

LIVING

# Why You Should Plan a Road Trip Through the Ozark Mountains

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The Ozark Mountains of Arkansas

Photo: Alamy



The Ozark Mountains—an isolated area of the mid-South—comprises the northern territory of Arkansas, the southern region of Missouri, and just a smidgeon of southern Illinois, Oklahoma, and southeastern Kansas. It hasn't always been at

the top of many travel lists, but often the stepchild of its larger, more sophisticated surrounding cities. The land has long been a destination for those seeking outdoor adventures among its rugged woodlands, limestone bluffs, and pristine waters, and travelers are finally catching on to its beauty. Big businesses have peaked, ushering in a demand for boutique accommodations, high-end shopping, fine art, and upscale dining.

Here, a guide to the heavenly hamlet we call the Ozarks:



Hotel Vandivort

Photo: Courtesy of Starboard & Port Creative



### Springfield's Downtown Darlings

Begin your trip in Springfield, Missouri: an ever-growing city that's nestled in the Southwest corner of the state. There are plenty of charming bed and breakfasts to choose from—like the Walnut Street Inn, which just begs for porch-sitting. Alternatively, the newly opened Hotel Vandivort offers a more sophisticated stay. The boutique property sits squarely in the downtown center and is abuzz with iPhone-toting locals come cocktail hour; the hotel's unisex bathroom—known to offer exemplary lighting—has become a hotbed for the perfect selfie.

Downtown offers plenty to peruse, with precious antique shops, cocktail bars, and restaurants that dot the historic streets. But just southeast is the Rountree district, which feels almost like a secret. It's this very neighborhood, with charming Craftsman- and Bungalow-style homes that famed photographer Julie Blackmon has used to set the scene for most of her work; Reese Witherspoon is an admirer among a slew of celebrities.



Elle's Patisserie  
Photo: Courtesy of Elle's Patisserie



Start the morning at Pickwick Place—a Spanish-style block of buildings that feels as if you’ve stepped into a movie set. At [Tea Bar & Bites](#), owner Colleen Smith’s house-made rosemary chocolate granola on top of yogurt is a nice respite from this biscuit-and-gravy-loving town. Book an oxygen facial at [Lavare Day Spa](#), then preserve the glow at [Good Skin Day](#). The petite shop packs a punch thanks to owner Courtney Dunlop, the beauty editor extraordinaire who’s moved from New York City to her hometown in the Ozarks to open a skincare shop featuring products like 37 Actives, Liquid Gold by Mary Schook, and Indie Lee. Next, pop into [Elle’s Patisserie](#), housed just a few feet away in a bright purple home with interiors that replicate an exquisite French pastry boutique. The sweets shop is tailor-made for Instagram and sells proper pour-overs alongside colorful macarons and truffles like the Unicorn (of course), filled with dark chocolate lavender ganache. End the afternoon with a cheese plate and a glass of wine on the patio at [Cherry Picker X Fare](#).

### **Table Rock Lake’s Pristine Beauty**

Winding your way south puts you in perfect position to experience Table Rock Lake. This area of the Ozarks is working to move away from its reputation as a kitschy country music hub with top-billed golf courses and the Branson Landing. But it’s perfectly okay to bypass all of that and head straight for the real gem: Table Rock Lake. The fresh blue-green waters are where you’ll find locals and their boats come any warm summertime weekend.



Big Cedar Lodge  
Photo: Courtesy of Big Cedar Lodge



Take dinner at Chateau Grille at Chateau on the Lake Resort & Spa for tops alfresco dining. And stay the night if you're so inclined (the hotel has 301 guest rooms, swimming pools that overlook the waters, and a full-service spa). But it's the Ozarks, and you're meant to take full advantage of the outdoors. Big Cedar Lodge delivers an upscale cabin-chic vibe that's done right. Originally developed in the early 1920s as a luxurious country retreat for two prominent Missourians, Big Cedar was later purchased in 1987 by Johnny Morris, who intended to use the property as a fishing camp for his Bass Pro Shop employees. Today, it serves as a 4,600-acre lakeside retreat that offers a list of amenities and activities that's as long as its wine list. Check into one of the private cabins with a stacked stone fireplace and whirlpool bath. The Cedar Creek Spa's 12 private treatment rooms are each equipped with a fireplace, and robes are heated post-treatment. Allow time for a dip in the candlelit grotto pool.



The Cedar Creek Spa  
Photo: Courtesy of The Cedar Creek Spa



## Northwest Arkansas's Buzzing Metropolis

The Arkansas border is a zippy drive south, crossing the state line into the bustling Northwest Arkansas territory. Fayetteville and Bentonville, known as the two bookends of the Northwest Arkansas regional corridor, have become a hive of activity and culture.

The area's pièce de résistance is The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. True to its roots, this modern museum is built on a 120-acre swath of land in a natural ravine, tucked deep into the Ozarks woodland with a permanent collection of works by Andy Warhol, Norman Rockwell, Georgia O'Keeffe, and James Turrell. While an entire day can be devoted to the museum, including the on-site hiking trails, block off time to visit painter-sculptor George Dombek's studio just east of Fayetteville. The space reflects the artist's watercolor paintings, much of which are based on nature. Nearby is the Fayetteville Underground, an art gallery and multi-artist studio with a rotation of monthly exhibitions.



The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art  
Photo: Courtesy of The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art



The Ozarks foodways have a leg up on the farm-to-table trend. Early settlers learned to forage from the land, providing people with trout, venison, pecans, berries, and even the elusive morel mushroom. Today, chefs have become inventive with the natural resources, which has resulted in a successful upscale dining scene. Make a dinner reservation at The Preacher's Son. Aptly named, the century-old Gothic revival-style church building is bathed in neutral colors, with bright light pouring through the George Dombek-designed glass window. Here, chef Matthew Cooper, whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were ministers, chose his own path and is working with farmers to create a community-grown menu that's rustic and sustainably sophisticated.



The Preacher's Son  
Photo: Courtesy of Mark Jackson



A room at the 21 C Hotel Bentonville is just the kind of place that put the Ozarks on the map. The boutique hotel has a modern and funky vibe, and the lobby is kind of an appetizer into the region's superb art scene; the hotel has 12,000-square feet of exhibition space. The Hive is the hotel's on-site restaurant and cocktail bar, where you'll spy well-heeled patrons sipping cocktails and snacking on Arkansas trail mix and pimento cheese with bacon jam. Chef Matthew McClure has earned a James Beard nod for his ability to pay homage to the Ozarks and turns out a menu of what he's calling "refined country," which happens to be a perfect description of the Ozarks.

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