



ROANOKE

VIRGINIA

LIKE SO MANY GREAT AMERICAN CITIES, ROANOKE IS WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED, OR PERHAPS, RE-DISCOVERED.

You've heard about **Southern Virginia's** abundance of colorful scenery and recreational activities—caving, biking, fishing—but chances are, Roanoke wasn't on your radar. We're here to tell you, it should be.

Surrounded by peaks of blue, Roanoke is sparkling like its famous Star; beckoning visitors to enjoy its intriguing blend of sophistication, culture and Southern hospitality. Never heard of the **Roanoke Star**? Straddling atop **Mill Mountain** stands the world's largest illuminated, freestanding, man-made star, constructed in 1949 out of an 88 foot-tall neon tube. A symbol of Roanoke's past and present, the Star is visible up to 60 miles. From its base, there's a spectacular view of Roanoke below and the **Blue Ridge Mountains** surrounding the town.

When the steam railroad was in its heyday, Roanoke was a busy metropolitan hub, drawing visitors from long distances to shop in its fine stores. The town was nicknamed "**Star of the South**," and the Roanoke Star was the symbol of the Roanoke's blossoming industrial and civic progress.

As new forms of transportation replaced the steam engine, however, Roanoke lost economic steam too. Today, Roanoke is experiencing a renaissance; inspired by investment in its dynamic downtown, and newest

showpiece, **Center in the Square**.

Center in the Square is a five-story wonder filled with **three state-of-the-art museums, aquariums, a professional theatre company, planetarium and panoramic rooftop garden** (with some of the best views in town). The restoration of the historic building (circa 1912) involved building a multi-level green roof, and installing solar panels that supply much of the building's energy needs. Floor-to-ceiling windows attract natural light into the interactive science, history and **African-American heritage museums**. While dining on the rooftop, guests can watch the fluttering residents of the **Butterfly Habitat** through an enclosed dome. Roanoke's new Center in the Square is helping transform a town renowned for its

Aerial view of Roanoke at night and Taubman Art Museum



JOE HAVIS/ISTOCK.COM (ROANOKE AT NIGHT); COURTESY OF TIMOTHY WIRSLEY/ROANOKE VALLEY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU (TAUBMAN ART MUSEUM)



(clockwise from top left) Center in the Square history museum; Roanoke Star on Mill Mountain; Center in the Square science museum

past, to an exciting cultural destination of the future.

But there's more.

Roanoke's **Taubman Art Museum**, a confection of modern design, soars above most of the historic downtown buildings. Inside its undulating glass, zinc and stainless steel façade, visitors are treated to a variety of mediums and styles, from the ancient to experimental. The Taubman's dramatic architecture is an example of the contrasts you'll encounter in Roanoke: like a **glassed-in pedestrian walkway** spanning antiquated railroad tracks; the **Historic Farmer's Market** bordering chic boutiques (see **LaDeDa, chocolatepaper**); and a **statue of Martin Luther King Jr.** standing by a bench delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech through an unconventional audio system.

Nearby, at the **Virginia Museum of Transportation**, a once-booming railyard now houses a collection of antique automobiles, buses, planes and locomotives. The

museum demonstrates the rapid development of transportation in America—featuring Roanoke's role as the **Crossroads of the South**.

Contrasts between old and new achieve a curious synchronicity here. The **Roanoker Restaurant**, which opened before World War II, cooks beloved Southern comfort foods, like fried chicken and biscuits. In contrast, the popular eatery, **Blue 5**, spins those classic dishes, serving them with local craft beers and ciders, while hosting live performances by soul, country and rock musicians.

Another notable contrast is found in the **Grandin Road** neighborhood; a historic district populated with avant-garde shops, an indie movie theatre and progressive food emporiums. Some highlights include **Local Roots**, specializing in locally-sourced, organic, sustainable dishes, and **Black Dog Salvage**, a high-end showroom teeming with repurposed, vintage-building materials—the operation is featured on HGTV DIY Net-

work's **Salvage Dawgs**.

Before heading home, run, bike or drive up **Mill Mountain** for the sweeping views of Virginia's Blue Ridge. At the top, you'll find the child-friendly **Discovery Center**, **Wildflower Garden** and diminutive **Mill Mountain Zoo**, and take a closer look at Roanoke's Star of the South—still welcoming visitors after 64 years. **—RS**

(below) Blue 5 and Black Dog Salvage



ACCOMMODATIONS

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\$130-\$209/night

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Elegant, historic hotel in heart of downtown, walk to most sites.

110 Shenandoah Ave.,
Roanoke, VA; 540-985-5900;
doubletree3.hilton.com
\$120-\$225/night

The Inn on Campbell

This elegant downtown inn is on the Select Registry. Spacious suites and gourmet breakfast included.

118 Campbell Ave., SW,
Roanoke, VA; 540-400-0183;
innoncampbell.com
\$220-\$305/night