

spirit

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

FROM THE
EVERYDAY TO THE
SPECTACULAR,
WE CELEBRATE
OUR NATION'S
PEAKS OF GENIUS,
LIKE **PINNACLES**,
OUR NEWEST
NATIONAL PARK.

AMERICAN BEAUTY



SPirit OF Branson

Tucked into Missouri's Ozark Mountains is Branson, a destination with a family-friendly history more than a hundred years long. Musicians, acrobats, dancers, all-around entertainers and exciting attractions make the border town an irresistible year-round haven; discover it once, and you'll quickly find yourself returning to **BRANSON** in every season.

BY MELANIE CLANCY

Silver Dollar City's Outlaw Run is one of the fastest coasters in the world.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SILVER DOLLAR CITY





The show "it" features 50 singers, dancers and musicians.

Families around the country rejoiced this year when Southwest Airlines began daily nonstop service to Branson in March—just in time for that oh-so-American tradition of the summer family reunion. The down-home ambience begins the moment visitors step off the plane, when they are greeted by the Branson Airport's unparalleled customer service and commitment to bringing families together to experience the rich history and natural beauty of the Ozarks. Opened in 2009, the airport is the first privately developed and operated commercial service airport in the United States; passengers can access more than 100 major cities from their central Midwest location, including five reachable via nonstop flights. For a complete list, visit flybranson.com.

CHEW

Think Branson is synonymous with buffets? Think again (although if

The down-home ambience begins the moment visitors step off the plane.

you're looking for a family-friendly buffet option, there are certainly plenty to go around). These days Branson is upping the culinary ante thanks to the work of Sean Fritchie, executive chef at the intimate Table 22 on Main Street near Branson Landing. The minimalist décor belies a rich, rotating menu focused on locally sourced ingredients and fresh, contemporary American cuisine, and the extensive wine menu is courtesy of Palate Fine Wine and Provisions, located conveniently next door. Both the duck and lamb dishes are perennial favorites based on availability, but the restaurant and its menu are really just a blank canvas for Fritchie to paint on nightly. The small restaurant only seats



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The Paddlewheel is one of the only places in town where you can eat and drink right on the water.

22 (hence the name)—make reservations by calling 417-973-0022.

If a light lunch is what you're in the mood for, look no further than the cozy ambience at Ruby Lena's Tea Room & Antiques, featuring exquisite homemade food capped by decadent cakes and pies. Located in a 100-year-old house just off Main Street, the name suggests exactly what you'd expect: quaint décor, charming service and down-home food like chicken and dumplings, green beans and mashed potatoes. Wash your meal down with strawberry lemonade, and indulge in classic desserts like the homemade cheesecake and cobblers. Walk-ins are welcome; Ruby Lena's is located just a few blocks west of Branson Landing.

SIP

Moonshine is an integral part of Ozark folklore, and you can sample some of the best at The Paddlewheel, one of Branson's latest and greatest new restaurants. An actual 1960s-era paddlewheel riverboat is the setting for the restaurant and bar, which is located on the water at Branson Landing; it previously cruised the White River (now Lake Taneycomo) but was permanently docked and renovated in April. The Paddlewheel is one of the only places in town where you can eat and drink right on the water, a welcome respite from summer heat thanks to the clear, cold waters from Lake Taneycomo. Adults will enjoy adding locally distilled Copper Run



Grab a drink at Paddlewheel's bar.



Nathan's hot dogs are on the menu.



The Paddlewheel's mac and cheese.

moonshine to any beverage on the menu, while younger family members can down something off the Nathan's Famous menu, featuring variations on Nathan's signature hot dogs and popular menu items like the gouda-and-parmesan macaroni and cheese. The restaurant's large patio affords a prime view of the Branson Landing Fountains and its fire, water, light and music show, making it a popular spot to grab a seat with the family in between hitting the area's shopping and entertainment options. Visit mainstreetlakecruises.com for more.

The Acrobats of China perform in the New Shanghai Theatre.



