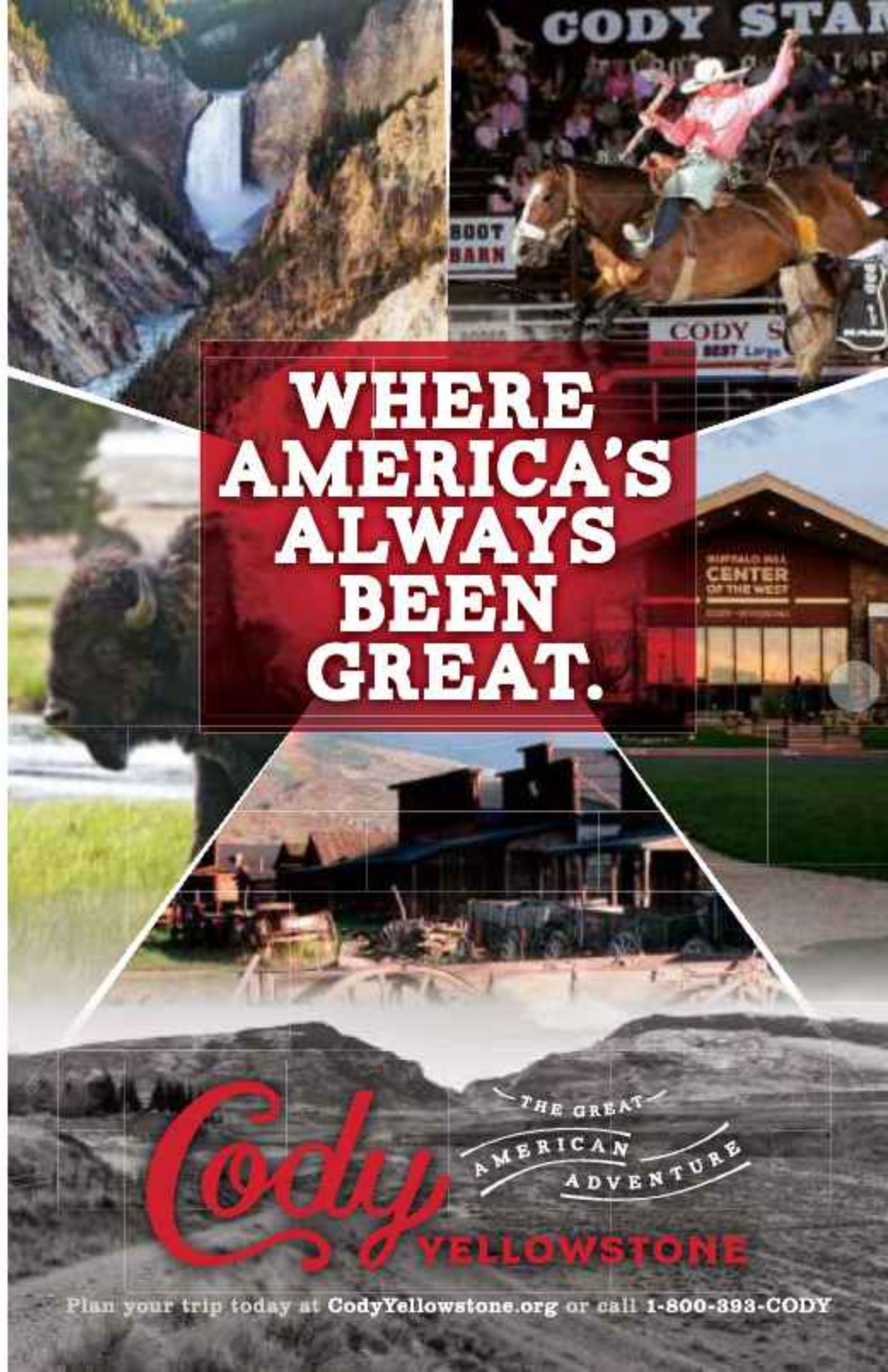
SPECIAL SERVICES ♿

Park activities and facilities that are fully accessible to visitors with disabilities are indicated throughout the guide by the ♿ symbol.



IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Park Headquarters and General Information	nps.gov/grsm/index.htm or (865) 436-1200
Emergencies	911 or (865) 436-9171
Backcountry Reservations	(865) 436-1297
Special Services ♿	(865) 436-1200
Lost and Found	(865) 436-1200
Road/Weather Conditions	(865) 436-1200
In-Park Lodging with Dining - LeConte Lodge	(865) 429-5704
Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau	(865) 436-4178
Cherokee Indian Reservation Visitor Center	(828) 497-9195
Sightseeing Tours/Rocky Top Tours	(865) 429-8687



Services: The park film is equipped for use by the vision and hearing impaired. Please inquire at the front desk for an assisted listening device before entering the theater. Inquire at visitor centers or ranger stations for parking permits for visitors with disabilities.

Facilities: The Oconaluftee, Sugarlands, and Cades Cove visitor centers are wheelchair-accessible and have restrooms that are wheelchair-accessible. Additional accessible restrooms and picnic sites are located at the Chimney Tops, Cosby, Metcalf Bottoms, Big Creek, Cades Cove, Deep Creek, and Collins Creek picnic areas. Cades Cove, Elkmont, and Smoke-mont campgrounds are wheelchair-accessible. Reservations for these sites can be made by calling (877) 444-6777. Level sites—available first come, first-served—are located adjacent to accessible restrooms. There are accessible campsites at Big Creek, Cosby, and Deep Creek. The Big Creek Horse Camp and the group camps at Deep Creek and Cataloochee are also accessible.

Trails: Paths near Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, and Sugarlands visitor centers are best suited for wheelchairs. Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail is specifically designed to accommodate visitors with disabilities. For more information, see the "Walking & Hiking" chapter, inquire at visitor centers, call (865) 436-1200, or consult *Access America Guide to the Eastern National Parks*, available at bookstores.

VISITOR SERVICES

Banking Services: Banks in the gateway cities of Gatlinburg, Townsend, and Cherokee have 24-hour ATMs, foreign currency exchange, and other services.

Camping and Picnic Supplies: Limited picnic and camping supplies are available at Cades Cove and Elkmont campgrounds. You will find a complete selection at numerous stores in the gateway communities near the park.

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has four electric vehicle charging stations at the Sugarlands and Oconaluftee Visitor Centers.

Emergencies: In case of an emergency, please call 911. For emergency messages, please contact the park communications office at (865) 436-1230. The names of people with emergency messages waiting for them are posted at visitor centers or campgrounds.

Gift Shops: Postcards, publications, DVDs, and CDs are sold at visitor centers. Many shops selling a variety of gifts, including native crafts, are found in gateway communities.

Kennels: The nearest kennels are in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee; Sevierville, Tennessee; and Cherokee, North Carolina.

Lost and Found: Report lost items and turn in found items at visitor centers or contact Park Headquarters, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738; (865) 436-1200. You can also submit an online form via nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/lostandfound.htm.

Medical Services: First-aid facilities are available at Park Headquarters and visitor centers. Medical emergency services are available at the following locations: LeConte Medical Center, (865) 446-7000, located on Middle Creek Road in Sevierville, Tennessee, 15 miles north of Gatlinburg; Blount Memorial Hospital, (865) 983-7211, on Highway 321 in Maryville, Tennessee, 25 miles north of Cades Cove; and Swain Community Hospital, (828) 488-2155, in Bryson City, North Carolina, 10 miles southeast of Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

Postal Services: Park visitor centers have mailboxes, but do not sell postage stamps. Post offices are found in gateway communities.

Religious Services: In the summer, a Christian Ministry in the National Parks sponsors nondenominational Christian worship services on Sundays at several locations.

PACKING ESSENTIALS

Don't hit the trail without:

- Topographic map & compass + GPS
- Satellite-enabled cellphone
- Backup battery
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Sunglasses, sunscreen & hat
- High-energy food & plenty of water
- Appropriate clothing & extra layers
- Waterproof matches
- First-aid kit with insect repellent
- Pocket knife
- Sturdy footwear

Service Stations: Gas, diesel fuel, and repair services are available in Gatlinburg at the park's main northern entrance, in Townsend, Tennessee, and at the park's main southern entrance in Cherokee, North Carolina. If your car breaks down on the road, contact a park ranger or call the park's dispatch at (865) 436-1230.

MORE INFORMATION

PARK NEWSPAPER

The award-winning quarterly park newspaper, *Smokies Guide*, offers current information about National Park Service naturalist walks, programs and other activities. It is available at park visitor centers and campgrounds.

BOOKS AND MAPS

Great Smoky Mountains Association sells park-related literature at visitor centers in the park and at some welcome centers outside the park. Hiking maps, USGS topographical maps, guides, books, and other items are available. To order materials, visit smokiesinformation.org or call (865) 436-7318.

FEDERAL RECREATION LANDS PASSES

A federal recreation pass is helpful if you plan to visit many national parks, forests or other federal lands. For information, call (888) 275-8747 or visit store.usgs.gov/pass

Type	Cost	Availability	Details
Annual Pass	\$80 \$20	General Public Seniors age 62+	This one-year pass is available on site, by phone or online (see above).
Senior Pass	\$80	U.S. residents age 62+	This lifetime pass is available on site or via mail order. ID required.
Military Pass	Free	Active U.S. military members and dependents	This one-year pass is available on site. ID (CAC Card or DoD Form 1173) required. \$10 processing fee on USGS stores.
Access Pass	Free	U.S. residents with permanent disabilities	This lifetime pass is available on site or via mail order. ID and documentation required. Plus \$10 for handling.
Volunteer Pass	Free	250 cumulative volunteer service hours	Inquire locally to obtain information about this one-year pass. Available on site only.

Park Regulations & Safety



You can make the most of your visit to the Smokies by planning ahead and becoming acquainted with some simple safety precautions and park rules.

PARK SAFETY

Please review and observe the following tips, which are designed to enhance your safety and enjoyment.

Feeding the bears is illegal! It makes them bold and potentially dangerous. Keep a clean camp and deposit garbage in park trash cans or dumpsters.

Bears cause significant property damage every year trying to get food, so be sure to "bearproof" your food, toothpaste and cosmetics. If you are car camping, keep food stored in the trunk of your car or in a strong food locker. If you must store food in the passenger compartment, cover it so that bears can't see it; they have learned to identify packaged food. If you are backpacking, suspend your food and food garbage on the cable system located at all backcountry campsites. Keep your tent, sleeping bag, and other gear clean and free of food odor. Food storage regulations are strictly enforced at the park.

If you see a bear or other wildlife, keep your distance. Park regulation prohibits visitors from approaching, disturbing, or displacing wildlife. Please keep a minimum distance of 50 yards. Bears may display signs of aggressive behavior such as charging, making loud noises, or swatting the ground—all indications of the bear demanding more space. If this happens, don't run. Instead, slowly back away, always watching the bear. If a bear follows you, change direction or stand your ground. Talk loudly or shout

at it and make yourself look as large as possible to try to intimidate the bear. Never turn your back or run away.

