

Special Remodeling Section: The Southern Home

# Southern Living

The heart of Southern life

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& Casual**

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Dreamy Garden Retreat**

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MAY 2007





## Shortcuts to The Smokies

Check out our secret routes and favorite spots near less-traveled Townsend, Tennessee.

**E**nter the Great Smoky Mountains National Park through Gatlinburg, and you'll likely feel as if you're driving through Atlanta on a Friday. I avoid the jam by sneaking in the park's less-crowded entrances.

### Tips for the Drive

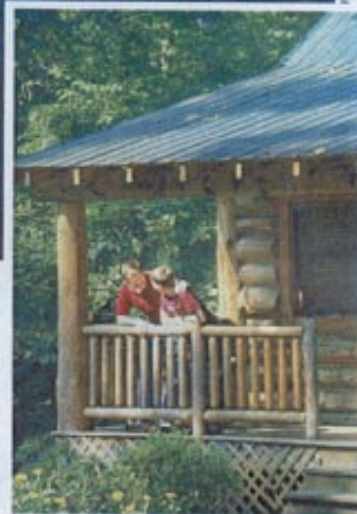
From Townsend, follow the Little River via U.S. 73. The road forks at a famous swimming hole called "The Y," where sunbathers recline on the rocky shore and swim in a deep, clear pool. Hang a left here on Little River Gorge Road, which winds along the river, crests a mountain, and leads to the Sugarlands Visitors Center. Or go right to reach Cades Cove, an area filled with historic homesteads. The 11-mile motor trail can be a parking lot, but I beat the traffic by taking a quiet bike ride when the trail is reserved for bicycles until 10 a.m. each Wednesday and Saturday from mid-May until mid-September.

### Perfect Picnic Spot

Another park entrance sees even less traffic. Take U.S. 321 through serene Wears Valley for about 7 miles (the midpoint between Townsend and Pigeon Forge), and turn right on Lyons Spring Road (look for the Trailhead Real Estate building). Drive about 2 miles to the park boundary and then another mile to Metcalf Bottoms picnic area. Bring lunch to enjoy in this lovely spot along the Little River (plenty of tables and bathrooms). From here, take a moderate 1-mile hike to the Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse, a weathered one-room affair that held class until the late 1800s. You can also drive there on a gravel road off of Lyons Spring Road.

### What's New in Townsend

Take a stroll or a roll down Townsend's new 9-mile paved loop, called "Shadows of the Past," which leads past a dozen or so historic sites. Pedestrian tunnels



*top:* Rent a cabin or a room at Dancing Bear Lodge to enjoy hiking and mountain biking trails, bike rentals, and a great location. *bottom:* Visitors bask in the sun and cool off in the Little River, a popular tubing spot.

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stretch under the highway so you don't have to cross in traffic. Before you set out, stop by the new Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center, a museum dedicated to Appalachian life. Peruse the American Indian exhibits, and then stop by the gift shop for locally made crafts. Outside, you can wander through a collection of hand-hewn log cabins that were built in the 1880s in Sevier and Blount Counties and later meticulously moved and reassembled here.

#### tubing the Little River

My number one way to chill out is a leisurely float down the lazy Little River. Several companies rent tubes and offer all-day shuttles down two main stretches. The upper stretch starts just outside the park entrance and sweeps you over a few tiny rapids that add some excitement to the relaxing trip. The shorter, lower stretch is calmer and better for small kids. People with their own tubes and vehicles often park at "The Y." (Commercial shuttles can't enter the park, and parking may be congested at peak times.)

#### Elkmont:

##### A Modern Ghost Town

My favorite secret spot is the relatively new ghost town of Elkmont. This collection of turn-of-the-20th-century cottages originated as a lumber community. When the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was dedicated in 1940s, the residents agreed to turn the cottages and land over to the national park after a generation had passed. The town became a hunting club and then a summer escape before the park reclaimed it in the early 1990s. What will happen to these buildings? Some say they should be torn down to let the land return to its natural state, while others believe they should be preserved as a historic site. The fate has yet to be determined. See it while you can. —KIM CROSS

#### Editor's Picks

**Where to eat:** Sister Cats Cafe offers great salads and sandwiches for lunch; (865) 448-0033. For one of the finest meals in the Smokies, head to the Foothills Milling Company in Maryville (reservations are recommended); (865) 977-8434.

**Where to play:** Smoky Mountain River Rat, located on U.S. 321, charges \$13, including tax, for a tube, life jacket, and all-day shuttles; [www.smokymtnriver.com](http://www.smokymtnriver.com) or (865) 448-8888.

**Where to stay:** Room rates at Dancing Bear Lodge start at \$189.99; one-bedroom cabins begin at \$229.99; [www.dancingbearlodge.com](http://www.dancingbearlodge.com) or 1-800-369-0111.

**Where to get more info:** Stop by the Smoky Mountain Convention and Visitors Center for maps, guidebooks, and brochures; [www.smokymountains.org](http://www.smokymountains.org) or 1-800-525-5834.



#### Closer Than You Think

Driving to Townsend is easier than you might imagine. Check out the approximate mileage from a few cities.

- Asheville: 110 miles
- Atlanta: 235 miles
- Birmingham: 275 miles
- Chattanooga: 140 miles
- Knoxville: 30 miles