

# DRESSED-UP DIGS: SMOKIES STYLE

By Katy Koontz

**S**TAYING IN THE SMOKIES just got significantly spiffier. Several new accommodations (from the ultra-casual to the glamorous) have popped up in Sevier County in the last year or so, and several already existing properties have recently received first-class facelifts.

One of the splashiest newcomers is the 132-room **Margaritaville Island Hotel** that opened last year on The Island in Pigeon Forge. This Jimmy Buffett-themed accommodation blends beach-style decor (think driftwood-finished furnishings) with mountain-style mainstays (such as stack-stone fireplaces). And in keeping with Buffett's reputation for singing the praises of liquid libations, each guest-room features a refrigerator, a wet bar, and a Frozen Concoction Maker (as well as a microwave—hot toddy, anyone?).

Yet Margaritaville is merely the beginning. Here we share the scoop on a number of new or updated accommodations in the Smokies—including some that will undoubtedly take you by surprise. So pick your favorite from our suggestions, make a reservation, and pack your bags—somewhere out there is a brand new plump pillow with your name on it, just waiting for you to check in!

## Dollywood's DreamMore Resort

The paint is barely dry on Dollywood's new DreamMore Resort, which opened in late July, coinciding with Dollywood's

30th anniversary. This 100-acre resort right next to Dolly's theme park and water park in Pigeon Forge offers 307 guest rooms and suites (including the penthouse apartment, known as Dolly's Suite Dreams celebrity suite). While this is a major hotel, it has a few downhome mountain cabin touches, as well—starting with the front porch lined with rocking chairs near the hotel's entrance.

In addition to standard rooms, the hotel offers extended suites, rooms with bunk beds and sleeper sofas for families, and reunion suites with adjoining rooms. Resort amenities include both an indoor and an outdoor pool, a full-service restaurant, a spa/salon, a fitness center, a family activities center, and some unique places made just for families (like storytelling spots, fire pits,





**If you're seeking fun in the sun, check out Dollywood's DreamMore Resort's Swimming Hole, featuring cascading waterfalls, a hot tub, and an interactive family splash pad.**

project that resulted in a brand new lobby as well as upgraded rooms and several types of new suites.

The Greystone's 15 new family suites each feature a master bedroom as well as a kids' room with a full-size bed underneath a twin top bunk bed. The suites have two balconies (one off of the living room and a second one off the master bedroom) and one-and-a-half bathrooms. Other new suite options include six gas fireplace suites and four soaking tub suites featuring oversized garden tubs. The hotel also boasts a brand new fitness room and a heated outdoor pool with a slide.

**Information:** 800-451-9202; [greystonelodgetn.com](http://greystonelodgetn.com).

### **Gatlinburg Inn**

Following the death of longtime proprietor Wilma Maples, the Gatlinburg Inn is not only still receiving guests, but it's also receiving a serious upgrade—one that manages to keep the inn's historic character and charm completely intact. Most of the furniture has remained, for example, while much of the upholstery has been redone. Mattresses, bed coverings, and linens in all 70 guestrooms are all new, and flat-screen televisions have been added to all the rooms. About a third of the bathrooms have been upgraded with new tile, new fixtures, and new electrical outlets—and by start of next year's spring season, all the rest will be upgraded, too.

This winter, the updates will continue with a total redesign of the lobby (including installing wooden flooring in keeping with the era of when the inn was built). The hotel, still owned by descendants of Mrs. Maples and her late husband Rel, also now includes a hot breakfast buffet for all guests (in a new breakfast room that used to be Mrs. Maples suite near the lobby). The other big change here is that the inn is now open year-round instead of closing at the end of October and re-opening in April.

**Information:** 865-436-5133; [gatlinburginn.com](http://gatlinburginn.com).

### **Tremont Lodge & Resort**

The old Valley View Lodge in Townsend (closed in 2013) reopened last year, after extensive remodeling, as Tremont Lodge & Resort. The lodge offers 132 rooms (standard rooms as well as one- and two-bedroom suites) in a total of eight separate buildings on 16 acres right in the middle of town. The

hammocks, and swings). Parking and Wi-Fi are included at no extra charge.

Guests will also receive exclusive park privileges (for both Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country), including TimeSaver passes that allow you to bypass the lines at certain rides, shows, and attractions; early Saturday morning park entry; free shuttle bus transportation between the parks and the resort; access to a resort-guests-only entrance; and complimentary delivery of purchases from park shops to hotel room.

**Information:** 800-365-5996; [DollywoodsDreamMoreResort.com](http://DollywoodsDreamMoreResort.com).

### **The Greystone Lodge on the River**

The Greystone has quite a long history in Gatlinburg—although from its recent remodeling, you'd think it was brand new. The original inn was built in 1941, with a separate building across the street added two decades later. In 1998, the first building was demolished to make way for Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies, leaving only the second building standing. And this year, that building just finished undergoing the inn's biggest renovation yet—a three-year, \$7-million





# BIG DIGS

Looking for something for your next family reunion, corporate retreat, or other large group event? How about a 16-bedroom, 16.5-bathroom log cabin that sleeps up to 74 and offers memorable mountain views? The two largest rental cabins in the United States are right here in the Smokies: the Big Moose Lodge (built in 2013) and the Big Elk Lodge (its sister cabin, built earlier this year), both owned and managed by HearthSide Cabin Rentals in Sevierville.



The top floors each have nine bedrooms (including two rooms with three sets of bunk beds each), the main floors each house a living room with an electric fireplace and a fully equipped double kitchen (as well as two more bedrooms), and the lower levels each feature five bedrooms, two hot tubs, a pool table, a smaller kitchen, a washer-dryer, and a 21-person theater with theater-style seating.

Hearthside offers many other mega-sized cabins on its property, just three miles from Dollywood, but these are the biggest—at least for now.

**Information:** 877-544-9594; [largecabinrentals.com](http://largecabinrentals.com).

hotel became the first in Townsend to earn the Tennessee Green Hospitality Certification for eco-friendly lodging.

Although two of the eight buildings are still being remodeled, most of the rooms now have new furnishings, carpeting, bathroom fixtures, flat-screen televisions, Keurig coffeemakers, and fine linens and bedding. Rooms also have refrigerators and microwaves, and some also have fireplaces and balconies.

The Grand Lodge Building (a huge log cabin) features the original bar from the 1892 Chicago World's Fair. Resort amenities include one indoor and two outdoor pools, a hot tub, a gazebo, and two pavilions for group events.

**Information:** 865-448-3200; [tremontlodge.com](http://tremontlodge.com).

## Camp LeConte Luxury Campground

Sure, you can take your tent or your trailer to this Gatlinburg campground, but the *real* reason to stay at Camp LeConte Luxury Campground is to bunk in one of the treehouses, which

made their debut just last year.

Each treehouse has an open air bedroom with a view of Mount LeConte plus a sleeping loft for kids and a full private bath. There's also a dressing and storage area, a covered patio, a fan with additional electrical outlets, and a fire ring with a grill. All the linens and towels are provided, as is a cooler filled with ice and drinks.

The campground also offers safari-style tent camping in large, two-bedroom tents (with heating and air conditioning) that have a queen bed in one room and a set of bunk beds in the other.

Campground amenities include a heated saltwater pool, a playground, a pavilion with a large grill for cookouts, organized kids' activities, a general store, laundry facilities, and Wi-Fi.

**Information:** 865-436-8831; [campleconte.com](http://campleconte.com). ✕

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