To reduce your risk of poison ivy and ticks, stay on trails and avoid brushy areas. Wearing a hat, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt helps considerably. If you think you've brushed against poison ivy, remove and isolate the clothes you wore until you can wash them. Apply insect repellent to ward off ticks, and check yourself and your clothes for ticks after hiking. If a tick attaches itself to you, remove it with tweezers and then wash the area thoroughly with antiseptic or soap and water. Seek medical attention if part of the tick remains in your skin. Ticks can transmit Lyme disease, which is characterized by skin changes, flu-like symptoms, and joint inflammation.

Be careful when walking around streams and waterfalls. Mist and moss make rocks and logs extremely slippery. Stay on trails. Don't drink untreated water, which may contain impurities and parasites that can make you ill.

Swimming is not recommended because streams contain submerged rocks, logs, and debris, and flash floods may occur with little or no warning.

Don't leave valuables in your car. They are an easy target in a locked or unlocked car. If you must carry these items with you, place them in your trunk before you park your car.

Storms can take you by surprise and temperatures on the Smokies' ridges are often much cooler than in the valleys. Dress in layers and always carry rain gear for comfort and to prevent hypothermia. This potentially fatal condition occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can generate it.

PARK REGULATIONS

Help protect the park, and yourself, by observing the following NPS regulations:

Alcoholic beverages are permitted only in designated picnic and camping areas. Possession of open alcoholic beverages in motor vehicles is prohibited.

Bicycles, mountain bikes, and motorcycles are allowed on paved roads and in campgrounds, but are prohibited on trails and administrative roads behind locked gates. Motorcyclists are required to wear helmets. **Skateboarding** is prohibited in the park. **Camp** in designated areas only. To camp overnight in the backcountry, you must obtain a **backcountry permit**. Permits are available online at **smokiespermits.nps.gov** or by contacting the backcountry office. Permits cost \$8 per person per night with a maximum fee of \$40 per person per permit. Federal law allows people who can legally possess **firearms** under applicable laws to possess firearms in the park. It is the responsibility of visitors to understand and comply with all applicable state, local, and federal firearms laws before entering the park. Please visit **nps.gov/grsm** for more information. **Hunting** is strictly prohibited.

Beginning in March 2015, only heat-treated, bundled **firewood** that displays a USDA or state Department of Agriculture certification stamp may be used in park campgrounds. It is sold in local communities and through concessions at Cades Cove, Elkmont and Smokemont campgrounds. **Fires** are allowed in established fire rings or fireplaces. Campers may also collect dead and down wood found in the park for campfires. Cutting trees or branches for firewood is strictly prohibited.

Fireworks are not allowed in the park.

Fishing is allowed within the park from sunrise to sunset. A valid Tennessee or North Carolina state **fishing license** is required and may be purchased at sporting



goods stores in gateway communities and at the Gatlinburg Welcome Center at the north entrance to town. Fishing with any natural bait is prohibited, so use single-hook artificial lures. Before you cast any lines, pick up the Great Smoky Mountains Fishing Regulations brochure at any visitor center. Check at a ranger station to learn which stream segments will be closed.

Pets must always be leashed. They are allowed along paved roads, in parking lots and in campgrounds accessible to motor vehicles. Pets are not permitted on trails (exceptions: Gatlinburg Trail and Oconaluftee River Trail), in public buildings or in the backcountry. Service animals are allowed throughout the park.

Vandalism, or the removal of rocks, plants, or any natural feature, is strictly prohibited. Please don't feed, approach, chase, or harass park **wildlife**.

Who's Who At The Parks ■ Preservation



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)

The NPS is the federal custodian of the park. It preserves the Smokies' natural habitat, which was once heavily farmed and logged, and maintains the park's historic man-made features. The NPS also helps visitors have a more enjoyable stay in the park. Contact the superintendent at: Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Rd., Gatlinburg, TN 37738; **(865) 436-1200** or visit nps.gov/grsm.

GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

Great Smoky Mountains National Park's gateway communities of **Gatlinburg**, **Cosby**, **Pigeon Forge**, and **Townsend** in Tennessee; and **Bryson City**, **Cherokee**, **Maggie Valley**, and **Fontana Dam** in North Carolina, offer lodging, dining, and other services and attractions. Innkeepers, restaurateurs, and merchants help make your stay in the Smokies comfortable and enjoyable. For more information about local chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus, or departments of tourism, please see the "Lodging & Dining" chapter.

FRIENDS OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

This nonprofit organization is dedicated to raising private and corporate contributions to help the park meet some of its critical funding needs. The goals include assisting with natural and historic resource projects and helping to improve visitor facilities and services. For information or to learn how to become a member, please call **(865) 932-4794** or **(828) 452-0720** or visit friendsofthesmokies.org.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1953 and operating bookstores both inside and outside the park, this nonprofit organization produces the park newspaper and other publications, funds staff positions for the park's library and archives, sponsors research projects, purchases items for living history demonstrations, and funds visitor center exhibits. For more information, please call **(865) 436-7318** or visit smokieslife.org.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS INSTITUTE AT TREMONT

The Institute is a nonprofit environmental education center offering residential and non-residential programs such as photography workshops, wilderness adventure camps, and citizen science programs. All programs emphasize exploration and understanding of the park's natural and cultural resources. Please contact the Institute at **(865) 448-6709** or visit gsmit.org.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to maintaining and protecting the Appalachian Trail, 70 miles of which run through the park. The organization publishes information about the trail, conducts research projects, and assists in trail maintenance. It represents more than 60 volunteer trail clubs and 16,000 members. For more information, please call **(304) 535-6331** or visit appalachiantrail.org.

The NPS plays a dual role in Great Smoky Mountains National Park: it preserves the park's natural environment and the historic relics of the mountain settlers.

SMOKIER SMOKIES

Air pollution has caused regional haze and decreased visibility from the park's scenic overlooks. Researchers believe the emissions rise at night, mix with air, and settle across the park's ridges. Visibility has significantly improved over the past 15 years due to emissions reduction.

Ground-level ozone pollution is one of the most serious air pollutants. Concentrations in the park are among the highest in the eastern U.S. During high ozone-pollution episodes, visitors (especially those at-risk) may wish to refrain from strenuous outdoor activities. Acid rain, produced by the combination of sulfur, nitrogen by-products, and water vapor, damages sensitive foliage and affects the chemical balance of streams and soils. Air-quality data is on display at the Sugarlands and Oconaluftee visitor centers.

IMPERILED FIRS AND HEMLOCKS

In the case of the Fraser fir, the threat is a tiny insect called the **balsam woolly adelgid (BWA)**. This native of Europe was inadvertently introduced to this country at the turn of the 20th century. Adelgids drink the Fraser fir's sap, killing it within six to eight years of initial infestation. More than 91 percent of the mature Fraser firs in the park have died since BWA was first discovered in 1962. In North Carolina, trees grown from seed in 1995 are managed as a reservoir of the park's genetic material.

The **hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA)**, the park's latest threat, is a tiny insect native to Asia that was discovered in the park in 2002. Spread in part, by larger insects and on birds' feet, HWA suck the sap from the base of tree needles which drop off, impairing new growth. A park team controls HWA with insecticides and the release of tiny predator beetles, which hold the best hope for long-term control. Early results show promise. The **"Save Our Hemlocks Action Team"** is a group of scientists, land managers and others organized by the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere consortium. These experts pool their resources to survey and monitor impacts of HWA, conduct outreach activities and look at solutions to reduce a potential disaster. For information, visit samab.org.

SAVING ANIMALS

Peregrine falcon reintroduction efforts in the Smokies have resulted in recovery of a small population, after the birds nearly vanished from the eastern United States by the mid-1960s as a result of widespread pesticide use. Between 1984 and 1986, 13 peregrines were released in the Greenbrier area of the park. In June 1997, a nesting pair was observed at Peregrine Peak and produced three young. At least two active falcon nests are known in the park. The success of the park's **brook trout restoration** efforts have made it possible for visitors to catch the only native trout species in the park. Logging and non-native fish introductions in the early 1900s reduced the original range of brook trout in the park by 70 percent. The fish now inhabit about 200 miles of streams.

History & Culture



The Great Smoky Mountains are among the highest peaks in the Appalachian mountain range, yet they are rounder and lower in elevation than younger mountain chains such as the Rocky Mountains. How they came to be this way is a story that began almost 1 billion years ago.

An ancient sea flooded what is now the eastern United States, submerging the remnants of an old mountain range. The sea slowly deposited layers of sediment onto the ocean floor. The intense pressure of thousands of feet of **sediment** compressed these layers into metamorphic rock. Almost 300 million years ago, the sea added yet another layer of limestone sediment that was composed of fossilized marine animals and shells. The stage was set for the formation of the Appalachian Mountains.

As a result of the eons-old shifting of the earth's **tectonic plates** (large sections of the earth's crust), Africa and North America collided about 250 million years ago. This caused the older, underlying layer of metamorphic rock to tilt upward and slide over the younger limestone rock, slowly creating a towering mountain range, the Appalachians. The older rocks, known as the **Ocoee Series**, now compose most of the Great Smoky Mountains. Charlies Bunion, Sawteeth, and Chimney Tops are dramatic examples of how the rock layers tilted and buckled to form steep cliffs and pinnacles. In Cades Cove, erosion of the overlying metamorphic rock reveals the limestone layer beneath.

During the ice ages, massive boulders were created by alternating freezing and thawing of the rock. You can see **boulder**

fields on the Cove Hardwood, Noah "Bud" Ogle, and Roaring Fork Motor nature trails.

The Smokies originally looked more like the Himalayas than the rounded mountains we see today. The relentless erosive force of water has sculpted their present-day appearance. Water runoff has also helped to carve the alternating pattern of **v-shaped valleys** and steep ridges. Landslides caused by a torrential downpour in 1951 created the large V-slash on Mount LeConte, and rock slides in 1984 briefly closed Newfound Gap Road. As you explore the park, look for ways water continues to sculpt the land.

HUMAN HISTORY

Evidence of human habitation here goes back thousands of years. The first inhabitants are believed to have been a break-away group of Iroquois, later to be called **Cherokee**, who had moved south from Iroquoian lands in New England. The Cherokee Nation stretched from the Ohio River into South Carolina and consisted of seven clans. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee lived (and continue to live) in this sacred ancestral home of the Cherokee Nation.

The Cherokee enjoyed a settled, sophisticated agriculture-based life. Their towns of up to 50 log-and-mud huts were grouped around the town square and the **Council House**, a large, seven-sided (for the seven clans), dome-shaped building where public meetings and religious ceremonies were held. The Cherokee first encountered Europeans in 1540, when Spanish explorer **Hernando de Soto** led an expedition through Cherokee territory.

