

GUEST GUIDE · WINTER

Winter-ready in the Smokies

Winter here is often mild in the valleys and wild up high. Here's how to get to the cabin safely, stay warm, handle a power outage, and enjoy the park when the weather turns.

3–5 times
a year, low elevations get an inch or more of snow[1]

5,046 ft
at Newfound Gap, where US 441 crosses the mountains[1]

~70 in.
of snow a year on Mount Le Conte[1]

BEFORE YOU HEAD UP

Check the roads first

Conditions at the cabin can be very different from conditions in town, and the high roads can close with little warning.

- **National park roads:** check closures at nps.gov/grsm or call the winter road line at 865-436-1200, ext. 631.[2] The park also posts road updates on X at @GreatSmokyNPS.[12]
- **State roads and highways:** dial 511 or visit tn511.com for Tennessee road conditions.[3]
- **Newfound Gap Road (US 441)** between Gatlinburg and Cherokee can close on short notice in hazardous weather, so have a backup route.[13]
- **Arrive in daylight** if you can, fill up on gas in town, and download an offline map. Cell service drops out on mountain roads.
- **Ask your host about the driveway.** Many cabins sit on steep, curvy drives where all-wheel or four-wheel drive helps in snow.

ON THE ROAD

Driving on snow and ice

- Slow down, avoid sudden braking, and leave extra space between you and the car ahead.[1]
- Going downhill, shift to a low gear and brake gently instead of riding the brakes.
- Bridges, shaded curves and north-facing slopes freeze first and stay icy longest.
- Speed limits on most paved park roads average about 30 mph.[1]
- The park doesn't use road salt. Crews plow and spread a sand-and-gravel mix called "chat," so roads can stay slick.[1]
- If conditions look bad, wait it out. A few hours often makes a big difference.

RAIN IN TOWN CAN MEAN SNOW UP TOP

Temperatures drop quickly as you climb, and precipitation is heavier and more frequent at higher elevations. A clear day in Gatlinburg doesn't mean a clear road at Newfound Gap.[1]

PACK FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Bring these in winter

- Warm layers and gloves
- Shoes with good grip
- Ice scraper and car blanket
- Phone charger for the car
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Extra days of medicine
- Snacks and water
- Printed park parking tag
- Your host's number, saved

AT THE CABIN

Stay warm and keep the pipes flowing

When it's very cold

- Keep the thermostat at the same temperature day and night.[4]
- Open the cabinet doors under sinks so warm air reaches the pipes.[4]
- Let a cold faucet drip slowly on the coldest nights. Moving water is less likely to freeze.[4]
- If a faucet only trickles, a pipe may be frozen. Tell your host right away and leave that faucet open.[4]

Decks, steps and the hot tub

- Decks and outdoor steps ice over fast. Use the handrails and wear shoes with grip.
- Keep the hot tub cover on and latched between soaks so it stays warm.
- Keep hot tub water at or below 104°F, and check it before you get in.[5]

Fireplace and heat

- Open the flue before lighting a wood fire so smoke can get out.[7]
- If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, get everyone outside and call 911.

IF THE LIGHTS GO OUT

Power outages

- **Check the outage map** at viewer.sces.net or call Sevier County Electric's outage line at **865-774-6300**.[6] Then let your host know.
- Use flashlights instead of candles.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer closed as much as you can.

CARBON MONOXIDE CAN KILL

Never use a gas stove or oven to heat the cabin. Run generators, camp stoves and charcoal grills only outdoors, at least 20 feet from windows, doors and garages.[7]

IF YOU'RE SNOWED IN

Make it a cabin day

- Stay put until roads are clear. A steep, icy driveway is often the hardest part of a winter trip.
- Let your host know your plans. They know the driveway and can tell you when it's usually passable.
- If roads are closed on checkout day, ask your host about timing.
- Board games, the fireplace and the hot tub in falling snow are what winter cabins are for.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The park in winter

- **Main roads stay open year-round,** weather permitting: Newfound Gap Road (US 441), Little River Road and the Cades Cove Loop Road.[8]
- **Smaller roads close for the season,** including Kuwohi Road, Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail, Little Greenbrier, Parson Branch, Rich Mountain and Heintooga Ridge roads.[8]
- **Parking tag:** any vehicle parked more than 15 minutes needs one. It's $5 a day or $15 a week. Buy it at a visitor center, or online at recreation.gov and print it.[9]

WINTER IS A GREAT TIME TO VISIT

Fewer crowds, long views through bare trees, and icicle-covered waterfalls. Pick lower-elevation walks when the high country is snowy.

- Trails at higher elevations can stay icy for days. Turn back if it gets slick.
- Bears are still around. Keep food and trash locked up at the cabin and in the car.[10]

SAVE THESE NUMBERS

Who to call

Emergency	**911**
Power outage (Sevier County Electric)[6]	**865-774-6300**
Park road conditions	**865-436-1200 ext. 631**
Tennessee road conditions[3]	**511**
Covenant Health LeConte ER, Sevierville[11]	**865-446-7000**

YOUR HOST

SOURCES

1 NPS, Smokies Guide, Winter 2025–2026: npshistory.com/publications/grsm/newspaper/winter-2025-2026.pdf

2 NPS, Safety guidance and emergency contact info: nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/safety.htm

3 TDOT, Tennessee 511: tn.gov/tdot/welcome-to-tennessee-511/

4 American Red Cross Tennessee, Prevent Frozen Pipes: redcross.org/local/tennessee/about-us/news-and-events/press-releases/red-cross-on-alert-for-winter-weather-in-western-tennessee.html

5 CPSC, CPSC Warns of Hot Tub Temperatures: cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/1980/CPSC-Warns-Of-Hot-Tub-Temperatures

6 Sevier County Electric System, Contact: sces.net/contact/

7 Ready.gov, Power Outages: ready.gov/power-outages

8 NPS, Seasonal Road Schedule: nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/seasonalroads.htm

9 NPS, Fees and Passes: nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/fees.htm

10 BearWise, Guest Checklist: bearwise.org/ufaq/new-bearwise-guest-checklist-and-lodging-safety-tips/

11 Covenant Health LeConte, Emergency Services: covenanthealth.com/leconte/services/emergency/

12 Reno Gazette-Journal, Busy days remain at Great Smoky Mountains National Park: rgj.com/story/entertainment/smoky-mountains/2026/11/13/great-smoky-mountains-national-park-busy-days-visitors-november-december-fall-winter/92722959007/

13 NPS, Current Conditions: nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm