

A WEEKEND GETAWAY IN ROANOKE

▶ Food, views and friendliness
make this Star City shine



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by Jan Ross,
Staff Writer

Roanoke, Va., is known as the Star City of the South. The nickname comes from the star perched on top of Mill Mountain.

Erected in 1949 as a Christmas ornament, this massive structure – the world's largest freestanding illuminated manmade star – weighs 10,000 pounds and is 88.5 feet high – probably the reason they decided to just leave it there rather than try to move it. The star glows with a white light, can be seen for miles and is pretty incredible up close. The lights are changed to red, white and blue on certain patriotic occasions and to commemorate 9/11.



Great food, interesting sites and wonderful people had combined to create the perfect weekend.

What impressed me the most about Roanoke, aside from the fabulous food, gorgeous views and friendly hosts, was the fact that every single resident adores where he or she lives. My husband and I were both like a couple of wide-eyed kids as we viewed the incredible Blue Ridge Mountains on our drive to Roanoke.

We stayed at the Sheraton Roanoke Hotel and Convention Center and were impressed with the free parking, free Wi-Fi, free Starbucks coffee in the rooms, a great complimentary breakfast and some of the most comfortable beds I have ever slept in. A wonderful lunch we enjoyed there

included the hotel's famous peanut soup.

We hiked through the beautiful woods on top of Mill Mountain, then enjoyed the Discovery Center. Offering classes, workshops, special events and summer camps, the Discovery Center is a great place for families, as is the nearby zoo.

Next we headed down to the historic Market District of downtown Roanoke. Local vendors were set up with lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and flowers. There were plenty of shops and restaurants available as well.

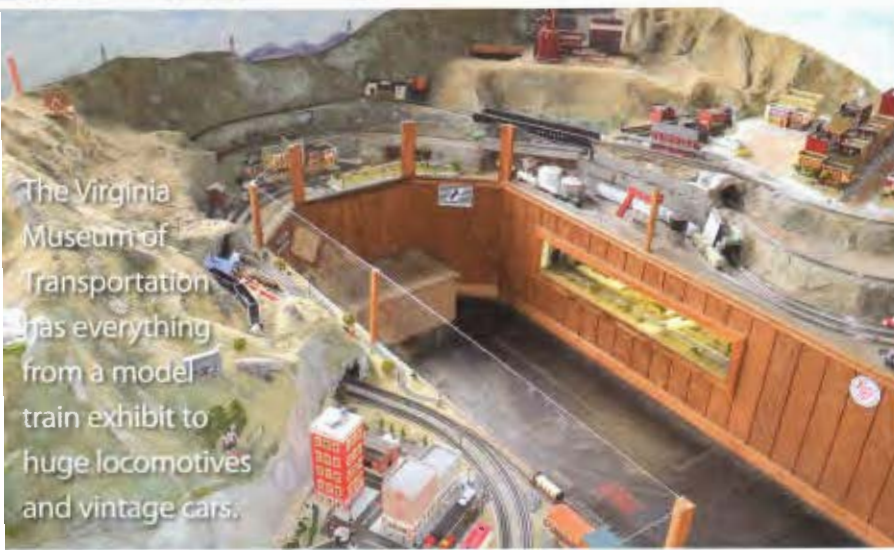
We also visited the architectural marvel, the Taubman Museum of Art. The museum is open and airy with a high, soaring ceiling and has some incredible exhibits. The Virginia Museum of Transportation has everything from a model train exhibit to huge locomotives and vintage cars. Visiting it could take up an entire day for a family.

Our last museum stop, the O. Winston Link Museum, is dedicated to the famous railroad photographer. Some of the photos we saw were truly amazing. The museum also showed an interesting movie about his life.

On the first Friday of every month, the art galleries in downtown Roanoke sponsor the Art by Night gallery crawl, where you stroll around town and pop into as many galleries as your heart desires. The gallery owners were very welcoming. The crawl is the perfect time to see works by local artists.

The next day, we spent the afternoon bike riding on one of Roanoke's greenways, which are designed for walkers, runner and bikers. We were a little sad to leave Roanoke on our final day. We felt the time had flown by much too fast. Great food, interesting sites and wonderful people had combined to create the perfect weekend.

Roanoke is probably just gorgeous in the fall and winter. We might have to find out for ourselves.



The Virginia Museum of Transportation has everything from a model train exhibit to huge locomotives and vintage cars.

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