A WORD ABOUT BEARS

Bears may appear tame, but they are dangerous wild animals and should not be approached closely, teased, or frightened—especially when cubs are present. Feeding bears is dangerous and is a violation of park regulations. Dependence on unnatural foods may make bears easy prey for poachers. If a bear approaches your car, stay inside with the windows closed.

HOW TO ENJOY THE PARK

The Great Smoky Mountains are the majestic climax of the Appalachian Highlands and a wilderness sanctuary that preserves the finest examples of temperate deciduous forest in the world. With outlines softened by a dense forest mantle, the mountains appear to be stretching and mighty billows to the horizon. The name “Great Smokies” is derived from the smoke-like haze that envelopes these mountains.

Much of the park contains virtually unspoiled forests similar to those found by the early pioneers who settled in isolated mountain valleys. Many of their log cabins and barns still stand as reminders of a pioneer way of life that has all but disappeared from these mountains. Today, visitors experience and enjoy the wilderness as a contrast to the pressures of modern living. Fertile soils and heavy rains, over a long period, have caused a world-renowned variety of flora to develop. Some 1,400 kinds of flowering plants grow in the park. Within the coves, broadleaf trees predominate, while along the crest, which rises to more than 6,000 feet, conifer forests like those of Central Canada find suitable climate. For the “do-it-yourself” naturalist, there are several trails that can be walked in a day. A scenic, high mountain road winds its way through Newfound Gap to Clingmans Dome; there, a 3-mile walk to an observation tower provides an excellent panorama of the countryside. In summer you can expect extremely heavy traffic on this route. Slow traffic must use pullouts. There is a 10-ton load limit on bridges in Cataloochee, Cades Cove, and on the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. Report accidents at a ranger station.

Naturalist activities. From mid-June to Labor Day you may enjoy evening programs and nature walks at most developed campgrounds. During the spring and fall these activities are scheduled on a limited basis. For further information about interpretive events, inquire at any park visitor center or ranger station.

Trails and Hiking. The 800 miles of horse and foot trails offer the most rewarding experiences; trails wind along streams and through forests into the high country, forget Man’s routines. Pick a trail and hike into the forest stillness of the Smokies. For the “do-it-yourself” naturalist, there are several short, self-guiding nature trails. Pick up the explanatory leaflet at the beginning of each trail. As you walk, read about the relationship of plants to their woodland habitat.

A back-country camping permit is required for all overnight hiking parties and can be obtained free at any ranger station or visitor center. Because of overcrowding, it is necessary to ration overnight use of the 68 miles of Appalachian Trail within the park. Five other popular areas, Mt. LeConte, Laurel Gap, Kephart Prong, Scott Gap, and Rich Mountain, are also rationed. Arrangements for a permit must be made after you arrive in the park. There are many uncrowded trails in the park. A listing of trailside campsites, for use in planning alternate hiking routes, is available upon request.

Naturalist activities include Naturalist at the Lodges. At Cades Cove and Sugarlands Visitor Center in November through March, winter gear and clothing suitable for survival in deep snow and temperatures as low as —20° F are necessary. This includes a sleeping bag adequate to —20°, waterproof matches or fire starter, food, and other items listed in the free leaflet BACKCOUNTRY MAP & Camping Guide, available at ranger stations or visitor centers.

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Pets are permitted in the park if on a leash or under other physical control at all times. They may not be taken on trails or cross-country trails.

Camping. There are seven developed campgrounds and three primitive camping areas in the park. Fees are charged at developed campgrounds.

Developed campgrounds have water, fireplaces, tables, comfort stations, tent sites, and limited trailer space. You must bring your own tent and other camping equipment, since no shelters are provided. There are no showers or hookups for trailers. The campsite fee is $4 per site per night.

Seasonal challenges include severe royalty and season-long cold. The temperature must be above zero to enjoy hiking, and in the spring, cold snaps may occur. In the summer, there is a 30% chance of rain daily. In autumn, the temperature must be above freezing to enjoy hiking. In the winter, the temperature must be above —20° to enjoy hiking and camping.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

Most neighboring towns have gas, food, lodging, and camping supplies. Many private campgrounds operate outside the park. For information, write the chambers of commerce of nearby towns in North Carolina and Tennessee. Accommodations are available at LeConte Lodge, 7 miles from the park entrance on the Little River Road. This lodge offers accommodations year-round and is open to the public.

OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

LeConte Lodge

This park has been declared an International Biosphere Reserve and is one of the world’s greatest sanctuaries. All natural and historic objects are protected by law. It is a sanctuary for people, too, so please enjoy it with care.
WE'RE JOINING THE METRIC WORLD.
The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become accustomed with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations. One meter is 3.28 feet, and 1 kilometer is 0.62 miles.