

Why You Should Care About the Ozarks

by **Anne Roderique Jones**
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Courtesy Big Cedar Lodge
Big Cedar Lodge

The Ozarks are a bit of a curiosity. This oft-forgotten pocket of America straddles the southern region of Missouri and northern territory of Arkansas—even dipping into a smidge of southern Illinois, Oklahoma, and southeastern Kansas.

This swath of land, often called the Ozark Mountains, is a densely forested territory that covers roughly 47,000 square miles, where limestone bluffs tower high above the crisscrossed trails and streams—with hamlets that moonshine makers once called home.

The Missouri side remains quaint and restful—replete with Americana charm, while Arkansas is flourishing due to an uptick in businesses that have settled in the northwest region—it’s particularly marvelous for the art aficionado. Here, a guide to exploring the area, starting at the northernmost region, and a grand hotel for a home base, then working down south, ending with a stop at one of America’s greatest modern museums, cut right through the Ozarks’ natural beauty and gently placed in nature—just as it should be in these parts.



Courtesy Big Cedar Lodge
Top of the Rock's Atrium room at Osage Restaurant is one of its more subtle selling points.

[BIG CEDAR LODGE](#)

Nestled in its own wooded hollow, on 800 acres of rugged Ozark Mountain preserve, Big Cedar Lodge is the epitome of a luxury wilderness resort. Johnny Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops, purchased the then-humble property, just 10 minutes south of Branson, envisioning a modest fishing camp for his employees. The final—and ultimately magnificent project—resulted in a retreat that overlooks the blue-green waters of Table Rock Lake. One would be remiss not to cast a reel here, as there are plenty of professional guides on hand, along with boat rentals for a no-doubt glorious day on the lake. But if gills and rods aren't your thing, there's a world-class, full-service spa, too. Accommodations here run the gamut from grand guestrooms in the lodge—many with whirlpool tubs and gas fireplaces—to a smattering of cabins outfitted with stacked stone fireplaces, jetted tubs, and private decks with a grill—a favorite among returning guests. Top of the Rock, the self-described “lifestyle outpost” and the lodge's newest addition, took more than five years for Morris to perfect. There are two restaurants, a bar, wine cellar, a natural history museum, a sprawling nature trail with a four-story cave and waterfall, and the ultimate stunner: a “floating” golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, and Arnold Palmer. (612 Devil's Pool Rd., Ridgedale, MO; 417-335-2777)