

# AT HOME

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## roadtrip



City Market



Virginia Museum of Transportation



Center in the Square



Booker T. Washington National Monument

# ROADTRIP TO ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

TEXT BY FRANCES J. FOLSOM | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ROANOKE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

People tend to bypass Roanoke when traveling on Interstate 81 to other parts of Virginia. This is unfortunate because the city, nestled along the Roanoke River with the Blue Ridge Mountains as a backdrop, is a gem filled with historic and cultural venues. Years ago, Roanoke was a major stop on the Norfolk & Western railroad line. Many of the city's cultural venues are in restored early 19th-century railroad buildings.

Make your first stop the Roanoke Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, housed in a building that in 1905 was the passenger station for the Norfolk & Western. Also here is the O. Winston Link Museum with many of Link's black and white photographs depicting what local life was like in the railroad's heyday.

## DOWNTOWN

It's an easy walk from the visitors center to the downtown and the Historic Market Square area where upscale shops, galleries and a daily farmer's market line the streets.

At **Chocolate Paper** you can indulge in handmade chocolates. Cases are filled with row upon row of confections like sea salt caramels, cherry cordials and truffles.

Local artist Betty Branch designs unique sculptures in bronze, stone, marble and fiber. To say Branch's work is larger than life is putting it mildly. Several of her pieces are part of the permanent collection of the **Taubman Museum**; others grace local grammar schools, universities and libraries. A visit to Branch's studio on Norfolk Avenue is a must for art lovers.

## OUTDOORS AND NATURE

The city's icon, the Roanoke Star, is the world's largest man-made illuminated star. Located in Mill Mountain Park, the structure is surrounded by ten miles of trails, Mill Mountain Discovery Center with nature exhibits and the Mill Mountain Zoo, home to a variety of mammals, birds and reptiles.

Get out and stretch your muscles by walking or biking any of the 26 miles of trails and paths that make up the Roanoke Valley Greenways. Routes meander along the Roanoke River as well as through neighborhoods and small towns.

If you want something more strenuous sign up for the Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon [www.blueridgemarathon.com](http://www.blueridgemarathon.com) taking place April

26. The race has been called "America's Toughest Road Marathon" because of elevation changes totaling 7,430 feet.

## CULTURE

The **Taubman Museum of Art** boasts an impressive collection of works by such artists as Thomas Hart Benton and Norman Rockwell and abstract artist Jean Helion. Current exhibits, running through September, are *From Picasso to Magritte*; *European Masters from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* and *Reunion: Highlights of the Collection*.

*From Picasso to Magritte* features works by Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Rene Magritte and Auguste Rodin. *Reunion* highlights pieces from the permanent collection and includes works by Thomas Hart Benton, Norman Rockwell, George Inness and John Singer Sargent.

**Center in the Square** is a restored 19th-century furniture store that houses the **Mill Mountain Theater**, several museums, an aquarium with living reef exhibits, the **Harrison Museum of African American History** and the **Science Museum of Western Virginia**. The rooftop offers views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.



Taubman Museum of Art

Walking the Rail Walk (1/4 mile long) brings you to the **Virginia Museum of Transportation**. Its comprehensive exhibits of steam, diesel and electric locomotives, freight cars, passenger cars and cabooses are sure to please anyone who is a railroad enthusiast.

### STAYING AND DINING

The **Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center** with 325 rooms overlooks the downtown. Built in 1882, the hotel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. If an intimate inn is more to your liking you can't beat the **Inn on Campbell**. In a renaissance style building that dates to 1904 innkeepers Keith and Cindy Hummer offer guests down bedding and comforters in elegant rooms. Breakfasts are sumptuous as Cindy is a trained chef.

Roanoke has no shortage of restaurants serving delicious regional fare. You can't visit the city and not have a meal at the **Roanoker**. The word diet does not exist when it comes to their homemade biscuits smothered in country gravy. The same goes for the **Homeplace's** baked Virginia ham, fried chicken and all the fixings served family-style.

### HISTORY

Twenty minutes from Roanoke is the tiny village of Salem on the Wilderness Road, Virginia's Heritage Migration Route that dates to 1600. This was the route used by settlers going west of Appalachia. Worth a visit is the **Williams-Brown House**, ca. 1845. On the National Register of Historic Places, it has a small but interesting museum detailing the area's history. A farmer's market featuring locally grown produce, fruits, honey, flowers and herbs takes place every Saturday.

Drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway, State Road 651, to the **Blue Ridge Institute &**

**Museum** at Ferrum College. As the state archive for Blue Ridge history the institute is stocked with exhibits, books and documents explaining the Blue Ridge and Appalachia areas. Take a step back in time to agrarian life in the 19th century with a visit to this living history farm. For the past 40 years, on the last Saturday of October, Ferrum College has hosted the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival.

Exit the parkway for the **Booker T. Washington National Monument**. Washington was born a slave here on the Burroughs Plantation in 1856. A replica of the cabin where he lived until he was freed at end of the Civil War sits behind the National Park Service Visitors Center.

Park rangers give tours telling visitors how Washington went to live in West Virginia when he was nine years old, graduated from the Hampton Institute, was the first leader of the Tuskegee Institute, authored many books, and was friends with noted professors, inventors and United States presidents.

Follow the Booker T. Washington Parkway to Moneta and Smith Mountain Lake, known by locals as the jewel of the Blue Ridge Parkway. One look at the shimmering lake surrounded by the majestic mountains and you will be hooked. The activities are endless; fish for bass, rent a motor boat, sailboat or kayak, dine at a myriad of dockside restaurants or peruse upscale shops and galleries.

Spend time in Roanoke and the surrounding area and you will leave planning your next visit back. ■

### IF YOU GO:

Roanoke Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau  
101 Shenandoah Ave. NE  
Roanoke VA 24016  
540.342.6025  
[www.visitroanokeva.com](http://www.visitroanokeva.com)



March 18-22, 2014

**John Berry**

March 18, 7:30pm

**Elton John in Concert**

March 19, 8pm

**Exhibit and Reception**

March 21, 6pm to 7:30pm

**The Importance of Being Earnest**

March 20-22, 7:30pm

March 22, 2pm

**Tupelo Craft Beer Festival**

March 22, noon to 5pm

**Les Sylphides and Contemporary Repertoire**

March 22, 2pm

**Romantic Gems: Brahms' Double Concerto**

March 22, 7:30pm

... and much more!

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