

Branson packs an entertaining punch

Live shows, museums, theme park, nature define town

Few cities have more energy than Branson. The tiny Missouri town is synonymous with the Ozark Mountains. Entertainment abounds. Attractions are abundant, and the shows never seem to end.

Branson's penchant for family-oriented amusement is a recipe for popularity. A city with a population of fewer than 7,500 attracts more than 7 million visitors annually. New York might be deemed the "City That Never Sleeps," but Branson is the destination that never disappoints.

Live shows define Branson's renowned reputation. Its list of more than 50 theater venues house a combined 57,000 seats – more than Broadway. Rarely does an empty seat exist. A majority of shows feature live music, comedy, variety and magic. There are shows for children, dinner shows and shows on boats.

Its proclivity for country music frequently attracts famous entertainers. An A-list of stars rarely go a year without a trip to Branson.

Tribute artists dress the role and play the part, honoring legends like Elvis Presley, George Strait, Neil Diamond, Patsy Cline and Neil Sedaka, as well as famous bands like The Beatles, Alabama and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

Comedy acts will have you believing the original Blues Brothers are a



LIT UP – Visitors watch a water-and-fire show in Branson. *Image: michael langley. Adobe Stock.*

stone's throw away. And Dolly Parton's Stampede is the setting for a show featuring a cast of horse riders performing jaw-dropping tricks while you're enjoying a four-course, country-cooked meal.

Branson's magnetism extends well beyond the stage. Museums offer themes sure to pique the interests of most guests. The Titanic Museum and

Ripley's Believe It or Not! are a pair of the more popular stops.

Visitors enter the Titanic Museum through an artificial iceberg and into a replica of the original luxury cruise liner. The galleries display more than \$4.5 million worth of Titanic artifacts. Shovel coal into the ship's boiler room, sit in an actual-size lifeboat or walk the

\$1 million exact-replica of the Titanic's Grand Staircase.

Ripley's Believe It or Not! is where you'll find shrunk heads, a car-parts robot 22 feet in height, an authentic vampire-killing kit and a wickedly spinning vortex tunnel. There are eight galleries comprised of a changing collection of more than 450 unique artifacts, art and illusions.

Silver Dollar City, meanwhile, is a theme park determined to satisfy your appetite for thrills. Time Traveler is the world's fastest, steepest and tallest complete circuit-spinning roller coaster, and highlights a group of heart-palpitating rides.

Branson also is blessed with natural beauty. It's home to more than 200 miles of publicly accessible trails, opening the way to hike, bike ride or go horseback riding. The majestic sights of colorful trees and rock formations of the Ozark Mountains provide a picture-perfect setting.

Guests can jet ski, kayak or paddleboard on Table Rock Lake or Lake Taneycomo. The waterways provide more than 800 miles of shoreline, the best fishing and plenty of camping space. Rent a cabin or park an RV. Heck, just spend the day.

Spend your time wisely in Branson. There's so much to do, and barely enough time to experience all it has to offer. Return visits are inevitable.

Fallingwater architectural wonder in woods

Arguably Frank Lloyd Wright's finest work in Laurel Highlands

The talents of architect Frank Lloyd Wright earned him the recognition as the "greatest American architect of all-time" by the American Institute of architects in 1991.

Wright died in 1959 but not before designing more than 1,000 buildings worldwide. His impressive list of works is comprised of structures that include churches, office buildings and esplanades, as well as residences for the rich and famous.

His best work arguably is a weekend home that he designed for a department-store mogul in the 1930s. The residence is tucked away in the Laurel Highlands.

Designed and built for Edgar J. Kaufmann, owner of Pittsburgh-based Kaufmann's Department Store, Fallingwater is an architectural masterpiece that has drawn millions of guests eager to explore Wright's finest work.

The home's innovative design captured the world's imagination. Wright positioned the house over waterfalls. Although it rises more than 30 feet above the falls, strong horizontal lines and resulting low ceilings reinforce the safe, sheltering effect Wright sought to achieve. Thus, bringing the natural environment into the home.

Completed in 1937, Fallingwater's design synchronizes people and nature. The building, and its furnishings and



HOME TOUR – Fallingwater in Fayette County is one of architect Frank Lloyd Wright's finest designs. *Image: Courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.*

surroundings become cohesive parts of a unified composition, meshing with the beauty of the Laurel Highlands.

The sublime fusion of the home and the surrounding rock, flora and cascades grab the attention of newcomers. A walkway provides a viewing platform from which guests can absorb the aesthetics.

Architectural historian Franklin Toker authored a book about Fallingwater, writing "Here is one of the most photogenic buildings in creation. So is the Taj Mahal, but the two work so differently – the Taj Mahal so perfect in its balance, Fallingwater so restless that it looks like a living thing sprouting out of rocks."

Wright had his own opinion of the home.

"Fallingwater is a great blessing – of the great blessings to be experienced here on Earth," he once said. "I think nothing yet ever equaled the coordination, sympathetic expression of great principle of repose where forest and stream and rock and all the elements of structure are combined so quietly that really you listen not to any noise whatsoever ... But you listen to Fallingwater the way you listen to the quiet of the country."

Fallingwater is comprised of a main house, guest house and a barn. The main living quarters is 5,330-square feet, and the guest house is 1,700-square feet. It was featured on the cover of Time magazine in 1938 and is the only major Wright-designed house to open to the public with its furnishings, art-work and setting intact.

The final cost of the home was \$155,000, which equates to more than \$2.67 million today. Fallingwater can be toured year-round, and more than 4.5 million people have visited the edifice since 1964.

It's safe to say Kaufmann was satisfied with his weekend home.

"In Fallingwater, Wright captured the perfect essence of our desire to live with nature, to dwell in a forested place and be at home in the natural world," he said.