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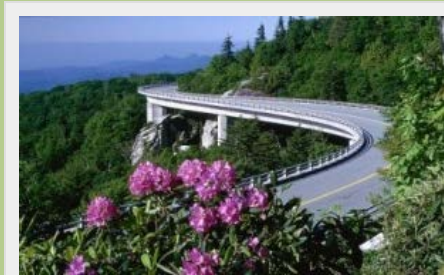


## The Frugal Joys of Car-Tripping: Roanoke, Virginia

by TFB EDITORS on JULY 24, 2012

By Jan Ross

The best kind of car trips are those that involve a scenic drive somewhere instead of brain-numbing miles of Interstate highway. That is precisely why a car trip to [Roanoke, Virginia](#) is a wonderful choice. The gorgeous [Blue Ridge Mountains](#) surrounding this lovely, scenic mountain town make the drive to Roanoke just as pleasant as the stay. Plan your drive to include the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#), which links two national parks – the [Shenandoah](#) and the [Great Smoky Mountains](#) – and you can relax and actually enjoy your trip.



The Blue Ridge Parkway in Spring.

You will have a number of choices of places to stay in Roanoke, but we found the [Sheraton Roanoke Hotel and Conference Center](#) to be the perfect place for seeing the area. When our room was just a little too close to the ice machine and we were concerned about hearing the sounds of dropping ice cubes at all hours, the staff immediately moved us to a much nicer room – truly the mark of an excellent hotel. They also offer free parking (a real plus; I just paid \$23 a day to park at another hotel), free wifi, free Starbucks coffee in the rooms, a very nice complimentary breakfast, and very, very comfortable beds. And the hotel is located just a few minutes from downtown Roanoke with free shuttle service to the nearby airport.



Roanoke City Market

Head to the historic downtown area of Roanoke, park your car, and stroll around to the many shops and restaurants in the area. Check out the [City Market](#) where you can pick up fresh local produce and beautiful flowers, then stop in [Chocolate Paper](#) for darling gifts and freshly made artisan chocolates. They even have chocolate-covered potato chips! Ask for a free sample of one of their many kinds of truffles. I personally recommend the raspberry.

You will need to devote at least a couple days for trying out the many good restaurants in the area. For breakfast, check out [Tudor's Biscuit World](#), a local chain that offers some of the moistest, most delicious biscuits I have ever eaten. You won't believe how many choices they offer!

If you're ready for a unique culinary delight, stop in [Thelma's Chicken and Waffles](#) for — you guessed it — chicken and waffles. OK, fried chicken along with freshly made, hot waffles and syrup sounds crazy, but it's truly delicious.

Speaking of unique culinary delights, you should stop in the historic [Hotel Roanoke](#) for some of their peanut soup. You definitely have to be a fan of peanuts for this meal, because the soup basically tastes like hot, creamy peanut butter. [Here's a link to the recipe.](#)

When it's time for a bakery treat, you must head to Grandin Village on the outskirts of Roanoke and order some of the best cupcakes in the world at [Viva La Cupcakes](#). Every one I ate was delicious, but my favorites were the raspberry white chocolate and the Boston cream pie.

Once you've eaten until you can't eat anymore, it's time to work off some calories with a bike ride around one of Roanoke's many greenways. A very bike-



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friendly town, Roanoke has plenty of bike paths. We spent a pleasant afternoon biking around one of the parks courtesy of [River Greenway Bicycle Rentals](#). They carefully made sure our bikes were sized correctly, and that made our ride much more pleasant.



Viva La Cupcakes!



The big star that gives the city its nickname.

Still need more exercise? Head up to Mill Mountain for a look at the famous [Roanoke star](#), which gives the city its famous nickname, "Star City of the South." Designed as a temporary Christmas decoration in 1949, it was so unwieldy (at almost 90 feet tall) and so popular that town leaders decided to just leave it there. Lit with white lights, the star is quite a sight and visible for up to 60 miles away. From the star, you can hit some of the walking trails around Mill Mountain or visit the nearby [zoo](#) or [Discovery Center](#). Both would be great for families.

Once you're ready for some time indoors, you can devote an entire day to the wonderful museums in Roanoke. The [O. Winston Link Museum](#) is conveniently located in the [Roanoke Valley Visitor Information Center](#) so it might be a good place to start as you can pick up maps and brochures and get an idea of where you want to visit.

I'd never heard of O. Winston Link and neither had most of our group. He was a very famous railroad photographer, and some of the photos we saw were truly amazing. The best thing we did, though, was go to the little movie theater and watch a movie about his life. If you go, you must see this movie. Hollywood is really missing something by not making a movie about [his life](#).

Then check out the incredible architectural marvel that is the [Taubman Museum of Art](#). The museum is open and airy with a high, soaring ceiling and some incredible exhibits. They have a number of [fascinating exhibits](#) that change often. One of the most interesting was the Faberge show, which runs through January, 2013, and features absolutely gorgeous pieces – everything from clocks to jewelry.



The Taubman Museum of Art

We also really enjoyed the [Virginia Museum of Transportation](#). From a small, detailed model train exhibit to huge locomotives and vintage cars, this museum could take up an entire day. The grandkids would love it!

On the first Friday of every month, the art galleries in downtown Roanoke sponsor the [Art by Night](#) gallery crawl. You stroll around town and pop into as many galleries as your heart desires. After a quick bite at [Norah's Cafe](#), located in the Taubman Museum, we did exactly that. All of the gallery owners were very welcoming and it was the perfect time to see some work by local artists. It was the perfect way to spend our last night in Star City.

Roanoke was beautiful in the spring and I think it would equally lovely with the gorgeous fall colors or with snow covering Mill Mountain. We just might have to check out the area during another season – what about you?

**Have you been to Roanoke, VA? Share your impressions and suggestions in the Comments section.**

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