JOHN WALKER



John Walker (1841–1921), of Wears Valley, along with his wife, Margaret Jane, lived in Little Greenbrier Cove with their 11 children and prided themselves on their self-sufficiency. Margaret Jane was an "herb doctor" and a midwife; John was a blacksmith, carpenter, miller and farmer. To accommodate his large family, Walker built a cabin and placed it adjacent to an original structure built by his father-in-law, Wiley King. Walker's cabin eventually passed to five of his daughters—Margaret Jane, Polly, Louisa, Hettie and Martha—who had never married.

In the 1930s, the commission responsible for acquiring land for Great Smoky Mountains National Park unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Walker sisters to sell the homestead. To avoid negative publicity, the commission finally opted not to force the Walkers off via eminent domain. The Walker sisters eventually sold the farm in 1941 in exchange for a lifetime lease. A local legend claims the sisters were paid a visit by President Franklin Roosevelt, who convinced them to sell the land.

In the late 18th century, **Scotch-Irish, German, English, and other settlers** arrived in significant numbers. The Cherokee were friendly at first, but fought with settlers when provoked. They battled Carolina settlers in the 1760s but eventually withdrew to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

To come to terms with the powerful newcomers, the **Cherokee Nation** attempted to make treaties and to adapt to European customs. They adopted a written legal code in 1808 and instituted a supreme court two years later. **Sequoyah**, a Cherokee silversmith, created an alphabet for the Cherokee language and in the space of two years, nearly all of his people could read and write the language.

But theirs was a losing cause. The discovery of gold in northern Georgia in 1828 sounded the death knell for the Cherokee Nation.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the **Removal Act**, calling for the relocation of all native peoples east of the Mississippi River to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma.

The Cherokee appealed their case to the Supreme Court and Chief Justice Marshall ruled in their favor. President Jackson, however, disregarded the Supreme Court decree in the one instance in American history when a U.S. president overtly ignored a Supreme Court decision.

In 1838, the U.S. government forced some 13,000 Cherokee to march to Oklahoma along what has become known as the **Trail of Tears**. About one-third of the Cherokee died en route due to malnutrition and disease. Altogether, about 100,000 natives, including Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw survived the journey.

A handful of Cherokee disobeyed the government edict, however. Hiding out in the hills between Kuwohi (formerly Clingmans Dome) and Mount Guyot, they managed to survive. In 1889, the 56,000-acre **Qualla Indian Reservation** was chartered with a population of about 1,000 people. Approximately 10,500 of their descendants now live on the reservation, which is located along the park's southern boundary.

Like the Cherokee, pioneers who settled in the Smokies in the 18th and 19th centuries coveted the fertile valleys. Land soon became scarce. Later arrivals made their homesteads along steep slopes.

Logging began slowly, but by the time it ran its course, it had radically changed the land and the life of the people. Timber, of course, was vital to the early pioneers. They used it for homes, furniture, fences, and fuel. They only began cutting it for cash in the mid-19th century. This had little noticeable effect on the forest, however, because men and animals could only carry so much.

Not so by the turn of the century. Technological advances and the eastern United States' need for lumber nearly eliminated all the southern Appalachian forests. Railroads were the key to large-scale logging operations and railroad tracks reaching deep into the mountains made timber readily available. Steam-powered equipment like skidders and log loaders also contributed to cost-effective tree removal.

Some 15 company towns and nearly as many sawmills were constructed in what is now the park. Mountain people who had once plowed fields and slopped hogs began to cut trees and saw logs for a living, abandoning their farms. They were attracted to logging by the promise of security and the stability of a steady paycheck.

Their security was short-lived, however. By the 1930s, the lumber companies had logged all but the most inaccessible areas and were casting their sights to richer pickings out West. Some of the mountain people returned to farming while others left to seek jobs in mines, textile mills, and automobile factories.

NATIONAL PARK STATUS

In 1904, a librarian from St. Louis named **Horace Kephart** came to the Smokies for a respite to restore his health. Kephart found that large-scale logging was decimating the land and disrupting the lives of the people. As the years progressed, he promoted preserving the Smokies as a national park. In the 1920s, prominent Knoxville residents took up the cause and formed a citizens' organization.

The NPS was looking for park sites in the East after having established parks in the West. Founded in 1916, the young agency hoped to generate further public support for national parks with a park closer to the majority of the nation's population. Along with private efforts, the NPS promoted the idea of a national park in the Smokies.

The states of Tennessee and North Carolina and countless citizens responded by giving millions of dollars to purchase parkland. The federal government was reluctant to buy land for parks; national parks in the West had been formed from land it had already owned. Eventually, it did contribute \$2 million. Coupled with **John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s** donation of \$5 million, the NPS reached its goal.

Lumber companies were bought out in agreements that phased out operations over several years and some people living within the proposed park boundaries were allowed lifetime residency rights. Most people moved, and consequently were paid more for their land. On June 15, 1934, Great Smoky Mountains National Park was officially established, preserving the land for generations to come.

Sights To See



Steeped in history and blessed with natural beauty, the Smokies provide visitors with historic log cabins, primeval forests, and misty vistas of seemingly endless ridgelines. Listed below is a sampling of the best the Smokies have to offer.

CENTRAL SECTION

The following locations are accessible from Newfound Gap Road.

ALUM CAVE BLUFFS

The Alum Cave Bluffs were supposedly a source of saltpeter for Civil War gunpowder. The bluffs, now a popular day hiker destination, were also the site of a 19th-century alum mine. Alum is a compound sulfate used in munitions manufacturing, in medicines and in setting cloth dyes. The trail begins between the Newfound Gap and Chimney Tops overlooks, and becomes somewhat strenuous near the end. It rises 1,360 feet above Newfound Gap Road and at times hikers must grip trailside cables to traverse cliffs. The trail is 2.5 miles to the bluffs and five miles to Mount LeConte and goes through **Arch Rock**.

A restoration project of Alum Cave Trail involved smoothing and widening portions, making steps less steep, improving bridges, and freshening old life-lines along the cliffs. One of the most popular trails in the Great Smoky Mountains now offers a safer and more enjoyable opportunity to reach unparalleled views.

Note that all hikers are prohibited from entering caves and mine shafts due to concerns about the spread of white nose syndrome among bats.

ANDREWS BALD

Balds are open, unforested fields on mountain ridges, once referred to by naturalist Edwin Way Peale as, "pieces of prairie lifted thousands of feet into the air." Biologists can't explain exactly why they occur, though theories involve overgrazing, woolly mammoths, and repeated fires set by early humans. The NPS maintains several balds in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Andrews Bald is the easiest of these to reach, located 1.8 miles south of Kuwohi by hiking trail. Views from the field make it an inviting picnic spot.

CHARLIES BUNION

The 1,000-foot high Charlies Bunion is a popular destination for day hikers who want to travel a small portion of the Appalachian Trail. Start at Newfound Gap and follow the crest east for four miles to see sweeping views of Mount LeConte and Greenbrier area. Return the same way for an eight-mile hike.

CHEROKEE ORCHARD ROAD AND ROARING FORK MOTOR NATURE TRAIL

Historical sites along these roads include the remains of a homestead owned by the Ogle family who lived here after the Civil War. There are also log cabins and a cemetery in Roaring Fork, remnants of a village that supported some two dozen families about 150 years ago. The sites are located just southeast of Gatlinburg and are accessible to automobiles via the paved **Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail** (closed in winter). The road is impassable to trailers and recreational vehicles.

CHIMNEY TOPS

Chimney Tops are sheer, dramatic examples of the tremendous forces that caused the eastern edge of North America to buckle, creating the Appalachian Mountains. You can see the twin pinnacles from the Chimney Tops Overlooks, located along Newfound Gap Rd., or hike Kuwohi. At 6,643 feet in elevation, Kuwohi is the highest spot in the Smokies. A forest of spruce and fir trees covers the top, but an observation platform provides an unparalleled view. From Newfound Gap, drive seven miles southwest on Kuwohi Road to the parking lot. Reaching the platform requires a steep, half-mile walk on a paved trail. Kuwohi Road is usually closed from December to April.

MINGUS MILL

Located north of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center on Newfound Gap Rd., Mingus Mill is one of two water-powered mills still operating in the park. From mid-March through mid-November, a miller grinds corn and wheat to make cornmeal and flour. *The mill interior is temporarily closed for preservation and rehabilitation work, though visitors are still welcome to walk around outside.*

MOUNT LECONTE

Hikers and backpackers often gather at dawn or sunset at Mount LeConte, the third-highest peak in the park, for one of the Smokies' most powerful wilderness experiences. The 6,593-foot-high mountain offers its best views from two outcroppings: on Myrtle Point and Cliff Top. There is no road leading to the top of Mount LeConte, or to the lodge perched there, so you'll have to go on foot. To summit, take one of five hiking trails: **Boulevard Trail** via the Appalachian Trail at Newfound Gap, 16 miles

round-trip; **Alum Cave Trail** at the Alum Cave parking lot on Newfound Gap Road, 11 miles round-trip; **Rainbow Falls Trail** or **Trillium Gap**, each 13.4 miles round-trip; or **Bull Head**, 14.4 miles round-trip from Cherokee Orchard. *Bull Head will be closed from Monday through Thursday each week, excluding federal holidays, until November 6, 2025 for rehabilitation.* **LeConte Lodge** is located in the trees not far from the summit.

MOUNTAIN FARM MUSEUM

Settled around 1800, Oconaluftee is now home to Mountain Farm Museum, which replicates a late 19th-century farm with a house, barn, corncrib, sorghum molasses mill and blacksmith shop. From spring through October, there are **costumed interpretive demonstrations**. The museum is located a short walk from the Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

NEWFOUND GAP

Figuratively (and almost literally) the park's center, Newfound Gap is the cut through the crest of the Great Smoky Mountains located between Sugarlands and Oconaluftee, along Newfound Gap Road. The Tennessee-North Carolina border crosses the gap east to west, as does the Appalachian Trail. At 5,046 feet, it offers spectacular views of the park.

WESTERN SECTION

CADES COVE

In the isolated valley of Cades Cove, first settled by Europeans in 1819, the NPS maintains a historical and cultural preserve of log cabins, churches and other buildings. **Cable Mill**, near Cades Cove Visitor Center, is an **operating water-powered gristmill** constructed in the early 1870s:

The **Cades Cove Loop Road** is an 11-mile, one-way road, open from sunrise to sunset, that passes 19 tour stops marked by numbered posts keyed to a pamphlet you can obtain at the beginning of the road or at visitor centers. The road is a favorite with cyclists because it is closed to all motor vehicles each Wednesday from June 18 to September 24, 2025 to provide for pedestrian and bicycle use. It is crowded during peak periods. Cades Cove can be reached via U.S. 321 near Townsend, Tennessee, as well as via Little River Road from Sugarlands Visitor Center.

Living history demonstrations, held from spring through fall, include the making of molasses, soap, and apple butter. Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park set up two drive-up donation boxes along the Loop Road. Funds go to visitor

facility improvements, natural, and cultural resource preservation, educational programs, and visitor services.

