



The Ultimate Family Travel Guide

Smoky Mountains

The National Park

Discover the best trails and attractions for your next adventure

Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge

Find the best places to eat and play for your family.

Other Adventures

Find hidden gems off the beaten path and budget friendly family fun.

Welcome to Your Ultimate Family Guide to the Smoky Mountains!

Get ready to explore one of America's most beloved destinations—The Great Smoky Mountains. With its misty peaks, lush forests, and endless opportunities for adventure, the Smokies are the perfect escape for families looking to reconnect with nature and each other.

This guide is packed with everything you need to plan the ultimate family getaway: scenic and kid-friendly hiking trails, exciting activities in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, must-see attractions, and restaurants the whole crew will love. From animal encounters to mountain coasters, there's no shortage of memory-making moments.



Discover the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

- What to know before You Go
- Main Attractions
- Most Popular Hikes
- Family Friendly Hikes

Discovering Gatlinburg

- Overview of the Town & Downtown Tips
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Great Smoky Mountains National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

What to Know Before You Go

Before you head into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, there are a few helpful things to know to make your family's visit smoother and more enjoyable. First, the park is free to enter, but a parking tag is now required if you plan to park for more than 15 minutes.

These tags are affordable and available at visitor centers or online. Cell service is limited throughout the park, so download maps or use a paper guide. Weather can shift quickly, especially in higher elevations, so dress in layers and bring rain gear. Finally, start early to avoid crowds at popular spots—especially during weekends, holidays, and peak seasons like summer and fall.

Popular Attractions



The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is full of unforgettable sights, perfect for families looking to explore nature, history, and incredible views. From scenic drives to iconic overlooks and hands-on visitor centers, these main attractions offer a little something for everyone. Here are a few must-see stops to add to your itinerary.

Clingmans Dome

Clingmans Dome is the highest point in the Smokies and offers incredible 360-degree views. A paved, half-mile walk leads to the observation tower at the summit.



Cades Cove

Cades Cove is a scenic valley loop known for wildlife sightings and historic cabins. Families can enjoy the 11-mile drive, bike rentals, or stop for a picnic.



Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail

This one-way loop road winds through lush forest, streams, and old homesteads. It's a great drive with optional short hikes like Grotto Falls along the way.



Sugarlands Visitor Center

Located near Gatlinburg, Sugarlands offers helpful rangers, exhibits, and a short nature trail. It's the perfect first stop to pick up maps and ask questions.



Newfound Gap

Newfound Gap sits on the state line and offers stunning mountain views and cool breezes. It's also where President Roosevelt dedicated the park in 1940.





Most popular

Trails



Chimney Tops Trail

Distance: 4 miles roundtrip | Elevation Change: 1,400 feet | Difficulty: Hard

A challenging climb with steep elevation gain, but the panoramic views from the top are some of the best in the Smokies. Not recommended for small children.



Laurel Falls Trail

Distance: 2.6 miles roundtrip | Elevation Change: 314 feet | Difficulty: Easy

This paved trail is one of the most popular family hikes, leading to a beautiful 80-foot waterfall. It's stroller-friendly (though a bit bumpy) and ideal for younger kids.



Abrams Falls Trail

Distance: 5 miles roundtrip | Elevation Change: 675 feet | Difficulty: Moderate

A longer, rolling hike that ends at a powerful 20-foot waterfall. Great for adventurous families, but supervision is important around the strong currents.



Grotto Falls Trail

Distance: 2.6 miles roundtrip | Elevation Change: 585 feet | Difficulty: Moderate

A shaded hike through old-growth forest that leads to a rare treat—you can actually walk behind the waterfall!



Alum Cave Trail

Distance: 4.6 miles roundtrip | Elevation Change: 1,200 feet | Difficulty: Moderate

A scenic trail with interesting geological features like Arch Rock and Alum Cave Bluffs. It's a steady climb but manageable for active families.



Clingmans Dome

Distance: 1 mile roundtrip | Elevation Change: 332 feet | Difficulty: Moderate

Short but steep, this paved trail leads to the highest point in the park. The views are well worth the effort!



