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Weekend Road Trip to the Smoky Mountains: What to See and Do

Our Friends · Sunday, July 14th, 2024

Planning a weekend escape to the Smoky Mountains? If you're craving a quick getaway that offers breathtaking landscapes, rich history, and fun activities, a road trip to the Smoky Mountains might be exactly what you need.

Whether you're coming from nearby cities like Knoxville or Asheville, the Smoky Mountains provide a perfect backdrop for adventure and relaxation. With countless attractions and scenic spots, planning your itinerary can be overwhelming, but don't worry—we've got you covered with the top things to see and do on your Smoky Mountains weekend road trip.

Tips for a Smooth Trip: Preparing for Your Adventure

To ensure your Smoky Mountains weekend road trip goes off without a hitch, it's important to plan ahead. Start by packing the essentials: comfortable hiking shoes, weather-appropriate clothing, a first-aid kit, and plenty of water.

Stick to marked trails, keep a safe distance from wildlife, and never feed the animals. If you're hiking, let someone know your plans and expected return time. It's also a good idea to download offline maps of the area, as cell service can be spotty in the mountains.

1. Plan Your Stay Beforehand

Whether you're planning a romantic getaway or a mini family vacation, you need to book your place of stay beforehand.

At visitmysmokies.com, you can look up accommodations that offer the ideal blend of convenience and comfort. With fully-equipped kitchens, spacious living areas, and breathtaking mountain views, guests can enjoy a home-like atmosphere while being surrounded by nature's beauty. Explore [cabins in Smoky Mountains](#) and enjoy a memorable stay close to the attractions of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg.

2. Scenic Drives to Start Your Journey

One of the best ways to begin your Smoky Mountains adventure is by taking a scenic drive. The region is renowned for its picturesque roads that meander through lush forests and offer stunning views at every turn. One popular route is the Newfound Gap Road, which runs through the heart of

the park, connecting Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to Cherokee, North Carolina. As you drive along this road, you'll experience dramatic elevation changes and encounter several overlooks where you can pull over and take in the majestic vistas.

Another must-drive route is the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. This 5.5-mile loop offers a quieter, more intimate experience with nature. The trail is lined with old-growth forests, historic buildings, and rushing streams, making it a perfect introduction to the natural beauty and history of the Smokies.

3. Hiking Trails for Every Experience Level

The Smoky Mountains are a hiker's paradise, with trails suited for all levels of experience. For beginners or those looking for a gentle stroll, the Gatlinburg Trail is an excellent choice. This 3.8-mile roundtrip trail runs from the Sugarlands Visitor Center to the outskirts of Gatlinburg, following the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River. It's a relatively flat and easy walk that still offers beautiful scenery.

For those seeking more of a challenge, the Alum Cave Trail to Mount LeConte is a must. This 11-mile roundtrip hike is strenuous, but the breathtaking views and interesting geological formations, such as Arch Rock and Alum Cave Bluff, make it well worth the effort. At the top, the vistas from Mount LeConte are unparalleled, providing a sense of accomplishment and awe.

4. Clingmans Dome: Reaching the Highest Point

No trip to the Smoky Mountains would be complete without a visit to Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the park at 6,643 feet. The drive up to Clingmans Dome Road is an adventure in itself, offering spectacular views as you ascend. Once you reach the parking area, a steep half-mile walk leads to the observation tower at the summit.

The panoramic views from the top are truly breathtaking, extending over 100 miles on clear days. The observation tower provides a 360-degree perspective of the surrounding mountains and valleys, making it a perfect spot for photography and quiet contemplation. Be sure to dress warmly, as temperatures can be significantly cooler at this elevation.

5. Waterfalls Worth Visiting: Nature's Spectacles

The Smoky Mountains are dotted with numerous waterfalls, each offering its own unique charm. Laurel Falls is one of the most accessible and popular waterfalls in the park. The trail to **Laurel Falls** is a 2.6-mile roundtrip hike that is paved and relatively easy, making it suitable for families with children. The 80-foot cascade is a beautiful sight and a perfect spot for photos.

6. Outdoor Activities Beyond Hiking: Expanding Your Adventure

While hiking is a major draw in the Smoky Mountains, there are plenty of other outdoor activities to enjoy. Fishing enthusiasts can take advantage of the park's numerous streams and rivers, which are home to diverse fish species, including rainbow and brook trout. Whether you prefer fly fishing or traditional rod and reel, the serene mountain waters provide an ideal setting.

If you're looking for a different kind of adventure, consider horseback riding. Several stables in

and around the park offer guided horseback tours, providing a unique way to experience the rugged beauty of the Smokies. Riding through dense forests, crossing clear streams, and traversing open meadows on horseback offers a fresh perspective on the landscape.

7. Smoky Mountains Wildlife: Encountering Nature Up Close

The Smoky Mountains are teeming with wildlife, making it a prime destination for animal enthusiasts. The park is home to a **wide range of species**, including white-tailed deer, elk, wild turkeys, and black bears. Early mornings and late afternoons are the best times to spot these creatures in their natural habitat.

For a guaranteed wildlife encounter, visit the Oconaluftee Visitor Center near Cherokee, North Carolina. The surrounding fields are a favorite grazing spot for elk, especially during the early morning and evening hours. Bring binoculars and a camera to capture these majestic animals as they roam the open meadows.

Conclusion

A weekend road trip to the Smoky Mountains offers a perfect blend of nature, history, and adventure. From scenic drives to diverse hiking trails and rich cultural sites, there's something for everyone. Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy fishing and horseback riding, while food lovers can savor local culinary delights. Wildlife enthusiasts will be thrilled with the abundance of animal sightings, and history buffs can delve into the region's rich past.

Whether you're seeking relaxation or adventure, the Smoky Mountains provide a rejuvenating escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. With careful planning and an adventurous spirit, you're sure to create unforgettable memories in one of America's most cherished natural landscapes. So pack your bags, hit the road, and immerse yourself in the timeless beauty of the Smoky Mountains.

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