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VA

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Everyone From Virginia Should Take This One Awesome Road Trip Before They Die

For hundreds of years, Virginia has been celebrated for her music. With much of our traditional music stemming from the mountains of the southwest, Virginia's distinct vocal and instrumental styles are often called "old-time music" or "mountain music." For many Virginians, this music is much more than just a way to pass the time – it's an integral part of their traditions, culture and identity.

"The Crooked Road" is a 333-mile journey designed specifically to celebrate the music of Virginia – and those who make it. Winding through the mountains of Southwest Virginia, The Crooked Road covers 19 counties, four cities and more than 50 towns and communities.



The Crooked Road

Called one of the top five trips in the USA by the Lonely Planet Travel Guide, The Crooked Road showcases string bands, a cappella gospel, blues, 300-year old ballads, bluegrass and much, much more. With nine major venues, more than 60 affiliated venues and festivals, and over 25 wayside exhibits, each stop along the way provides an opportunity to hear the music that has become so deeply ingrained in our culture. The following list highlights the major venues along the trail and tells a little bit about the adventures that await you on this musical pilgrimage.

1. Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center, Clintwood



Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center / Facebook

The music of Ralph Stanley has spanned generations. Today, the Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center in Clintwood provides a closer look at the life of this legendary performer, songwriter, and musician. Stanley himself provided much of the material for the museum, including vintage instruments. The museum and music center is set in a large, historic Victorian home and includes exhibits and displays on on both Ralph and Carter Stanley, as well as showcasing artists who they inspired, such as Ricky Skaggs and Patty Loveless.

2. Country Cabin II Appalachian Traditions Village, Norton



Country Cabin II / Facebook via Shirley Smith

The Country Cabin is hailed as the longest continuously running traditional music venue along The Crooked Road. The original cabin was built in 1937 through the inspiration of local singer and songwriter Kate O'Neil Peter Sturgill and, today, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "Country Cabin II" came about in 2002 when more space was needed to accommodate the crowds drawn to this performing arts haven. In addition to local bluegrass and old-time music performers ever Saturday night, the site hosts clogging and line-dance classes, as well the Dock Boggs Festival every September.

3. The Carter Family Fold, Hiltons



Southern Foodways Alliance / flickr



Southern Foodways Alliance / flickr

At the foot of Clinch Mountain sits the Carter Family Fold. The Carter Family is known as “The First Family of Country Music,” having been part of the original Bristol Sessions in 1927. Today, visitors can see the cabin where the famous Carter Family lived and made the music that has inspired generations. A museum, housed in A.P. Carter’s old general store, showcases the music and life of the Carter family. The adjacent 800-seat music venue offers live music performances every Saturday night.

4. The Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Bristol



[The Birthplace of Country Music Museum / Facebook](#)

Bristol is known as the “Birthplace of Country Music” because of the famous 1927 recordings that took place on State Street, featuring legendary artists like Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. The museum offers visitors an inside perspective on the sounds and history of Bristol's famous music scene. If you visit in September, be sure to catch the Rhythm and Roots Reunion, a three-day festival featuring more than 20 stages set up for concerts, jams and musical demonstrations.

5. Heartwood Artisan Gateway, Abingdon



Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway



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At the Heartwood Artisan Gateway, you can shop for local juried crafts and instruments, hear old-time, bluegrass and gospel music, meet artisans and musicians and enjoy local foods and fine dining. As one of the premier destinations on The Crooked Road, Heartwood offers some of the best traditional country, folk and bluegrass music anywhere in the world.

6. The Old Fiddler's Convention and Rex Theater, Galax



[Eli Christman / flickr](#)



Brent Moore / flickr

Galax has long been a haven for old-time music lovers. Since 1935, this small mountain town has hosted the Old Fiddler's Convention, one of the most prestigious competitions for traditional music in the world. Every year, the convention takes place at Felts Park during the second week of August. Thousands of musicians and music lovers convene from around the world to play and hear some of the finest fiddling and traditional music available anywhere.

Just down the road, the historic Rex Theater hosts a live Friday night radio program, highlighting the theater's bluegrass and old-time stage performances. The show, called "Blue Ridge Backroads Live," can be found on WBRF 98.1FM or online where it is streamed to audiences around the world.

7. Blue Ridge Music Center, Galax



[Blue Ridge Music Center / Facebook](#)

Also located in Galax, The Blue Ridge Music Center offers year-round opportunities to learn about Virginia's musical traditions. The center has played host to some of the finest old-time musicians in the world and from May through October, they host Mid-Day Mountain Music, a daily concert series featuring regional musicians. Be sure to visit The Roots of American Music Museum, a free museum showcasing the origins of traditional mountain music.

8. The Floyd Country Store & County Sales, Floyd



[The Floyd Country Store / Facebook](#)



[Bruce Tuten / flickr](#)

For more than 100 years, The Floyd Country Store has been a regional favorite with well-stocked shelves, a café, and barrels of candy set by the front door. But what draws hundreds of visitors every week is the Friday Night Jamboree, an ongoing concert series that features local heritage music and dancing. If you miss Friday night, be sure to come back for Americana music on Saturdays and traditional mountain music jams every Sunday. Just down the street, you'll find County Records/Sales, a shop that is known for having the largest catalog of old-time and bluegrass music in the world.

9. Blue Ridge Institute and Farm Museum, Ferrum



[Blue Ridge Institute and Museum / Facebook](#)



Blue Ridge Institute and Museum / Facebook

This fascinating cultural institute is considered the “State Center for Blue Ridge Folklore.” With galleries and exhibits, the BRI examines the folk traditions that define the Blue Ridge culture, showcasing music, crafts, food, and arts. The accompanying Farm Museum provides a living history interpretation of life on a Virginia-German farm in 1800, complete with costumed guides, dramatic interpretations, heirloom gardens, historic livestock breeds and interactive displays. Be sure to catch the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival in October where as many as 40,000 visitors come to see crafts, music and events including draft horse working and coon-dog racing.

With so many more amazing affiliated venues and wayside exhibits, there’s no way to do The Crooked Road justice in a single article. For a complete list of venues and exhibits or to plan your trip with an interactive map, be sure to visit The Crooked Road.

If you've already traveled The Crooked Road, we would love to hear about your experience. Be sure to tell us about it in the comments below...and we're pretty sure you'll agree, this is a trip that every Virginian should take at least once in their lifetime!