Family Favorite Trails

Gatlinburg Trail

DISTANCE: 3.8M
ELEV. CHANGE:
MINIMAL
DIFFICULTY: EASY



This wide, mostly flat trail runs along the river from Gatlinburg to Sugarlands Visitor Center. It's one of the only trails in the park that allows dogs and bicycles, making it ideal for families.

Elkmont Nature Trail



A short, peaceful loop through old-growth forest and historic ruins. Great for young kids, with fun educational signs about the area's ecology and history.

DISTANCE: .8M
ELEV. CHANGE:
MINIMAL
DIFFICULTY:
EASY

Metcalf Bottoms Trail

DISTANCE: 1.5M
ELEV. CHANGE:
200 FT
DIFFICULTY: EASY



Start with a picnic at Metcalf Bottoms, then take this short hike to a preserved 1800s schoolhouse. It's a hit with kids and a great introduction to the park's cultural history.

Porters Creek Trail



A flat, paved, and fully accessible trail near the Sugarlands Visitor Center. Ideal for strollers, wheelchairs, and grandparents alike.

DISTANCE: .5M
ELEV. CHANGE:
MINIMAL
DIFFICULTY:
EASY



Downtown Gatlinburg

Discover Gatlinburg

Nestled at the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg blends small-town charm with big-time adventure. Downtown Gatlinburg is walkable, lively, and packed with shops, eateries, and attractions—all against a stunning mountain backdrop. Start your visit with a stroll along the Parkway to soak in the energy and sights.

Parking, Traffic & Getting Around

Downtown Gatlinburg can get busy, especially during weekends and holidays. Paid parking lots and garages are available throughout town, with many offering easy access to major attractions. Once you're parked, walking is the best way to explore, or you can hop aboard the Gatlinburg Trolley for a low-cost, convenient ride.

Top 5 Family Friendly

Activities



Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies ★★★★★

Explore over 10,000 sea creatures, interactive touch tanks, and a mesmerizing underwater tunnel. It's a hit for all ages.



Anakeesta ★★★★★

This mountaintop park offers treetop skywalks, ziplining, gem mining, and panoramic views of the Smokies.



Ober Mountain ★★★★★

Enjoy year-round activities like ice skating, alpine slides, and wildlife encounters. In winter, it's Tennessee's only ski resort.



Gatlinburg Space Needle & Arcadia ★★★★★

Ride the glass elevator to a 407-foot observation deck for 360° views, then head to Arcadia for arcade games and laser tag.



Gatlin's Fun Center ★★★★★

A one-stop spot for mini-golf, laser tag, escape rooms, and bumper cars—perfect for family bonding.





Must-See Attractions

Gatlinburg SkyLift Park ★★★★★

Walk across the longest pedestrian suspension bridge in North America, offering breathtaking mountain vistas.



Great Smoky Mountains National Park ★★★★★

America's most visited national park offers scenic drives, waterfalls, and wildlife viewing—just minutes from downtown.



Wild Bear Falls Water Park ★★★★★★

An indoor water park featuring a lazy river, water slides, and a treehouse play area—fun regardless of the weather.



Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium ★★★★★★

Discover bizarre artifacts and interactive exhibits that intrigue both kids and adults.



Fannie Farkle's ★★★★★★

A classic arcade experience with a variety of games and their famous Ogle Dogs—giant corn dogs loved by all.





Favorite Family

Restaurants

Crockett's Breakfast Camp ★★★★★

Known for hearty Southern breakfasts and a rustic, family-friendly atmosphere.



Pancake Pantry ★★★★★

A Gatlinburg staple since 1960, offering a wide variety of pancakes and breakfast favorites.



Big Daddy's Pizzeria ★★★★★

Features wood-fired pizzas and an arcade area to keep the kids entertained.



