

PIGEON FORGE

T E N N E S S E E

Midwest Travel Journalists Association Conference Itinerary

Wednesday, May 8, 2019

Conference registration is open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. at the [LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge](#) (135 Jake Thomas Road). Shuttle service to each lodging property is provided for the duration of registration.

1:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.—Optional Tours (please choose one): All tours begin at 1:45 p.m. and conclude at 4:15 p.m. Space is limited. The shuttle from your hotel to the tour's starting point will depart the hotel lobby at 1:30 p.m.

1. **Competitive Sports Tour—1:45 – 4:15 p.m.**

Competitive sports—baseball, gymnastics, cheer leading and more—are big business in Pigeon Forge. The five-year-old [LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge](#), which spans more than 232,599 square feet, has hosted more than 147 events, many of which are athletic competitions, since opening in 2013. The facility's ability to accommodate a wide range of sporting events helped drive an additional 429,000 room nights over five years for the city. Nearby, The Ripken Experience Pigeon Forge, which opened in March 2016, has hosted more than 2,100 youth baseball teams and 150 high school softball teams in just three years. In total, more than 33,500 players and coaches have traveled to play ball on fields that offer unobstructed views of the Great Smoky Mountains. In 2018, its third year of operation, [The Ripken Experience Pigeon Forge](#) delivered \$33.8 million in visitor spending to the city while hosting 925 teams from 25 states, Canada and Puerto Rico. Yes, Major League Baseball Hall of Fame member Cal Ripken, Jr., is an active participant. Visit both facilities and see why Pigeon Forge has the winning edge.

2. **Sweet Treats Tour—1:45 – 4:15 p.m.**

Candy making is one of the area's most popular crafts, and the culinary arts have a rich—and sweet—history in the kitchens of Pigeon Forge. Join us on a culinary journey through a selection of Pigeon Forge's sweetest kitchens. This tour will take you behind the scenes and get you up-close as tried-and-true recipes are

demonstrated. We'll take a peek into a couple of the city's busiest kitchens, where stories fill the air about as often as sugar fills the measuring cup!

3. Spirits Tour—1:45 – 4:15 p.m.

Tennessee's Whiskey Trail features more than 30 stops, with 13 distilleries located in East Tennessee. Craft distilling's popularity continues to expand, and the Tennessee Distillers Guild gains new members, some of whom are located in Pigeon Forge. We'll visit the [Old Forge Distillery](#), which combines the settlers' old-fashioned methods with the modern-day know-how of Old Forge's head distiller. The tour also includes a visit to [Ole Smoky Moonshine](#) at The Island, with an onsite still and tasting area. Moonshine is jarred, labeled and sold onsite in a range of flavors.

4. Foothills Parkway Missing Link Tour—1:45 – 4:15 p.m.

Experts from Great Smoky Mountains National Park lead this scenic excursion to the famous Foothills Parkway. Construction on this new section of roadway began in 1966, including the 1.65-mile section known as the "Missing Link" which is now connected by a series of nine bridges. Some 75 years in the making, this long-awaited section of the Foothills Parkway (located between Walland and Wears Valley, Tennessee) officially opened to the public on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018. The Foothills Parkway now consists of two finished sections at either end of the 72-mile corridor. The western section now extends 33 continuous miles from Chilhowee to Wears Valley, offering a new recreational experience for motorists and cyclists. The eastern section, completed in 1968, extends six miles from Cosby to Interstate 40 presenting breathtaking views of Mt. Cammerer. [Foothills Parkway Completion](#).

6:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. Welcome Reception at [Titanic Museum Attraction](#) (2134 Parkway)

Guests open the door to the past in a one-of-a-kind way with an exclusive dinner on the ship's private third floor. Enjoy a very special presentation about the ship's newest exhibit from the ship's owner, Mary Kellogg Joslyn. Later, an after-hours tour of the museum lets attendees experience what it was like to roam the hallways, parlors, cabins and grand staircase of the Titanic while surrounded by more than 400 artifacts, a collection valued at more than \$4.5 million.

