

DESTINATION: CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

CHOOSE

Hiking, biking, paddling
and more abound at
Tennessee's Scenic City.

BY MELISSA L KAUFFMAN

Chattanooga!

Surrounded by Tennessee's southeast mountains and with the Tennessee River running right through it, Chattanooga was made for outdoor lovers. You'll find great hiking, biking and water sports opportunities throughout the city and surrounding areas. It's the perfect spot for a RV trip, because it's just a two- to three-hour drive to other popular destinations like Nashville, Knoxville, Asheville in North Carolina, and Atlanta.

There's so much to do in Chattanooga, but if you only have time to focus on one area, take a drive up Lookout Mountain, which sits 2,000 miles above sea level. It's right outside downtown Chattanooga, on the Georgia/Tennessee border and is part of The Cumberland Plateau — the southern part of the Appalachian Plateau in the Appalachian Mountains. At Lookout Mountain, four unique experiences wow visitors: Rock City, Ruby Falls, the Incline Railway and Point Park, which is part of the Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park. Just take it slow driving the RV because the roads are steep and twisting.

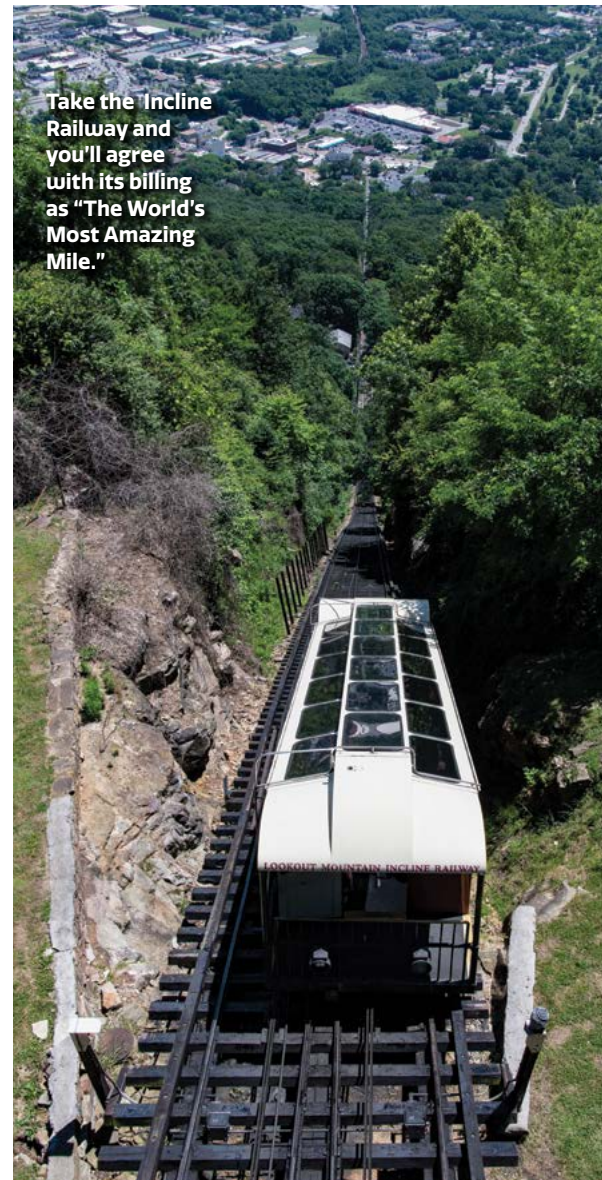
SEE ROCK CITY

You'll see advertisements for visiting **Rock City** long before you get there. In fact, Rock City is just as famous for its advertising as the destination. It opened in 1932, when the only way to advertise was billboards. Owners Garnet and Frieda Carter put their "See Rock City" billboards on barn roofs through the south, making them some of the most well-known and iconic billboards in the U.S.



MELISSA L. KAUFMAN

From this picturesque vantage point, visitors to Rock City can see seven states!



Take the Incline Railway and you'll agree with its billing as "The World's Most Amazing Mile."