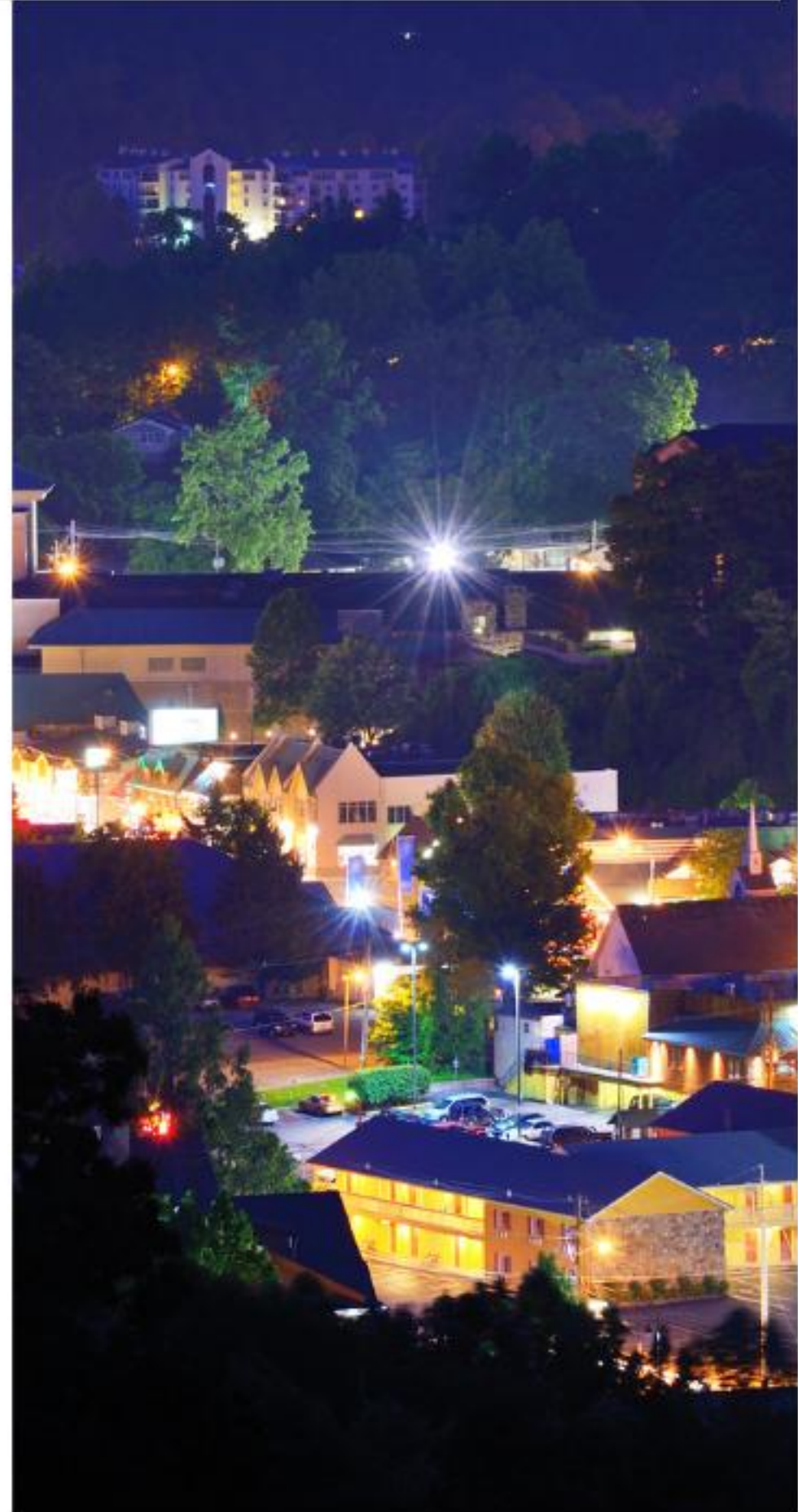
Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que ★★★★★

Offers slow-smoked meats and a kids' menu, making it a family favorite for BBQ lovers.



The Park Grill ★★★★★

Provides a cozy mountain lodge setting with a diverse menu that caters to all ages.



The Island Ferris Wheel

Family Fun in Pigeon

Forge

Just a few miles north of Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge is a bustling mountain town packed with family fun, world-class attractions, and Southern hospitality. Known for its action-packed Parkway lined with amusement parks, theaters, and dinner shows, Pigeon Forge offers nonstop entertainment with a scenic Smoky Mountain backdrop. It's a great home base for families who want a mix of adventure and convenience, with plenty of space to unwind.





