Make Your Visit #SmokiesSafe
Planning a trip in extraordinary times

COVID-19 continues to affect every facet of life in our region. As Great Smoky Mountains National Park resumes operations this summer, park staff are committed to protecting the health and safety of visitors, employees, and volunteers.

For your own sake and that of others, please follow these important tips to make your trip #SmokiesSafe.

Delay your trip if you're not feeling well or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Avoid crowded areas. If you get to a trailhead or overlook and the parking lot is full, do not park along the road shoulder. Choose another destination.

Maintain at least six feet between yourself and others around you whether on the trail or at park facilities. Send only one or two members of your party into visitor centers for information or purchases.

On the trail, hiking etiquette is to give those going uphill the right of way when passing in tighter quarters. Find a place to safely step off trail and allow others to pass.

Pack in and pack out everything you need for the day—including water, snacks, and hand sanitizer.

Some restrooms may be closed in the early phases of resumed operations. If restrooms are open, wash your hands and keep the areas clean for all users.

Find out what campgrounds, picnic areas, and visitor center areas are open by checking the park website at nps.gov/grsm/ or calling 865.436.1200, ext. 631, for road information.

Words with a Ranger continues on page 5
COVID-19
Following guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and state and local public health authorities, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is increasing recreational access and services through a phased approach. Park managers have implemented an Adaptive Operations Plan with five operational phases. The park’s plan is designed to be adaptive to regional conditions by increasing or decreasing the scope of park operations as appropriate.

Check nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm for the latest updates on open facilities and access. All openings are based on available staffing. Temporary closures may occur on short notice.

Camping in the national park
The National Park Service maintains developed campgrounds at nine locations in the park. Only Cades Cove and Smokemont are open in winter. There are no showers or hookups other than circuits for special medical uses at Cades Cove, Elkmont, and Smokemont.

Campsite reservations are required at Abrams Creek, Balsam Mountain, Big Creek, and Cataloochee campgrounds. Reservations also may be made at Cades Cove, Cosby, Elkmont, and Smokemont. Sites may be reserved up to six months in advance. Make your reservation at recreation.gov or call 877.444.6777.

Site occupancy is limited to six people and two vehicles (a trailer = one vehicle). The maximum stay is 14 days.

Special camping sites for large groups are available seasonally at Big Creek, Cades Cove, Cataloochee, Cosby, Deep Creek, Elkmont, and Smokemont. Group sites must be reserved and may be secured up to a year in advance.

The list below shows number of sites, elevations, nightly fees, and maximum RV lengths. For more information, visit nps.gov/grsm.

• Abrams Creek 16 sites, elev. 1,125’, $17.50, 12’ trailers
• Balsam Mountain 42 sites, elev. 5,310’, $17.50, 30’ RVs
• Big Creek 12 sites, elev. 1,700’, $17.50, tents only
• Cades Cove 159 sites, elev. 1,807’, $21-$25, 35’-40’ RVs
• Cataloochee 27 sites, elev. 2,610’, $25, 31’ RVs
• Cosby 157 sites, elev. 2,459’, $17.50, 25’ RVs
• Deep Creek 92 sites, elev. 1,800’, $21, 26’ RVs
• Elkmont 220 sites, elev. 2,150’, $21-$27, 32’-35’ RVs
• Smokemont 142 sites, elev. 2,198’, $21-$25, 35’-40’ RVs
• Look Rock closed in 2020

Firewood
To prevent the spread of destructive insect pests, the NPS has banned outside firewood from entering the park unless it is USDA- or state-certified heat-treated wood. Campers may gather dead and down wood in the park for campfires. Certified wood may be purchased in and around the park.

Bicycling
Most park roads are too narrow and heavily traveled by automobiles for safe or enjoyable bicycling. Helmets are required by law for persons age 16 and under and strongly recommended for all bicyclists.

On Wednesdays from June 17 to September 30, 2020, only bicycles and pedestrians are allowed on Cades Cove Loop Road. Bicycles may be rented at the Cades Cove Campground store.

Bicycles are permitted on park roads but prohibited on trails except Gatlinburg, Oconaluftee River, and lower Deep Creek/Indian Creek.

Accommodations
• LeConte Lodge (accessible by trail only) provides the only lodging in the park. 865.429.5704 or leontelodge.com
• Bryson City 800.867.9246 or greatsmokies.com
• Cherokee 828.788.0034 or cherokeesmokies.com
• Fontana 800.849.2258 or fontanavillage.com
• Gatlinburg 800.588.1817 or gatlinburg.com
• Maggie Valley 800.624.4431 or maggievalley.org
• Pigeon Forge 800.251.9100 or mypigeonforge.com
• Sevierville 888.766.5948 or visitsevierville.com

Pets in the park
Pets are allowed in frontcountry campgrounds and beside roads as long as they are restrained at all times. Pets are not allowed on park trails, except for Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails. Dogs on these trails must be kept in control on a leash no longer than six feet.

