

How to spend a weekend in Big South Fork, Tennessee

Those looking for adventure in Tennessee will find outdoor recreation aplenty in Scott County. Anchored by Huntsville and Oneida, this pocket of Northeast Tennessee boasts easy access to [Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area](#), which straddles two states and occupies a quarter of the real estate within Scott County's boundaries. Big South Fork's proximity to Nashville, Knoxville, Louisville and Lexington make this outdoors activity-centric destination an easy trip with access to several larger airports.

Scott County draws many travelers en route to or from the Smoky Mountains who tack on a long weekend in Big South Fork as one last adventure before heading home. The area also attracts day trippers who travel to the area for its ATV and mountain biking, as well as those who are exploring neighboring Morgan County, Frozen Head State Park and the famed Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary, now the site of [a distillery](#) of the same name.

Day 1 in Huntsville and Oneida

Huntsville is the Scott County seat and the heart of its industry, but Oneida is where much of the retail and restaurants live. A 5,500-foot long runway and airpark, [Scott County Airport](#) sits adjacent to Big South Fork, bringing in pilots and groups—even many private jets—making the area accessible to many, despite its remoteness.

Hit the trails at Brimstone Recreation

Located just minutes from downtown Huntsville, [Brimstone Recreation](#) is a privately-owned paradise for ATVs and dirt bikes, with 20,000 acres and 300 miles of trails strung out among the area's hardwood canopy, rivers and creeks. While it's open year-round, the grounds really get popping when the weather warms up, with country music concert series, racing series and demo rides throughout the summer and early fall at the event center. Brimstone also features on-site accommodations with a wide range of options including full-sized houses that sleep 10 people, rentable RVs and luxury cabins, all of which have direct access to the trail system and are pet friendly.

Explore North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area (WMA)

While Brimstone Recreation is reserved for ATVs and dirt bikes only, bigger classes of off-road vehicles can utilize the [North Cumberland OHV Riding Area](#). Found within the 200,000-acre WMA, North Cumberland is conveniently close to Brimstone and is the largest such terrain actively managed by the state of Tennessee. Open 24 hours a day all year long, the WMA and OHV Riding Area hosts extensive mountainous upland hardwood forests filled with wildlife, making it a mecca for hunting with reintroduced elk, bear, beaver, deer and black bear available to harvest, depending on the season.

Camping is allowed throughout the entire WMA, with hiking trails and backwoods roads that are perfect for horseback riding or mountain biking. More information about

restrictions and use can be found on the [North Cumberland WMA website](#). Permits are required for all activity within the range.

Experience the paranormal at Historic Scott County Jail

Built in 1904 and operated as a prison until 2008, this jail in downtown Huntsville is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Operated as a business now, the imposing sandstone structure's three floors exudes history. In addition to regular daylight tours, the jail offers escape room activities, self-guided and private visits both day and night. Ghost hunters coming to the area for the paranormal tour at [Historic Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary](#) in particular will want to detour to Huntsville to check out the [Scott County Jail](#). The Historic Huntsville Ghost Walk is a guided, two-hour tour of downtown Huntsville that ends inside the historic jail, traversing all three levels in search of the supernatural.

Tour the Museum of Scott County

Built and managed by students and located on the grounds of the Scott County High School, the [Museum of Scott County](#) is set on two acres that contain numerous historically accurate structures and artifacts tracking history from prehistoric to modern days. One of the most child-friendly destinations in Tennessee, the facility has year-round activities that include STEM learning tools and a large collection of artifacts from the USS Tennessee, one of the ships bombed at Pearl Harbor during the outbreak of WWII. The Museum of Scott County is only open for scheduled tours with plans to introduce more regular hours in the future.

Explore downtown Oneida

Those coming to Scott County to shop gravitate to downtown Oneida with its growing number of cafes and retail options like [Riella Boutique](#) and [the Black Cat Antiques & Oddities](#), which started as a haunted attraction for those looking for a scare and morphed into a collector's paradise shop of curiosities. The bi-level shop is heavy on Halloween items, props and other spooky things, but you'll also find everything from matchbox cars to taxidermy. There's even a museum upstairs filled with artifacts from the Old West and collectible comics and toys and a tarot reading room on the ground floor.

