

Long Weekend in Gatlinburg & the Smoky Mountains: Cabin, Hikes, and Serious Barbecue

A relaxed Friday-to-Sunday escape for two, built around a secluded hot-tub cabin, two easy-but-rewarding view hikes, one scenic loop drive, and the best smoke in town. Honest heads-up baked in throughout, including the one trail closure that trips up a lot of 2026 planners.

o) Your Details at a Glance

Item	Detail
Dates	Fri Sep 11 to Sun Sep 13, 2026 (2 nights, before peak fall color)
Group	You + your wife (2 adults)
Transport	Your own car
Budget	Around \$150 per night for the cabin
Must-haves	Secluded cabin with hot tub, within ~15 min of Gatlinburg; 2 easy hikes with views; great barbecue
Special requests	One scenic drive (Cades Cove or Roaring Fork); one nice sit-down dinner besides barbecue

1) At a Glance

Element	The Plan	Concrete Facts (as of June 2026, confirm before booking)
Cabin (recomm ended)	Mountain Paradise (Cabins For You), secluded, outdoor hot tub	From \$104/night plus taxes and fees; secluded, mountain view, ~10 miles from the Arts & Crafts area. Source: cabinsforyou.com
Cabin (alt 1)	Hen Wallow Creek Cottage, secluded, by a stream	From \$121/night plus taxes and fees; "Secluded," outdoor hot tub, just outside the park. Source: cabinsforyou.com
Cabin (alt 2)	Bear Tracks (Mountain Shadows Resort)	From \$139/night plus taxes and fees; outdoor hot tub, mountain view, short drive to downtown. Source: cabinsforyou.com
View hike 1	Andrews Bald via Forney Ridge Trail (from Kuwohi/Clingmans Dome)	3.6 miles roundtrip, grassy bald with big mountain views. Moderate (relatively strenuous climb on the return). Free; parking tag required. Source: nps.gov

Element	The Plan	Concrete Facts (as of June 2026, confirm before booking)
Easy hike 2	Cades Cove area: Cades Cove Nature Trail / Abrams Falls (your pick)	Inside the 11-mile loop; flat valley + mountain backdrops. Free; parking tag required. Source: nps.gov
Scenic drive	Cades Cove Loop Road (11-mile one-way loop)	Open to vehicles sunrise to sunset; free; parking tag required to stop >15 min. Source: nps.gov
Barbecue	Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que, 714 River Rd	Hickory-smoked up to 14 hrs; (865) 436-2400. Gatlinburg hours not individually published on the official site, confirm by phone before going. Source: bennetts-bbq.com
Sit-down dinner	The Peddler Steakhouse, 820 River Rd	Tablesides-cut steaks by the river; (865) 436-5794; opens 5:00 PM daily (Sat 4:30 PM); reservations via Resy. Source: peddlergatlinburg.com
Park entry fee	None (no entrance fee), but a parking tag is required	\$5/day, \$15/week, \$40/year for parking >15 min anywhere in the park. Source: nps.gov

1b) Recommendation and Reasons (plus the best alternative)

Recommended cabin: Mountain Paradise. It hits all four of your hard criteria at once. It is explicitly listed as secluded with an outdoor hot tub, it sits in the Arts & Crafts area on the Gatlinburg side (a short drive to downtown restaurants), and at from \$104/night, this 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom secluded cabin offers an outdoor hot tub, rocking chairs, 4 HDTVs, a flat driveway and high-speed internet. The "from" rate leaves comfortable headroom under \$150/night for taxes and fees, which is the realistic part most listings hide.

Best alternative: Hen Wallow Creek Cottage, if you want true creekside seclusion right at the park edge. It is a cabin located just outside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with the 90-foot Hen Wallow Falls just down the road, plus a spacious yard by a quiet stream, and lists from \$121/night. The trade-off: the Greenbrier/Cosby edge is more like 20–30 minutes from downtown Gatlinburg, slightly outside your 15-minute target, so it wins on seclusion but loses a little on the restaurant-convenience wish.