Special events
Events are subject to cancellation.

December 12 Festival of Christmas Past: Sugarlands Visitor Center
December 19 Holiday Homecoming: Oconaluftee Visitor Center
Postponed until September 2021 Music of the Mountains: Sugarlands Visitor Center

For rent
The Appalachian Clubhouse and Spence Cabin at Elkmont can be rented for daytime events. Contact recreation.gov.

Visitor centers
Hours are subject to change. Summer hours of operation are: Oconaluftee, Sugarlands, and Cades Cove: 9-5 Clingmans Dome: 10-4

Picnic areas
Picnic areas are open at Big Creek, Cades Cove, Chimney Tops, Collins Creek, Cosby, Deep Creek, Greenbrier and Metcalf Bottoms. Check nps.gov/grsm for updates. See map on page 12 for locations. Picnic pavilions may be reserved for $12.50-$80 at recreation.gov.
Other services
There are no gas stations, showers, or restaurants in the national park.

SOCIAL DISTANCING
Observe wildlife rules... but with people!

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
Stay home when sick.
Stay 6 feet away from other people.
If you sneeze or cough, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.
Avoid touching your face.
Still don’t use other people’s clothing and rain gear. Stay dry.

Smokies Guide Summer 2020 • 3
Supporting Wildlife with Native Plants

Planting flowering natives at home attracts pollinators and restores habitat for wildlife

Two years ago, park partner Discover Life in America (DLiA) dedicated a brand new grant-funded pollinator garden at Sugarlands Visitor Center. The garden—a collaboration led by Great Smoky Mountains National Park in partnership with DLiA and with support from Great Smoky Mountains Association—was specifically designed to feature native flowering plants of the Smokies as part of a broader National Pollinator Health Strategy spurred by the alarming decline of insect populations throughout the country.

Now well-established and in full summer bloom, the Sugarlands pollinator garden showcases the mutually beneficial relationship between native plants of the Smokies and the pollinating birds and insects that depend on them, including bees, moths, butterfiles, beetles, and flies. The garden also serves as a model of wildlife gardening for those who may be interested in converting their own lawn, porch, or even window sill into a slice of pollinator habitat.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is rich with diverse vegetation and home to more than 1,600 species of flowering plants. Roughly 500 park plant species are considered rare, and 76 species are listed as threatened or endangered in the states of Tennessee and North Carolina. Ground-level ozone, or “smog,” has also been documented to negatively affect at least 30 native plant species in the Smokies.

While many of these specific native plant species may be harder to come by in more general nurseries or difficult to propagate, now is a great time to learn more about the flowering plants that are native to your own part of the world.

Here are a few plants found in the Smokies that you might try sourcing from your local nursery to help ecological resilience across greater Southern Appalachia:

Sun plants generally attract bees, butterfiles, and hummingbirds.
- Asters (Symphyotrichum spp.)
- Bee balm (Monarda didyma)
- Black-eyed susan (Rudbeckia fulgida)
- Butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa)
- Carolina bush pea (Thermopsis villosa)
- Coreopsis (Coreopsis spp.)
- Crossvine (Bignonia capreolata)
- Fringe tree (Chionanthus virginicus)
- Goldenrods (Solidago spp.)
- Indian pink (Spigelia marilandica)
- New Jersey tea (Ceanothus americanus)
- Phlox (Phlox paniculata, P. maculata)
- Purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)
- Redbud (Cercis canadensis)
- Spicebush (Lindera benzoin)
- Sumacs (Rhus spp.)
- Swamp milkweed (Asclepias incarnata)
- Sweet Joe-Pye-Weed (Eupatorium purpureum)

Shade plants generally attract flies, beetles, and other small insects.
- Alumroot (Heuchera spp.)
- Goatsbeard (Astilbe spp.)
- Mayapple (Podophyllum peltatum)
- Red columbine (Aquilegia canadensis)
- Sweetshrub (Calycanthus spp.)
- Wild geranium (Geranium maculatum)

*ssp.: multiple species with several cultivated varieties available

It is illegal to harvest plants in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. If you see someone poaching plants, call 865.436.1230 or report this activity to the nearest ranger station.

