

Daytrips and Staycations in Monroe County, TN

If you only have a weekend to explore our towns, how can you make the most of this brief trip? Or if you live here and want to be a tourist in your own home, where should you check out? These itineraries for each town can be used for both day trips and weekend retreats.

Madisonville

The best place to start your day is at Donna's Old Town Cafe in downtown for some breakfast. You can also visit the historic courthouse and war memorials across the street. If you need to walk off breakfast, Houston Park is a brief walk away from the main street. Don't forget to check out the murals across downtown and do some shopping. Also check out The Shops of Monroe which is a quick drive away from downtown.

Madisonville has two great agritourism destinations. First is Tsali Notch Vineyard. Here you can sample wines, juices, and jellies made from muscadines, an indigenous grape. The vineyard offers tours and private tastings. These must be booked online. If you want something savory, visit Benton's Smoky Mountain Country Hams & Bacon, one of the last producers of traditional country ham in America. Their store is open to the public but they do not offer tours. Nearby is Legends and Lore Pizzeria which serves up pizza and stories of the paranormal.

There are a few ways to enjoy the outdoors while in Madisonville. The first is Kefauver Park where you can relax by the lake. The second, more intense option, is a bike ride on the Madisonville Loop, a 35 mile cycling trail which takes you through downtown and the hills surrounding the city. The trail also takes you past Monroe County Airport where you can go on a short aerial sightseeing tour. When it is time for supper, we recommend The Patio, Bert's Hometown Grill, and Sol Azteca Mexican Grill which are in or near downtown.

Day Trip

Morning: Downtown Madisonville

Mid-Day: Tsali Notch & Benton Hams

Afternoon: Kefauver Park and Downtown Madisonville

Weekend Trip

Day 1: Downtown Madisonville

Day 2: Tsali Notch & Benton Hams

Day 3: Kefauver Park and Madisonville Loop

Sweetwater

Downtown Sweetwater has everything you need for a good morning. Grab a coffee and a pastry from Cup Runneth Over then check out the shops on main street such as Dogwood Lane Boutique, Sweetwater Antiques, and The Lily Pad Boutique. Note that these shops don't open until 10 AM. While

exploring downtown, don't miss the murals. Across the street from downtown is the Duck Park which is perfect for a morning stroll, especially if you take the trail to the Sweetwater City Recreation Park.

Sweetwater's most famous attraction is the Lost Sea, the country's largest underground lake. Only accessible by guided tour, the experience includes a trail (nearly a mile long) down and back that takes you past mineral formations with needlelike crystals. Many parts of the trail are slippery and steep, so those with mobility issues will find the tour challenging. At the lake, you'll board a glass-bottom boat and sail on the crystal blue placid water.

Head up to Grain Bin Commodities for some fresh baked treats. If you are willing to wait, take those sweets to downtown for a picnic at one of the city parks or the train car. Nearby, 3 Generations Art Studio offers lessons on how to paint and make pottery. Sweetwater Heritage Museum has exhibits on local history. Always ask for a tour guide to hear stories of the community. Downtown has several dining options including El Jacal Restaurante Mexicano, Kokita Asian Cuisine, and The Lazy Beagle. When in downtown on a warm day, you have to get some ice cream at the Sweetwater Creamery.

Day Trip

Morning: Downtown Sweetwater

Mid-Day: The Lost Sea

Afternoon: Grain Bin Commodities & Downtown Sweetwater

Weekend Trip

Day 1: Downtown Sweetwater

Day 2: The Lost Sea

Day 3: Grain Bin Commodities & Downtown Sweetwater

Tellico Plains

The two best places to start your day in Tellico Plains are Tellico Grains Bakery for a pastry and Trout Mountain Coffeehouse & Inn for a coffee. While in downtown, check out some of the local shops such as Wren Rock Mercantile and The Bookshelf. A visit to Tellico Goods & Gear may be needed if you are planning to explore the Cherokee National Forest.

Tellico Plains is famous for its mountains and forests which you can explore in two ways. The first is taking a drive on the Cherohala Skyway. Here you can enjoy scenic views from the the long and winding road. The second way is spending a day or two camping in the Cherokee National Forest itself. Indian Boundary Lake is a must-see for any length of stay. While in the forest, you can go fishing, hiking, biking, stargazing, birdwatching, and even goldpanning! When in the forest, be respectful of the animals and their environment.

Once you return to civilization, you can enjoy some more of what Tellico Plains has to offer. Our historically-minded visitors will love the Charles Hall Museum where you can see exhibits on local Appalachian and Native American history. Depending on when you visit, you can also check out the Tellico Community Farmers Market, which is owned by the local Mennonite community. Dining

options include Tellico Beach Drive-In and Peach Street Grill. If you haven't had enough natural beauty, head to Buck Bald (which is a 30 minute drive from Tellico) for a gorgeous sunset.

Day Trip

Morning: Downtown Tellico Plains

Mid-Day: Cherokee National Forest and/or Cherohala Skyway.

Afternoon: Tellico Community Farmers Market, Charles Hall Museum, and Buck Bald.

Weekend Trip

Day 1: Downtown Tellico Plains, Charles Hall Museum, Tellico Community Farmers Market, and Buck Bald

Day 2: Cherokee National Forest

Day 3: Cherohala Skyway

Vonore

A higher-scale brunch can be found at The Bay Bistro at Rarity Bay. Take the start of your Vonore trip slow by relaxing on the lakeshore. Rasar Landing Campground and Heritage Park are excellent choices for a tranquil moment before you take to the water. If you are the golfing type, Rarity Bay Golf & Country Club is the place for you.

A visit to Vonore is not complete without some time on Tellico Lake. Spend a day boating, jet skiing, paddleboarding, canoeing, or if you want something slower, fishing. Tellico Marina has everything you'll need for the day including docks and launch ramps, a supply store, restrooms, showers, and mechanics. Not far away, especially by boat, is The Mudpuppy where you can enjoy a meal with views of the lake. It is part of Cherokee Outdoor Resort which has a marina, cabin rentals, and boat rentals. Jet skis, ski boats, and pontoon boats can also be rented at JBeez Watercraft.

Vonore has several destinations for visitors interested in history. The city features two museums telling both sides of local history: Fort Loudoun State Historic Park and the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum. They showcase the 18th and 19th centuries from the perspectives of the English and the Cherokee. Outside the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum is a burial mound of Cherokee people. 20 minutes down the road are memorials to Chota and Tanasi, two Cherokee towns which were destroyed by the TVA during the creation of Tellico Lake.

Day Trip

Morning: Rarity Bay & Rasar Landing

Mid-Day: Fort Loudoun & Sequoyah Birthplace Museum

Afternoon: Tellico Lake

Weekend Trip

Day 1: Rarity Bay and Rasar Landing

Day 2: Tellico Lake

Day 3: Fort Loudoun & Sequoyah Birthplace Museum