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Rock City itself is just as unique. This fourth-generation-owned botanical and geological park packs a solid afternoon of fun with a 4,100-foot walking trail through plants, one-of-a-kind sculptures and lots of rocks in all shapes and sizes. Don't miss the 90-foot waterfall, the 180-foot long suspension bridge, the retro Mother Goose Village (with mini scenes of favorite nursery stories) and the Fairyland Caverns.

My favorite spot is Lover's Leap, a large rock jutting out from the side of Lookout Mountain. The amazing view from here allows you to see seven states at one time: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

It's self-guided, so go at your own pace; there are stairs and just under a mile of



MELISSA L. KAUFMAN

walking. Leashed, well-behaved dogs are allowed. You can pick from the couple of places to get food inside the gardens. Tickets are timed, so buy them online before you arrive, or you may have to wait, especially during the summer. (1400 Patten Road, Lookout Mountain, GA; 706-820-2531; seerockcity.com. RV parking available. Open year-round, but hours vary depending on the season.)

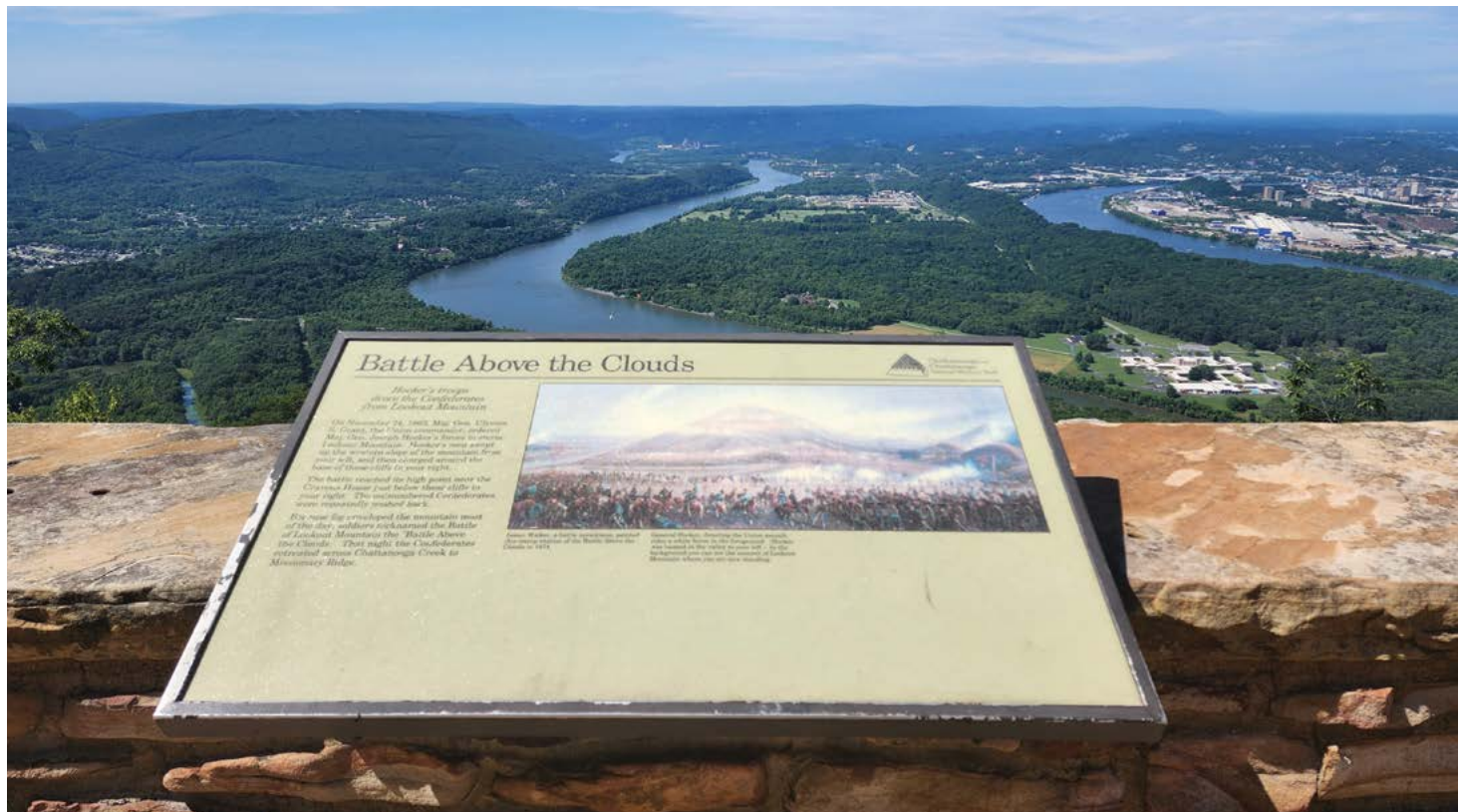
RIDE THE INCLINE RAILWAY

Incline tracks were created more than 135 years ago for train cars to climb up Lookout Mountain from the town of St. Elmo. Today, you can ride up and down the steep incline for fun instead of transportation. Two inclines were created, the first in 1887 and the second — which is used today — in 1895.

The **Incline Railway** has two substations — one at the top by Point Park and one at the bottom in St. Elmo. Each way takes 10 minutes, and the cars leave every 20 minutes. Enjoy the 10-mph ride — it's one of the steepest passenger railways in the world due to the 72.7% grade near the top. Once at the top, check out Point Park, then ride back to the bottom and enjoy ice cream at **Clumpy's** or **Mr. T's Pizza and Ice Cream** in St. Elmo.

Tickets are timed, so buy online ahead of time to avoid waiting. Tickets are \$15 per adult round trip and \$7 for children. (3917 St. Elmo Ave.; 423-821-4224. Only a few RV parking spaces are available. Park at the St. Elmo station at the bottom as there is no RV parking at the top. Open year-round but hours vary depending on the season. No dogs allowed.)

Lover's Leap is a must-see attraction at Rock City which is located just six miles from downtown Chattanooga.



MELISSA L. KAUFMAN

Union troops defeated Confederate forces at the Battle of Lookout Mountain, which is also known as the Battle Above the Clouds.

The passage-way to Ruby Falls was discovered by chemist Leo Lambert in 1928. He named the falls after his wife.



MAMIYOJU / ADOBE STOCK

VIEW POINT PARK

For some of the best views in Chattanooga, don't miss Point Park, part of the **Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park**. This 10-acre Civil War memorial overlooks the Lookout Mountain Battlefield, where the Battle Above the Clouds was fought in November 1863. A paved path winds throughout the park's monuments with spectacular views of the city and river at different points. (110 Point Park Road Lookout Mountain; 423-821-7786. Admission is \$10 for adults, children and veterans are free. Dogs are allowed. Although free, car parking is limited. No RV parking.)

Walk down to the Ochs Memorial Observatory, which houses different historical photos. Warning: It's a bit of a steep walk up and down to the observatory, but the views are worth it. Outside the park sits the **Lookout Mountain Battlefield Visitors Center** that includes a Civil War digital diorama, a relic and weapon collection, plus a bookstore and gift shop. (1110 East Brow Road, Lookout Mountain; 423-821-2812. Open year round.)

DISCOVER RUBY FALLS

Want to see an underground cavern and a 145-foot waterfall? Just take a glass-fronted

GOOD EATS, Y'ALL!

You'll find a surprising amount of variety in Chattanooga's restaurants, not just Southern cooking. I asked pretty much every native Chattanooga I encountered for their favorite, made a list and then checked them out. Here are some of my favorites.

Craving Italian: Tony's Pasta Shop & Trattoria, a carriage house restaurant nestled in the Bluff View Art District, offers baskets of bread from the Bluff View Bakery as soon as you are seated. The bread is so amazing (and yes, you'll go through more than one basket!) that you could be too full to eat the main meal. My favorite here is the baked pesto chicken ravioli. (212 High St.; 423-321-0235)

Train Experiences:

Looking for a completely unique eating experience? Try the **Homefront Tea Room** at the Tennessee Valley Railroad Grand Junction Depot. Enjoy the experience of high tea (tea, scones, sandwiches, sweets) followed by around an hour-long train ride. For those who are not high tea lovers, try the **dinner train** experience — a three-course meal in the dining cars. Whichever you choose, you'll enjoy every moment. I sure did. Pinkies up! (4119 Cromwell Road; 423-894-8028. No pets allowed.)

