



ACCOMMODATIONS

Posted by: [Jan Ross](#)

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We hadn't been to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee in years. Caught up in traveling all around the world, we had almost forgotten this charming town tucked away at the base of the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#), one of the most visited national parks in the United States.

We were in town to check out [Wilderness Wildlife Week](#), an annual event that brings together fans of nature with an astonishing variety of presenters, hikes, and bus tours of the area. What really amazed us about this event is that every single activity from the decorated entrance to the gorgeous displays in the beautiful [LeConte Center](#) to every single presentation, hike, and tour is totally free to anyone who would like to attend. Professional writers, park rangers, musicians, storytellers, wildlife experts, and others all provide their expertise for free in rooms full of fascinated spectators.



The beautiful LeConte Center in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

The LeConte Center is truly one of the nicest venues for an event we have ever experienced – they even have roaring fireplaces and comfortable furniture in which to relax!



Front of the Eagles on High cabin.

But before we headed to the LeConte Center to experience all the offerings, we checked into our fantastic accommodations. Although a beach house is generally first on my list of the top accommodations, my husband's favorite is a cabin hidden away in the woods and I have to say I'm fine with a cozy cabin in the winter. We managed to arrange the perfect place with [Eagle's Ridge Resort](#) which offers an assortment of cabins in all

different sizes. Since our son and daughter-in-law were going to join us for part

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of our stay, we asked for a cabin with three bedrooms and ended up with the aptly named [Eagles on High](#). We were thrilled to find a fireplace, a hot tub on the porch with an expansive view of the mountains, a Jacuzzi tub in one of the bedrooms, and a game room complete with a pool table and a sixty-game multi-cade. The wrap-around porch was furnished with rocking chairs, a picnic table, and gas grill in addition to the hot tub. Eagles on High was the perfect place for our trip to Pigeon Forge and we loved coming back to our comfy abode every evening.

We enjoyed attending a variety of different events and presentations at Wilderness Wildlife Week including one about snakes and one about the unique hammer dulcimer, but two were especially memorable. The first was a bus tour of the park.



Grazing deer in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Encompassing over 800 square miles, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is huge and filled with incredible scenery and an amazing variety of wildlife. One of the most popular ways to see the park is driving around the scenic byways where you might be lucky enough to see deer grazing or bears gamboling about. Since our drive took place during the winter, the large population of black bears in the area was tucked away for their winter naps, though we did see plenty of deer. We took the Cades Cove photo bus tour and it was the perfect way to see the park in the winter. Be aware that the park will close some roads if it is snowy or icy and plan accordingly. Our guide was very knowledgeable about the area and completely amenable to changing the itinerary when most of the group was not interested in stopping for lunch, opting instead to continue the tour. We really enjoyed seeing wildlife, the amazing mountain scenery, and beautiful waterfalls in the park. There were dozens of bus tours and hikes offered during the week and all were free; you just need to sign up for whichever one you want.



Golden Eagle at the American Eagle Foundation.

We were actually unsure what to expect on our second tour. We had attended a session put on by the [American Eagle Foundation](#) at the LeConte Center and were fascinated with the variety of birds of prey they showed and talked about. So, when a tour of their nearby facility was offered, we immediately signed up. Tours are not normally available to the public so this was a special opportunity to see the birds

and learn about the rehabilitation the facility offers. All the birds at the facility have been deemed not releasable either due to injury or because they have imprinted on humans. It was amazing to see the magnificent eagles, the fierce hawks, and the other birds. Trained to perch on the thick gloves the volunteers wear, the birds swiveled their heads and eyed their human audience, not at all intimidated by us. The resident biologist talked about the birds and explained about how they came to the facility, their eating habits, and other fascinating bits of information. They also flew some of the birds in short flights from one volunteer to another and, even though they were short flights, they were still amazing.

Although you can't tour the facility except in a special situation like this, you can see some of the eagles at the Dollywood Park where they offer their [Wings of America](#) show in an open-air theater from early April through late October. You can get an up-close look at eagles, hawks, falcons, owls and vultures and they will fly some of the birds for you.

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In between sessions at Wilderness Wildlife Week, we of course managed to make time for some great local dining. The [Johnson family](#) in Pigeon Forge owns several restaurants and we would like to make time on future visits to eat at every single one. We had dinner at the Alamo steakhouse twice, and both meals were wonderful. Fried shrimp, salmon, and steak are all delicious but the highlight of one of our meals was one of the desserts, which was pretty incomparable. Called the Alamo Chocolate Burrito, it was basically a flour tortilla wrapped around a Hershey bar and deep fried. It was amazing!



Amazing dessert at the Alamo Steakhouse.

We also recommend any of the restaurants and shops at [The Old Mill](#). Located only one block off the busy main street of Pigeon Forge, the centerpiece of Old Mill Square is actually an original grist mill built in 1830 which still produces about half a ton of flour, cornmeal, grits, pancake mix, and hushpuppy mix, which is sold in the shops in the square and also around town. The Old Mill Restaurant and the Pottery House Café both use some of the mill's output to make fresh bread, cornbread, biscuits, and more so they are great places to eat. I especially recommend their corn chowder, which was so good I bought a bag to take home and make it myself!



Mountain stream and tunnel on the Cades Cove driving tour.

One of the highlights of a visit to Pigeon Forge is the many factory outlet malls in town. They have a fairly new Tanger Outlet where I whiled away a pleasant afternoon in the dozens of stores they have to offer.

Pigeon Forge has a lot to offer and we barely experienced a fraction of the many offerings. It's a great location for families with a huge variety of lodging options, great restaurants, and

plenty of activities. If you want to put Wilderness Wildlife Week on your calendar, it will provide a memorable spring experience for all visitors.

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For twenty years, I worked as a librarian in an elementary



school but finally decided to get serious about travel writing and devote all my time to it. Now, I travel the world and write all about it. I can't imagine a more fabulous or fulfilling job. I write a regular travel column for two regional, Central Kentucky magazines and contribute regularly to other magazines and online travel sites, such as The SavvyGal, A Luxury Travel Blog and

The Vacation Gals. I'm an avid reader and stay active with Yoga, Pilates and Zumba classes. My favorite place in the whole world is a beach - any beach. I have been married for 34 years and my husband is my favorite travel companion. I also rely on him for his excellent photography skills. We have two grown children and the best grandson in the world. Slowly but surely, we are visiting all the places we have dreamed about. Hopefully, the next one will be the one you want to read about!

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