

12 REASONS TO CHECK OUT CHATTANOOGA

Riverboats, trains and hang gliders are just a few of the incentives enticing travelers to stop in this vibrant city on the banks of the Tennessee River

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN FLIGHT PARK

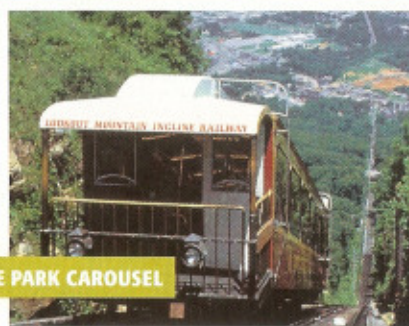
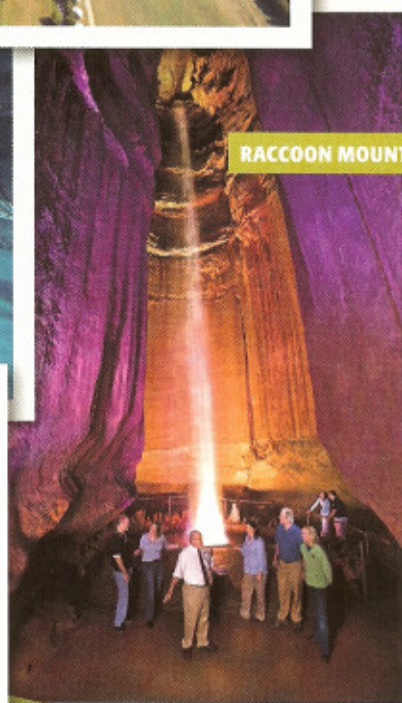


Photograph by Hope Philbrick



TENNESSEE AQUARIUM

RACCOON MOUNTAIN CAVERNS



COOLIDGE PARK CAROUSEL



COOLIDGE PARK CAROUSEL

Amid the clatter of breakfast dishes being cleared from tables, a representative of the Chattanooga Area Convention and Visitors Bureau rose to his feet and asked a group of 30 visitors, "How many of you have ever been to Chattanooga?" Most hands went up. Then he asked, "How many of you have actually visited Chattanooga and not just driven through it?" Most hands went down.

But over the course of my five day visit, I discovered a dozen reasons to park the car and get out. So try these tips on your next trip to Tennessee.



Most images are courtesy of The Chattanooga Area Convention and Visitors Bureau; see individual pictures for other photography credits

6. ROCK CITY



8. CREATIVE DISCOVERY MUSEUM

1 VISIT Penguins' Rock, the newest exhibit at the Tennessee Aquarium, featuring five pairs of macaroni penguins and five pairs of gentoo penguins. From the gallery you can watch the cold-climate birds' activities above and below water. A wave machine creates ocean-like swells that give the penguins a more natural environment and encourages them to play.

2 HANG GLIDE in Lookout Mountain Flight Park, the nation's largest and most popular full-time hang-gliding school and resort, located just 20 minutes from Chattanooga. Sail through the air at 2,000 feet on a tandem flight with a professional at your side, or work toward becoming a certified hang-gliding pilot so you can fly solo.

3 EXPLORE a cave. If you like nature unobstructed, take a spelunking tour at Raccoon Mountain Caverns. You'll get dirty from head to toe and strain muscles you never knew you had, but the reward is a chance to see rock formations such as stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone and rimstone up close.

If you prefer walking upright, holding a handrail and keeping your clothes

clean, and if you don't mind a dose of commercialism, visit Ruby Falls, a cave transformed into a tourist attraction in 1929. The highlight of the tour is a 145-foot underground waterfall.

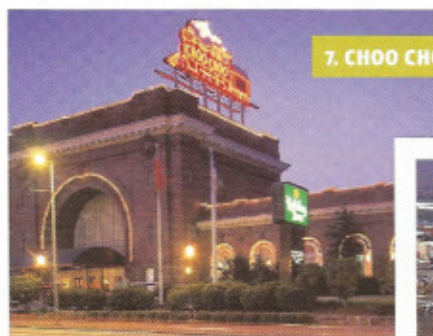
4 SPIN on the historic Coolidge Park Carousel, which was restored by artist Bud Ellis, in the seven-acre park on the north shore of the Tennessee River. Then learn how colorful carousel animals are crafted from blocks of wood at Horsin' Around, the nation's only carousel-carving school, about 15 minutes from the park in Soddy Daisy. Ellis and his students at Horsin' Around are building a carousel for the Chattanooga Zoo that features endangered and threatened animals. Carvings under way include a wolf, a manatee and a sea turtle.