Ice Cream Galore: A Chattanooga favorite is **The Ice Cream Show**, which offers so many ice cream choices

— over 17,000 possible flavors! How? First choose vanilla or chocolate ice cream (or yogurt, sugar-free or dairy-free options) and then add to it your pick of a variety of flavors (Kahlua, rum, hazelnut, etc.) and ingredients (Thin Mint, banana, cookie dough, etc.). It takes me a long time to order because the combinations are overwhelming. The shop sits on the south side of the pedestrian Walnut Street Bridge, which makes it perfect to grab some ice cream before making the trek to the North Shore. (105 Walnut St.; 423-702-5173. Closed Sundays, hours vary depending on seasons.)

Casual American Fare: Previously a retail store, **Frazier Five & Dime** now offers casual dining. The front of the restaurant has a large horseshoe bar area with tables that look out over the North Shore's Frazier Street, where you can watch tourists and locals walk by. It's American fare with a southern twist: smoked pork belly, house-made bologna, pimento cheese, biscuits and more. My favorite is from the brunch menu — smoked salmon eggs benedict, yum! (16 Frazier Ave.; 423-541-9655. Serves Sunday brunch and dinner from 3 p.m. to close.)

Fan Favorite: When I asked Chattanoogaans for a favorite restaurant, **Boathouse Rotisserie & Raw Bar** was on everyone's list. Located right on the south bank of the river, the views command. You'll find the restaurant packed most days of the week. Although known as a seafood restaurant the menu offers a variety of fare, from rotisserie chicken to fish tacos and, of course, raw oysters. I enjoyed the Ahi Tuna Poke Bowl while my husband chowed down on the Chicken Chimichanga. (1459 Riverside Drive; 423-622-0122. Does not accept reservations, so be prepared to wait.)



MELISSA L. KAUFMAN



ROBERT HAINER / ADOBE STOCK

The Tennessee Aquarium (right) is located on the Tennessee River. You can take the Walnut Street Bridge (above) to get there.

elevator that descends 260 feet into Lookout Mountain. You'll spy the deepest, tallest underground waterfall open to the public in the U.S. **Ruby Falls** opened for tours in June 1930, with the cave, waterfall and the destination's limestone castle listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

A variety of tours are available: the basic cave walk to Ruby Falls, a history tour, a gentle walking tour and a lantern tour, which takes place in the evening. The basic tour takes about an hour and a half, but plan for more if you want to peruse the gift shop or check out the view from the Lookout Mountain Tower and Blue Heron Overlook. These are timed tours, so buy your ticket online in advance to avoid long waits.

If going underground isn't enough of a thrill, you can also purchase tickets to the Ruby Falls' High Point Zip adventure — 700 feet or rushing ziplines. There's plenty of parking but it's limited for RVs.

The zipline is located close to Rock City and Point Park, so you can do all three in one day if you time the tickets right, but I advise doing it over two days. (1720 S. Scenic Highway; 423-821-2544. *Dogs are not allowed, but there are four kennels available on a first-come, first-served basis.*)

WALK DOWNTOWN

The Tennessee river runs right through Chattanooga, making it incredibly picturesque. The South Shore downtown area —



KENNETH SPONSER / ADOBE STOCK

south of the river— includes the Tennessee Aquarium and the Bluff View Art District, along with the Riverwalk.

The **Tennessee Aquarium** takes about two hours to go through and also includes an IMAX theater (tickets sold separately). The aquarium is housed in two buildings that highlight the biodiversity of the Southeast, with its rivers, caves and mountains. It's located along the river and the Riverwalk. (One Broad Street; 800-262-0695. *Open Sunday through Saturdays, closed Thanksgiving and Christmas.*)

After the aquarium, take the Riverwalk to the Bluff View Art District and the **Hunter Museum of American Art**, which is surrounded by some incredible outdoor artwork. The museum has one of the most complete collections of American art in the Southeast. (10 Bluff View; 423-267-0968. *Closed Tuesdays and holidays.*)

Stop by the free sculpture garden exhibit of the **River Gallery** high on the bluff, along with a spectacular view of the Tennessee River. It features permanent sculptures and hosts an annual changing exhibit. If you love

walking, stay on the Riverwalk, which boasts a 16.1-mile walkway along the Tennessee River Southern bank.

