SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA: HEART OF APPALACHIA

Nestled in the southwest corner of the state, the HEART OF APPALACHIA region is known for the rugged beauty of its landscapes, as well as its vibrant culture and people. Adventure abounds among roaring rivers and stunning vistas, while picturesque mountain towns draw you in with the sights, sounds and tastes of Appalachia.

INSTAGRAM-WORTHY
Views from Birch Knob Observation Tower stretch endlessly over so much unspoiled wilderness, you can almost convince your followers you’ve stepped back in time. Trees, boulders, ridges; undulating hills, mountains and valleys; the shadows of clouds punctuating the landscape that spreads out all around you. After climbing 183 stairs to this sturdy deck – at an elevation of 3,144 feet above sea level – you’ll see Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee – even Ohio! – on a clear day.

WHAT’S NEW
The Back of the Dragon is a winding road that roars 32 miles through the mountains, changes 3,500 feet in elevation, takes 438 knee-dragging curves, and offers breath-takingly picturesque views. Then it spits you out at the new Back of the Dragon Welcome Center. The 5,000-square-foot building features a store, brewery, specialty coffee, yogurt, food and a photogenic 12-foot dragon. Visitors can enjoy live events, or they can just sit a spell, swapping tales with other motor enthusiasts who dared to ride this stretch of road.

NOTABLE TOWN
Have you seen Woodbooger – aka Big Foot or Sasquatch? Well you might in Norton, where the legend is embraced, especially after the 2011 filming of Animal Planet’s “Finding Bigfoot.” Even bigger than Woodbooger, though, is Norton’s prime location for outdoor recreation – mountain biking, hiking, fishing, kayaking, trail running, rock climbing – and for cultural and historic landmarks.

HIDDEN GEM
Waterfalls hold universal appeal: the natural setting creates a primal allure; the soothing sounds of water cascading over rocks drown out everyday concerns. Some waterfalls seem inaccessible – a difficult hike over too many miles – but Tank Hollow Falls welcomes everyone. Park at the ADA-accessible lot, then traverse the half-mile walking path to the 60-foot-high falls. Clear water plunging over moss-covered rocks. If you’re in the mood, continue the three-mile trail to the Cleveland Barrens Natural Area Preserve. The water calls!

ASK A LOCAL
“The Appalachian African-American Cultural Center is unique in terms of documenting and preserving history; very little is written, so we primarily talk to people to preserve their stories. I call the region our country’s hidden secret; for the beauty of the mountains and the history, which is really what has grabbed me: not just the African-American experiences but the history of the Melungeons and the Scots-Irish, as well as the plight of the area’s coal miners.” — Jill Carson, Appalachian African-American Cultural Center

DID YOU KNOW?
The Clinch River, meandering through the Heart of Appalachia, is one of the world’s most aquatically diverse rivers. It shelters the nation’s highest number of rare aquatic species, including 40 species of freshwater mussels, half of which are threatened or endangered. Approximately 130 species of fish swim here. Caves around the river also harbor globally diverse species, some that only live in that cave. Whether you’re a paddler, angler or nature watcher, the Clinch River can float your boat.

PET-FRIENDLY
For tail-wagging, leaping-and-bounding fun, invite your pooch to join you at Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure. Together you can wander the trails around the campground and beyond, catching signs of the plentiful wildlife and basking in nature. You’ll both crash in a contented heap at the end of the day, in on-site campgrounds or cabins. Or let Fido sleep it off while you enjoy everything else Southern Gap has to offer!
The Virginia Scenic Russell Park Farm
- Rice: 276-853-9546
- Breakspark.com: Breaks and pools offering classic five-six whitewater. Relates to first visit in October.

GAME & GUNROOM
- 380 S. Main St., Christiansburg, VA 24073
- 540-387-7641
- Office hours: Mon.-Fri. 9-5; Sat. 9-2. "Great place to visit while in Christiansburg. Very friendly and accommodating."

CUMBERLAND GORGE NATIONAL WILDERNESS
- 276-734-1268
- The most popular recreational area in the national forest. Over 25 miles of trails for ATVs, mountain biking, and hiking.

CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL WILDERNESS
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- The largest national park preserve forests in the United States. Over 25 miles of trails for ATVs, mountain biking, and hiking.

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Dykes Burying Ground House is Old Court House. In 1720, the courthouse was located here. 

Pinecastle National Park & Recreation Area State Park is 28 miles north of St. Paul, 276-999-7100, parkscrossville.net. Pinecastle National Park & Recreation Area

Rock City Bike Route State Route 80, 276-678-1117; expereeridger.com. Rock City Bike Route is a 15-mile route with a 400-foot climb and four rest stops.

Cove Mountain Bike Trail South of Corbin, Route 600; 276-389-0994, sportsmanland.com. Cove Mountain Bike Trail is a 2-mile mountain bike trail with 500-foot gain.

Oxbow Lake 1634 Lake Rd., 276-703-4721; stplum.com. Oxbow Lake is a 60-acre lake with boat ramp, fishing, and picnicking.

Sugar Hill & Clinch River Trails 10802 Norton-Coeburn Rd., 276-565-3900; facebook.com/americanartscouncil. Sugar Hill & Clinch River Trails is a 10-mile trail with 1,500 feet of elevation gain.

Dungannon Depot 143142 Bus Dr., 276-467-2306; ddcinc.org/depot.htm. Early 20th-century train depot, now a museum.

Jefferson National Forest 2850 Fish River Rd.; 276-726-2886; usforestlands.gov. Jefferson National Forest is a 376,000-acre forest with hiking, fishing, and picnicking.

Planes Fly Overheld Parkway 276-796-5775; planesflyoverparkway.com. Planes Fly Overheld Parkway is a 7,000-acre park with hiking, fishing, and picnicking.

Pocahontas Cemetery 102, 276-945-5922; spearheadtrails.com. Pocahontas Cemetery is a 10-acre cemetery with over 100 local cemeteries.

Pound Memorial Bridge 1634 Pound Rd., 276-796-5775; spearheadtrails.com. Pound Memorial Bridge is a 105-foot bridge with scenic overlook.

High Knob Overlook Tower 276-796-5775; planesflyoverparkway.com. High Knob Overlook Tower is a 240-foot tower with panoramic views of 4 states.

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