A quick reality note on budget: all of this company's cabins with a private hot tub are available 365 days a year, but September is a popular shoulder month, so the "from" price is a starting anchor. Mid-September weekend rates can drift up with demand, so book early and confirm the all-in nightly figure (taxes + cleaning/service fees) at checkout.

1c) Book Now

What	By When	Where / Link
Cabin (Mountain Paradise or alternative)	ASAP, ideally 2–3 months out	cabinsforyou.com/... or call 1-800-684-7865

What	By When	Where / Link
Park parking tag (weekly \$15 covers your whole trip)	Before arrival or at a visitor center on Day 1	nps.gov/...
The Peddler Steakhouse dinner reservation (Sat night fills fast)	2–4 weeks out	resy.com/... or (865) 436-5794
Bennett's BBQ	No reservation needed; just arrive off-peak and confirm hours by phone	bennetts-bbq.com , (865) 436-2400

💡 Buy the **weekly parking tag (\$15)**, not three daily tags. It costs the same as three \$5 days and saves you fumbling at the machine each morning. When you leave your vehicle for more than 15 minutes anywhere in the park, you need a parking tag: \$5 per day, \$15 per week, or \$40 per year.

2) Day-by-Day Plan

Friday, Sep 11: Arrive, settle in, first smoke

- **Afternoon:** Pick up your **weekly parking tag** (online ahead, or at Sugarlands Visitor Center near the Gatlinburg park entrance). Check into the cabin and christen the hot tub.
- **Evening, barbecue:** Dinner at **Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que**, 714 River Rd. A stone fireplace and knotty-pine beams set an old-school mood; phone (865) 436-2400. They slowly roast meats over hickory wood for up to 14 hours, with pulled pork, brisket, smoked sausage, chicken and more.
Hours note: the official Bennett's site publishes daily hours of 11am to 10pm for its Pigeon Forge location but does not list separate hours for the Gatlinburg location on its Hours & Locations panel, so please call (865) 436-2400 to confirm the Friday closing time for the 714 River Rd location before you head over. Planning a 6:30 to 7:00 PM arrival is a safe bet either way.

💡 Tip: Order the combo platter so you can taste brisket, pulled pork and ribs in one go, and grab an extra pound of pulled pork to go for a trailhead picnic on Saturday.

Plan B (weather): If it's pouring, this is a perfectly indoor evening anyway. Add a stroll through the covered shops on the Parkway, or just keep the hot tub warm and order BBQ to take back to the cabin.

Saturday, Sep 12: Big-view hike + scenic loop

This is your headline day. Two of your three must-haves in one outing.

- **Early morning, Hike 1, Andrews Bald.** Drive up Newfound Gap Road to the Kuwohi (formerly Clingmans Dome) parking area and take the Forney Ridge Trail. It is a 3.6-mile roundtrip that descends through high-elevation spruce-fir forest to a popular grassy bald known for views of the surrounding mountains. **Honest difficulty rating: this is a moderate hike, not an easy one**, despite often being grouped with the area's "easy" walks. The trail is wide and graveled and descends many stairs before narrowing to a well-trodden dirt path, and per the National Park Service the return hike to the trailhead involves a relatively strenuous climb. In plain terms: you go *down* on the way out and have to *climb back up* a sustained grade with stairs to return, so expect a real, calf-burning effort on the way back. The payoff is genuine: an open meadow with sweeping southern views, far quieter than the Clingmans Dome crowds. If you or your wife prefer to keep both hikes truly gentle, lean on the flat Cades Cove options below and treat Andrews Bald as the optional "earn-the-view" hike.

💡 Tip: Go first thing. The NPS warns to expect extreme crowding and limited parking in this popular area, and even suggests a shuttle, so pick your time early. While you're up there, the paved half-mile to the Kuwohi observation tower is right at the lot if you want a bonus 360° view.

- **Midday:** Picnic at the bald (your Bennett's leftovers earn their keep), then drive down toward the Townsend "Y."
- **Afternoon, Scenic drive + Hike 2, Cades Cove.** Do the **Cades Cove Loop Road**, an 11-mile one-way loop through the historic valley with mountains all around, abundant wildlife, and pioneer cabins and churches. For your second, genuinely easy hike, choose between the short, flat **Cades Cove Nature Trail** (a gentle wooded loop right off the road) for something truly easy, or stretch your legs on the **Abrams Falls Trail** if you have energy left. Either way you're inside the loop, so the parking tag already covers you.

