



With 32 crossovers and the most acute banking of any all-wooden structure coaster, Thunderhead is the 2005 Golden Ticket winner for best wooden roller coaster in the world.

HEAD TO THE HILLS

Find a mountain retreat in Sevierville, Tenn.

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

If there's one thing that can bring together a firefighter, a poker champion, a new first-time mother, a retiree and a teacher, it's the promise of a luxury spa treatment. That's what recently lured me to join this diverse group of women in Sevierville, Tenn., for a "girl's getaway" weekend. Sevierville (pronounced Severe-ville, named for Tennessee's first governor John Sevier) not only gave us the chance to relax in multiple spas, but it also offered plenty of entertainment venues to rev up our friendships.

The Resort at Governor's Crossing proved to be a convenient and comfortable choice of accommodations. Each one-, two- and three-bedroom unit is individually furnished and decorated. My suite included a cozy living room with a gas fireplace and balcony overlooking the pool, a kitchenette with a stacked washer and dryer, a bedroom with a king-sized bed and a bathroom with jetted bathtub. Because this is a condominium complex and not a full-service hotel, the daily housekeeping services include fresh towels and trash removal. Full service is available for an extra charge determined by unit size, but the basics suited me just fine.

First stop on our itinerary was the Utopia Day Spa, which has a New Age vibe. We each chose different treatments; curiosity drove me to select ear candling. After a face and neck massage with aromatherapy oils and steamed towels, I was told to lie on my side. A 12-inch long hollow paper tube coated with paraffin was inserted into one ear and lit with a match. The theory is that the burning ear candle creates a vacuum that softens and pulls excess earwax into the candle. There was no discomfort or noticeable heat, but I also didn't experience the euphoria of improved hearing that I'd anticipated. I was envious of my friend who got to enjoy a 90-minute massage outdoors overlooking the pond.

I did enjoy a refreshing half-hour massage at the Spa at Oak Haven. The peaceful environment at this luxury spa got me wishing that I had time for another treatment.

But how to choose between the almost-heaven facial, mineral salt scrub, chocolate cake manicure and ice cream pedicure?

Of course, no girl's getaway could be complete without shopping expeditions. Five Oaks Tanger Outlet Center is Tennessee's largest outlet shopping area with 107

brand-name stores. Bass Pro Outdoor World, the state's largest outdoor store at 142,000 square feet, stocks outdoor gear and supplies. Scrapbook Superstore boasts the largest inventory of scrapbook supplies in the United States. We had a blast with a "make and take" class. The Apple Barn Complex, a working farm with more than 5,000 apple trees, incorporates a quaint candy factory, winery, bakery and general store. Historic Downtown Sevierville houses several boutique stores including Purple Cat, which specializes in beads and beaded jewelry; Change of a Dress, a women's clothing and accessories store; Second Thoughts, which showcases works by local artisans; Cherry Pit, a quilter's paradise; Common Good, a shop of unique gifts and home accessories; and Wagon Wheel Antiques.

For girls who just want to have fun, the broad range of attractions in and around Sevierville will deliver no matter what your definition of fun is. To quench our need for speed, we went to NASCAR SpeedPark and raced each other around eight different tracks. One afternoon, we hiked through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the nation's most visited national park and the only one that is free to enter. We putted through the obstacles at Old MacDonald's Mini Golf. At Dollywood, Tennessee's No. 1 attraction, we split into groups. Some wanted to ride the roller coasters, while others preferred to watch musical performances, shop the craftsmen's guild and explore the Dolly Parton museum. Despite our group's diverse tastes, we all enjoy shows, and both the Great China Circus and Legends of China feature breathtaking acrobatics and elegant dance performances.

Since Sevierville is located just a day's drive from more than one-half of the U.S. population, odds are it's a great getaway option for your friends and family members—no matter how different everyone in the group may actually be. **SP**

TRAVEL



Find more than 19 varieties of apples at the Apple Barn, as well as apple butter, jams, jellies and hundreds of other goodies.

COURTESY OF SEVIERVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

More than 40 performers bring Chinese acrobatics to Sevierville, Tenn., at the Great China Circus.



COURTESY OF SEVIERVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

IF YOU GO

WHEN TO GO

There are reasons to visit year round:

- Springfest: Mar. 12–June 8, 2008
- Bloomin' Barbecue & Bluegrass: May 16–17, 2008
- Smoky Mountain Harvest Festival: Sept. 19–Oct. 31, 2008
- Smoky Mountain Winterfest: Nov. 3–Feb. 28, 2008
- Sevierville's Annual Christmas Parade: Dec. 6, 2008

WHERE TO EAT

- Applewood Farmhouse Restaurant
865-428-1222
www.applewoodfarmhouserestaurant.com
- Chop House
865-774-1991
www.thechophouse.com
- The Diner
865-908-1904
- Flapjacks Pancake Cabin
865-774-5374
- Taulbee's
865-453-2782

WHERE TO STAY

- Oak Haven Resort & Spa
800-652-2611
www.oakhavenresort.com
- Resort at Governor's Crossing
800-398-5179
www.governorscrossing.net

MORE INFORMATION

- Sevierville Chamber of Commerce
888-766-5948
www.visitsevierville.com