**Artwork for the native pollinator garden signage you can see at Sugarlands Visitor Center. This project was grant-funded and a collaboration with NPS, DLiA, and GSMA. Artwork by Emma DuFort**
Connecting with the Smokies from Home

The challenges of the last few months have spurred creative efforts to connect Smokies lovers to their favorite place when visiting has, at times, not been possible.

Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational partner of the park, used its award-winning publication, Smokies Life magazine, as inspiration for a new online endeavor. Smokies LIVE, a collaborative virtual magazine, has been delivering new content to readers daily since late March. Writers, interpreters, photographers, artists, and GSMA staff have brought their various talents and expertise to a diverse array of Smokies stories.

The new concept even sparked other avenues for reaching the Smokies faithful. GSMA launched a podcast called Smoky Mountain Air featuring Smokies-related stories, interviews, and author readings. Staff digitized four ‘Missing Issues’ of Smokies Life magazine and will soon make available a few other issues that can no longer be found in print.

“The neatest thing about all these projects,” said Frances Figart, GSMA’s creative services director, “is that we seized an opportunity to develop new storytelling tools that will remain available to us long after COVID-19 is history.”

Smokies LIVE, Smoky Mountain Air, and other GSMA efforts including digitized ‘Missing Issues’ of Smokies Life can be found at SmokiesInformation.org/news.

Environmental Monitoring Continues during COVID Closure

While GSMNP remained closed from March 24 to May 9 as part of a nationwide effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, some NPS scientific programs like air quality monitoring remained active throughout the closure. The data collected may provide an insight into the effects of airborne pollutants in the Smokies.

“Long-term monitoring is critical in understanding how park resources are changing over time and how they compare to other places,” said Air Resource Specialist Jim Renfro. “The park is committed to continue this monitoring to provide data to meet certain legal mandates and national reporting requirements related to public health and natural resource protection.”

Meanwhile, a coalition of park partners, including Friends of the Smokies, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Discover Life in America, and GSMA, worked with National Park Service staff in the Smokies to develop a new digital learning space to support outdoor education.

SmokieEE’s @ Home invites students of any age to Explore nature-related topics and activities, be Entertained through music, art, and stories, and Escape with a chance for quiet observation of the natural world. Videos, materials, and activities can be found at Smokieees.org, with new content being added even as the park resumes operations. “We hope you’ll join us for an opportunity to virtually experience the Smokies,” said Superintendent Cassius Cash of the SmokieEE’s educational effort. “I invite you to pause and enjoy a Smokies break online with us.”

In addition to these new endeavors, the park and its partners redoubled their social media efforts with exciting and engaging projects. During National Park Week, park staff asked the public to share their favorite photos and memories of the park through social media, and Smokies lovers answered the call. Park partners also got creative with distance activities like The Great American Camp-in (Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont), the Virtual Fireflies Event (DLiA), and the Alum Cave At-Home Adventure (Friends of the Smokies). GSMNP official social media accounts are listed on the front of this Smokies Guide.

Although exhaust from vehicles within the park accounts for less than one percent of park air pollution, regional vehicle and power-plant emissions do significantly impact park haze and pollution levels. Ozone in particular is harmful to humans, wildlife, and sensitive vegetation in the Smokies.

“The air quality branch will follow up after lab analysis and quality assurance checks to look at the effect of the significant reduction in motor vehicle emissions in and near the park. Concentrations of ozone, particulate matter, nitrogen, and carbon gases and particles will be analyzed,” said Renfro. “Staff will also look at the effect of noise pollution with the reduction in commercial air travel over the park.”
The Ten Essentials Checklist

Before you head out on that backpacking trip, ask yourself these basic questions: Can I respond positively to an accident or emergency? Can I safely spend a night or more in the backcountry?

The items you carry along on your trip can determine whether you are prepared for a safe backcountry experience. Below are ten essentials that all backpackers should have:

- Navigation: map and compass
- Insulation: extra clothing, sleeping bag
- Illumination: headlamp, flashlight
- First-aid supplies
- Fire: waterproof matches/lighter/candle
- Repair kit and tools
- Nutrition: extra food
- Hydration: extra water, filter, or tablets
- Shelter: tent, tarp, garbage bag, emergency blanket
- Sun protection: sunglasses, sunscreen
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• First-aid supplies
• Illumination: headlamp, flashlight
• Insulation: extra clothing, sleeping bag
• Navigation: map and compass
Pooping in the park is only natural for Smokies wildlife. But for the rest of us, it’s important to follow a few simple rules for disposing of waste when away from park restroom facilities.

