

NATIONAL PARK SERIES • GUIDE NO. 001

5-Day Great Smoky Mountains Itinerary

One home base in Gatlinburg. Five completely different days.

\$0 ENTRY

ONE HOME BASE

FAMILY-FRIENDLY

Quick Facts Before You Go

- No entrance fee — but a \$5/day parking tag is required
- Stay in Gatlinburg all five nights. Never pack a bag twice.
- Closest airport: Knoxville (TYS), about an hour away
- 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.

Arrival & Downtown

Settle into your home base for the whole trip

- 1

AFTERNOON

Check Into Gatlinburg

Stay here all five nights. It is the most central base for every stop on this route.

HOME BASE
- 2

3:00 PM

Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies

A relaxed first stop after travel, right in downtown Gatlinburg.

FAMILY FAVORITE
- 3

5:00 PM

Gatlinburg SkyPark & SkyBridge

Sweeping mountain views, then walkable shops and restaurants for an easy first evening.

BEST PHOTO SPOT

Pro Tip: One home base means you never pack a bag twice. Every stop on this itinerary is within an hour of Gatlinburg.

Cades Cove

Wildlife & history — 45–60 min from Gatlinburg

- 1

SUNRISE

11-Mile Scenic Loop Drive

The park's best wildlife viewing. Bears, deer, and wild turkeys are common. Go early — it becomes a traffic jam by mid-morning.

BEST WILDLIFE
- 2

MIDDAY

Historic Sites Along the Loop

Preserved cabins, churches, and a working gristmill scattered throughout the cove.

HIDDEN GEM

Pro Tip: We saw bears, deer, and turkeys before lunch — all from an 11-mile loop that costs nothing to drive.

Kuwohi & Newfound Gap

The highest point in the Smokies — and it is a paved walk

- 1

10:00 AM

Kuwohi (Clingmans Dome)

Highest point in the park at 6,643 ft, with 360-degree views. Paved 0.5 mi walk to the tower — short but steep. → *20 min drive*

DON'T MISS
- 2

2:00 PM

Newfound Gap

On the TN/NC state line, with the Rockefeller Memorial and some of the best views in the park.

BEST PHOTO SPOT
- 3

ALL DAY

Overlooks on Newfound Gap Road

Multiple easy pull-offs for photo stops and layered mountain views.

EASY ADVENTURE

Pro Tip: Bring a jacket. Kuwohi runs 10–20°F cooler than Gatlinburg even in summer, and the road can close in winter for snow and ice.

Roaring Fork Motor Trail

Waterfalls and cabins — 5–10 min from Gatlinburg

- 1

8:30 AM

Noah “Bud” Ogle Place

An 1880s mountain farmstead with an easy 1-mile nature trail loop. → *10 min drive*

EASY ADVENTURE
- 2

9:00 AM

Grotto Falls

2.6 mi round trip. The only waterfall in the park you can walk behind.

ASHLEY’S FAVORITE
- 3

12:30 PM

The Scenic Loop Itself

A 5.5-mile one-way drive past historic log cabins and forest. → *On the loop*
- 4

1:30 PM

Place of a Thousand Drips

A roadside waterfall at the end of the motor trail. No hiking required — you can see it from the car.

NO HIKING

Pro Tip: Laurel Falls — the paved waterfall walk most guides recommend — is CLOSED until mid-2026. Grotto Falls and Place of a Thousand Drips are the better calls. Arrive before 9am; Grotto Falls parking fills fast.

Pigeon Forge

Family fun day — 15 min from Gatlinburg

- 1

PICK ONE

Dollywood OR The Old Mill

WORTH THE SPLURGE

Dollywood is an award-winning theme park. The Old Mill is a historic restaurant known for Southern comfort food.
- 2

AFTERNOON

Mountain Coaster

FAMILY FAVORITE

A family-friendly ride you control the speed on, with mountain views the whole way down.
- 3

EVENING

The Island in Pigeon Forge

EASY ADVENTURE

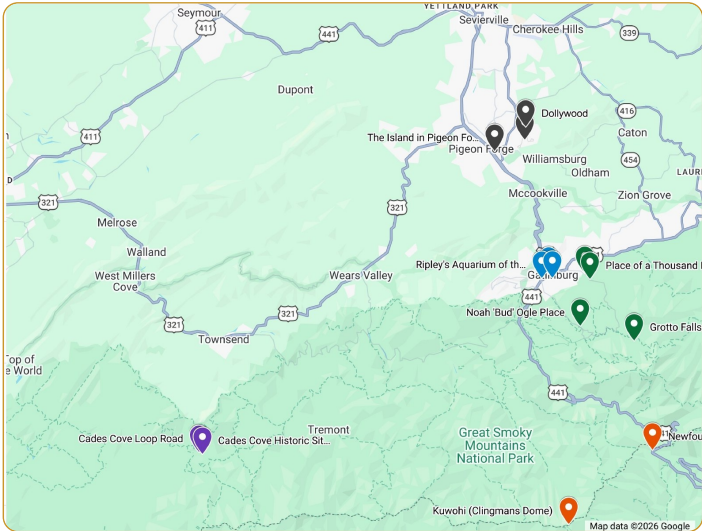
Rides, shopping, and fountain shows — all in one walkable spot.

Pro Tip: Choose ONE major attraction. Trying to fit Dollywood, The Island, the coaster and shopping into one day always feels rushed. Local picks: breakfast at Crockett's, dinner at The Old Mill.

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Map This Route

Every stop from all 5 days, color-coded so you can navigate once you're in the park.



DAY 1 · GATLINBURG DAY 2 · CADES COVE DAY 3 · KUWOHI DAY 4 · ROARING FORK DAY 5 · PIGEON FORGE



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

Why Gatlinburg?

- **Most central** — every stop on this route is within an hour
- **Walkable downtown** — restaurants and shops on foot after a long day
- **No mid-week repack** — one hotel, five days
- Prefer alternatives? Pigeon Forge (more space), Townsend (quiet), Cherokee (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** — Kuwohi runs 10–20°F cooler than town
- **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

stealtheitinerary.com

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