Thursday, May 9, 2019

6:30 a.m.—Optional sunrise photo op at Clingmans Dome's Oconuluftee Overlook in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Snacks will be served enroute to Clingmans Dome. At an elevation of 6,643 feet, Clingmans Dome is the highest mountain in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is the highest peak in Tennessee as well as the highest elevation point along the 2,174-mile Appalachian Trail. It offers stunning sunrise photos. This optional outing requires a 5 a.m. departure from each lodging property to ensure adequate travel and setup time. Upon completion, participants will be transported to the half-day session at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

7:30 a.m. – Noon Conducted by the expert staff of [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) (GSMNP), this half-day session takes you into the country's most visited national park, specifically to the Elkmont area, a site of ongoing preservation and restoration. The day's program will take a deep dive into the area's rich history as it focuses on the 19 cabins (eight of which will be restored in time for this visit) that are at the center of this renovation effort. A storyteller will take participants back in time to learn about the original mountain pioneers and their authentic way of life. GSMNP rangers will focus on the area's natural beauty, its wildflowers, the hiking trails, and fishing. Breakfast will be served upon arrival.

12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. lunch at the historic [Old Mill](#) (175 Old Mill Ave.)

In the early 1800's, a water-powered gristmill on the banks of the Little Pigeon River became one of the main hubs of activity in the small mountain community of Pigeon Forge. In those days, the mill faithfully produced the meals and flours that were crucial for day-to-day existence of the Smokies' early settlers. The Old Mill even furnished electricity for the town until 1935. Fast forward to present day, and the Old Mill is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The working gristmill is now also home to the Old Mill restaurant, which serves authentic Southern cuisine. It also is one of the most photographed mills in the country.

1:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.—All tours (please choose one) begin at 1:45 p.m. and conclude at 4:15 p.m. Space is limited.

1. **Spirits Tour—1:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.**

Tennessee's Whiskey Trail features more than 30 stops, with 13 distilleries located in East Tennessee. Craft distilling's popularity continues to expand, and the Tennessee Distillers Guild gains new members, some of whom are located in Pigeon Forge. We'll visit the [Old Forge Distillery](#), which combines the settlers' old-fashioned methods with the modern-day know-how of Old Forge's head distiller. The tour also includes a visit to [Ole Smoky Moonshine](#) at The Island, with an onsite still and tasting area. Moonshine is jarred, labeled and sold onsite in a range of flavors.

2. **Pulse of the Parkway Tour—1:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.**

Attendees will participate and/or observe. From rolling around one in [Outdoor Gravity Park's](#) water-filled orbs to [indoor skydiving](#), Pigeon Forge offers a variety of get-your-heart-racing adventures. Learn more about the country's first indoor [snow](#) facility (which just opened in 2018) and a new three-in-one 200-foot-tall drop tower called the Mountain Monster, set to open in spring of 2019.

3. **Family Fun Attractions Tour—1:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.**

Pigeon Forge prides itself on offering something to do for everyone across all age groups. Multi-generational families enjoy visiting because so many of the city's attractions offer experiences that are perfect for the entire family, which means more quality family time! We'll sneak in a little education at the museums, test attendees' skills on the (mini) links, coast a little on an Alpine Coaster and take the wheel on a fast-

paced track. Facility representatives will offer tips and insights as to how they are constantly updating and improving to offer unforgettable memories for our city's visitors.

4:15 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.—Return to hotel for evening refresh.