EASTERN SECTION

CATALOOCHEE VALLEY

Smaller and less visited, this lowland valley was once a choice site for farmsteads and became the largest settlement in the Smokies. Only a few of the nearly 200 buildings that were here at the turn of the 20th century remain. Farmhouses, barns, a schoolhouse, and a church are located in the valley. An unpaved steep and narrow road at the junction of I-40 and U.S. 276 leads to Cataloochee Valley.



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KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR ELK!

Elk once roamed the southern Appalachian Mountains, but were extirpated from the region by over-hunting and habitat loss. The last elk in the area are believed to have been killed by the mid-1800s. By 1900, alarmed by the decrease of population of elk in North America, hunting groups and other conservation organizations became concerned the species was headed for extinction. The park reintroduced elk to the park in 2001 and the herd has grown to at least 200 animals.

ELK FACTS

Bulls weigh 800-900 pounds and have antlers as wide as five feet, while cows average 600 pounds. Adults are seven to 10 feet long from nose to tail and stand four and a half to five feet tall at the shoulder. Cows usually give birth to only one calf annually beginning in the second autumn of their lives. Newborns weigh about 35 pounds and can stand within minutes of birth. Elk graze on grasses, forbs, and acorns, and browse bark, leaves, and buds from shrubs and trees. In the Smokies, coyotes, bobcats, and black bears may kill young, sick, or injured elk. Those that survive these threats can live as long as 20 years, though 15 is more typical.

VIEWING ELK

The best elk viewing opportunities are in Cataloochee during early morning or late evening, as well as during the breeding season in autumn, known as "the rut". The rut is a fascinating mating ritual when the bulls bugle and compete for dominance to attract cows. Elk are also active on cloudy summer days and before or after storms. They are best viewed at a distance, using binoculars or a spotting scope for close-up views. It is un-



lawful to approach elk. Approaching wildlife causes undue stress, forcing them to expend crucial energy unnecessarily and can result in real harm. **If a nearby animal stops feeding, changes direction of travel, or otherwise alters its behavior, you are too close!**

WARNING!

Elk are the largest animals in the park and they can be dangerous. Cows will defend their calves and they've been known to charge people in the park. Bull elk may perceive people as a challenge to their territory and may charge too, especially during the breeding season. Always keep your distance and never touch or move elk calves. Though they may appear to be orphaned, it is likely that their mother is nearby feeding.

The use of spotlights, elk bugles, and other wildlife calls are illegal in the national park. It is also illegal to remove elk antlers or other elk parts from the park. Never feed elk or other wildlife or bait them in for closer observation. Feeding park wildlife is strictly forbidden by law and almost always leads to the animal's demise.

Gatlinburg, TN



As one of Great Smoky Mountains National Park's principal gateway communities, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, hosts many of the park's millions of annual visitors. It is located on U.S. 441 on the park's northern border, just two miles north of the Sugarlands Visitor Center. The city offers lodging, dining, shopping, and other services to make your stay convenient and comfortable.

LODGING

Gatlinburg offers accommodations for every taste and budget. Within Gatlinburg, there are more than 14,000 sleeping rooms including hotels and motels; cabins, condominiums, chalets, inns, and lodges; nine bed and breakfasts, and three private campgrounds. Book early, especially if you're visiting during the summer, over the weekend, or during holiday periods. For more information, please contact the Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau at **(865) 436-4178** or gatlinburg.com.

DINING

More than 100 restaurants contribute to Gatlinburg's food scene, with plenty of options for every taste, from gourmet hubs serving seafood, prime rib, and wild game, to locally owned eateries serving the best in authentic Southern cooking. Dress up if you like, but dining in Gatlinburg is a casual affair.

In 2019, country music superstar Blake Shelton opened Ole Red Gatlinburg, a restaurant, bar, and music venue featuring Southern cuisine and live music.

SHOPPING

Gatlinburg has over 500 gift and specialty shops. Handcrafted leather goods, wood carvings, quilts, homemade fudge and candies, jewelry, custom glassware, and furniture and pottery are available. Gatlinburg is also home to the **Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Trail**, the largest gathering of independent artisans in North America. Located on an eight-mile loop only three miles from downtown Gatlinburg on East Parkway (U.S. 321-N), the Arts & Crafts Trail features more than 120 shops, studios, and galleries for those interested in collecting one-of-a-kind pieces of artwork and crafts. In downtown, the handcrafted, old-world European design of **The Village Shops** transports you back in time as you shop its 27 stores, boutiques and galleries.

ENTERTAINMENT

Gatlinburg SkyLift Park offers thrilling experiences for travelers, including the SkyDeck amphitheater which features an expansive view of the Great Smoky Mountains; and the SkyBridge, which is the longest pedestrian suspension bridge in North America.

Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies features more than 1.3 million gallons of salt water and is home to thousands of rare fish including 12-foot sharks and other aquatic wildlife. Its Penguin Playhouse, an exhibit of African black-footed penguins, provides an additional interactive offering to aquarium visitors. **Ober Gatlinburg Ski Area and Amusement Park** offers winter skiing, snowboarding, and tubing, year-round.

indoor ice skating, and America's largest tram, a 120-passenger aerial tram that whisks you from downtown Gatlinburg to the top of Mt. Harrison.

Anakeesta celebrates the Smokies' rich mountain heritage. Take a Chondola ride to the summit of Anakeesta Mountain, where you'll be treated to spectacular views, shopping, and dining at the new Cliff Top Bar and Grill. Your inner adventurer will love the 16-bridge Tree Canopy Walk, Dueling 1,000+ foot Zipline Adventure, and the Brandauer single rail mountain coaster!

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Convenient free trolley service travels throughout Gatlinburg.

SPECIAL EVENTS YEAR-ROUND

Gatlinburg offers popular special events throughout the year.

The **76th Annual Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage** held from April 23-25, 2026 boasts more than 199 programs, including hiking tours, motorcades, demonstrations, and lectures centered on the park's flora.

On the evening of July 3, tens of thousands of people gather for Gatlinburg's **4th of July Midnight Parade**. Distinguished as the first Independence Day parade in the country, it steps off at 12:01 p.m. The event's festivities conclude with a downtown fireworks extravaganza the night of the 4th.

At the **Craftsmen's Fair** on July 11-20 and October 2-19, you'll find the best in art, crafts and music with more than 200 exhibitors from across the country.

The **Gatlinburg Songwriters Festival** celebrates the area's Appalachian musical roots from August 15-16 with entertainment, song competition, workshops, mentoring sessions, and stage spots. The festival promotes songwriters and entertains music fans.

Celebrate **Fall Festival at Ober Mountain**. The festival features Bavarian-style food, beverages, music, and live entertainment during daily shows all month long. Specific dates have not yet been announced, but the event usually takes place September-October.

The **Smoky Mountain Harvest Festival** celebrates the season with new 3D Scarecrow people, festivals, special events, and autumn-themed displays mid-September through late November.

The **Pigeon Forge Winterfest** runs from mid-November 2025 through January 4, 2026, with millions of small, twinkling lights coming together on streets throughout the mountain towns to form elaborate displays.

Shop early for a one-of-a-kind Christmas present during the **Thanksgiving Arts & Craft Show** at the Gatlinburg Convention Center, late November.

Gatlinburg's **50th Annual Fantasy of Lights Christmas Parade** on December 5 is one of the most popular events of the season, with lighted floats, marching bands, balloons, and more.

Kick off the new year in style. Gatlinburg celebrates **Auld Lang Syne** with a **New Year's Eve Ball Drop and Fireworks Show** from the top of the 400-foot-tall Gatlinburg Space Needle.



The strong crafts tradition in the Smokies produces many fine handcrafted items. Long after most people along the Eastern Seaboard lived in a cash economy, the mountain people still spun thread from sheep shearings, built furniture from forest hardwoods, and made baskets styled after those made by the Cherokee people, their predecessors in the region.

Appalachian crafts include rocking and cane chairs, cornshuck dolls, hand-carved wood sculptures, and woven items such as napkins, jackets, scarves, and blankets.

Situated along a lush eight-mile loop is the only zoned crafts community in the United States and the largest group of independent artisans in North America, proudly known as Great Smoky Arts & Craft Community.

Established in 1937, the community boasts celebrated artisans with a variety of skills, specializing in everything from whittling to painting, sewing, weaving, and carving to cre-

ate original collectibles and works. No visitor will leave empty-handed when they shop the many contemporary crafts, handmade gifts, and one-of-a-kind pieces. In the spring, arts and crafts lovers can learn craftsmanship in a variety of mediums during Hands on Gatlinburg, a weekend-long event packed with workshops taught by community artists.

Visitors to this artists' haven can step back in time and witness the rich heritage of Gatlinburg come to life when they stroll through more than 100 of the community's shops, restaurants, and studios.

Those looking for unique creations in downtown Gatlinburg can find them at the internationally-recognized Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. Aspiring and advanced artists can participate in workshops taught by studio artists and university faculty.

Please visit gatlinburg.com for more information.



Cherokee, NC



GUIDE SERVICES

Smoky Mountain Angler offers full- or half-day group and personally guided fishing trips, including waders, rods, and licenses; call **(865) 436-8746** for more information. **A Walk in the Woods** features guided day hikes, nature walks, and backpacking trips; call **(865) 436-8283** for more information. **Nantahala Outdoor Center's Great Outpost**, immediately adjacent to the park's Gatlinburg entrance, features outdoor gear and guide services for hiking, trout fishing, and rafting; call **(865) 277-8209** for more information.

VISITOR SERVICES

There are seven banks with 24-hour ATMs, several service stations, grocery stores, liquor stores, and drug stores. Call **911** for ambulance service.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For brochures and additional information, please call the Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau at **(865) 436-4178**; visit **gatlinburg.com**, or download the Gatlinburg app.



For answers to all your questions,
go to **OhRanger.com**

In Cherokee, there's too much to do in one day. A culture, a people and a place that's actually a sovereign nation, Cherokee is located right in the heart of Western North Carolina. It's also base camp for hiking in the Great Smokies, arts and crafts shopping, elk viewing and hours of fishing fun, and it's home to a history that spans millennia. Each place you visit pulses with the stories and significance of a people whose roots run deep and whose ancient wisdom is fascinating to uncover. How will Cherokee affect you?

THE MUSEUM OF THE CHEROKEE PEOPLE

Inspired by the beauty and ingenuity of the Cherokees, this museum is a cultural and historical tour without equal. Hear the whir of the arrow and feel the vibrations of the drums amid spectacular exhibits. Step through the doors and discover up close the Cherokee people's spirit of inventiveness and resilience, and their will to survive.

