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WHERE TO GO NEXT

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The view from Arnie's Barn at Top of the Rock PHOTO: COURTESY OF BIG CEDAR LODGE

Here's Why the Ozarks Is a Great Idea for a Weekend Getaway

Another downside of a cooler-than-usual summer is that it feels like it's ending sooner than it should. Stretch the season with a visit to Missouri's Ozark Mountains, where highs can reach the upper 80s into September and where **Big Cedar Lodge** (from \$129), the rambling wilderness resort founded by Bass Pro Shop Owner Johnny Morris, is showing off a new 462-acre expansion. No ordinary lodge addition, the new Top of the Rock opened in June and features a golf course *and* a natural history museum, all of it situated high on a cliff overlooking the Ozarks and the 43,000-acre Table Rock Lake.

Guests staying at Big Cedar can hike a 2.5-mile nature trail or ride a golf cart to get to Top of the Rock, the entrance of which is framed by the four-story Lost Canyon Cave: Step into the mining-style elevator, stop at the cave bar for a drink, and watch the waterfall from a viewing balcony. The resort's new golf course is a stunning beast, created by three golf greats: Jack Nicklaus designed the nine-hole course, Arnold Palmer the 16-target practice facility, and Tom Watson the one-acre putting course inspired by Scotland's St. Andrews. Inside the Top of the Rock complex, the Ancient Ozarks Natural History Museum contains a range of finds that includes carbon-dated Missouri mammoth and cave lion skeletons, prehistoric animal dioramas, Osage Indian artwork, and Civil War displays.

Top of the Rock also has four dining and drinking options. Arnie's Barn, a wooden barn reconstructed by a local Amish family, serves Mexican food. The rustic dining room under iron chandeliers at Osage Restaurant looks over the rugged mountains. You can get your small plates at Buffalo Bar, served on a glass-enclosed bar displaying Native American relics. And, at the "End of the Trail" All-American Wine Cellar, you'll find a tasting room, whiskey bar, cigar and cognac room, and an infinity pool with a Native American tribute statue.

There's even a romantic retreat for couples: the Civil-War-era Honeymoon Cabin. The two-story cabin, built by local and Amish craftsmen, features a stone fireplace, outdoor shower, covered porch, and sweeping views over the Ozarks. Those looking to tie the knot won't find anything like the three-story, antique pine wedding chapel, situated at edge of Top of the Rock. The chapel is a throwback to American country style with Gothic arch windows, a copper roof, and a steeple with a bell tower.