

Mapping Out An Off-Season Getaway

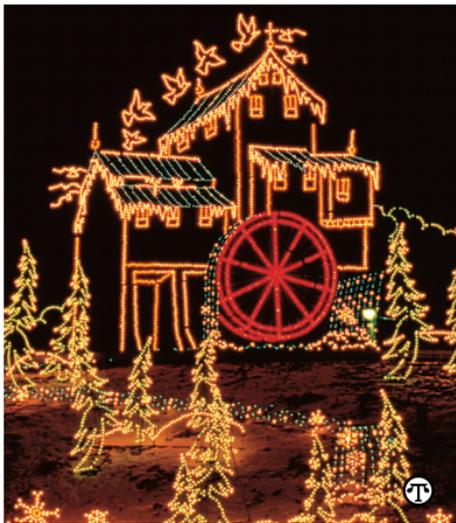
(NAPSA)—Whether you enjoy trips off the beaten path or prefer mainstream vacation spots, off-season travel can be a delightful and affordable way to get away.

The trips can be an opportunity to discover that a destination—perhaps even one of your favorites—has a personality that changes with the seasons. Enjoying a ski resort in summer is a ready example. It's both weird and wonderful to hike on a cross-country trail or ride a mountain bike down a ski slope when your only memory of these locations is snow covered. Plus, many traditional warm-weather destinations offer incentives and activities to help save off-season travelers some cool cash.

Each year, for example, a four-month-long event called Pigeon Forge Winterfest attracts vacationers to the Great Smoky Mountains in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., an area once strictly thought of as a place for summertime fun. Now in its 20th year, the festival welcomes thousands.

The hallmark of the celebration is an unforgettably dazzling show of millions of decorative lights. The city even mounts lighted snowflakes on utility poles and erects gigantic storytelling displays—a popular one depicts a blacksmith pounding on an anvil producing snowflakes, not sparks, in the Tennessee night.

Complementing the city's efforts—which you can view on narrated trolley tours—are displays created by businesses throughout town. The Dollywood theme park adds millions more lights for its holiday event called Smoky Mountain Christmas, as well.



An off-season vacation can offer a fresh look at favorite destinations.

There's also the popular Wilderness Wildlife Week that offers eight days of free classes, seminars, photo shows and activities, most of which focus on Great Smoky Mountains National Park, located next to Pigeon Forge.

Additionally, travelers can enjoy hikes in the Smokies—where winter produces vistas that don't exist when summer's leaves are on the trees. Indeed, each year, Wilderness Wildlife Week hikers collectively cover about 5,000 miles on dozens of National Park trails.

For those looking for what may be a surprisingly authentic Western experience, Winterfest stirs things up with its popular celebration of cowboy poetry and Western music. Even though the city is east of the Mississippi, American Cowboy magazine still calls the experience one of its Top 101 Western Events.

For more information and tips on planning a trip, visit www.MyPigeonForge.com or call (800) 251-9100.