Top 5 Family Friendly Activities



Dollywood



The crown jewel of Pigeon Forge, Dollywood offers more than 50 rides, live shows, artisan crafts, and themed festivals throughout the year. It's perfect for thrill-seekers and little ones alike, with kid-friendly rides and splash zones. Don't miss Wildwood Grove—an enchanting area filled with imaginative play spaces.



The Island



This free-entry entertainment hub has something for everyone: a ropes course, arcades, shops, and the massive Great Smoky Mountain Wheel. Stick around after dark for the fountain light show synced to music—it's a relaxing way to end a busy day.



WonderWorks



This upside-down attraction blends fun and learning with more than 100 hands-on exhibits. From a bubble lab and earthquake simulator to glow-in-the-dark ropes courses and laser tag, WonderWorks is part science museum, part indoor amusement park—and 100% kid-approved.



Pigeon Forge Snow



Yes, it's snowing—indoors and year-round! Families can enjoy tubing down snowy hills and playing in real snow without bundling up. It's a cool (literally) break from summer heat or rainy weather and perfect for kids who love a little thrill.



TopJump Trampoline



Let the kids bounce off their energy at this high-flying indoor park. TopJump features trampolines, ninja warrior courses, climbing walls, and even a candy shop. It's a great option for rainy days, energetic kids, or anyone who wants a fun workout disguised as play.



Top 5 Must-See Attractions



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Hatfield & McCoy Dinner Fued



Get ready for a rowdy night of laughs, stunts, and all-you-can-eat Southern cooking at this family-favorite dinner show. Watch as the Hatfields and McCoy's try to settle their differences with singing, dancing, diving dogs, and belly-flopping comedy—all while you chow down on fried chicken, pulled pork, and Granny's creamy mac & cheese. It's dinner and a show, Appalachian-style!



Dollywood Splash Country



If you're visiting during the warmer months, Splash Country is a must. With water slides, lazy rivers, and shaded retreats, it's a refreshing escape where the whole family can cool down and have fun.



Outdoor Gravity Park



If you've ever wondered what it's like to roll downhill inside a giant inflatable ball filled with water—wonder no more. Outdoor Gravity Park is the only zorbing park in the U.S., and it's as ridiculous and fun as it sounds. It's a slip-sliding, laugh-out-loud experience your family won't stop talking about (or filming on their phones).



Top 5 Kid Approved Restaurants



Old Mill Restaurant



A true Pigeon Forge classic, The Old Mill serves hearty Southern meals in a cozy riverside setting. Kids love the chicken and dumplings, fresh-made cornbread, and watching the working gristmill right outside the window. Bonus: there's a candy kitchen and ice cream parlor just steps away.



Downtown Flavortown



Guy Fieri's over-the-top food and family entertainment hub has landed in Pigeon Forge! Kids will love the creative burgers, outrageous milkshakes, and massive arcade, while grown-ups can sneak in a game of duckpin bowling or sip a "Trash Can Nachos"-themed cocktail. It's big, bold, and full of flavor—just like you'd expect.



Frizzle Chicken Farmhouse Cafe



Where else can you enjoy pancakes and eggs while animatronic chickens serenade you with country tunes? Frizzle Chicken is silly, colorful, and perfect for younger kids who think a breakfast without singing poultry is just boring. The rainbow pancakes are a crowd-pleaser!



Big Daddy's Pizzeria



Wood-fired pizza, made-from-scratch dough, and a mini arcade? Yes, please. Big Daddy's lets kids customize their own pies and burn off some energy while parents enjoy a delicious slice (or three).



Local Goat




A bit more "grown-up" in vibe but still very kid-friendly, Local Goat has a wide variety of burgers, sandwiches, and appetizers, plus crayons, kids' menus, and a staff that knows how to keep young diners smiling. Parents will appreciate the locally sourced ingredients—and the dessert menu.

ADVENTURES

around the

Smokies



There's more to the Smoky Mountains than the big-name attractions—and some of the best memories are made when you venture just a little off the beaten path. This section is your guide to scenic drives, hidden gems, budget-friendly fun, and outdoor adventures that go beyond the usual stops. Whether you're chasing waterfalls, cruising along mountain roads, or discovering quiet corners of the park, these adventures add a little extra magic to your family's Smoky Mountain escape.