5 RIDE the Incline Railway, the world's steepest passenger railway, with a 72.7 percent track grade. In operation since 1895, the ride offers panoramic views of Lookout Mountain valley. A one-way trip lasts approximately 15 minutes; round-trip rides are offered three times every hour, and you can start the trip at either the top or bottom stations.

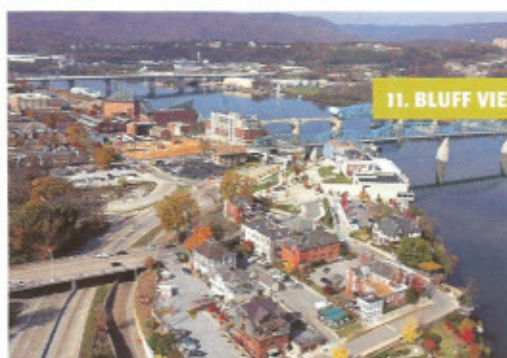
6 WANDER the 4,100 feet of trails in Rock City that incorporate 200-million-year-old geological formations, gardens with more than 400 native plant species and kitschy, gnome-adorned caverns. Highlights of the 15-acre preserve include a 100-foot waterfall, an overlook with a panoramic view of seven states and a 200-foot swinging bridge.

7 SLEEP inside a train car at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Holiday Inn. Guest accommodations include 48 Victorian train cars, each outfitted with queen-sized beds (some also have trundles), private baths and modern amenities. The 24-acre complex includes the Model Railroad Museum, restaurants, shopping and Terminal Station, a train depot designed in 1900.

8 RELEASE your inner child at the Creative Discovery Museum. Consistently ranked among the nation's top 20 children's museums, the place is designed especially for kids ages 12 and younger but is fun for all ages. Interactive exhibits provide an opportunity to build a robot, sail boats through locks and dams, play musical instruments, create



7. CHOO CHOO HOLIDAY INN



11. BLUFF VIEW ART DISTRICT



9. SOUTHERN BELLE RIVERBOAT

sculptures, see rocks glow in the dark, dig for dinosaur bones and more. There's a special area designed just for toddlers.

9 FLOAT along the Tennessee River aboard the Southern Belle Riverboat and learn the city's history while taking in the sights. Cruises for sightseeing, lunch and dinner are available, as are special tours such as the four-hour Fall Leaf Cruise that sails through the Tennessee River Gorge, also known as the Grand Canyon of the South.

10 MAKE OUT (or actually watch the movie) at Wilderness Outdoor Movie Theater. If you've never been to a drive-in, or if you want to revisit the good old days, pull in to view current movies—for example, *Spiderman 3* on its opening weekend—at prices way below those of most indoor theaters. The concessions stand is also bargain-priced. Double features are projected onto a 100-foot-by-50-foot screen, the largest in the world.

11 STROLL through the Bluff View Art District, which boasts restaurants, galleries, gardens and a historic bed and breakfast. The historic

neighborhood offers spectacular views of the Tennessee River, downtown Chattanooga and the Walnut Street Bridge, plus opportunities to play bocce ball, watch chocolatiers prepare tantalizing desserts, view sculptures and shop for fine art. Visit Rembrandt's Roasting Company to learn how coffee beans are roasted and sample a variety of flavors.

12 SIP wine at Tennessee's premier wine-tasting festival, Wine Over Water, held on the Walnut Street Bridge each fall. Taste more than 100 wines from around the world and dishes from area restaurants while listening to local musicians.

There are plenty of reasons to visit Chattanooga, and this list just scratches the surface. Plan a longer stay and enjoy the metro area's art museums, nature centers, shopping boutiques, hiking trails, restaurants, kayaking and mountain biking. The beautiful sights and friendly people make it worth the drive to, and not just through, Chattanooga. ♡

Hope S. Philbrick is a freelance writer because she doesn't think work and fun should be mutually exclusive

MORE INFORMATION

BLUFF VIEW ART DISTRICT
www.bluffviewartdistrict.com

CHATTANOOGA CHOO CHOO HOLIDAY INN
www.choochoo.com

CREATIVE DISCOVERY MUSEUM
www.cdmfun.org

HORSIN' AROUND
www.horsin-around.net

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN FLIGHT PARK
www.hanglide.com

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN INCLINE RAILWAY
www.ridetheincline.com

RACCOON MOUNTAIN CAVERNS
www.wildcave.com

ROCK CITY
www.seerockcity.com

RUBY FALLS
www.rubyfalls.com

SOUTHERN BELLE RIVERBOAT
www.chattanoogaariverboat.com

TENNESSEE AQUARIUM
www.tnaqua.com

WILDERNESS OUTDOOR MOVIE THEATER
www.wildernesstheater.com

WINE OVER WATER
www.wineoverwater.org

Want to know more? Call the Chattanooga Area Convention and Visitors Bureau at (800) 322-3344 or visit them at www.chattanooga.com.