

# KEYS TO THE CITY **OF GATLINBURG** IT TAKES A VILLAGE

## **The great outdoors.**

The jewel in Gatlinburg's crown is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which attracts more visitors than any other national park to view its wildlife like elk, wild turkey, and deer, not to mention the wildflowers and 135 species of trees. Its beauty can be marveled at from almost anywhere in this town of only 3,500 residents.

"One of my personal favorite things is that I can be in the middle of downtown Gatlinburg and I can turn and see the mountains," says Vicki Simms, executive director of the Gatlinburg Chamber of Commerce.

One of the best ways to take in the mountain scenery is to drive the 11-mile Cades Cove loop in the park. Hiking (on more than 800 miles of trails), fishing, horseback riding, and bird-watching are a few of the popular ways to get out and experience the park. Junior ranger programs such as "Stream Splashin'" let kids and rangers wade in creeks to identify critters like salamanders.

"Sometimes, it is hard for kids to understand nature," says Bob Miller, park spokesman. "We give them a menu of things to do to make it easier."

Adrenaline junkies can opt for white-water rafting — the Pigeon River roars with Class III and IV rapids. But you can make it a family affair, as some calmer down-stream trips accommodate children.

"Most people that come to this area have never rafted before," says Claudette Geoffrion, general manager of Rafting in the Smokies, one of the local outfitters. "So it is great that we have options for the whole family, even three-year-olds."

In true four-season style, Gatlinburg attracts snow lovers, too. Ober Gatlinburg ski resort recently added a snow-tubing course, but traditionalists can hit the skiing and snowboarding slopes. And everyone can unwind with a ride on Ober's aerial tramway, a unique way to take in a breathtaking mountain view.

An important difference between the Great Smoky National Park and other national parks is that lodges and other infrastructure are not built

inside the park. The park surrounds Gatlinburg and its attractions, while still remaining natural and undeveloped. This design allows visitors to experience the wonder of nature, but also explore the other attractions Gatlinburg has to offer. (Can you say "shopping"?)

## **Meet me downtown.**

Downtown Gatlinburg is home to most of the town's famous attractions, including the entrance to Ober Gatlinburg and Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies, recently voted the No. 1 aquarium in America by TripAdvisor.com. It's an easy downtown to stroll, but those who want to sit back can hop on the trolley for 50 cents. For a bit more, take the trolley to the town of Pigeon Forge, five miles away, and explore the attractions there (Dollywood!).

Gatlinburg's downtown is also packed with interesting stores and restaurants. Spend a leisurely day browsing the specialty shops at The Village, where it's possible to snag everything from hiking equipment and pottery to fine silver jewelry and French-milled soaps.

## **Rich heritage, living history.**

Just three miles outside of downtown Gatlinburg lies the Great Smoky Arts and Crafts Community, an eight-mile loop with workshops and stores from more than 100 local, independent artisans. Many of them make crafts similar to what Gatlinburg's early settlers made, such as candles, baskets, and sculptures. While browsing, you can watch and learn how to make these crafts.

Similar to the Arts and Crafts loop, the Tennessee Heritage Trail's Music Trail and History Trail tells the story of the people and events that shaped Tennessee, America's 16th state. "There is a very fierce independence of East Tennesseans and a real love of their heritage," says Susan Whitaker, commissioner, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. "We love to share that heritage and show everyone what a great place the mountains are."—Margaret Littman

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