Budget Friendly Family Fun



The Mountain Mile

Located in Pigeon Forge, The Mountain Mile has a large open lawn where kids can play cornhole, giant chess, and other outdoor games—all for free. Bring a coffee, let the kids run, and take in the mountain views.



The Gatlinburg Strip

It doesn't cost a thing to window shop, watch candy being made at Ole Smoky Candy Kitchen, or enjoy street performances along the bustling Gatlinburg Parkway. Bonus: grab a sample or two!



Wear Farm City Park

This spacious park in Pigeon Forge has a playground, walking trails, splash pad (seasonal), and plenty of room for a family picnic or afternoon of fresh air—and it's all free to the public.



Bigfoot's Country Barn Selfie Park

Looking for laughs and fun photo ops without spending a fortune? Bigfoot's Country Barn Selfie Park is a quirky outdoor space filled with hilarious themed backdrops—perfect for silly family selfies and social media-worthy moments.



Downtown Pigeon Forge

Downtown Pigeon Forge is a budget traveler's dream. Stroll the Parkway for free attractions like live music, dancing fountains, candy-making demos, and people-watching galore. Many shops offer samples or entertainment, and window-shopping with a view of the mountains is always on the house.



scenic drive



Sometimes the best way to explore the Smokies is from the comfort of your car—especially when you're traveling with little ones or just want to soak in the views without breaking a sweat. These drives offer jaw-dropping overlooks, historic sites, and a chance to spot wildlife (yes, even bears).

Cade's Cove Loop Road

This 11-mile one-way loop is a fan favorite. You'll see open meadows, historic cabins, and if you're lucky, a deer or black bear. Go early to avoid traffic and bring snacks for a peaceful pull-off picnic.



Newfound Gap Road

Climb in elevation as you wind from Gatlinburg to Cherokee, NC. Stop at scenic overlooks, hike a short trail, or stand with one foot in Tennessee and the other in North Carolina.



Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail

A narrow, one-way loop just outside Gatlinburg offering rushing streams, preserved homesteads, and access to hikes like Grotto Falls. It's close to town but feels like you've stepped into another century.



Foothills Parkway

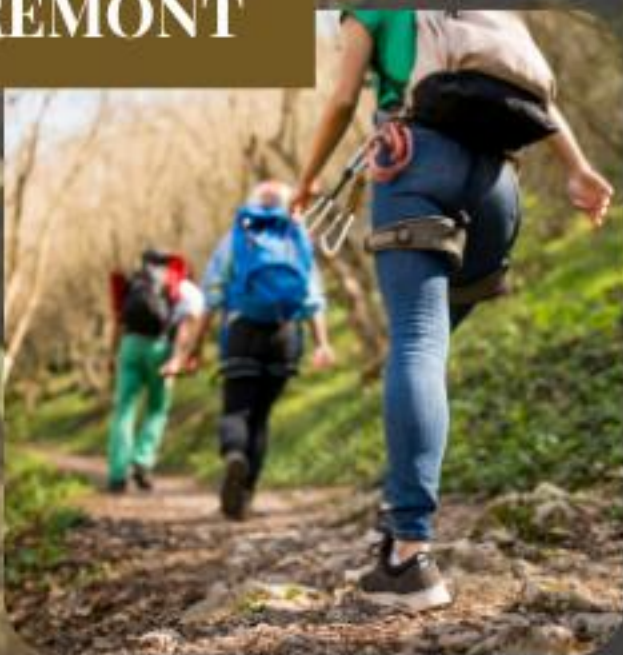
A lesser-known gem with sweeping mountain views and far fewer crowds. Great for golden hour photo ops and a peaceful drive with plenty of scenic pullouts.