OCONALUFTEE INDIAN VILLAGE

As you step onto the soft trails of the village, you're immediately transported to the 1760s. The faint tang of wood smoke wafts by as a Cherokee cultural expert leads you on an interactive journey through ancient and authentic Cherokee lifestyle and history. Speak with villagers as they hull canoes, offer blowgun demonstrations, sculpt pottery and masks, weave baskets, and fashion beadwork. Watch as a village prepares for war.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

Having Great Smoky Mountains National Park at your doorstep means heaven for outdoorsy folk. The Cherokee people treat their environment with great care and respect in order to eat well and stay in harmony with nature. Consider that over 800 miles of the best hiking trails east of the Mississippi are located here.

"UNTO THESE HILLS"

A spectacular reimagining of the Cherokee story, **"Unto These Hills"** is an outdoor drama that portrays the gripping legacy of the Cherokee people through the zenith of their power, through the heartbreak of the Trail of Tears and finally ending in the present day, where the Cherokee people continue to rewrite their place in the world.

QUALLA ARTS & CRAFTS MUTUAL, INC.

As you walk in, you note the smooth wood of the dramatic masks used in traditional dance rituals or the cool clay of the wedding vases. Founded in 1946 with the purpose of preserving and advancing Cherokee arts and crafts, Qualla Arts & Crafts Mutual, Inc. is the oldest and foremost Native American arts cooperative in the United States. Here, thousands of authentic treasures wait to go home with you.

FISHING IN CHEROKEE

In Cherokee, anglers enjoy 30 miles of streams, arguably the longest stretch of managed fishing waters in the eastern U.S., stocked with trout: rainbow, brook, golden, and brown. You will discover

thousands of new favorite fishing spots in Cherokee, all collected into one amazingly beautiful place.

HARRAH'S CHEROKEE CASINO RESORT

Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort is home to a 21-story, four-star luxury hotel nestled in the beautiful mountains of western North Carolina. Guests have access to an arcade, indoor pool, workout room, and several delicious restaurants. The Mandara Spa brings casino guests the highest quality of therapeutic luxury.

FIRE MOUNTAIN TRAILS

Cherokee's Fire Mountain Trails boasts 11 miles of multiuse routes for mountain bikers, hikers, and runners alike. Designed for flow and fun, the network features smooth single-track, rock gardens, berms, and elevation changes for all skill levels. The system winds through breathtaking Great Smoky Mountains scenery—inviting both thrill-seekers and casual explorers to enjoy nature, responsibly and joyfully, in one of North Carolina's most scenic outdoor settings. The trailhead is located at 160 Indian Village Road, about 100 yards from the Oconaluftee Indian Village.

SEQUOYAH NATIONAL GOLF CLUB

Your Sequoyah National Golf Club experience begins with a Robert Trent Jones II design enveloped in dramatic mountain beauty. With 6,600 yards of rolling fairways and fun, playable tees for all skill levels, it's little wonder Sequoyah is consistently recognized as one of the top public golf courses in the United States.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Make a special event the foundation of your vacation. Festivals, fairs, and other cultural events abound throughout the spring, summer and fall. All provide an easy opportunity to absorb some Cherokee culture through dance, food, craft making, and more. For a full list of events, go to visitcherokeenc.com. The **Cherokee Indian Fair**, which takes place in October, has been taking place for more than a century. It's a cornucopia of sights and sounds, and a treat for the senses, with food, music, and rides.

MINGO FALLS

Mingo Falls is one of the tallest waterfalls in the Southern Appalachians, cascading 120 feet down rugged rock. A short but steep trail with 161 steps leads to a stunning viewing bridge. Visitors enjoy picnics, misty mornings, and Cherokee legends in this scenic spot just five miles the park. Open daily and free to the public, Mingo Falls is a must-see destination!

LODGING, DINING & TRANSPORTATION

Cherokee offers accommodations to suit everyone's taste and budget, with a great selection of hotels, motels, rental cabins and cottages, and more than 15 campgrounds. Cherokee operates **two downtown shuttle routes** Monday through Friday, with stops every 30 minutes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Cherokee Welcome Center at **(828) 497-9195** or visitcherokeenc.com for more information on cultural events and attractions, hours and days of operation, group rates, and value packages.

Lodging & Dining



IN THE PARK LECONTE LODGE

For a taste of the pioneer life, stay at LeConte Lodge, a rustic collection of cabins located in the forest near the top of Mount LeConte. It can be reached only by taking one of five hiking trails, the shortest and steepest being 5.5-mile Alum Cave Trail. Allow yourself time to enjoy the incredibly diverse flora and fauna. Mountaineer Jack Huff built the lodge as a retreat in 1926. He and his wife, Pauline, operated the lodge until 1960. The present concessioner is Stokely Hospitality Enterprises.

Guests stay in rough-hewn private cabins or private rooms in cabins with shared living rooms. The lodge accommodates up to 50 guests. Cabins have kerosene lamps, heaters, sheets, and wool blankets; and no indoor plumbing, electricity, television, or telephones. Four flush toilets are located in outhouses. Prices include meals. Overnight guests are served meals "family style" in the Dining Hall. This is for breakfast and dinner service only. Lunch can be served as a "to-go" meal. Day hikers and backpackers are welcome to pick up meals from the gift shop as well.

The lodge is open late March to late November. To make reservations, contact the lodge to be entered in a lottery, which takes place each fall. For more information Call **(865) 429-5704** or visit lecontelodge.com.

NEAR THE PARK

Accommodations and restaurants are available in many communities near the park. For a more complete list of nearby towns, see the chart in this chapter.

PIGEON FORGE, TENNESSEE

Pigeon Forge is located near the park's north entrance and is home to Dollywood, where visitors experience mountain traditions, amazing adventures, and live entertainment.

Warm weather fun continues through October when glorious fall foliage adorns the city. Fall also brings several arts and crafts festivals, two of which are nationally acclaimed. Arrive between November and February to be greeted by five million twinkling lights—part of the annual Winterfest celebration. Live entertainment and traditional holiday festivities take place in November and December, while January and February feature dozens of special events like a storytelling festival. For a complete list of upcoming events, visit pigeonforge.com/events.

Pigeon Forge is also a prime destination for outlet aficionados, boasting more than 200 factory outlet stores, as well as specialty and craft villages.

TOWNSEND, TENNESSEE

In the early 1890s, this little mountain village was the capital of the lumber industry in the eastern United States. Townsend has become a peaceful vacation spot for travelers who want comfort, good food, affordable prices, and easy access to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Accommodations include modern motels, amenity-filled log cabins, and campgrounds. You can enjoy golfing, tennis, swimming,

tubing, and horseback riding. Some facilities also offer games, fishing poles, and badminton sets for children. Bicycle rentals are available for visitors who want to take advantage of the paved, three-mile bike trail that parallels U.S. 321 through the community.

Townsend's excellent restaurants offer varied menus, some of which specialize in regional dishes such as Tennessee country ham. Many restaurants will prepare box lunches, perfect for a picnic in the Smokies.

NEARBY COMMUNITIES: LODGING & DINING CONTACTS

Accommodations and restaurants are available in nearby communities. Contact the local visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce or departments of tourism below for more information. See the "Plan Your Visit" chapter for a regional map and directions.

Cherokee, North Carolina (828) 497-9195
Adjacent to the park on U.S. 441 at the park's south entrance. See the "Cherokee" chapter for more information.
visitcherokeenc.com

Gatlinburg, Tennessee (865) 436-4178
Adjacent to the park on U.S. 441 near the park's north entrance. See the "Gatlinburg" chapter for more information.
gatlinburg.com

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee (800) 251-9100 or (865) 453-8574
On U.S. 441 near the park's north entrance
mypigeonforge.com

Townsend, Tennessee (800) 525-6834
On U.S. 321 near the park's west entrance
smokymountains.org

Bryson City, North Carolina (828) 488-3681
Off U.S. 74 near the park's south entrance
greatsmokies.com

Fontana Dam, North Carolina (800) 470-3790 or (828) 479-3790
On Highway 28 on the park's southern boundary
grahamcountytravel.com

Maggie Valley, North Carolina (828) 926-1686
Off U.S. 19, southeast of the park
maggievalley.org

Sevierville, Tennessee (888) 738-4378 or (865) 453-6411
On U.S. 441 near the park's north entrance
visitsevierville.com

Jefferson County, Tennessee (865) 471-1881
On I-40 and I-81 near the park's north entrance
jeffersoncountyvacation.com

Cosby, Tennessee (423) 623-7201
On U.S. 321 near the park's east entrance
newportcockecountychamber.com

Asheville, North Carolina (828) 258-6129
Off of I-26 and I-240 east of the park
exploreasheville.com

Waynesville, North Carolina (828) 456-3517
Off U.S. 74 east of the park
downtownwaynesville.com

Things To Do



Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers a variety of things to do each season.

SPRING, SUMMER & FALL PARK PROGRAMS

The NPS offers talks, slide shows, films, guided nature and history walks, and evening campfire programs. The park provides a wealth of year-round classes and programs covering almost every aspect of its nature and history.

HISTORIC EXHIBITS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Barns, churches, a school, and many cabins are preserved in Cataloochee Valley. This was once the largest settlement in the Smokies and is located in the park's southeast area. The NPS also maintains historical cabins, farmhouses and churches in Cades Cove, a valley in the western area. Here, and at other locations throughout the park from spring through October, park employees dress as 19th-century settlers and demonstrate how mountain people lived. At the Mountain Farm Museum near the Oconaluftee Visitor Center, they spin wool, weave cloth, forge tools, and make sorghum into molasses. At Minus Mill, also near Oconaluftee, and Cable Mill, near Cades Cove Visitor Center, millers grind corn into cornmeal and wheat into flour using a water-powered gristmill.

FIELD STUDIES

The Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont is located in the park near Townsend, Tennessee. Open year-round this center educates visitors through

special science programs, family weekends, outdoor experiences, craft workshops, and other offerings. On-site lodging and dining facilities allow participants to immerse themselves in the programs, which usually last two to six days and cover a variety of subjects. Reservations are required for all 2025 programs. For details, please call (865) 448-6709 or visit gsmit.org.

The University of Tennessee Smoky Mountain Field School offers nature programs and activities that incorporate backpacking and hiking. Programs, which run from four hours to two days and are frequently held on weekends, cover various aspects of natural and cultural history. *Note you must be 18 or older to register for and attend a Smoky Mountain Field School course.* For more information, call (865) 974-0150 or visit cpell.utk.edu/programs-courses/smoky-mountain-field-school.





THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

The Appalachian Trail was proposed by conservationist **Benton MacKaye** in 1921. Work began the following year, and by 1937, the trail was complete. The first person to walk its entire length, from Georgia to Maine, did so in 1948. Every year, a couple thousand hikers repeat the feat. Successful hikers include a 6-year-old boy, several octogenarians, and a visually impaired man with his service animal. The entire trip takes four to six months, crossing 14 states, eight national forests, two national parks and 15 major rivers. Elevations range from 6,643 feet at Clingmans Dome in the Smokies to near sea level at the Hudson River in New York. The segment within the park follows the Smokies' ridgeline 68 miles for nearly the entire length of the park. You can access the trail at Newfound Gap, Kuwohi, Fontana Dam, and at the end of Highway 32 just north of Big Creek Campground. For a suggested route within the park, see the "Walking and Hiking" chapter.