SEE

Raise the curtain on any of the incredible shows dotting 76 Country Boulevard and you're bound to be entertained; on any given day there are more than 50 performances to choose from.

The shortest name of any Branson attraction belies the show's over-the-top production; "it" brings together 50 world-class singers, dancers and musicians to create one of the city's signature entertainment experiences. The award-winning cast includes the famous Hughes Brothers and their families, backed by huge production numbers running the gamut of Broadway, country, comedy, patriotic, gospel and rock and roll. The location of "it" inside the Hughes Brothers Theatre on Highway 76 epitomizes the Branson experience; visit itbranson.com for show times and tickets.



International magician Kirby VanBurch.

The Acrobats of China arrived in Branson in 1998 as the first international show to call the town home; they've since opened their own venue, the New Shanghai Theatre, while continuing to evolve their dramatic interpretation of classic Chinese dance and physical performance art. A revolving lineup of acrobatic acts from the New Shanghai Circus form a fast-paced production resplendent with lavish costumes and backdrops,



CHRISTMAS IN BRANSON

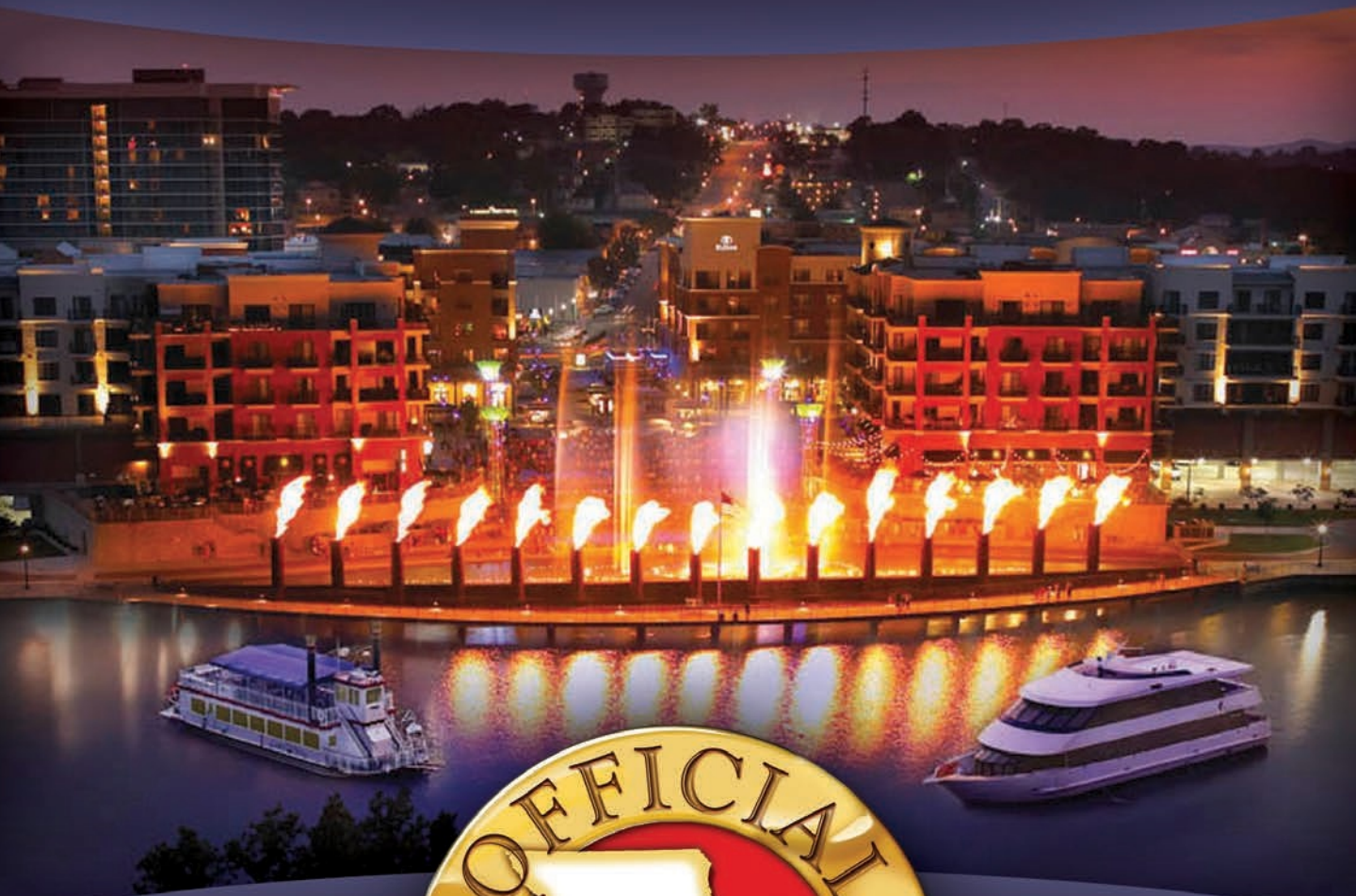
A cooler climate prevails this winter in Branson, where the city's annual Ozark Mountain Christmas awaits with its usual dose of world-class entertainment, this time with a dash of holiday spirit thrown in.