**Bring the Essentials**
Before you set out for the trail, pack these essentials so you’re well prepared to answer nature’s call and leave no trace:

- Lightweight camping trowel
- Toilet paper
- Plastic bags for packing out waste

**Find Your Spot**
Privacy is only half the battle. Being mindful to avoid stepping on sensitive plants and flowers, find a spot at least 100 feet away from trails, campsites, and water sources. Waterways are not bathrooms. “Using the woods” allows the soil to filter and break down organic matter.

**Make a Cathole**
Use a trowel to dig a hole roughly 6–8 inches deep. When you’re done with number two, be sure to completely bury all solid waste and deposit any used toilet paper in the hole before thoroughly filling it in.

**Pack Out Waste**
Completely bury or pack out all used toilet paper—even if you’re just going number one. Surface-level toilet paper left behind is a common issue and hazard for backcountry rangers and hikers in the park. Do your part by packing out all waste and practicing Leave No Trace principles wherever you are to help keep the Smokies pristine.

Illustration by Emma DuFort

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**HOW TO MAKE AN EFFECTIVE CATHOLE**

**1. PACK A TROWEL**
Unless you have bobcat paws, you’ll probably prefer to dig with one of these. A standard garden trowel will do, or you can purchase a backpacking trowel from any visitor center.

**2. DIG A 6–8” DEEP HOLE**
This is the most important part! The hole should be at least 6 inches deep, not wide. This will allow the soil to efficiently break down the waste without affecting the surface layer.

**3. BURY IT!**
When you’re done, bury the waste by thoroughly filling the cathole back up. You can bury your toilet paper or pack it out, but please don’t leave it on the surface for someone else to clean up!

Thanks for keeping it clean!
It is your responsibility to be safe and to know and obey park rules. You can find information and rules at visitor centers, trailhead bulletin boards, and the park website at nps.gov/grsm.

**Basic Pack List**

- Water, a water filter, tablets, or the ability to boil water
- Food and plenty of snacks
- Extra layers (base layer, jacket, socks) for changing conditions
- Sun protection with sunscreen, sunglasses, and/or a hat
- Rain gear
- Pack cover to keep what you are carrying dry (ziplocs inside your pack can do this too)
- Map and compass and the knowledge of how to use them
- Shelter in the form of a tent or tarp
- Flashlight or headlamp and batteries
- Fire starter with a lighter, strike stick, and something to light
- Knife or multi-tool for a variety of uses
- First aid kit with all the essentials to care for common accidents
- Permit for camping overnight (provide itinerary so the NPS knows where to begin looking for you in an emergency)

**Hiking in the Heat**

Hiking in the heat can be tough, even on a relatively short trip. Plan ahead, know your limitations, and be sure to pack the essentials this summer.

**BE MINDFUL OF:**

- Lightning
- High winds
- Rapid changes in weather
- Wildlife including elk and black bears
- Poison ivy and brambles
- Slippery logs, rocks, and leaves
- Water crossings (Water can rise quickly, and rocks and logs near water are often very slippery; closely supervise children around all water.)
- Drones are banned on all National Park Service property, including the Smokies.
- Campfires are permitted only within fire rings. Use only firewood purchased from campgrounds; imported wood contains dangerous and invasive pests. Do not leave food or trash in fire rings.
- Pets are prohibited on all trails (except Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails) to protect wildlife. Pets must be kept on a leash at all times in campgrounds, picnic areas, and along roads. Service animals that have been individually trained to perform specific tasks for the benefit of persons with disabilities are allowed in all visitor use areas.
- Metal detector use is prohibited.
- Take only pictures. It is illegal to take any natural features including flowers, seeds, rocks, antlers, or historical artifacts or to disturb soils, rocks, or vegetation. Limited collection of some fish, berries, nuts, and mushrooms is permitted.
- Pack out all trash and leave no trace to help protect the Smokies.
For eons, the Great Smoky Mountains have stood watch over the Southern Appalachian region. The park depends on the four primary nonprofit partners described here, as well as on 2,800 park volunteers who help its staff meet the needs of 12.5 million visitors and 522,000 acres of unexploited resources. In addition to these partners, the park fosters collaborative relationships with its gateway communities, universities, and other service and learning groups.

**Great Smoky Mountains Association**

Since 1953, the nonprofit Great Smoky Mountains Association has supported the educational, scientific, and historical preservation efforts of the NPS by operating the park’s educational bookstores, publishing books and other media about the park’s natural and cultural resources, and contributing cash donations to support park programs. Over the years, GSMA has contributed more than $44 million to assist with living history demonstrations, saving hemlock trees, wildlife and resource education internships, construction of visitor centers and the Collections Preservation Center, and much more.