💡 Tip: The loop is famous for bear and deer sightings, and it can crawl bumper-to-bumper. Treat it as a slow, stop-and-look drive, not a quick lap, and bring binoculars.

Plan B (weather): High-elevation balds and the Cades Cove loop both lose their magic in thick cloud and rain. If the forecast for Kuwohi is soaked in, swap Andrews Bald for a lower, sheltered walk and spend more time on the Cades Cove loop drive (still scenic in light rain from the car), or visit Sugarlands Visitor Center and the nearby easy riverside paths.

⚠️ Important closure to plan around: **Laurel Falls**, the classic easy Smokies waterfall hike, has been closed for a long rehabilitation. The National Park Service began a major rehabilitation on Laurel Falls Trail, closing it for 18 months starting Jan. 6, 2025, as crews improve the trail and parking areas. An 18-month project from January 2025 points to a reopening around mid-2026, so by your September trip it may have reopened, but it is not guaranteed. That's exactly why I've built your two hikes around Andrews Bald and Cades Cove, which are reliably open. If you find Laurel Falls officially reopened when you arrive, it's a lovely, mostly easy 2.6-mile alternative; check the NPS page before driving out.

Sunday, Sep 13: Slow morning, special dinner, head home

- **Morning:** One more hot-tub soak and coffee on the deck. If you want a final short walk, the easy riverside trails near Sugarlands are an unhurried option before checkout.

- **Late afternoon/evening, the nice sit-down dinner: The Peddler Steakhouse**, 820 River Rd, on the Little Pigeon River. Naturally aged steaks are cut tableside to your specification and grilled over real Tennessee hickory charcoal. They open daily for dinner at 5 PM (4:30 PM on Saturdays). On a Sunday they're open 17:00–21:00; phone (865) 436-5794.

💡 **Tip:** Book a river table on Resy in advance. River tables are booked online only; if they don't appear they're full, and bar-area seating is first come, first served for walk-ins. Diners have even watched a black bear amble along the river from the dining room, so it's a fitting finale.

Sunday-rate / timing note: Sept 13 is a Sunday, so The Peddler closes at 9 PM (not the later Saturday 10 PM). Aim to be seated by 7:00 to enjoy the salad bar and a dessert without feeling rushed.

Plan B (dinner alternative): If The Peddler is fully booked, an excellent nearby steak-and-Southern option is **Calhoun's**, 1004 Parkway #101 in downtown Gatlinburg, a mountain-lodge-style spot known for hickory-smoked ribs and prime rib. Calhoun's Gatlinburg is located at 1004 Parkway #101.

3) Practical Notes & Checklist

Barbecue, your menu of named options (you said "great barbecue," here are three so you can choose):

- **Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que**, 714 River Rd, (865) 436-2400, hickory-smoked up to 14 hrs. The official site lists 11am to 10pm daily for Pigeon Forge but no separate Gatlinburg hours, so confirm the River Rd location's hours by phone. Best for a sit-down combo platter.
- **Delauder's BBQ**, a local favorite. A family-owned spot for juicy barbecue; they prepare fresh daily, so arrive early before they sell out. Best for a no-frills local pick.
- **Myron Mixon BBQ**, 762 Parkway #5, Gatlinburg. Pulled pork, baby back ribs and beef short ribs are all excellent, but pork belly burnt ends and prime brisket are where it shines. Best for a brisket and burnt-ends splurge.

Dinner (non-barbecue): The Peddler Steakhouse (primary) or Calhoun's (alternative), both detailed above.