6:15 p.m.—Please choose a dinner option from one of the following; Space is limited:

1. [Bullfish Grill](#) (2441 Parkway)—Bullfish Grill serves the freshest selections available, from hand-cut aged grand champion Angus beef to a stellar selection of fresh daily seafood. From-scratch side items include stone ground cheese grits while dessert highlights include a towering three-layer homemade strawberry cake.
2. [Huck Finn's Catfish](#) (3330 Parkway)— This family owned and operated establishment serves 50 tons of pond-raised, grain-fed Mississippi catfish fillets each year, all certified by the U.S. Catfish Institute. Other menu favorites include fried chicken, country-fried steak, frog legs, and chicken livers. Signature hushpuppies, and dill pickles and onions slices are just a sample of the sides.
3. [Gaucho Urbano](#) (111 Valley Dr.) – The first of its kind in Pigeon Forge, this Brazilian steakhouse uses traditional Brazilian culinary and cultural influences throughout the dining experience to give guests a taste of Brazil. Authentic ingredients and premium grilled meats celebrate an “Urban Cowboy” approach to churrasco-style dining.

7:30 p.m.— Please choose an evening entertainment option from one of the following:

1. [Paula Deen's Lumberjack Feud Show & Adventure](#) (2530 Parkway)
High-energy axe throwing, chopping, sawing, speed climbing, log rolling and other competitive events as world-class lumberjacks compete in 11 events along with a portion of the show that involves audience participation.
2. [Country Tonite](#) (129 Showplace Blvd.)
Comedy, choreography and big production numbers combine to present *Country Tonite*, a fast-paced show filled with country classics, hot new country hits and hilarious country comedy performed by an award-winning cast of performers.
3. [Smoky Mountain Opry](#) (2046 Parkway)
The area's largest musical variety show features every genre of music—from Big Band Swing through today's country hits and disco to the soulful sounds of Motown. Singers, dancers, comedians, and musicians perform the best hits from all genres against a backdrop of special effects, laser lights, pyro, and giant video screens.

Friday, May 10, 2019

8 a.m. – 9 a.m. Breakfast at [Bennett's BBQ](#) (2910 Parkway)

Locally owned and operated for more than 27 years, Bennett's Pit BBQ offers a breakfast bar filled with not only pulled pork but Belgian waffles, eggs, sausage, bacon, French toast, pancakes, home fries, grits, biscuits, toast, sausage gravy, cinnamon apples, assorted fruits, donut holes, blueberry muffins and more.

9:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.—All tours (please choose one) begin at 9:30 a.m. and conclude at 11:45 p.m. Space is limited.

1. Mountain Crafts & Heritage Tour—9:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Step back in time with us for a glimpse into how our past defines and shapes our present. Mountain life wasn't always the easiest life, and early pioneers had to use their own inventions and know-how to survive in the Great Smoky Mountains. Relying on their natural resources, mountain folks lived off the land and learned to improvise by making many of the items they needed. From grinding grains to make flour and cornmeal to shaping clay to make home goods to feeding the family from the field's harvest, Pigeon Forge's rich heritage has nurtured a way of life that is now celebrated in the form of artistic pottery, decorative metal works, delicious cuisine, aged spirits and more.

2. Sweet Treats Tour—9:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

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Noon – 3 p.m.—Dollywood theme park (2700 Dollywood Parks Blvd.) Lunch served upon arrival.

Dolly Parton's Dollywood is every bit as unique as its namesake. An award-winning theme park, Dollywood is known for its captivating entertainment, thrilling rides, master craftspeople, all set amid a stunning Smoky Mountains backdrop. Park officials also will provide information about the Dollywood Company's other resort properties, including Dollywood's Splash Country,

Dollywood's DreamMore Resort & Spa, Dollywood's Smoky Mountains Cabins and more. Attendees will spend the afternoon experiencing the park, with opportunities to choose from different areas of focus, taking advantage of the Dollywood staff to make recommendations and answers questions.

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.—Vice President's Hour at the LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge in the South LeConte Meeting Rooms. Refreshments provided.

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.—Professional Development at the LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge in the South LeConte Meeting Rooms. Refreshments provided. (There will be time for Media Marketplace setup immediately following Professional Development.)

5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m.—Return to hotel for evening refresh.