The magic of the season begins each year with the Festival of Lights Drive-Through, a 1-mile, illuminated journey that passes by more than 175 holiday-themed displays. The 65th annual Adoration Parade takes place the first weekend of December each year, and Branson Landing turns into Winter Wonderland, featuring visits with Santa Claus and a water and fire spectacular set to the sounds of the season.

Last-minute Christmas shopping is no problem given the area's three major outlet malls and hundreds of area boutique and specialty stores. Plus, the dazzling performances don't stop for the holidays, either. The late, legendary performer Andy Williams' Christmas Show tradition continues at the Moon River Theatre with a holiday spectacular starring entertainment legends The Osmonds and The Lennon Sisters; the family icons join a cast of dancers, singers and the Moon River Orchestra in a celebration of traditional family Christmas.

Visit explorebranson.com for more info.

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state-of-the-art lighting and mesmerizing physical feats for thrilling, twice-a-day performances. For tickets, visit acrobatsofchina.com.

On the opposite side of audience amazement stands award-winning magician Kirby VanBurch, whose show is billed as the world's largest magic show. From the minute the curtain drops, VanBurch begins rapidly performing illusions, packing everything from astonishing disappearing acts to classic tricks like cutting his assistant in half to his menagerie of exotic animals into a twice-daily show in his theater on Highway 76. Purchase tickets at kirbyvanburch.com.

Continuing Branson's tradition of showstopping performing families are The Duttons, a mainstay on the area's entertainment scene for going on 16 years. Nine family members, each playing multiple instruments, comprise the core performing group, with spouses and grandchildren sprinkled in as the ever-changing show allows. The high-energy, award-winning show spans diverse musical genres from rock to bluegrass, and is completely redesigned twice a year, meaning repeat

The perfect extension of the convention center is the adjoining Hilton Branson Convention Center Hotel.

visitors can always find something new to love. For tickets, visit theduttons.com.

RELAX

Visitors to Branson aren't always there for pure leisure, as much as they might prefer to be. In fact, Branson has become a robust meeting and trade show destination, in large part thanks to the Branson Convention Center. Opened in the fall of 2007 and managed by Hilton Worldwide, the convention center's 220,000 gross square feet of flexible space has hosted everything from boat shows to dance competitions to major conferences,



BRANSON.COM

A little help goes a long way toward planning the perfect getaway in Branson, especially given the almost overwhelming amount of entertainment options in the area. Enter Branson.com, the city's first destination website dedicated exclusively to providing Branson visitors with all the information they need to know to have a great vacation. Its recent optimization and synchronization with the power and systems of sister site BransonTourismCenter.com has resulted in one of the most efficient, powerful and easy-to-use tools available anywhere to research the city's many offerings, as well as book shows, attractions and lodging. Local experts are even available via phone seven days a week by calling the Branson Tourism Center at 1-800-785-1610, making a perfectly planned trip entirely within reach.