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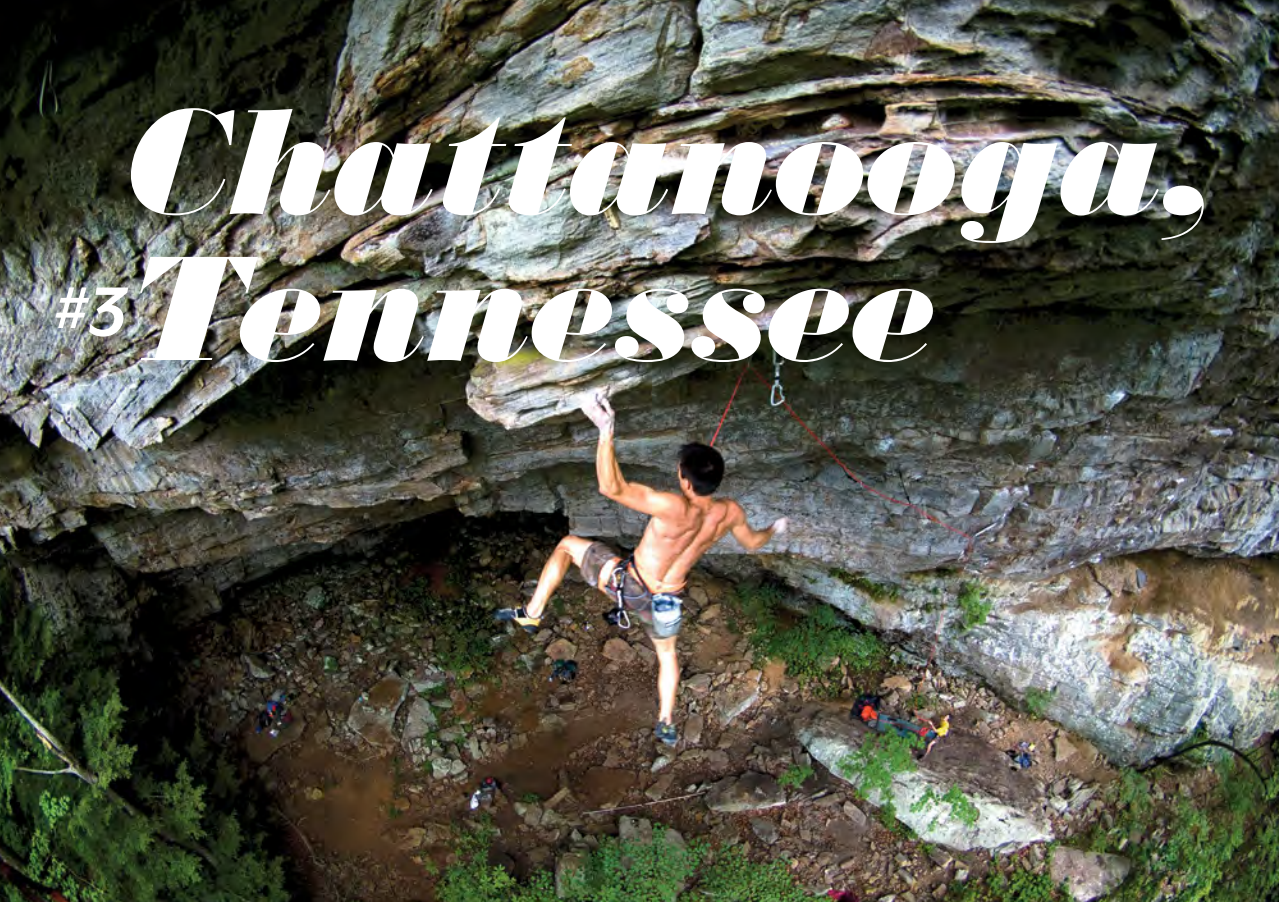


Best in the U.S. 2018

Lonely Planet's travel experts scoured the States to bring you our top 10 underrated, rejuvenated and out-of-this-world spots to visit in 2018. From natural wonders and captivating coastlines to up-and-coming cities, these destinations promise big things this year.