7:30 p.m.—Dinner served at one of the following shows (attendee's choice):

1. [Dolly Parton's Stampede](#)

A four-course family feast and 32 magnificent horses are the stars of this friendly North and South competition. The experience begins with the Mountain Ruckus pre-show concert in the saloon before everyone moves into the arena for a show filled with unbelievable stunts performed on horseback, spectacular special effects, musical productions, audience participation and a fabulous meal.

2. [Hatfield & McCoy Dinner Feud](#)

Become part of the longest running feud in history and help the Hatfields and McCoys try to settle their differences—mountain-style—with singing, dancing, mighty feats of strength, jaw-dropping stunts, side-splitting comedy and audience participation. The shindig also includes an all-you-can-eat feast of Southern home-style favorites. Simply stated, it's Southern feudin' feastin' family fun.

Saturday, May 11, 2019

8 a.m. – 9 a.m.—Breakfast at [Mama's Farmhouse](#) (208 Pickel St.)

The menu is filled with recipes from Mama, the matriarch of the Johnson family, proprietors of the Farmhouse. Southern breakfast favorites are served family style as guests gather round the table. Diners are treated to every item on the day's menu, and servings of these family-favorite recipes are all you can eat.

9:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.—Media Marketplace at the LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge on the West Concourse.

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.—MTJA Business Meeting at the LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge in the South LeConte Meeting Rooms. Refreshments provided.

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.—Lunch. Attendees will choose one of the following international dining options:

1. Wild Bear Tavern (4236 Parkway) – authentic German comfort food
2. Smokies Cuban Café (3526 Parkway) – classic Cuban specialties
3. Cielito Lindo (3965 Parkway) – casual Mexican favorites
4. Little Tokyo (2430 Teaster Ln.) – contemporary Japanese steakhouse

2:45 p.m. – 5 p.m.—All tours (please choose one) begin at 2:45 p.m. and conclude at 5 p.m. Space is limited.

1. Competitive Sports Tour—2:45 p.m. – 5 p.m.

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4. Pigeon Forge Riverwalk Tour—2:45 p.m. – 5 p.m.

For Pigeon Forge visitors who want to unplug and enjoy the beautiful outdoor scenery, the Pigeon Forge River Walk makes it so very easy—and fun! Tour participants will encounter various experts along the trail who highlight some of the available activities, including many that are free. Measuring nearly two miles—and growing—the Greenway is paved and is located on the east bank of the Pigeon River along which the city was founded. While it continues to grow, the goal is to completely connect the city for those who want a chance to disconnect and take in the scenery and nature while biking, walking, running, fly fishing or bird watching. Attendees will learn all about the possibilities along with a little history of the forge and pigeon.

4:45 p.m. – 6:15 p.m.— Return to hotel for evening refresh.

6:15 p.m.— Depart hotel for Closing Reception.

6:30 p.m. – 10 p.m.—MTJA Conference Closing Reception & Dine Around at [The Island at Pigeon Forge](#) (131 The Island Dr.)

Everyone will gather in the Compass Rose Room for the MTJA Conference closing ceremony and dinner's first course. A clever scavenger hunt will lead attendees to the following courses at various locations. The Island in Pigeon Forge offers the best of everything. Delicious dining, 35 specialty retail shops, a four-star Margaritaville Island Hotel and the Margaritaville Island Inn, and a variety of rides, games and attractions, including the 200-foot-tall Smoky Mountain Wheel. Attendees will have an opportunity to explore The Island, take in some incredible sunset views from the observation wheel, shop, and, of course, dine! Once the sun goes down, we'll gather to watch an amazing dancing waters fountain show, choreographed by the same company that works with the Bellagio in Las Vegas, and listen to a bluegrass concert from the Ole Smokey Moonshine stage.

Sunday, May 12, 2019

Attendee's hotel will provide a complimentary breakfast prior to check-out. (Check-out is 11 a.m.) Airport shuttles for those not participating in the post-tour will begin at 6 a.m. and will continue until 11 a.m. Representatives from Knoxville will provide transportation from the hotel to Knoxville for those attending the post-tour. Click [here](#) to view the Knoxville post-tour itinerary.