

## TRAVEL

# See Roanoke, Virginia – The Star of Blue Ridge Parkway

I'm standing at the Roanoke Outlook, just beneath the Mill Mountain Star. It's the world's largest freestanding illuminated man-made star, constructed in 1949, and I'm



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looking out on the magnificent Roanoke Valley. It's beautiful here, but there's still more to do at the Outlook.

Like marvel at wild animals at the Mill Mountain Zoological Park. Or hike along the Appalachian

Trail. Or see the Discovery Center, with its interactive exhibits of environmental education. Called the best outdoor town on the East Coast, Roanoke is a fascinating place to visit. Filled with history and art museums, as well as the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains, I could have stayed longer than just a few days.

### Downtown Roanoke – Where History Comes Alive

The showpiece of the city is Hotel Roanoke, built in 1882 around the time railroad was king, and now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The elegant ambience preserves the nostalgic feel of a historical railroad hotel with contemporary amenities.

Guests and locals alike enjoy Regency Room dining with their famous signature dish, peanut soup and spoon bread, served since the hotel opened. For convenience, the hotel is connected to the downtown area by a pedestrian walkway. [Hotelroanoke.com](http://Hotelroanoke.com).

Roanoke also has a world-class art museum in its midst. Showcasing modern American

art with decorative arts, folk and regional art, the Taubman Museum of Art boasts more than 2,000 permanent works. The structure is a work of art unto itself. I loved the collection of Judith Leiber handbags, especially the personalized Roanoke Star Clutch decorative she created for the city. [Taubmanmuseum.org](http://Taubmanmuseum.org).

History buffs will enjoy walking along the Railwalk – a convenient half-mile trek along an outdoor museum featuring interactive signage, displays and whistles – detailing Roanoke's railroad history to the present day.

I learned more about famous railroad photographers at the O. Winston Link Museum, located in the former Norfolk & Western Railway Station. The museum features a brief film and collection of photography from a man whose passion for the rail is now preserved for generations.

### Virginia's Blue Ridge

Driving along the parkway, I couldn't help but get caught up in its serene majesty. The 469 miles of Blue Ridge Parkway is a National Scenic Byway and All-American Road, the most visited in the U.S. National Park System.

Smith Mountain Lake, the "Jewel of the Blue Ridge Mountains," is where the recent Hallmark original movie "Lake Effects" was filmed. The resort is filled with lots of family-friendly activities. Also along the parkway is the Booker T. Washington National Monument, where you can learn more about this prominent African American educator and orator.

### The Crooked Road – Virginia's Heritage Music Trail

Traditional bluegrass, old-time string bands and gospel music are the soul of Virginia. Experience authentic mountain music at



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Smith Mountain Lake is considered the "Jewel of the Blue Ridge Mountains."

its birthplace, along the 300 miles of The Crooked Road. At the Blue Ridge Institute and Museum of Ferrum College in Rocky Mount, learn all about Appalachian folklore and culture. Music festivals are held year-round. So no matter when you go, the crafts, quilts, coon dog races, horse pulls, vintage farm machinery, car culture, and old-time foods are a great way to get a feel for these traditions. [Crookedroad.org](http://Crookedroad.org).

Find your way to Roanoke this fall and be a

"leaf peeper." It promises to be quite a show. [Visitroanokeva.com](http://Visitroanokeva.com); [virginia.org](http://virginia.org).

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