

Gatlinburg, TN: 2025

This year, I was graciously invited to my partner's annual family vacation-- this time to Gatlinburg, TN. Read on to learn about our 6-day adventure in the mountain town of Eastern Tennessee!

As with most cross-country excursions, the first day of traveling can be a bit exhausting. We flew into Nashville, TN (Knoxville tends to have more expensive flights) and drove about four hours to our destination in Gatlinburg. On the way, we stopped at the world famous [Buc-ee's](#)! As a west-coast dweller, the spectacle of Buc-ee's was completely new to me and can be best described as a Costco-sized gas station with rows and rows of gas pumps, a convenience store to the max and the cleanest bathrooms you could ask for on a road trip! Although I was not fond of the crowds of people and bountiful selection of beef-jerky, I was relieved to find a clean bathroom with numerous stalls. It is also a right of passage to visit a Buc-ee's on that side of the country.

Upon arrival, we checked into our hotel-- [Margaritaville](#). Despite the cheesy reputation, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the place. My partner and I stayed in a room nearly the size of a studio apartment, complete with a huge shower with multiple shower heads and even a beautiful balcony facing the front of the hotel. I guess it was also suiting that we stayed in Margaritaville over Cinco De Mayo, and yes, I enjoyed several margaritas at the hotel bar over the course of our stay!

After getting a good night's rest (thank you blackout curtains!) the family gathered for a trip to [Anakeesta](#), a "mountaintop adventure park," walking distance from our hotel. Actually, to get to the attraction we had to take a ski lift to the top of the mountain, which in itself was fun! Anakeesta was enjoyable, but expect to do lot's of walking! There were several attractions to stay busy and get your money's worth, such as the smokey mountain observatory tower, treetop skywalk and two mountain coasters. There were also plenty of shops, a restaurant and a really cool bar at the observatory.

Apart from Anakeesta, which was the main attraction down the strip we were staying at, there were a number of touristy attractions to keep busy. My partner and I enjoyed visiting two different arcades and the rest of the family explored one of the many mini-golf attractions. One day, we all went to the [Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies](#). The aquarium was fun, but a bit expensive given the time it took to see everything. Like most tourist locations, the various

vendors are aware that patrons are at the mercy of the parameters of said trip and can charge what they want since they are the ones supplying the “things to do.” Ultimately, if it were just my partner and I traveling, we would have opted for an Airbnb closer to the smokies, where you can venture in nature (no cost) and buy/cook all of your food from home instead of paying everywhere-- truly a water bottle on the trip was a luxury!

Of course, when visiting Gatlinburg, attending [Dollywood](#) is a must! Dollywood was only about a twenty minute drive from our hotel into Pigeon Forge, and it just so happened to be the 40th anniversary of its inception. The tickets were about \$100 each after taxes and fees, but reasonable considering the amount of attractions (not nearly as expensive as Disney!). It might have been because it was raining all day, but the ride wait times were also very reasonable and their “timesaver passes” were not necessary. My partner and I enjoyed riding several of the rollercoasters, my favorite was the Wild Eagle, and we even managed to purchase their famous cinnamon bread! Out of all the different activities in and near Gatlinburg, this was definitely my favorite-- I highly recommend stopping by if you find yourself in the area.

On our final day, my partner and I were dropped off in Nashville-- the rest of the family was staying a few more days in Franklin. And we weren't just dropped off anywhere, but none other than [Third Man Records](#)! Even better, one of my fellow Third Man fans, and good friend, met up with us (he and his wife live in Nashville). After breaking the bank at Third Man, the Nashville natives took us down Broadway, where we enjoyed our drinks over live music. Afterwards, we visited their beautiful home, equipped with a few fur-babies! After several days of being away from home, I couldn't have asked for a better ending to our trip-- surrounded by friends that make you feel at home!

Overall, I think I sufficiently explored Gatlinburg, but I definitely see myself one day spending time hiking in the actual Smokey Mountains and 100% spending more than just a few hours in Nashville!