

# 20 Experiences You Can Only Get in Arkansas

## *The first things you must do after moving here*

### PERUSE WORKS OF ART IN THE WOODS.

Located on 120 acres of Ozark woodlands in Bentonville, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art is one of the nation's premier art institutions dedicated solely to American art and artists, including notable works by Norman Rockwell, John Koch, Wayne Thiebaud, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. The museum's architecture is inspired by its picturesque surroundings and aimed at enhancing and protecting the natural beauty of the site. More than 3 miles of sculpture and walking trails link the museum's forested park and gardens to downtown Bentonville.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: [www.CrystalBridges.org](http://www.CrystalBridges.org)*

### PLAY ALL 12 COURSES ON THE NATURAL STATE GOLF TRAIL.

The Natural State Golf Trail was created to showcase the scenic courses that dot the state and allow you to play through rolling hills, hardwood forests, towering pines, grand prairies and fertile deltas. Whether you seek to challenge your skills at a championship golf course or just play for fun, world-class golf awaits you on the trail. After you've checked all 12 off your list, there are still more than 200 Arkansas courses left to play.

*Regions: All*

*More info: [www.NaturalStateGolfTrail.com](http://www.NaturalStateGolfTrail.com)*

### BIKE A 17-MILE LOOP ALONG THE ARKANSAS RIVER.

Then, traverse the 37-mile Womble Trail, one of the top single-track biking trails in the country according to the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

Whether you prefer roadway or rocky path, Arkansas's biking trails are plentiful. Routes of varying difficulty are spread all across the state. As a testament to the state's commitment to biking, a \$9.2 million pedestrian-bicycle bridge was completed in Little Rock in 2006. Dubbed the Big Dam Bridge, it's the longest pedestrian-intended bridge in the U.S. and serves a vital link in the Arkansas River Trail, a 17-mile loop stretching from downtown Little Rock to Pinnacle Mountain State Park on the southern riverbank and from downtown North Little Rock to Cook's Landing on the northern riverbank.

*Regions: All*

*More info: [www.Arkansas.com/Outdoors/Biking](http://www.Arkansas.com/Outdoors/Biking)*

### BUY A WATER BUFFALO.

It's OK if you don't live on a farm — you buy it, or another animal, to help families living in poverty achieve self-reliance. Heifer International's water buffaloes, which sell for \$250 each or \$25 for a share, provide draft power for planting, milk for protein and manure for fertilizer and fuel to families in poor villages. Heifer, a global nonprofit with 928 active projects in 54 countries and 28 U.S. states, is headquartered in Little Rock, along with Heifer Village, which shows visitors what life's like around the world for populations less fortunate. Visitors can tour the village or the nonprofit's super environmentally friendly headquarters, or travel one hour to Heifer Ranch in Perryville — complete with water buffalo (among other animals) and global village re-creations.

*Region: Central*

*More info: [www.Heifer.org](http://www.Heifer.org)*

### GEOCACHE ON TOP OF SUGAR LOAF MOUNTAIN.

While it's not the only geocaching hot spot in Arkansas, it's a great place to start. Sugar Loaf Mountain, an island in the middle of Greers Ferry Lake, is home to one of the first national scenic trails. The view — and any geocache treasure found along the way — is a great reward for making the 1-mile trek to the top. Climb down and head to nearby Indian Rock House Cave, a local landmark not to be missed in the Fairfield Bay resort community.

Next, geocache the rest of the state with Arkansas State Parks' ParkCache — a series of geocaches, one in each of the 52

state parks, that contain clues to a 53rd geocache hidden in Arkansas. It's a perfect way to get to know Arkansas better while enjoying the state's great outdoors.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: [www.Arkansas.com/Geocache](http://www.Arkansas.com/Geocache), [www.Geocaching.com](http://www.Geocaching.com)*

## FLY THROUGH THE TREETOPS.

Zip lining has propelled toward popularity over the past few years, and several locations around the state offer the high-flying, perfect-for-all-ages adventures.

Loco Ropes! Treetop Adventure Park at Ozark Folk Center State Park in Mountain View offers a handful of different options. Located on a mountain ridge near Ponca, Buffalo Outdoor Center offers zip liners a slower pace from tree to tree. Rowdy Adventures, a 300-acre outdoor adventure park in Okolona at Copperhead Creek Preserve, has 13 zip lines and miles of cable. In Jasper, Horseshoe Canyon Ranch delivers an adrenaline rush on its "Iron Horse," the highest, fastest and longest zip-line in Arkansas, which promises a 277-foot vertical drop and zipping speeds of 50 mph or more.