BICYCLING

The park has limited areas for safe biking because roads tend to be steep and narrow, and bicycles are prohibited on trails. Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley, however, make for pleasant cycling. The 11-mile loop road around Cades Cove is closed to automobiles on Wednesdays from mid-June through September. Rent bikes at the Cades Cove Campground Store and at Nantahala Outdoor Center in Gatlinburg.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Equestrians consider the Smokies among the best riding country in the east. About 550 miles of the park's hiking trails are open to horses. Obtain a copy of the park's trail map, which outlines the rules and regulations of riding in the backcountry. It also has information about backcountry camping and permit requirements. Official trail maps are available at any park visitor center or by calling **(865) 436-1297**.

You can also rent horses from concessioner-managed stables located in the park:

Cades Cove, **(865) 448-9009**; Sugarlands Riding Stables, **(865) 436-5470** and Smokemont, **(828) 497-2373**.

The NPS requires concessioners to send guides with rental horses. Children younger than 6 years old must ride with an adult. The park's five drive-in horse camps are open April through October. Reservations are required and can be made by calling **(877) 444-6777** or visiting **recreation.gov**. In addition, Cades Cove Riding Stable offers carriage and hay rides (wheelchair accessible). The Smokemont Riding Stable offers horse-drawn wagon rides along the historic Oconaluftee Turnpike.

PICNICKING

There are 11 picnic areas in the park. Several remain open year-round and about half have pavilions that are available to reserve up to one year in advance. A pavillion reservation does not exempt visitors from the Parking Tag requirement. Visit the park's website for a listing of picnic areas or call **(877) 444-6777**.



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FISHING

You can fish for smallmouth bass, rock bass, and brook, rainbow, or brown trout within the park's bountiful streams from sunrise to sunset. A valid North Carolina or Tennessee state fishing license is required. You can purchase one at sporting goods stores in gateway communities, at the Gatlinburg Welcome Center at the north entrance of town or at ncwildlife.gov or GoOutdoorsTennessee.com. Make sure you pick up a copy of fishing regulations at the visitor centers.

WINTER

The two main roads, Newfound Gap and Little River, are closed when they become unsafe. Kuwohi Road is closed to cars in winter from early December to April 1. For road and weather conditions, please call **(865) 436-1200**.

WINTER RECREATION

Kuwohi Road is one of the best places in the park for cross-country skiing and

sledding. **Ober Mountain Ski Area & Amusement Park** offers downhill skiing, snowboarding, snow tubing, and ice skating. Hikers will have the **Appalachian Trail** all to themselves during the winter. From November through April at elevations above 4,000 feet, it is often snowy with temperatures frequently falling below zero. There is no in-park lodging during the winter, but the Cades Cove and Smokemont campgrounds remain open year-round.

WINTER WILDLIFE WATCHING

The park teems with life and you'll see plenty of white-tailed deer, woodchucks, and raccoons in winter, especially around Cades Cove. You likely won't see bears, though; they'll be denning—hibernating. Some small birds, such as black-capped chickadees also winter in the Smokies, as are larger ones like wild turkeys. The "Nature & Wildlife" chapter has more information about plants and animals in the park.



Grand Canyon



Grand Tetons



Yellowstone Park



Yosemite Valley



Glacier Park

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Walking & Hiking



With its miles of scenic paths and trails, Great Smoky Mountains is meant to be explored on foot. Whether you're a casual day hiker or a determined mountaineer, there's a trail for you. You can choose to stroll easy quarter-mile paths called **Quiet Walkways** or go on self-guiding nature walks (pamphlets describing points of interest are available at the trailheads). If you're an experienced hiker, you can tackle trails that bring you up steep mountainsides, along high ridges, and through deep forests with rushing streams. Be sure to stop at a visitor center beforehand to learn about your walking and hiking options; pick up maps, and find out about weather and trail conditions; and trail closures.

Big Creek Trail is closed beyond the first two miles at Mouse Creek Falls due to significant damage. There is no access to campsites 36 and 37 from Big Creek Trail. Scott Mountain Trail is closed between campsite 6 to Schoolhouse Gap. Laurel Falls Trail is closed

as of January 6, 2025 for rehabilitation and is not expected to reopen for 18 months.

HIKING TIPS

- **Consider the weather.** If you get caught in a thunderstorm, stay off the balds and away from meadows and other open areas to avoid getting hit by lightning. Always carry rain gear.
- **Know your limitations.** An average hiker travels two miles an hour. Steep terrain, heavy loads, or young children may slow your travel time.
- **Stick to the trails.** Getting lost or injured is much more likely to occur if you are away from established trails. If you do become lost or are overtaken by darkness, stay calm and remain where you are. Park rescues of overdue hikers who stay on trails are usually successful within a few hours; it may take days to locate hikers off the trails. Never hike alone and always leave an itinerary with someone.
- **Be wary of bears and boars**—give them a wide berth. Experienced hikers wear bells, carry a whistle, talk, or sing to announce their presence to bears.
- **To prevent blisters**, the most common ailment on the trail, wear comfortable shoes or boots that suit your needs and the terrain. Likewise, choose quality outdoor socks that will cushion and protect your feet.
- **Don't drink stream water.** It may contain impurities and parasites that can make you ill. Boil, filter, or treat (with iodine pills) any water from streams or springs.
- **Do not rely on technology to help you.** Cell phones do not work most places in the backcountry and GPS is sometimes unreliable. Carry a current park trail map and know how to read it.



WALKING & HIKING TRAILS

Trail Trailhead	Description	Round-Trip Distance	Difficulty Elevation Gain
Abrams Falls Trail <i>Abrams Falls Parking Lot at west end of Cades Cove Loop Road</i>	This relatively level trail leads to the 20-foot-high Abrams Falls, which spills into a scenic pool.	5 miles	moderate 340 feet
Alum Cave Trail <i>Alum Cave Bluffs parking area at Newfound Gap Road between Newfound Gap and Chimney Tops</i>	Travel through Arch Rock's erosion-created tunnel to Alum Cave Bluffs and finally up steep cliffs to Mount LeConte, one of the park's best viewpoints.	11 miles	strenuous 2,800 feet
Appalachian Trail <i>Newfound Gap</i>	A popular section of the trail leads from Newfound Gap to Charles Bunion, which passes through a spruce-fir forest with spectacular vistas.	8 miles	moderate 980 feet
Boulevard Trail <i>Appalachian Trail from Newfound Gap to Boulevard Trail</i>	This is one of five trails to Mount LeConte's summit. It is the longest, but less steep and still considered strenuous.	16 miles	strenuous 1,545 feet
Chimney Tops Trail <i>Chimney Tops Trailhead on Newfound Gap Road</i>	Because of heavy damage from the November 2016 fire, this trail no longer provides access to Chimney Top pinnacles. NPS created an observation area from which hikers can view them.	1.75 miles	strenuous 1,335 feet
Hen Wallow Falls Trail <i>Before the picnic area on the road to Cosby Campground</i>	A good, short day hike. The main trail leads to the top of the falls; a steep, narrow side trail leads to the bottom.	4 miles	moderate 520 feet
Indian Creek Falls Trail <i>End of Deep Creek Road just past the Deep Creek Campground</i>	This flat trail leads to picturesque Indian Creek Falls, which cascades 60 feet down a series of ledges into a wide pool.	2 miles	easy 100 feet
Laurel Falls Trail <i>Laurel Falls parking area on Little River Road</i>	The paved trail is the most popular waterfall trail in the park. It passes through a pine and oak forest.	2.5 miles	easy 200 feet
Ramsey Cascades Trail* <i>From Greenbrier, follow signs to the Ramsey Cascades trailhead.</i>	This trail passes through an old-growth deciduous forest before reaching the 100-foot-high Ramsey Cascades.	8 miles	strenuous 2,375 feet
Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail** <i>Off Newfound Gap Road, 0.25-mile south of Sugarlands Visitor Center. &</i>	A paved trail leads to the forest, a river and the remains of pre-park dwellings. Favorite among older visitors, families with children in strollers, and visitors with mobility and sensory impairments.	0.5 mile	easy level

* Do not attempt to climb to the top of the falls; several attempts have resulted in fatalities.

** Special communications media are available at the visitor center to assist in interpreting nature.

Note: Hike times range from 1.5 miles to 3 miles per hour, depending on the steepness of the terrain and the physical fitness of the hiker. Plan your hike based on your individual ability and the trail descriptions above.

Camping



Great Smoky Mountain camping is primitive by design. The park operates 10 front-country campgrounds that have 1,000 sites. These campgrounds have cold running water, picnic tables, fire pits, and flush toilets. There are no RV hookups or showers. The largest campgrounds also have amphitheaters used for ranger talks and slide shows. Cades Cove and Smokemont remain open year round. For more information about the park's five drive-in horse camps, please see the "Things to Do" chapter.

RESERVATIONS

All campsites require a reservation in advance. To make one, visit [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) or call (877) 444-6777. Reservations may be made up to six months in advance.

RESTRICTIONS

Stays of up to seven days are allowed from mid-May through October; 14 consecutive days is the limit during the rest of the year. Longer stays require that you move to another campground.

BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING

Permits are required in the backcountry and are available online or at the backcountry office at the Sugarlands Visitor Center. Anyone staying overnight in the backcountry must camp in one of the nearly 100 designated sites or shelters. Permit and reservations can be made up to one month in advance and cost \$8 per person per night with a maximum fee of \$40 per person per permit for up to seven nights. As of March 1, 2023, backpackers who are planning to park a car must also purchase a parking tag.

Always prepare before heading into the backcountry—listen to the local forecast and pack proper clothing, food, water, and equipment. Always store your food properly and follow Leave No Trace principles. For information about backcountry trail and campsite closures and to make backcountry camping reservations, call (865) 436-1297, or visit smokiespermits.nps.gov.

CAMPGROUNDS

Campground	Open dates	# of Sites	Elevation (ft)	Fee Per Night
Abrams Creek †	typically April to October	16	1,125 ft.	\$30
Balsam Mountain †	typically May to October	43	5,310 ft.	\$30
Big Creek*^ †	typically April to October	12	1,700 ft.	\$30
Cades Cove* †	Year-round	161	1,807 ft.	\$30
Cataloochee* †	May 5 to October 17	27	2,610 ft.	\$30
Cosby* †	typically March to October	157	2,459 ft.	\$30
Deep Creek* †	April 18 to October 25	92	1,800 ft.	\$30
Elkmont* †	March 14 to November 30	211	2,150 ft.	\$30
Look Rock †	typically April to October	68	2,600 ft.	\$30-\$36
Smokemont* †	Year-round	142	2,198 ft.	\$30

*Group sites available ^No RVs permitted †Requires advanced reservations

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- **Natural disasters and weather events:** May cover the cost of damage from storms, floods, or other natural disasters.