Off the Beaten Path

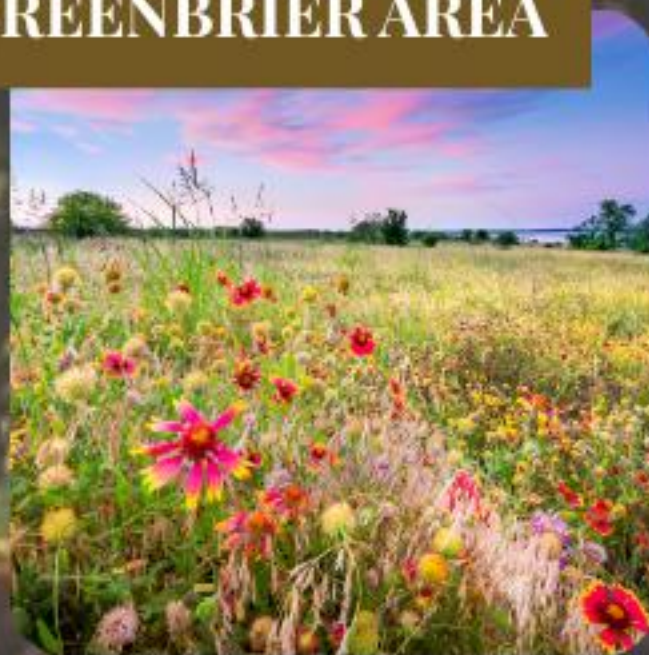
Ready to go where most tourists don't? These lesser-known spots offer the same beauty and wonder—with way more breathing room.

TREMONT



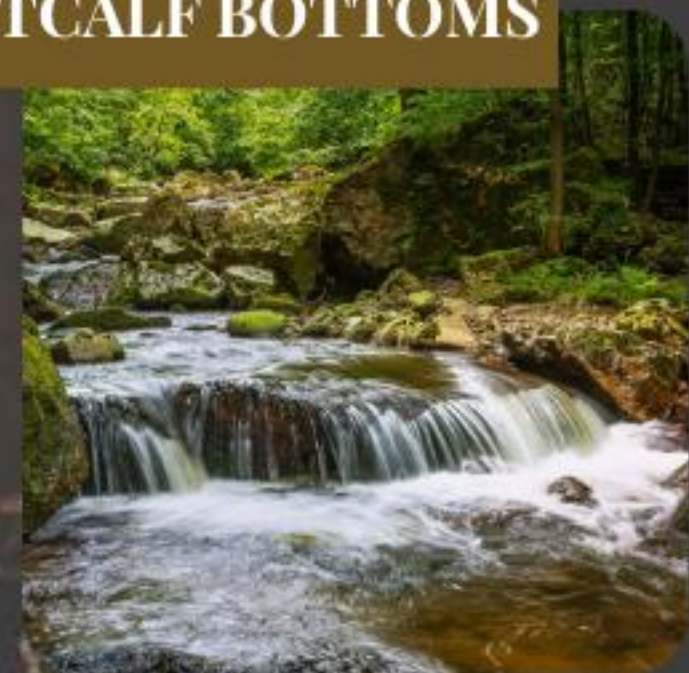
Home to the Great Smoky Mountains Institute, this area offers educational displays and peaceful hikes along Middle Prong Trail. It's scenic, educational, and often overlooked.

GREENBRIER AREA



Just east of Gatlinburg, this quiet area offers wildflower viewing, picnic spots, and access to Ramsey Cascades (for ambitious hikers). It's a perfect escape from the Parkway crowds.

METCALF BOTTOMS



This riverside picnic area is ideal for families. A short trail leads to the Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse, and the nearby river is great for wading and splashing.



Vistas to Behold is a spacious 3-bedroom, 3-bath tri-level cabin in Pigeon Forge, offering sweeping views of the mountains and The Island's Ferris wheel from your deck. With two game rooms, a fully stocked kitchen, and cozy spaces to unwind, it's perfect for families looking to relax and reconnect. Just minutes from the Parkway, Dollywood, and local attractions—this cabin puts you close to everything while still feeling like a private retreat in the hills.



