

NATIONAL PARK SERIES • GUIDE NO. 001

3-Day Great Smoky Mountains Itinerary

All three sides of America's most-visited national park

\$0 ENTRY

FAMILY-FRIENDLY

3 FULL DAYS

Quick Facts Before You Go

- No entrance fee, no day pass, no timed reservation — ever
- You DO need a parking tag: \$5/day, \$15/week, \$40/year
- Cades Cove at sunrise is the best wildlife window of the trip
- Laurel Falls Trail is closed — reopening expected mid-2026
- Download the NPS Smokies app; cell service is unreliable



STEALTHEITINERARY.COM

Steal the research. Keep the adventure.

Sugarlands & Roaring Fork

Waterfalls, historic cabins, and a sunset from Newfound Gap

- 1

9:00 AM

Sugarlands Visitor Center

Grab a park map and sign the kids up for the free Junior Ranger program. → 15 min drive

FREE
- 2

10:00 AM

Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail

A slow, scenic one-way loop past waterfalls and preserved historic log cabins. → On the loop
- 3

11:00 AM

Grotto Falls

The only waterfall in the park you can walk behind. 2.6 mi round trip on the Trillium Gap Trail. → 50 min drive

ASHLEY'S FAVORITE
- 4

5:00 PM

Newfound Gap Overlook

Close day one with mountain views at sunset.

BEST PHOTO SPOT

Pro Tip: Laurel Falls Trail — the one everyone recommends — is closed for rehabilitation until mid-2026. Grotto Falls is the better call, and you can walk behind it.

Cades Cove

The best wildlife viewing in the entire park — if you go early

- 1

SUNRISE

Cades Cove Loop Road

11-mile one-way loop. Go at sunrise for the best odds of bears, deer, and wild turkeys.

BEST WILDLIFE
- 2

WEDNESDAYS

Car-Free Loop (Seasonal)

In summer, Cades Cove closes to cars on Wednesdays — rent bikes and ride it traffic-free.

FAMILY FAVORITE
- 3

12:00 PM

Cades Cove Picnic Area

Pack lunch. No need to leave the loop. → 15 min drive

EASY ADVENTURE
- 4

1:30 PM

Abrams Falls Trailhead

About 5 mi round trip for older kids. For little legs, pick one of the 14 short Quiet Walkways instead.

CHOOSE YOUR EFFORT

Pro Tip: We saw 3 bears before 9am. The loop turns into a traffic jam by mid-morning — the early start is the whole trick.

Oconaluftee & Kuwohi

Elk, a working gristmill, and the highest point in the Smokies

- 1

9:00 AM

Oconaluftee Visitor Center

Wildlife exhibits, plus elk often grazing in the fields nearby. → 3 min drive

BEST WILDLIFE
- 2

10:30 AM

Mingus Mill

Quick stop at a historic water-powered gristmill, still in motion. → 30 min drive
- 3

4:00 PM

Kuwohi (Clingmans Dome)

Highest point in the park at 6,643 ft. Short paved walk up to the observation tower.

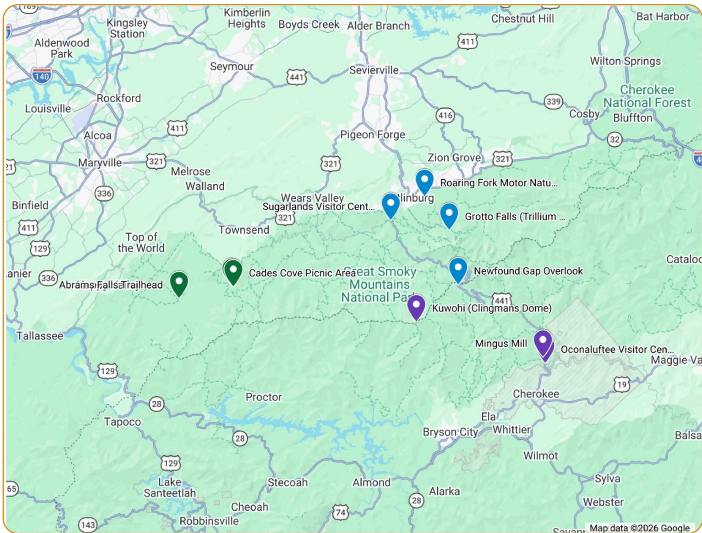
DON'T MISS

Pro Tip: Time Kuwohi for sunset. It is the highest point in the Smokies, it is completely free, and the walk up is paved and stroller-friendly.

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Map This Route

Every stop from all 3 days, color-coded so you can navigate once you're in the park.



● DAY 1 · GATLINBURG ● DAY 2 · CADES COVE ● DAY 3 · CHEROKEE



Scan for the Live Interactive Map

Every stop, color-coded by day, in Google Maps. Pull it up before you leave the hotel — cell service in the park is unreliable at best.

Where to Stay & What to Pack

Which Town?

- **Gatlinburg** — the most walkable, and closest to the park entrance
- **Pigeon Forge** — more space for your money, and the Dollywood base
- **Townsend** — the quiet side, closest to Cades Cove
- **Cherokee, NC** — best for the Blue Ridge Parkway and the NC side
- There is no lodging inside the park — the gateway towns are the whole plan

Don't Forget

- **Parking tag** — \$5/day. Required if you stop for more than 15 minutes
- **NPS Smokies app** — download it; trail maps work offline
- **Layers** — elevation changes shift the temperature fast
- **An early alarm** — Cades Cove at sunrise is the whole trip
- Full gear guide with 70+ picks on the website

FULL ITINERARY · BOOKING LINKS · INTERACTIVE MAP

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