*Regions: Ozarks, Timberlands*

*More info: [www.LocoRopes.com](http://www.LocoRopes.com),  
[www.BuffaloRiver.com](http://www.BuffaloRiver.com), [www.RowdyAdventures.com](http://www.RowdyAdventures.com),  
[www.HorseshoeCanyonDudeRanch.com](http://www.HorseshoeCanyonDudeRanch.com)*

## EAT YOURSELF SILLY AT AN ARKANSAS FOOD FESTIVAL.

The Natural State is big on its cuisine and celebrates this fact with numerous food festivals throughout the year in all corners of the state. Among the most popular are Picklefest in Atkins and the World's Championship Steak Cook-Off in Magnolia (May), the Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival and Emerson's PurpleHull Pea Festival (June), Altus Grape Fest (July), the Hope and Cave City annual watermelon festivals (August), Bikes, Blues & BBQ in Fayetteville (October) and the duck gumbo cook-off at Stuttgart's Wings Over the Prairie Festival (November). From barbecue and chili, to peaches and peas – Arkansas has a food festival you'll enjoy.

*Regions: All*

*More info: [www.Arkansas.com/Dining/Festivals-Cook-Offs](http://www.Arkansas.com/Dining/Festivals-Cook-Offs)*

## DINE BESIDE THE ARKANSAS RIVER.

Other cities across the country afford residents river views, but only in Arkansas can you see what we see while dining along the Arkansas River. Sit in style on the terrace of Brave New Restaurant (order one of the specials) and soak up views of the downtown Little Rock skyline, or relax with creative cocktails and live music on the popular deck at Cajuns Wharf.

From either vantage point, watch barges float by hauling loads to distant destinations, spy wildlife along the banks or witness a brilliant sunset fall behind red rock cliffs. These meals and memorable views are not to be missed.

*Region: Central*

*More info: [www.BraveNewRestaurant.com](http://www.BraveNewRestaurant.com), [www.CajunsWharf.com](http://www.CajunsWharf.com)*

## DIG FOR DIAMONDS.

And keep what you find! One of the gems in Arkansas's crown is Crater of Diamonds State Park, the only diamond-producing site in the world that is open to the public. The largest diamond ever found in North America – at 40.23 carats – was discovered here. For a small rental fee, the park provides all the tools necessary to prospect in its 38-acre diamond search area. The park's "finders, keepers" policy ensures that anything you unearth is yours to keep, regardless of value.

*Region: Ouachitas*

*More info: [www.CraterOfDiamondsStatePark.com](http://www.CraterOfDiamondsStatePark.com)*

## FEEL THE GROOVE AT THE KING BISCUIT BLUES FESTIVAL.

Held annually for three days in October, the King Biscuit Blues Festival takes place in historic downtown Helena-West Helena on the banks of the Mississippi River. Each year, tens of thousands of people flood in to hear the soulful tunes of notable blues musicians like B. B. King, Taj Mahal and Dr. John and the Lower 911. Since its inception in 1986, King Biscuit has grown to include three stages and additional activities, including the Kenneth Freemyer 5K, the Blues in Schools program and the Tour da' Delta Bicycle Tour. Check the website for the current lineup.

*Region: Delta*

*More info: [www.KingBiscuitFestival.com](http://www.KingBiscuitFestival.com)*

## BEHOLD THOUSANDS OF BLOSSOMS AND BUTTERFLIES.

Nestled in the Ouachita Mountains on a peninsula in Lake Hamilton, the 210-acre Garvan Woodland Gardens is a botanical retreat. The gardens are open all year except January. Special events are scheduled year-round, including the popular Festival of Lights, which illuminates the garden with almost a million twinkling lights during much of November and all of December. Up north, the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks is another floral haven, welcoming more than 40,000 visitors a year to its collection of 10 themed gardens and the region's only butterfly house.

*Regions: Ouachitas, Ozarks*

*More info: [www.GarvanGardens.org](http://www.GarvanGardens.org), [www.BGOzarks.org](http://www.BGOzarks.org)*

## SLEEP AT A FINE ART MUSEUM.

Named to *Travel + Leisure* magazine's 2013 "It List: Best New Hotels," 21c Museum Hotel lures over-nighters for a unique experience – stay at a hotel that's also a fine art museum. Located just north of Bentonville's historic square and a quarter mile from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the 104-room hotel features 12,000 square feet of exhibition space solely dedicated to exhibiting the art of the 21st century. 21c also hosts rotating curated exhibits, poetry readings, film screenings, artist lectures and live performances. Admission is free to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: [www.21cMuseumHotels.com](http://www.21cMuseumHotels.com)*

## CHUG ALONG THE ARKANSAS & MISSOURI RAILROAD.

Step back in time and take a ride on the Arkansas & Missouri Railroad in one of its beautifully refurbished antique passenger or parlor coaches. Established in 1896, the A&M Railroad meanders over tall trestles and through a quarter-mile tunnel to the top of the scenic Boston Mountains and into the historic Arkansas River Basin. Jovial conductors enhance the experience with tales about the area's rich history while tending to passengers' needs. Rides depart from Fort Smith, Springdale and Van Buren.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: [www.AMRailroad.com](http://www.AMRailroad.com)*

## CRUISE THE GREAT RIVER ROAD.

If you need a good excuse to rent a convertible, here it is. Named a "Southern Travel Treasure" by AAA's *Southern Traveler* magazine, the 363-mile Arkansas Great River Road is a National Scenic Byway that runs parallel to the Mississippi River in eastern Arkansas. The road begins in Blytheville and winds down through Osceola, West Memphis, Helena-West Helena, DeWitt, Dumas, Lake Village and Eudora before ending at the Louisiana state line at the very southeast corner of the state. Gaze at expansive rice, cotton, wheat and soybean fields, as well as swamps, bayous and the oxbow lakes created by the Mississippi River as it changed its course. Along the way, stop to visit museums, monuments and any of six state parks that highlight Delta heritage and history.