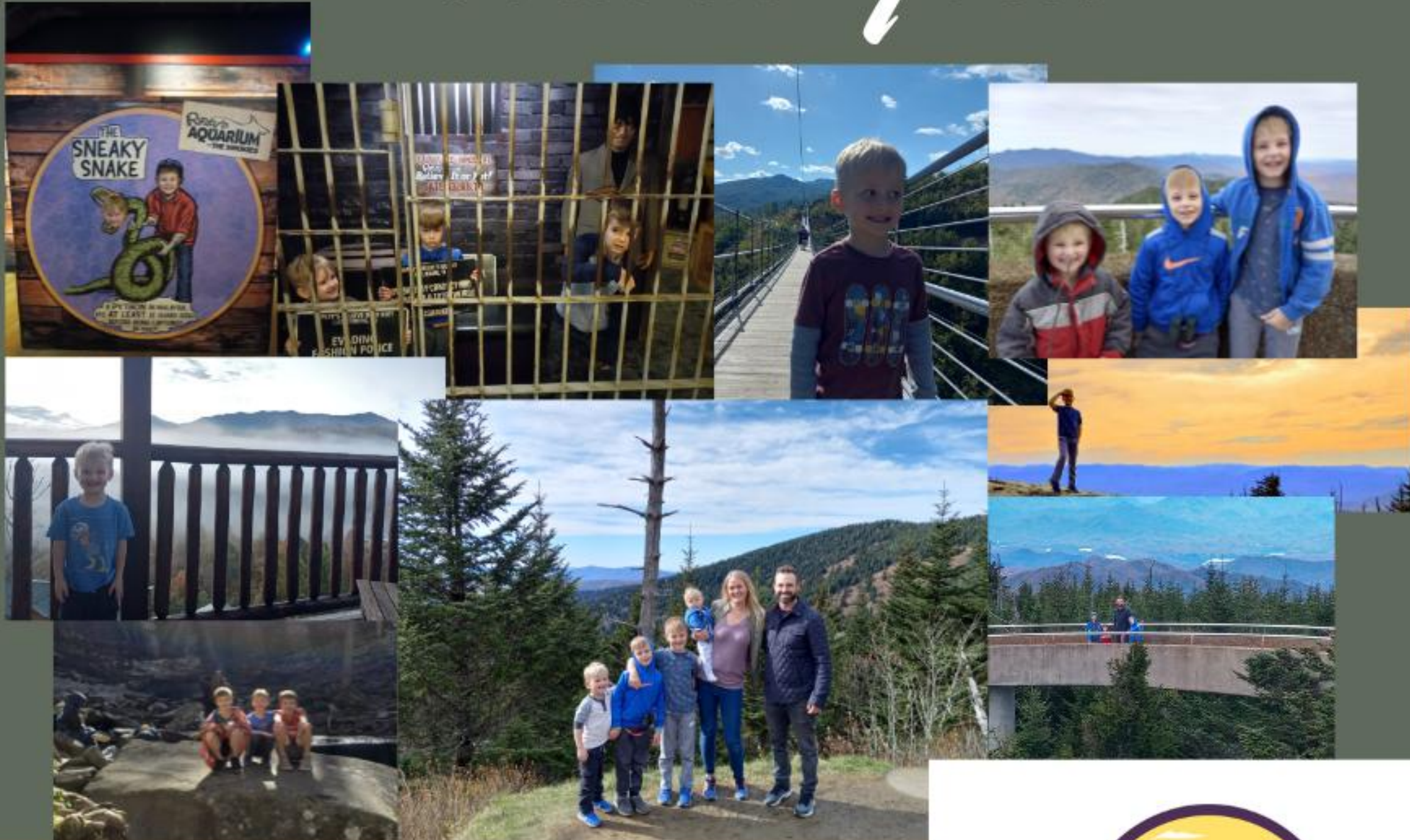
VISTAS TO BEHOLD

BOOK NOW

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Thank You!



Thanks for taking the time to discover some of the places, trails, and hidden gems we love most about the Smoky Mountains. We hope this guide helps your family make unforgettable memories—and maybe even inspires you to explore a few surprises of your own along the way. Whether you're chasing waterfalls, eating rainbow pancakes, or just soaking up the mountain views, we'd love to be a small part of your adventure.

From our family to yours—happy exploring, and we hope to host you soon at Vistas to Behold.



STAY FOR THE ADVENTURE
VACATION HOMES