If your time is limited, I recommend crossing from downtown to the trendy shopping and eating neighborhood, North Shore. You can get there by four different bridges, but the one to take is the **Walnut Street Bridge**. This bridge — one of the longest pedestrian bridges in the world — takes about 10 to 15 minutes to walk across and the view and breeze make it well worth it. You'll find plenty of shopping and fun eateries on the

The Tennessee Aquarium requires timed-entry tickets. Guests must arrive within their scheduled 30-minute time block to be admitted.

North Shore, plus its own Riverwalk. It has two parks — **Coolidge** and **Renaissance** — all great for walking your dogs. My favorite part: the **Coolidge Park Antique Carousel**, where you can ride one of 52 whimsically carved animals (I love the rabbit!).

Note: There's no good place to park an RV in downtown Chattanooga or North Shore, so it's best to leave it behind at one of the RV parks. There is a free downtown electric shuttle service.

DO SO MUCH MORE

These attractions don't cover everything you can do in Chattanooga. Water adventures abound throughout the area with plenty of opportunities to canoe or kayak in the Tennessee River Blueway (the 45 miles between the Chickamauga and the Nickajack Dam) and nearby lakes. Whitewater rafting is big here, with several rivers running through Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee. If that's not your style,

you can cruise around the river and city on the **Southern Belle Riverboat**, which you can do in under two hours.

Prefer biking? Rent bikes downtown or ride the dirt trails in the surrounding parks. Two **U.S. Bicycle Route Systems** go through Tennessee too, with USBR 121 and USBR 21 connecting to Chattanooga.

More into drinking up adventure? You'll find over 15 local breweries in Southeast Tennessee, plus you can tour **Chattanooga Whiskey**, which brews award-winning bourbon.

Whatever or wherever your taste for adventure lies, you are sure to find it in Chattanooga. You never know, you might be one of the families that fall in love with the area after a visit and decide to make it their permanent home. 🏠

Melissa L. Kauffman is a freelance writer and editor, who recently relocated to Chattanooga. For the past decade, Melissa and her husband have traveled around the country in their RV along with their dogs and parrots.



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The Walnut Street Bridge is for pedestrians only and is known for its spectacular views and as a great place to meet new friends.

WHERE TO STAY

There is a range of RV campgrounds in the southeast around Chattanooga. Where you stay depends on what activity you most want to do.

River Life RV Resort: Located on the banks of the Tennessee, **River Life RV Resort** has both 30- and 50-amp full hookup sites. There's a limited number of spots, so reserve in advance. (21448 River Canyon Road; 423-413-7411)

Ocoee RV Park: Just outside of the Cherokee National Forest and Cleveland, Tennessee, is **Ocoee RV Park**. Located just 45 minutes from downtown Chattanooga, this campground is perfect for those who want to kayak, canoe or whitewater raft because it's close to several outdoor adventure companies. Includes a dog park, showers and laundry facilities. (1765 US-64, Benton; 423-582-2258)

Lookout Mountain/Chattanooga West KOA Holiday: Part of the KOA campgrounds, **Chattanooga West** is the closest to Lookout Mountain and downtown Chattanooga. Includes all the KOA amenities: pool, frisbee/disc golf, bathrooms and dog park. (930 Mountain Shadows Drive, Trenton, GA; 423-661-7655)



MELISSA L. KAUFFMAN

The Hunter Museum of American Art is housed in three buildings that represent 100 years of architecture. Above is the 21st century waterfront west wing, a \$22 million expansion that was completed in 2005.

The Coolidge Park Antique Carousel (left) was originally constructed in 1894 and was restored by local carver Bud Ellis, who ran Horsin' Around woodcarving school.