Map links:

- Mountain Paradise (Cabins For You office): [Open in maps](#)
- Kuwohi / Clingmans Dome parking (Andrews Bald trailhead): [Open in maps](#)
- Cades Cove Loop Road: [Open in maps](#)
- Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que: [Open in maps](#)
- The Peddler Steakhouse: [Open in maps](#)

Packing & prep checklist:

- Parking tag purchased (weekly \$15)
- Peddler reservation confirmed for Sunday
- Bennett's Gatlinburg hours confirmed by phone before you go

- Layers and a rain shell (Kuwohi sits over a mile high and runs cool and cloudy even in September)
- Sturdy closed-toe shoes; the Andrews Bald trail is rocky, has stairs, and a moderate climb on the return
- Water (1L+ each), snacks, and any Bennett's leftovers for the picnic
- Binoculars and a phone car charger (no cell service at Kuwohi or on the Cades Cove loop)
- Bear awareness: keep food sealed and never approach wildlife on the loop or trails

Estimated cost overview (2 people, 2 nights), mirrored against your ~\$150/night cabin budget:

Item	Estimate (USD)	Notes
Cabin, 2 nights (Mountain Paradise)	~\$208 base + taxes/fees	"From \$104/night"; expect ~\$300–\$420 all-in for 2 nights after taxes/cleaning. Confirm at checkout.
Park weekly parking tag	\$15	Covers the entire trip
Friday BBQ dinner (Bennett's)	~\$45–\$70	Two platters + drinks
Saturday picnic lunch	~\$0–\$20	Largely leftovers
Sunday dinner (The Peddler)	~\$90–\$140	Two steak entrées; some dishes can be pricey
Gas / incidentals	~\$30–\$60	Local driving, snacks, coffee
Trip total (excluding travel to the area)	~\$390–\$700	Cabin is the swing factor

Budget verdict: your ~\$150/night target is realistic here. The recommended cabin's "from \$104" base keeps you comfortably under \$150/night on the room rate itself; the only thing that can push the all-in nightly figure toward or past \$150 is the taxes-plus-fees stack, so confirm that total when you book. The rest of the weekend (a \$15 tag, one BBQ night, one steak night) fits a relaxed couple's budget without drama.

4) Sources (checked June 2026)

Accommodation

- Cabins For You, Gatlinburg cabins with hot tubs (Mountain Paradise, Hen Wallow Creek Cottage, Bear Tracks listings and "from" prices): [cabinsforyou.com/...](https://cabinsforyou.com/)
- Mountain Paradise detail page: [cabinsforyou.com/...](https://cabinsforyou.com/)
- Hen Wallow Creek Cottage detail page: [cabinsforyou.com/...](https://cabinsforyou.com/)

Hikes, scenic drive, fees (National Park Service)

- Andrews Bald (Forney Ridge Trail), including the "relatively strenuous climb" on the return that makes it moderate: [nps.gov/...](https://nps.gov/)
- Laurel Falls closure status: [nps.gov/...](https://nps.gov/)

- Laurel Falls trail page: [nps.gov/...](#)
- Parking tag / fees: [nps.gov/...](#)

Barbecue

- Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que official site (address, phone, smoking method, hours panel): [bennetts-bbq.com](#)
- Local BBQ ranking (Myron Mixon, Calhoun's, Delauder's addresses): [thesmokies.com/...](#)

Sit-down dinner

- The Peddler Steakhouse (hours, tableside steaks): [peddlergatlinburg.com/...](#) and [yelp.com/...](#)
- Reservations: [resy.com/...](#)

A couple of honest caveats worth repeating: cabin "from" rates and the all-in total are the one thing I could not lock to the exact penny for your specific September dates (the live total sits behind the booking widget), so treat \$104/night as a firm starting anchor and confirm the taxed total before you pay. On Bennett's: the official site clearly publishes "Daily 11am-10pm" only for its Pigeon Forge restaurant and shows the Gatlinburg location (714 River Rd) without its own posted hours, so a quick call to (865) 436-2400 is the reliable way to lock Friday's closing time. And Andrews Bald is best understood as a moderate hike with a real uphill return, not a flat stroll, so build it in only if you both feel up for the climb. Do check the NPS Laurel Falls page right before the trip in case it reopens and you'd rather add that classic waterfall walk. Everything else, the loop drive, the parking tag, and both restaurants, is set and ready. Enjoy the smoke and the soak.

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