We asked our experts for their insider perspectives on what makes these places great. Some recalled stories of their favorite visits, while others offered new reasons to return. Each of the stories that follow captures what's special about this year's picks – and why they're the Best in the U.S.

Chattanooga, #3 Tennessee



How a downtown hostel helped redefine Chattanooga and turn the city into the next great adventure destination.

By **Kevin Raub**

There's no sugarcoating it: the U.S. is not exactly a haven for backpackers. Except for a few gems here and there in the top-destination cities, finding a great hostel is difficult, which is why walking into Chattanooga's Crash Pad – the world's first hostel to earn Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design's highest rating for green construction – is all the more remarkable.

From the outside, it's a striking structure of wood and bricks 95 percent fashioned from reincarnated materials from the site's previous building. Inside, rich hardwoods and exposed concrete marry to create a warm and world-class 4,300-square-foot property with a boutique hotel ambiance that skirts a fine line between homey and hipster.

After checking in, I immediately engage the front desk about the neighborhood, the 'Noog's hip Southside district. The knowledgeable staff fires off a laundry list of distractions that rev my engine: There's a cycling-themed hipster coffee shop (Velo), killer breakfast grits (Bluegrass Grill), craft beer (Chattanooga Brewing Company, Terminal Brewhouse),

award-winning spirits (Chattanooga Whiskey), gastropubs (Feed Co. Table & Tavern, Beast + Barrel), farm-to-table new Southern fine-dining (St. John's Meeting Place), authentic pizza (Alleia) and exquisite mixology (Flying Squirrel, Crash Pad's next-door sister operation) – much of which is housed in once-abandoned warehouses, factories and garages.

When Crash Pad opened its doors in 2011, the vision of Max Poppel and Dan Rose (two climbers who ingeniously envisioned Chattanooga accommodations that catered to outdoor adventurers), the city wasn't yet accustomed to its blossoming coolness – it had spent more time over the previous four decades as an industrial wasteland than a hip destination. However, coming off 2008's three-year CreateHere initiative, which infused cultural and economic life back into the city by supporting the arts and creative enterprises, a whiff of change was airborne.

Chattanooga only needed its privileged position in the Tennessee River Valley flanked by craggy ridges and sheer gorges to be explored. Progressive city leadership revamped the riverfront, reopened the 100-year-old Walnut Street Bridge to pedestrians and embraced tech, setting in motion a barrage of coolness embraced by hipsters, outdoor enthusiasts and start-up tech wizards, all emanating from the Southside's bars, restaurants, art galleries and newfound community spirit. Crash Pad naturally evolved into the neighborhood's anchor.

Back when I was a small child, we used to make the drive from Atlanta to Indiana every year, and Chattanooga was always best seen in the rearview mirror. These days it's a place I'm dying to crash.

Small Town, Big Adventure

Chattanooga straddles the Cumberland Plateau, a 300-mile ridge stretching into Alabama and Georgia, and this interstate sandstone monster has catapulted the city to its status as America's adventure capital. Here are five activities to try.

Kayak the Tennessee

Rent a kayak and paddle out to Maclellan Island, a sanctuary owned by the Chattanooga Audubon Society.

Learn the ropes

High Point Climbing and Fitness (highpointclimbing.com) is one of the best indoor rock climbing facilities and schools in the U.S.

Paddle the Ocoee

A half-day whitewater rafting trip down the Ocoee River features Class III-IV rapids.

Take in the views at

Lookout Mountain

This craggy perch along the borders of Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee features some of the area's oldest and best-loved attractions.

Hike the Cumberland Trail

Stretching over 200 miles along the Cumberland Plateau, this trail traverses gorges, waterfalls and groves of hemlock.

Why Go Now

A revitalized downtown, centered on the makeover of the city's signature train station into a nightlife and entertainment destination, is rife with pilgrimage-worthy new Southern cuisine and thirst-quenching breweries. Meet the new South!