*Region: Delta*

*More info: [www.DeltaByways.com](http://www.DeltaByways.com)*

## DARE TO TAKE ON THE COSSATOT RIVER.

The National Park Service describes the Cossatot River as "probably the most challenging" whitewater float in the state, something the early Native Americans knew when they named it Cossatot — "skull crusher." Much of the river's whitewater is not recommended for the inexperienced canoeist, and experienced river-runners should always check water levels in advance.

Looking for tamer waters? The Buffalo National River – the most popular rafting river in the state – as well as the Spring River are fine choices for a more forgiving float.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: Find out more: [www.Arkansas.com/Outdoors/Canoeing-Rafting-Kayaking](http://www.Arkansas.com/Outdoors/Canoeing-Rafting-Kayaking)*

## TOUR ARKANSAS WINE COUNTRY.

About a half-dozen wineries near where the Arkansas River meanders between the Ozark and Ouachita Mountains offer tastings, tours and events. Paris, Ozark, Wiederkehr Village and Altus are located in Arkansas Wine Country, just off Interstate 40 northwest of Little Rock and east of Fort Smith. Winemaking actually began there in the 1880s, making Arkansas the South's oldest wine-producing state. Two European families started it all after noting the region's similarities in climate and soil with that of Switzerland and Germany's winemaking regions. Make a day trip or enjoy more wine and stay the night at a nearby bed and breakfast.

*Region: River Valley*

*More info: [www.Arkansas.com/Dining/Wineries-Breweries](http://www.Arkansas.com/Dining/Wineries-Breweries)*

## TRACE THE FOOTSTEPS OF CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS.

To be fair, you can do this in just about any state below the Mason Dixon Line, but Arkansas ups the ante with a special trail system for bikers, history buffs and road trippers alike. The Arkansas Department of Heritage's Civil War Trail invites riders to journey along eight scenic paths that Confederate and Union soldiers carved into Arkansas's history more than 150 years ago. When you've finished those, pick up the Trail of Tears, the Southwest Trail or the Butterfield Overland Trail — these history trips recount even more of Arkansas's storied past.

*Regions: All*

*More info: [www.ArkansasHeritageTrails.com](http://www.ArkansasHeritageTrails.com)*

## EXPLORE THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT.

Look back on President Bill Clinton's childhood, newlywed days and political career in various outposts across three regions of the state. In the Timberlands, explore Clinton's childhood home in Hope. In Fayetteville, tour the first home of Bill and Hillary (they were married in the living room). And join tourists from around the globe in Little Rock at the 148,000-square-foot Clinton Presidential Center, which houses a museum, presidential archives and educational and research facilities. Must-see exhibits include full-scale replicas of the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room, decorated exactly the way they were during Clinton's time in office.

*Regions: Timberlands, Ozarks, Central*

*More info: [www.ClintonChildhoodHomeMuseum.com](http://www.ClintonChildhoodHomeMuseum.com), [www.ClintonHouseMuseum.org](http://www.ClintonHouseMuseum.org), [www.ClintonPresidentialCenter.org](http://www.ClintonPresidentialCenter.org)*

## GET A DEGREE — FOR FREE.

All public colleges and universities in Arkansas offer free tuition to students age 60 and older who take for-credit courses. To qualify, you must be an Arkansas resident, be at least 60 years old and be a high school graduate or a GED recipient.

*(Find a school on page 80.)*

Other continuing education opportunities abound here. An outstanding speaker series at the Clinton School of Public Service in Little Rock is a popular post for learning. Past lecturers include President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, international dignitaries and former and first female Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

*Regions: All*

## SAVE THE LIONS AND TIGERS...

...and also the leopards, bobcats, cougars and serval. Visitors to the Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge, a USDA-licensed refuge for big cats located 7 miles from downtown Eureka Springs in the Ozarks, contribute to the refuge's ability to care for its rescued lot. This heart-warming place is a hidden gem that's open year-round for habitat tours, keeper chats, overnight stays and other educational experiences.

Of course, this is just one of many opportunities to encounter wildlife in Arkansas. More than 400 species of birds, 70 kinds of mammals, 115 reptiles and amphibians, 16 different bat species and 155 butterflies call The Natural State home.

*Region: Ozarks*

*More info: [www.TurpentineCreek.org](http://www.TurpentineCreek.org)*