Is your travel trailer covered under your home or auto insurance?

While your home or auto policy can protect your trailer in certain instances, it can also leave you with gaps in your coverage.

For example, your auto policy may only cover your trailer while you're on the road, not if you're parked or at a campsite. The same goes for home insurance—if you're on your home's property it might be covered, but damage from a storm at a campground wouldn't be.

What specialized coverages does Progressive offer?

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Nature & Wildlife



The astounding variety of plants and animals in the Smokies is unequalled in most temperate areas of the world.

Biological diversity is the hallmark of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which encompasses more than 800 square miles in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. No other area of equal size in a temperate climate can match the park's amazing diversity of plants, animals and invertebrates. Almost **20,000 species** have been documented in the park; scientists believe an additional 25,000 to 50,000 species may live here.

Mountains, glaciers and weather are the primary factors in the park's diversity. Elevations in the park range from 875 to 6,643 feet, mimicking the latitudinal changes you would experience driving north or south across the eastern United States from Georgia to Canada. Plants and animals common in the southern United States thrive in the lowlands of the Smokies, while species common in the northern states find a suitable habitat in the higher elevations.

The Great Smoky Mountains are among the oldest mountains in the world, formed perhaps **200-300 million years ago**. They are unique in their northeast to southwest orientation, which allowed species to migrate along their slopes during climatic changes such as the last ice age, 10,000 years ago. In fact, the glaciers of the last ice age affected the Smoky Mountains without invading them. During that time, glaciers scoured much of North America, but did not quite reach as far south as the Smokies. Consequently, these mountains became a refuge for many species of plants and animals that were

displaced from their northern homes. The Smokies have been relatively undisturbed by glaciers or ocean inundation for over a million years, allowing species to diversify.

The park's abundant **rainfall**, 55 inches in the valleys to over 85 inches on some peaks, along with high summertime humidity provides excellent growing conditions. During wet years, over eight feet of snow falls in the high country. The relative humidity in the park during the growing season is about twice that of the Rocky Mountain region.

Some 100 species of **native trees** find homes in the Smokies, more than any other North American national park. Almost 95 percent of the park is forested, 25 percent of which is **old-growth**—one of

FOLIAGE COLOR GUIDE

The Smokies foliage changes in the mountains beginning in mid-September and moves down to the valleys through October, often continuing into early November. Here is a guide to the spectacular fall colors.

Yellow	Flowering beech, birch, black gum, buckeye, hickory mountain ash, and poplar trees
Scarlet	Red maple tree
Red	Dogwood, maple, pin cherry, sourwood, and sumac trees
Crimson	Blackberry and blueberry bushes
Mixture	Buckeye northern red oak pin cherry (orange, red), red maple, sugar maple (yellow, orange, scarlet), sweet gum (yellow, red, dark purple), and witch hobble (yellow, red)

the largest blocks of deciduous, temperate, old-growth forest remaining in North America. Over 1,500 additional flowering plant species grow in the park. The park is the center of diversity for lungless salamanders and is home to more than **200 species of birds, 66 types of mammals, 50 fish species, 39 varieties of reptiles, and 43 species of amphibians**. Mollusks, millipedes, and mushrooms reach record diversity here. In recognition of the park's unique natural resources, the United Nations has designated Great Smoky Mountains National Park as an International Biosphere Reserve.

ALL TAXA BIODIVERSITY INVENTORY

There has been much written about the accelerating crisis in protecting global biodiversity. This is as much an issue in the tropics as it is in the United States. How can



we make critical decisions about protection, when we do not know what species exist, their relative abundance or distribution?

Discover Life in America, a non-profit partner of the national park, is coordinating an All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, or ATBI, to catalogue the estimated 25,000 to 50,000 species of living organisms in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

You can be a part of the ATBI. Join other citizen scientists and volunteers in discovering new species in the park. For more information, visit **DLIA.org**.



→ PLANT LIFE



The Smokies' diversity of flowering plants and deciduous trees makes for a colorful spring, summer and fall. The spring bloom starts in the valleys in late March and works upward to the peaks through July, while the changing colors of the leaves starts on the peaks as early as mid-September and work downward to the valleys into early to mid-November.

FLOWERS

BLOODROOT

This plant's name is derived from its stem, from which American Indians made red dye. A member of the poppy family, the bloodroot's flowers are white with a gold center. It grows along streams in wooded areas.

DUTCHMAN'S BREECHES

This white flower's shape is reminiscent of a pair of pantaloons hung out on the line to dry. The leafless flowering stalk arches over the bluish, finely dissected leaves, which stand upright.

STAR CHICKWEED

This native perennial wildflower member has white star-like flowers with deeply cleft petals in clusters atop an erect stem. It is usually found in woods and on rocky slopes April through June and grows 6 to 16 inches tall.

TREES

BLACK CHERRY

This is the park's largest native cherry tree, growing up to 60 feet tall. It has white blossoms in spring and leaves that turn red or yellow in fall.

BLACK LOCUST

Black locusts grow mainly in the southern Appalachian Mountains and have forking, irregular trunks. Their aromatic white flowers appear in late spring, and their fruit consists of flat brown pods, which appear in fall and then split open in winter.

MOUNTAIN LAUREL

This common evergreen shrub ranges along the East Coast from southern Maine to northern Florida and west to Louisiana. Its small pink or white flowers appear in spring in clusters of pointed buds, and its leaves are long and narrow.

→ WATCHABLE WILDLIFE



BLACK BEAR

Approximately 1,500 bears live in the park. Coming out to forage during the day, they eat juicy plant parts, insects, berries, nuts, acorns, and meat. See the "Park Regulations & Safety" chapter for bear safety tips. • **Weight** 200-600 pounds • **Size** 5-6 feet long • **Active** spring through fall.

RED-TAILED HAWK

Red-tailed Hawks are among the largest and most recognizable raptors in the country. With their broad, four-foot wingspan, the hawks can be seen soaring over the park's meadows searching for prey—squirrels, rabbits, and other small mammals, snakes, and birds. • **Weight** 2-4 pounds • **Size** 2 feet long • **Active** year-round.

NORTHERN SPRING PEEPER

This nocturnal tree frog gets its name from its familiar peeping sound. Although rarely seen, these frogs are often heard throughout the park. They live in wooded areas near ponds and lakes. • **Weight** 1 pound • **Size** 1 inch long • **Active** spring through fall.

RED FOX

This reddish fox, with white under-parts, chin and throat, is common in the park, but is rarely seen because it is shy and nocturnal. It eats almost anything it can sink its teeth into, including birds, crickets, and plants. • **Weight** 10-15 pounds • **Size** 15-30 inches long • **Active** spring and summer.

WHITE-EYED VIREO

A small and shy songbird, the White-eyed Vireo inhabits bushes and shrubby areas and is more noticeable for its explosive song than its appearance. Interestingly, the White-eyed Vireo bathes by rubbing against wet foliage. • **Weight** 0.5 ounce • **Size** 4-5 inches long • **Active** spring through fall.

WHITE-TAILED DEER

White-tailed deer live throughout the Smokies. Most commonly seen in areas with open fields such as Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley, more than 6,000 may live in the park. • **Weight** 100-350 pounds • **Size** 3-3.5 feet long • **Active** year-round.

Just For Kids



A visit to the Smokies gives kids a chance to get back to nature and learn about plant and animal life, living history and the wonders of the ecosystem. Here's a helpful rundown of fun ways kids can get involved. *Keep in mind that many park activities are seasonal.*

PARK ACTIVITIES

Become a Junior Ranger. Kids can earn a badge by engaging in specially-designed programs such as blacksmithing, pottery, venturing to learn about insects and other wildlife, or becoming a nature detective and identifying animal signs, tracks, and scat. Age-specific guide booklets are available at visitor centers.

Walk with a park ranger to get the scoop on nature during a ranger-guided walk, or attend a slide show at campground amphitheaters. Check the park newspaper for current times and topics.

Take a hayride in Cades Cove. Cool mornings are the best time to see wildlife. Call Cades Cove Riding Stables at (865) 448-9009 for reservations.

Take a field trip. The University of Tennessee Smoky Mountain Field School offers family programs on topics such as reptiles and amphibians, insects, and animal tracks. Call (865) 974-0150 or visit cpell.utk.edu/programs-courses/smoky-mountain-field-school for more information.

Listen to Southern Appalachian stories. Check visitor centers for times and locations of these stories about settlers, the Cherokee, and even ghosts.

Go Fishing. Nearly 700 miles of fishable streams meander down the Smokies and spill into Fontana Lake and three prongs of Little Pigeon River. Brook, rainbow, brown

trout, and other sport fish thrive here. You'll need a valid Tennessee or North Carolina fishing license, for sale in local communities, if you are 16 years or older (13 years or older for non-residents in Tennessee). Always follow state fishing regulations.

Attend Discovery Camp. Participate in a three-day program at Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, designed specifically for children ages 9 through 12. Summer youth programs focus on exploring the Smokies, hands-on science and adventure. Family camps, naturalist workshops and programs for kids are also available. For more information, call (865) 448-6709 or visit gsmit.org.

Families can now experience the Great Smoky Mountains from home with **Smokiee's @ Home** adventure. This is an extension of GSMNP's Parks as Classrooms program, in collaboration with Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Discover Life in America (DLIA) and Great Smoky Mountains Association (GSMA), and in partnership with Friends of the Smokies. Attend ranger-led activities, explore the park, and print your very own Junior Ranger badge. Visit smokiee.org to get exploring!

ACTIVITIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The gateway communities of Great Smoky Mountain National Park offer a variety of fun, kid-friendly events like the **Children's Trout Derby** in Cherokee, NC and **Smoky Mountain Tunes & Tales** in Gatlinburg, TN. For a listing of popular events in Cherokee and Gatlinburg, see the corresponding chapters in this guide. More information is also available at the chambers of commerce listed in the "Lodging & Dining" chapter.



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The southern Caribbean island of Curaçao welcomes you with the warmest embrace. From the moment you arrive, you're immersed in a world of vibrant color, rich culture, and a blend of European and Caribbean flair. Beyond its unique personality and charm, the island boasts endless adventures above and below the sea. Water lovers can enjoy scuba diving, snorkeling, jet skiing, boat trips, the ultimate beach day on one of over 35 beaches, and more. Back on land, activities include museums, spas, tours, biking, safari excursions, golf courses, festivals and beyond. Wherever you turn, you can count on a vibe like no other on an island that is sure to capture your heart.

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If You Only Have A Day

If you only have one day to visit the park, drive along **Newfound Gap Road** (U.S. 441) between the Sugarlands and Oconaluftee visitor centers. Begin at either visitor center. This trans-mountain road connects Tennessee to North Carolina, offering spectacular panoramic views and plenty to do along the way.