Next door to Oneida's downtown coffee shop Gather, [Blooms and Roots Apothecary](#) sells herbs, teas and other natural remedies for common ailments. On Saturdays from April through mid-December, [Oneida Primitive Barn](#) is an all-in-one emporium of shopping, antiques, vintage items and a weekly lunch special.

Day 2 in Big South Fork

Encompassing 125,000 acres of the Cumberland Plateau, [Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area](#) draws a million visitors a year who flock to this free-flowing

section of the Cumberland River. The park brims with dramatic sandstone bluffs, chimneys and arches that have been carved up by its extensive network of rivers and creeks. While the UTV and ATV trails are the largest draw to Big South Fork, the area also attracts mountain bikers from across the South.

Spend the day in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

The outdoor adventures in this massive, two-state national recreational area are many, with off-road vehicle tracks, extensive backwoods camping options and hundreds of miles of cliffs from which to rock climb. An abandoned town only 40 minutes from Oneida on the Kentucky side of the park, [Blue Heron Mining Community](#) has a high concentration of developed, vertical sport routes. [The Big South Fork Scenic Railway](#) passenger train—which operates seasonally, including special trips like fall foliage rides and the Polar Express every November and December—travels out to this historic mining town and back on seven miles of historic trackage that K&T Railway once owned.

[Whitewater paddling](#) on the tumultuous Big Fork Cumberland River is another popular sport for the uber-adventurous visiting Big South Fork, while fishing and hunting make this region of the country a much sought-after destination for game like turkey, deer, duck and wild boar. The park is also a hub for [horseback riding](#) with the Bandy Creek area housing stables and access to many equestrian trails.

For travelers looking for a more laid-back experience in Big South Fork, the park hosts annual events like [Spring Planting and Music Festival](#) in April, [the Storytelling Festival](#) each September and the [Blue Heron Ghost Mine](#), an evening full of thrills and chills plucked from the hollows of the Cumberland Plateau, every October.

Where to eat in Oneida and Huntsville

Scott County's most popular coffee shop, [Gather Coffee Lounge](#) has a spacious café in downtown Oneida with three rooms, ample seating and live greenery, an art gallery wall, and a stage for live music and other live performances. Gather's smaller location in Huntsville near the square is a [drive-through outpost](#) that caters to UTV drivers looking to fuel up before hitting the trails. Also in Huntsville, [Howdy Coffee](#) is a retro camper outfitted with a walk-up window for to-go coffee orders.

For lunch, Oneida has several dining options. [Eatin' Good](#) serves up complex subs, soups and salads, while [Derita's Dairy Bar](#) serves up pizza, sandwiches and burgers. Raezack's Grill and Deli, a wide-open, country classic of a restaurant dishes out steak, meat-and-threes and a range of sandwich options, salads and quesadillas. [Sweetie Pie's](#) rotates its menu with lunch items like white chicken chili, broccoli casserole, taco salad and, of course, several varieties of pies.

Originally a food truck, [Ruth's Little Asian Kitchen](#) now serves the best Asian food in the Big South Fork area, specializing in sushi and Filipino fare. [Preston's Steakhouse](#)

serves up baby back ribs, gigantic burgers, a dozen different steaks and a handful of seafood items, sides and appetizers in their large, mountain cabin-inspired dining hall.

Where to stay near Big South Fork

While Scott County is peppered with cabin rentals, Airbnbs and campgrounds, it also has a high-end option for those who want a full-service stay. [Timber Rock Lodge & Spa](#), features more than a dozen rooms and suites in various configurations with a continental breakfast included daily. The wooden paradise on the outskirts of Oneida is a popular spot for family reunions, weddings and couples looking to experience the outdoors while still staying in luxury. There are on-site trails and a spa offering massages, facials and other treatments.

For those looking to camp in Big South Fork, the park has five campgrounds, several of which are set up for equestrian campers like [Station Camp](#). One of the larger camping areas in the park, [Bandy Creek Campground](#) has a total of 181 campsites; 96 are trailer sites with water and electric hook-ups, while 49 sites are for tent camping and the remaining ones spread between two group camping loops.

In addition to Brimstone, Huntsville has camping at [Trails End Campground and Cabins](#) and a KOA. [Winona/New River KOA Journey Recreation](#) is set up for tent campers and RVs up to 100 feet in length; it also has a general store, dog recreation area, playground, nature trail, and riverfront area for kayaking, canoeing and floating. The park is flanked by ATV/SXS trails, making it an ideal location for those coming to Big South Fork to off-road.