

# TRAVEL USA

all-seasons Hocking Hills. close and comfy encounter with nature at Ohio's

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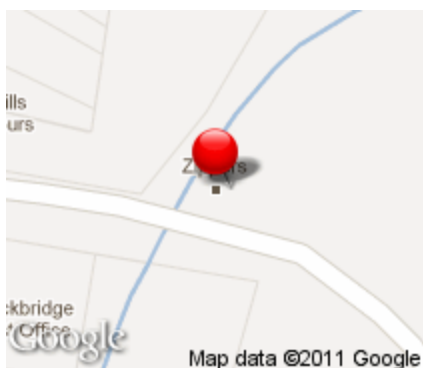
FIRST POSTED: MONDAY, OCTOBER 03, 2011 12:00 AM EDT



Wobbly suspension bridges can be as unnerving as ziplining on the fun three-hour Hocking Hills Canopy Tours. (BARBARA TAYLOR/QMI Agency)

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Enjoy exhilarating canopy tours, hiking and paddling amid spectacular views. Or kick back on a well-placed boulder or deck chair surrounded by autumn's colourful glory.

The outdoors of Ohio's Hocking Hills are indeed great. But they can soar even higher when combined with the exquisite creature comforts of the area's charming inns.

The region of hills, gorges, waterfalls and caves, is flush with lodgings ranging from campgrounds to single cabins to chalet communities to B&B inns.

Quaint names such as At Boulders Edge, Black Bear Getaway and Love Shack Cabins invite all-seasons guests boasting woodstoves, hot tubs, air-conditioning and rocking chairs on verandas.

Most are a short drive or walk to the area's natural wonders, many formed by sandstone eroded by thousands of years of water surging from the Appalachian Mountains.

Popular spots include:

\* Ash Cave -- named for the large deposits of ash believed to be from early Native American campfires, it's the state's largest recess cave at more than 700 feet wide

\* Cedar Falls -- incorrectly named when settlers mistook hemlocks for cedar trees, it drops 50 feet into deep woods Old

\* Man's Cave -- immortalizing a hermit who lived there post-Civil War, it's carved into a half-mile gorge as deep as 150 feet.

Hocking Hills itself is about an hour's drive southeast of the state capital of Columbus and a half-day's drive from Southwestern Ontario.

For me and my two teenage sons, The Inn at Cedar Falls had it all going on -- creatively decorated rooms, charming cabins and cottages, fine dining in an 1840's log house, beautiful grounds and an innkeeper extraordinaire.

Ellen Grinsfelder, who shares innkeeper duties with husband Terry Lingo, not only runs this B&B-plus with hands-on efficiency, but exudes a passion for hospitality.

To succeed in this business, Grinsfelder tells me, the work has to be "your heart, and soul and passion."

She comes by the sentiment honestly, keeping alive the dream of her hard-working mom, who traded in a corporate life to establish the pioneer homestead-come inn as a retreat in 1987.

Anne Castle died four years later, but her daughter with family and friends, has continued to grow the business with recent additions of a rooftop garden, woodland spa and the Gathering Place for corporate retreats.

Four beehives, new to the property this year, are expected to produce honey in the spring for delicious dining, spa treatments and gift shop purchases.

No surprise the inn cultivates a vegetable garden on site with locally grown produce served at every meal. Son Ian enjoyed the Caesar salad so much he ordered a second one for dessert.

My favourite sweet, a warm rum and lime cake was delicious while son Adam savoured the local favourite -- mixed berry (raspberry, blueberry, blackberry) cobbler with vanilla bean ice-cream.

We also recommend from executive chef Anthony Schulz's gourmet kitchen: entrees of Peking Duck and Pan-Roasted Mahi Mahi graciously served in the 170-year log house diningroom; the hearty breakfast on the patio and the ready-when-we-were brown bag lunch -- a real trail pleaser. [www.innatcedarfalls.com](http://www.innatcedarfalls.com)

Of course great food is especially welcome when you are heading to and from "the hills."

In addition to hiking both rugged and relaxed, we got high one afternoon ziplining and gingerly crossing a series of suspension bridges with Hocking Hills Canopy Tours. It's a thrill a minute up there with two knowledgeable guides.

Tours from Rockbridge operate daylight hours April through November at a cost of \$85 per person. [www.hockinghillscanopytours.com](http://www.hockinghillscanopytours.com)

Next up the teenagers loved paddling a five-mile route on the Hocking River while I gave my thumbs and forefingers a frantic Twitter workout from shore.

Located in Logan, Fox's Hocking Hills Canoe Livery offers a range of vessels -- kayaks, canoes, rafts -- plus life vests and transport upstream for either a five-mile or seven-mile trip. Prices range from \$21 for a kayak on the short trip. [www.hockingriver.com](http://www.hockingriver.com)

With time for one more indulgence before we departed Logan, I was delighted to spot the Midwest Glassware Outlet, just beyond the livery.

Its aisles overflowed with bonafide wholesale-priced items from unique vases to cool blue mugs to bakeware, Just one more thrill from Hocking Hills. [midglassware@verizon.net](mailto:midglassware@verizon.net)

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