If you're driving south to Oconaluftee, stop first at Sugarlands Visitor Center to get information and a park overview.

A short drive leads to **Chimneys Picnic Area**, where you'll find the 0.75-mile, self-guided **Cove Hardwood Nature Trail**. **Chimney Tops Overlooks** offer a view of the twin summits called *Duniskwalguni*, which means "Forked Antlers" in Cherokee. Take a scenic seven-mile drive, then hike the steep half-mile paved trail to Clingman's Dome Observation Tower, for sweeping views.

Continue on Newfound Gap Road to **Oconaluftee Visitor Center**. Just beyond the visitor center is **Mountain Farm Museum**, a collection of farm buildings. Here, costumed interpreters reenact 19th-century farm life from spring through late October. At nearby **Mingus Mill**, watch a demonstration of how people ground grain for their daily bread.

Depending on which direction you drive, finish the trip with an evening in **Cherokee** or **Gatlinburg** (see the relevant chapters of this guide for more information).

Ride the **SkyLift**, a scenic chairlift, so that you can cross the **SkyBridge**, the longest pedestrian suspension bridge in North America! Enjoy panoramic views of Great Smoky Mountain National Park from high above the forest canopy including their newest overlook: Clayton's Landing.



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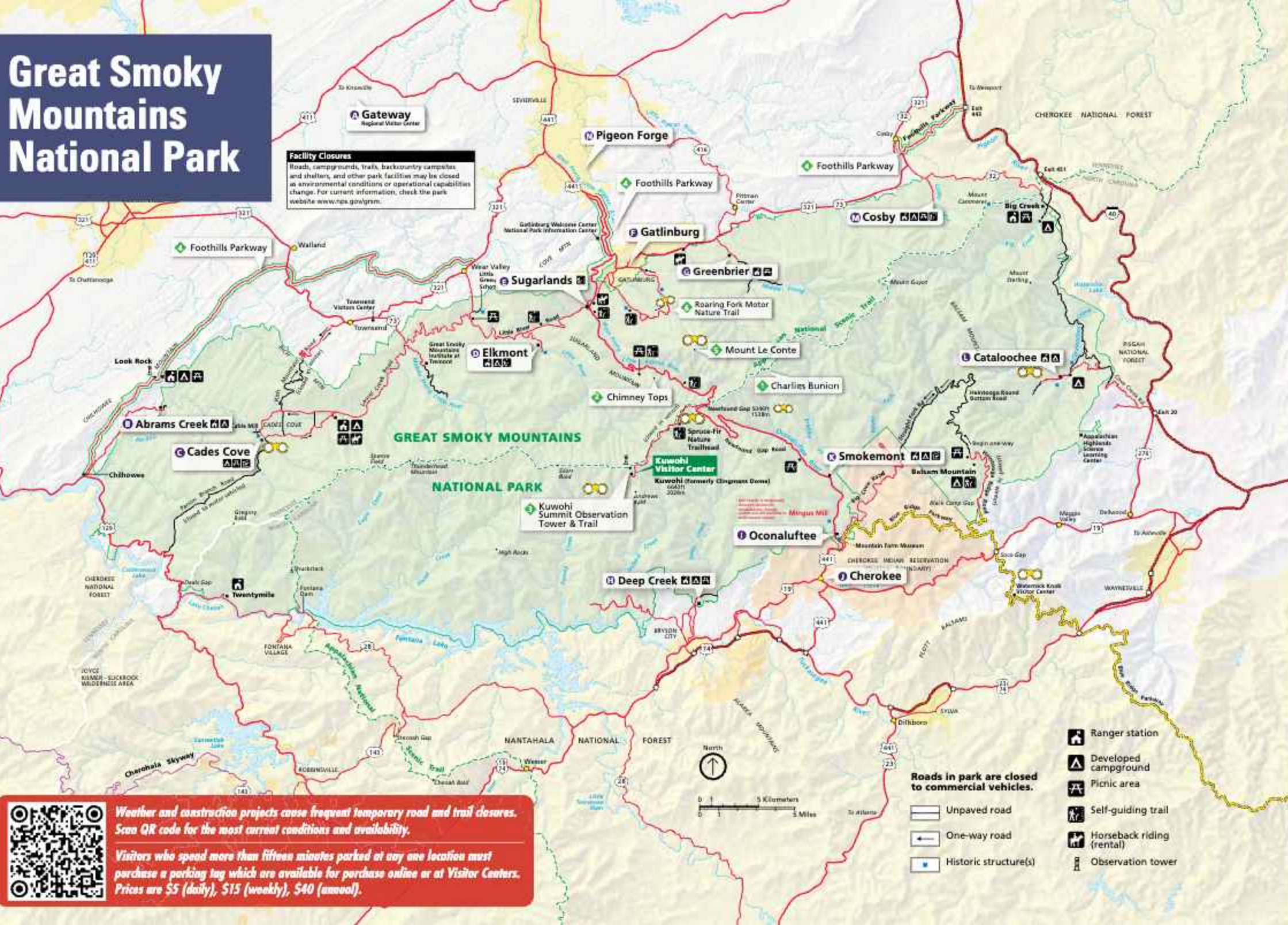
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Facility Closures
Roads, campgrounds, trails, backcountry campsites and shelters, and other park facilities may be closed in environmental conditions or operational capabilities change. For current information, check the park website www.nps.gov/gsmn.



Weather and construction projects cause frequent temporary road and trail closures. Scan QR code for the most current conditions and availability.

Visitors who spend more than fifteen minutes parked at any one location must purchase a parking tag which are available for purchase online or at Visitor Centers. Prices are \$5 (daily), \$15 (weekly), \$40 (annual).



A Gateway Regional Visitor Center

- Film
- Gift shop
- Information
- Interactive exhibits

B Abrams Creek

- Camping

C Cades Cove

- Cable Mill
- Camping
- Historical sites
- Horses for hire
- Information
- Picnicking
- Visitor center

D Elkmont

- Camping
- Information
- Restrooms

E Sugarlands

- Information
- Lost and found
- Natural history exhibits
- Park Headquarters
- Restrooms
- Visitor Center

F Gatlinburg

- Accommodations
- Anakeesta
- Automobile services
- Banks
- Dining & Entertainment
- Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Community
- Groceries/Supplies/Gifts
- Medical services
- Ober Gatlinburg Ski Resort & Amusement Park
- Post office
- Religious services
- Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies
- Trolley

G Greenbrier

- Picnicking

H Deep Creek

- Camping
- Picnicking

I Oconaluftee

- Information
- Living history demonstrations
- Mountain Farm Museum
- Pioneer history exhibits
- Restrooms
- Visitor Center

J Cherokee

- Automobile services
- Accommodations
- Banks
- Dining
- Entertainment
- Gifts
- Groceries/supplies
- Medical services
- Post office
- Religious services
- Museum of the Cherokee Indian
- Oconaluftee Indian Village
- "Unto These Hills" Outdoor Drama at Mountainside Theatre

K Smokemont

- Camping
- Horse for hire
- Information
- Living history demonstrations
- Restrooms
- Visitor Center

L Cataloochee

- Camping

M Cosby

- Camping
- Picnicking
- Restrooms

N Pigeon Forge

- Accommodations
- Banks
- Dining
- Dollywood
- Entertainment
- Gifts
- Groceries/Supplies
- Religious services
- Titanic Pigeon Forge

Points of Interest

- Charles Bunion
- Chimney Tops
- Kuwahli* (formerly Clingmans Dome) 6,843ft/2,024m
- Foothills Parkway (3 sections)* Look Rock Viewing Platform
- Mount LeConte 6,593ft/2,009m
- Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail*

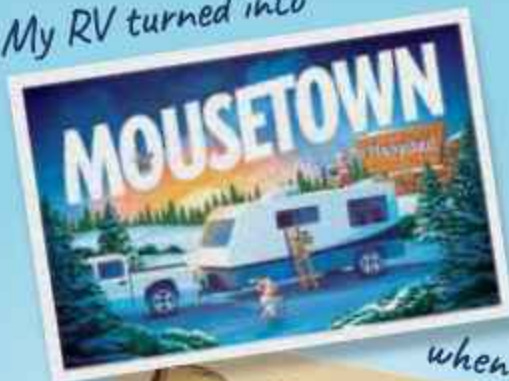
* Closed in winter

† Cades Cove Loop Vehicle-Free Day
Cades Cove access will be motor vehicle-free all day Wednesdays from June 18 to September 24, 2025 to provide opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists to experience Cades Cove without motor vehicles.

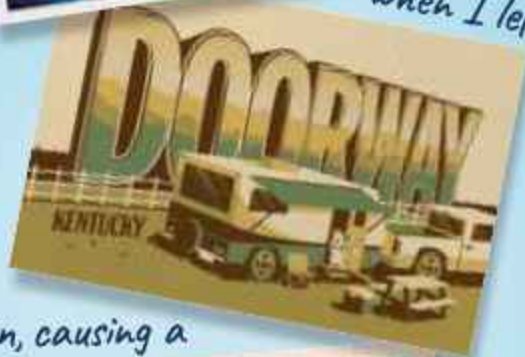


Locations with this logo have the most impressive views of the park's landscape or are pristine wildlife habitat. You'll appreciate them even more with binoculars or a spotting scope.

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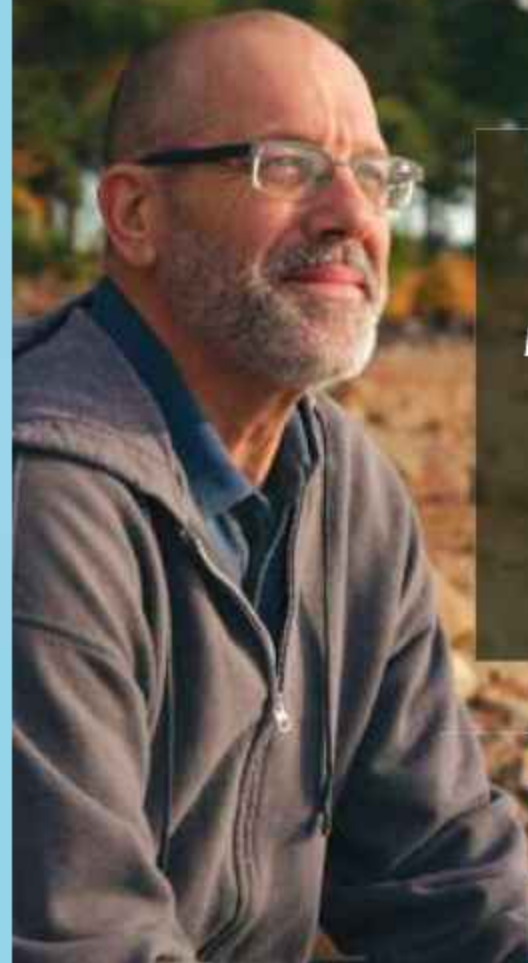
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