

## Discovering Dollywood: Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

by Ginger Withers, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Dollywood is a theme park located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, nestled in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. It is named for its co-owner, the one and only Dolly Parton. Dolly is also from this area. She had stated that if she made it big, she wanted to do something great for her community. She has certainly achieved this goal. She returns to her theme park several times a year for different occasions, such as opening day.

This theme park originally opened in 1961 as a small tourist attraction. Dolly took over in 1986. Since then, there has been steady growth. In fact, there has been a new attraction or area added every year since she took over. The park has now doubled in size to 150 acres. Dollywood is open from the end of March through the end of the year. Dollywood also has a 35-acre water park called Dollywood's Splash Country that is open from the end of May through the first week of September. It is located next to Dollywood.

Dollywood is located 16 miles from Interstate 40, about 25 miles southeast of Knoxville. You will start seeing billboards for Dollywood almost immediately when you get off the Interstate. This is a very tourist-friendly area with well-marked signs.

Lodging in the area is plentiful. From the time that you get off of the Interstate, there are multiple hotels and cabin rentals. Although there are no on-site hotels at Dollywood, there are many close by. Dollywood has some all-inclusive vacations packages that include lodging with Starr Crest Luxury cabins with accommodations up to 25 guests. These cabins are two miles from Dollywood. The all inclusive vacation packages include unlimited admission to Dollywood, a one day admission to Dollywood's Splash Country, breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack each day of your visit. If you choose to book lodging separately, you can find hotel listings at the Pigeon Forge official web site, [mypigeonforge.com](http://mypigeonforge.com). There also is a link on the [Dollywood website](#) to area hotels.

If you choose to buy your admission tickets separately, you have several options. I personally think you should allow at least two days to see Dollywood and one day for Dollywood's Splash Country. Depending on the crowds, it could take two days to cover Splash Country as well if two days in a water parks isn't too much for you. Dollywood has thought about this as well, since a season pass costs less than two daily

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admissions. There are many ticket options. Current prices for One Day Admission tickets are Regular (ages 12-59) \$55.90, Child (ages 4-11) \$44.70, and Senior (ages 60 & up) \$52.50. Under 4 is free. A season pass comes with extra privileges such as discounts at other attractions. Regular season passes are \$89, child \$76, and senior \$89. There also is a Gold Season Pass that comes with extra privileges that include but are not limited to, free parking, 20% discount off food and beverages, merchandise, accommodations during select times, and at the Dollywood Kennel. The ultimate season passes are the Super Passes, which includes Dollywood Splash Country. These passes may be Regular or Gold. One of the best features is if you buy a one-day ticket and decide you want a season pass, you can apply the cost of your admission ticket to a season pass.

There is another option - a Splash & Play ticket. This allows one person three days of unlimited admission to Dollywood and Dollywood Splash Country to be used within seven days of first use. This ticket does need to be purchased before admission. The cost is Regular \$82.00, Child \$67.00. Any of these tickets can be purchased in advance to speed up admission to the parks.

Dollywood is arranged into ten different themed area. Each area has attractions and food options. The Showstreet, Rivertown Junction, Craftsmen's Valley, The Village, Country Fair, and Jukebox Junction areas reflect the historical eras and culture of East Tennessee. The Dreamland Forest and Adventures in Imagination areas explore Dolly Parton's life and imagination.

There is much more to Dollywood than just rides. Naturally, there are many live music shows, ranging from Dolly's relatives, gospel groups, street performers singing songs from the '50s and '60s, and full musical presentations including dancing and acrobatics.

Throughout the operating season, there are four different festivals. The first is the Festival of Nations. It is a four-week international celebration featuring entertainment and food vendors from several different countries scattered through the park. In the summer comes Kidfest, which is a seven- to eight-week celebration targeting children, although kids of all ages enjoy it. There are several entaining shows ranging from a comedy percussion show, to a magic show, bubble show with lasers and lighting effects, juggling, and a ventriloquist. There is also an interactive adventure called Star Trek Live based on the science fiction franchise.

There are a few characters roaming throught the park. Many of these are "animals" such as dogs, pigs, and bears, although there are a few

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"local celebrities," too. There is a character breakfast buffet available with Strawberry Shortcake and Pippi Longstocking. For the fall, there is the National Gospel and Harvest Celebration. This combines Southern Gospel with free concerts. There also are many craftsmen demonstrating and selling their crafts. In the winter comes the Smoky Mountain Christmas. This combines a modern and traditional Christmas. There is a fantastic light display with over four million Christmas lights. There also are Christmas shows, Christmas music, a Christmas parade, and special Christmas food.

Dollywood is truly a unique theme park. With the beautiful area, local flair, great food, and Dolly Parton's influence, there is no other like it. All ages from infants to seniors have something to enjoy. There is something for everyone.

*About The Author: Ginger Withers is a local East Tennessee resident, having lived most of her life there. She has witnessed first-hand the theme park now known as Dollywood through all of its transformations. She and her family have season passes for both Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country. They make several trips every year, from the first opening until the last closing of the year.*

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