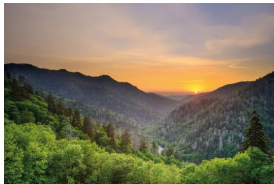


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Great Smoky Mountains beat the Maldives on list of best-value places to travel

Christopher Salvemini, Knoxville News Sentinel Published 3:30 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2018 | Updated 3:37 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2018



(Photo: Getty Images)

The Great Smoky Mountains was nominated as the third most valuable place in the world to travel.

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The mountains appeared on [Lonely Planet's list of best places to travel](#)

([/story/travel/destinations/2018/10/23/lonely-planet-best-travel-2019/1736439002/](#)) for its list of the top travel destinations for 2019. The list includes the Maldives, a city in Poland, and Houston. They were only beat out by the Maldives in Egypt and Łódź, a city in Poland known for a vibrant cultural atmosphere.

More: [Lonely Planet picks the top travel destinations for 2019](#) ([/story/travel/destinations/2018/10/23/lonely-planet-best-travel-2019/1736439002/](#))

The best-value list compiles destinations where travelers can go to both save money, and experience unique things that make their dollars worth more. Choosing destinations for the list balances the cost of going to them with opportunities travelers have when they get there.

46 years of guiding travelers

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The list compiles the travel destinations that provide the best experiences for the least cost, all of which were decided on by a panel of travel writers. They decided which destinations deserved a place on the list after compiling results from a survey handed out to people working with Lonely Planet and from ideas created during brainstorming events held in their offices, worldwide.

Clingmans Dome Observation Tower



Reproduced with permission from Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2019 © 2018 (Photo: Submitted/Lonely Planet)

This year's committee included Tony Wheeler, the founder of the company. Lonely Planet began in 1973, and has since produced a variety of guidebooks and posts travel-themed articles on their website. Their guidebooks are tailored for exploring different regions, such as a guidebook for exploring Australia or Asia.

Lonely Planet also publishes travel guides for across the world, including an annual publication ranking different destinations in a variety of ways. The [2019 Best in Travel \(https://www.lonelyplanet.com/best-in-travel\)](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/best-in-travel) guidebook also includes list for the best cities to travel to, the best countries and the best regions.

While other lists consider the opportunities a region offers travelers, the best in value list also takes into account the time and money it takes to get to a destination.

"The Great Smoky Mountains are so accessible," said Trisha Ping, Lonely Planet's Eastern U.S. destinations editor. "Other national parks are less accessible because it's a long drive or you have to camp to see anything."

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What's great about the Smokies?

Free national parks and public lands in every state

The Great Smoky Mountains earned third place on the list because it is beautiful year-round, according to Lonely Planet. The mountains are also free to enter, which helps travelers' dollars go farther than other, more expensive travel destinations.

"We wanted to call out and highlight the value of the Smokies," Ping said. "The list provides the places which give the most utility to travelers."

The Great Smoky Mountains cover 522,427 acres between North Carolina and Tennessee. Their highest peak at Clingmans Dome reaches 6,643 feet, and the mountains host more than 400,000 hikers every year

At the same time, its smallest mountain reaches only 875 feet and easier trails, like the 1.9-mile Gatlinburg Trail, take travelers' breath away with their sights, not their difficulty.

"There are easy trails to walk with the kids or with grandparents," Ping said. "And there are harder trails, too."

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Mountains on the rise

The area has had two years to rebuild after [wildfires devastated the area \(story/news/2017/11/19/gatlinburg-wildfire-one-year-later-smoky-mountains-horror-heroism/859695001/\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/11/19/gatlinburg-wildfire-one-year-later-smoky-mountains-horror-heroism/859695001/), Gatlinburg in particular. The fires killed 14 people, damaged more than 2,500 homes and threatened the local tourism-fueled economy.

Chimney Tops trail rejoins ranks of popular fall hikes

Now that the fires have been extinguished, the mountains have been on the rebound. In 2016, the park received 11.3 million visits.

As a result of the mountains' popularity, Lonely Planet is planning a guidebook for the park set to be released late next year, according to Ping.

It will be the first guidebook the publication has made for a national park in the eastern U.S.

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Most visited national parks, monuments and memorials in 2017