

Main

Topics

More



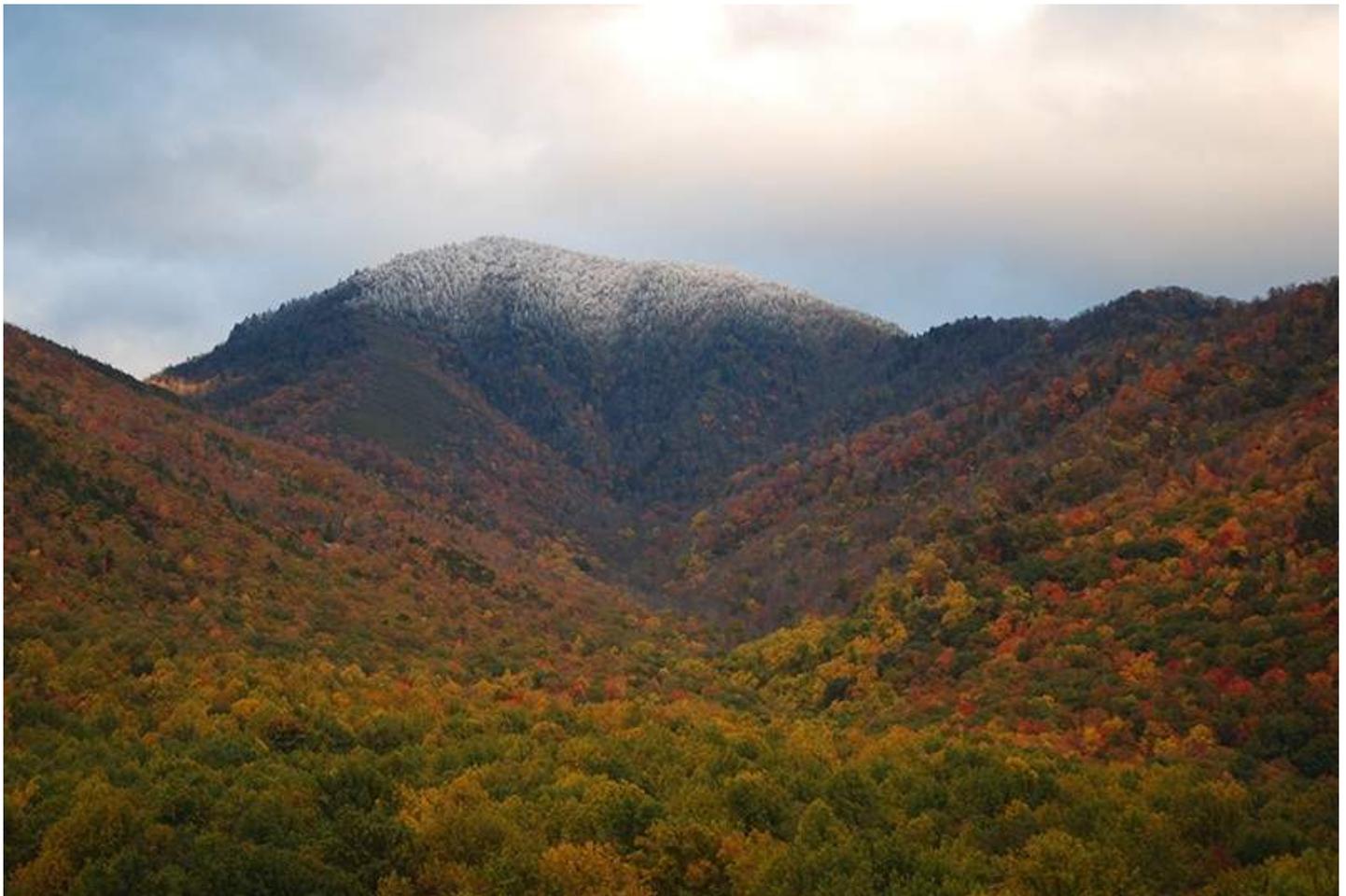
**TASTE THE FEELING™**

# A Weekend Hike Up Mount LeConte

BY DEBORAH R. HUSO

0

*Published: September 30, 2015*



**Mount LeConte is a hike-in only lodge with no electricity or running water in**

## the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

---

Growing up in Virginia, only minutes away from Shenandoah National Park, mountains have always been a part of my life. As a child, I often hiked with my parents, and once my own daughter was old enough to travel, I was eager to share my love of the outdoors with her.

We decided to head south to the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, which straddles western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. While my 2-year-old, Heidi, was already a veteran of several day hikes, I bravely decided to try an overnight hike up the Smokies' third highest peak, Mount LeConte, which towers 6,593 feet.

Mount LeConte offers the only lodging available within the boundaries of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The catch? **LeConte Lodge** is a hike-in only lodge with no electricity or running water.

### Friday: Old Mill

Heading into the Smokies Friday afternoon, we spend the night in **Pigeon Forge**. We skip the tourist hoopla and head to **Old Mill Square**, home of an operational 1830 gristmill. From there we grab dinner and turn in for the night.

### Saturday: The Hike

Early Saturday morning we head into Gatlinburg to the famous **Pancake Pantry** to load up on hike-worthy fare. Stomachs full, we enlist local hiker shuttle service **A Walk in the Woods**. Shuttle services drop hikers off at a trailhead in one place, so they can park their car at a different end spot. (Shuttle costs vary.)

We're dropped off with our gear and we set off on our steep 5-mile journey to the top of LeConte. The first stretch of the trail gives us a good opportunity to warm up. The path parallels Alum Cave Creek and we pause for Heidi to wade in the chilly water.

As we continue on our way, we come to Arch Rock, a narrow tunnel formed by centuries of freeze-thaw conditions on this mountainside. From there the trail

climbs more steeply, and we reach Inspiration Point, which affords us views of jagged slopes.

At the halfway point, we come to the trail's signature feature — Alum Cave Bluffs. These arching rock formations create a rain shelter with such an arid climate in their shadow that precipitation never reaches the dry soil beneath them.

The trek becomes more challenging as we navigate narrow rock ledges using steel cables to pull our way along. Within a few hours, we approach LeConte's summit and the lodge comes into view. Exhausted, we turn in early.

### **Sunday: Down the Mountain**

We rise early the next morning, heading down the Rainbow Falls Trail, electing to stop for a picnic lunch on the boulders below the falls, which make a dramatic drop over a rock ledge and create a veil of water out of a fairytale setting. Heidi toddles around on the rocks, bending to touch the stream below the falls. When we reach the trail base and the parking lot with our car, it's about 3 p.m.

We drive back toward civilization, hitting Gatlinburg, where we pay a visit to **Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies**. Heidi is delighted by the long glide path under the shark lagoon where sharks and stingrays swim over our heads.

After dinner, and before we head back to the hotel, we take a sunset ride up the **Gatlinburg Sky Lift**, which carries us over the town for a mountaintop view.

Plan your very own Mount LaConte getaway and mix in some fun by stopping in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg for a trip the entire family can enjoy.

*Deborah R. Huso is an outdoor recreation and travel writer who has the good fortune of living on a farm in central Virginia within walking distance of two wineries. She blogs at [deborahhuso.com](http://deborahhuso.com).*

## RELATED CONTENT