Association members receive a number of benefits to keep them informed about special events in the park and issues affecting the Smokies:

- Subscription to the semi-annual full-color magazine *Smokies Life*
- Digital access to this award-winning quarterly park newspaper, *Smokies Guide*, e-newsletter and Smokies LIVE e-blasts
- A 15–20% discount on books, music, gifts, and other products sold at park visitor centers and GSMA’s web store
- Special GSMA group hikes, backpacking excursions, and educational sessions led by experts invite you to immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and smells of the outdoors and learn more about nature and history in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Join today by visiting SmokiesInformation.org, or call us at 888.898.9102, ext. 257.

**Friends of the Smokies**

Friends of the Smokies assist the National Park Service in its mission to preserve and protect Great Smoky Mountains National Park by raising funds and public awareness and providing volunteers for needed projects.

Since it was founded in 1993, supporters of Friends have contributed more than $68 million to meet park needs. Examples of programs and projects include:

- Rehabilitation of the most impacted trails through Trails Forever
- Forest conservation and wildlife management
- Air quality monitoring
- Facility improvements and visitor amenities
- Historic structures rehabilitation
- Cultural experiences and special events
- Search and rescue program support and equipment
- K–12 educational programs

Programs like Parks as Classrooms, which serves approximately 20,000 students every year, provide educational experiences that help foster a love for nature and inform the next generation of park supporters. Management and research programs are critical in maintaining a healthy environment for the park’s abundant wildlife—bears, elk, native brook trout, and much more.

Friends’ commitment to preservation includes support for restoring and maintaining historic log homes, barns, outbuildings, churches, schools, and gristmills. Become a Friend by visiting FriendsOfTheSmokies.org or calling 800.845.5665.

**Discover Life in America**

The Smokies have long been renowned for their rich variety of life. Knowing what creatures reside here helps the National Park Service better protect the Smokies against threats like air pollution, wildfire, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change.

Discover Life in America is the nonprofit partner that was launched in 1998 to manage the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI), an effort to identify and learn about every variety of plant and animal in the park. The organization works with leading biologists from around the globe to conduct this massive inventory.

Volunteers and interns become ‘citizen scientists’ who help with DLiA’s work. These participants get an insider’s look at the park, as well as firsthand knowledge of biology, field science, and laboratory practices. Funding comes from donations by individuals and institutions.

DLiA celebrated the 20th year of the ATBI in 2018. To date, DLiA has helped add more than 10,000 species to the inventory of life in the park. This year, the tally has risen to 9,718 species new to the park and 1,025 species completely new to science! You can support DLiA by purchasing the Smokies Species-a-Day perpetual calendar. Learn more at DLiA.org or by calling 865.430.4757.

**Tremont**

Born out of a need for residential education programs in the park, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont has offered student and adult programs that promote a connection to nature for more than 50 years. Up to 6,000 students and adults annually attend workshops, camps, and school programs at the institute that are designed to promote curiosity and inspire learning.

Adult workshops include birding, backpacking, community science, professional and teacher development, photography, and a naturalist certification program. Summer camps provide youth and their families opportunities to spend six to 11 days exploring the national park, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.org to learn more!
Test your detective skills! Pictured are birds or things bird-related that you might see in Great Smoky Mountains National Park as well as in your own neighborhood. Each time you spy one, put an X in its square until you get four in a row. For extra challenge, see if you can find all 16.

Illustrations by Lisa Horstman
Information
General park info: 865.436.1200 • nps.gov/grsm
Backcountry information: 865.436.1297
smokiespermits.nps.gov
To order maps and guides: 865.436.7318 x226
SmokiesInformation.org

Emergencies
For emergencies after hours:
Park Headquarters 865.436.9171
Cherokee Police 828.497.4131
Gatlinburg Police 865.436.5181

Hospitals
Le Conte/Sevier County 865.446.7000
Middle Creek Rd., Sevierville, TN
Blount Memorial 865.983.7211
U.S. 321, Maryville, TN

Haywood County 828.456.7311
Waynesville, NC
Swain County 828.488.2155
Bryson City, NC

All-access
Restrooms at park visitor centers (Cades Cove, Oconaluftee and Sugarlands) are fully accessible.
Sugarlands Valley all-access nature trail is on Newfound Gap Road just south of Sugarlands Visitor Center.

Avoid the fine
Picking or digging plants is prohibited in the park. Persons feeding wildlife are subject to a $5,000 fine. Pets are only permitted on the Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails, which allow dogs on a leash.

For more information, go to nps.gov/grsm