



April 6, 2004

Great Places To Visit In Southeastern U.S.

By Dennis Gaub for KOA Kompass

You can turn any camping trip into a memorable vacation by visiting some of the top attractions, scenic, historic or outdoor recreation sites in North America.

And it's easy to do by planning a journey that combines stopovers at KOA campgrounds with area attractions or National Park locations.

To make your task easier, the KOA Kompass kicks off a new feature beginning this month that will highlight great places to visit in the U.S. and Canada. This month's focus is on destinations within the Southeastern part of the U.S. In a region rich with scenic and historic sites, it's a challenge to choose a handful of top destinations, but four are especially worth travelers' time:

- The Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Fort Sumter National Monument
- Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site

The 16th president was born on the 348-acre Sinking Spring Farm (near present-day Hodgenville, Kentucky) on February 12, 1809. His parents, Thomas and Nancy, had settled there two months earlier. The Lincolns later moved about 10 miles away to Knob Creek, where Lincoln spent more of his boyhood.

Congress designated the farm as an historic site on July 17, 1816. The home at Knob Creek became part of the park in 2001.

A Kentucky cabin dating from the early 19th century, similar to the one in which Lincoln was born, is preserved in a memorial building on the site.

A visitor center displays tools and utensils representative of the period and the Lincoln family Bible. Other activities include bird watching, hiking, interpretive programs, nature walks and wildlife viewing.

Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/abli/index.htm>

Blue Ridge Parkway

The Parkway's winding 469-mile path through North Carolina and Virginia connects Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks. Travelers will find abundant scenic overlooks, picnic and camping facilities, trails, and cultural and natural areas.

The Parkway was a Depression-era project designed to provide as much employment as possible. Crews completed about half the road by World War II, and all but one section was open by the 1960s. The last piece, around Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, was finished in 1987.

Portions of the parkway reach elevations of more than 6,000 feet, and the average elevation is about 3,000 feet. This altitude, combined with long curves and bridges, plus overhanging trees that shade the road, results in frequent freezing and thawing and ice buildup on the road. For information on temporary closures due to weather, call

828-298-0398.

Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/blri/index.htm>

Fort Sumter National Monument

The Civil War started here. The Confederate government attacked South Carolina's Fort Sumter soon after President Lincoln, in a show of Federal sovereignty, ordered re-supplying of the U.S. Army garrison stationed there. Union forces surrendered on April 14, 1861, and Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas seceded to round out the ill-fated Confederacy.

The monument includes Fort Sumter located in Charleston Harbor, the Liberty Square Visitor Education Center and departure facilities in Charleston at 340 Concord Street, and Fort Moultrie, located on Sullivan's Island.

Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/fosu/index.htm>

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Ridges covered with deep forests span the line separating North Carolina and Tennessee. The timbered crests silhouette this 521,490-acre national park, one of the largest protected areas in the eastern U.S.

The Smokies draw more than nine million visitors annually, attracted by plant and wildlife diversity, beautiful rolling mountains, preserved aspects of Appalachian culture and the area's wilderness qualities.

Hikers can trek 800 miles of trail and sample an area that the Cherokees once called home.

Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm>

Dozens of KOA campgrounds are located throughout the region. They can be located online by state: [Georgia](#), [Alabama](#), [Tennessee](#), [North Carolina](#), [South Carolina](#), [Virginia](#), [Kentucky](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Florida](#).

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