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LIFE TRAVEL



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With 11 different 'ecoregions,' Oklahoma has more to explore than the state traveler might realize. Look at these landscapes ...

BY JENNY COON PETERSON



The first view I ever had of Oklahoma was coming in for a bumpy landing at Will Rogers World Airport. Honestly, it didn't do much to warm my heart toward my new home — the dusty red soil; the windswept, treeless plains.

Meeting lifelong Okies, I would hear two facts over and over again: that Oklahoma had the country's most diverse terrain and boasted more shoreline than any other state.

While that second point is woefully incorrect, it is true that the state is

above This statue sits outside the Woolaroc Museum & Wildlife Preserve in Bartlesville.

But, turning off the main road and dipping under a canopy of trees lining the narrow road, you realize the drive is worth it.

home to a great diversity of landscape. In fact, Oklahoma boasts 11 different

"ecoregions" — more per square mile than any other state. Make it your mission this summer to explore what Oklahoma has to offer.

WAGONER

The drive to Wagoner through the rolling hills of eastern Oklahoma is beautiful. And long. But, turning off the main road and dipping under a canopy of trees lining the narrow road to The Canebrake, you realize the drive is worth it.

Touring the property with Adam Miller, marketing director at The Canebrake, it's obvious that the Bracken family took every detail into account when designing this fabulous restaurant and retreat, featuring a new activity barn with spa facilities and an adult-sized sandbox for games. A landscaped path leads from the main building to the cabins, which feel a world away, hidden in a grove of trees and flowers.

Past an airy balcony, complete with painted rocking chairs, the rooms do not disappoint: high ceilings, a tiled floor and a fireplace. An enormous bathroom with a walk-in shower and Aveda products finish the quarters.

Before dinner, stop by the boutique. It's stocked with organic products like bags and wallets by Ecoist, and face and body products by Pangea Organics. Before the entrance to the restaurant, a lounge with a fully stocked bar and towering wine shelf is more than a little enticing, and bartender Phillip Baxter enjoys a rep for making one amazing martini.

The restaurant, lit with blown glass pendants, has a fireplace at one end and a wall of windows separating the enclosed patio, where tables surround a central fountain and oven for grilling.

Although there are more intimate areas of the restaurant, the best seat is at the half-circle bar, which faces the open kitchen. Sit here and you may expect some tasty tidbits from the chef, as you dine on grilled endive with tomatoes, olives and

peppers, and sample homemade sausage.

To work off the meal from the night before, yoga in the specially designed yoga barn is a must. A variety of classes for all skill levels is available, complimentary to guests.

The drive into downtown Tahlequah is short and scenic. Shops and restaurants line the main street and get steadily cooler as you near Northeastern State University.

The Iguana Café has an old Southwest feel, but doesn't stray too much into kitsch. Plus, the sandwiches are pretty tasty. Across the street, pizza place Sam and Ella's comes recommended.

If you do one thing in Tahlequah, visit the Cherokee Heritage Center. At the entrance to the museum and research center, three tall columns represent the only surviving piece of the Cherokee National Female Seminary, one of the first institutions of higher learning for women west of the Mississippi River.

Outside the museum, the Tsa-La-Gi Ancient Village can only be visited by tour and is highly recommended. Tour guide Robert Lewis led our group through a representation of Cherokee life in their native homeland of the eastern United States. The fascinating tour included demonstrations of everything from stickball (a lot harder than it looks) to blowgun shooting (damn near impossible). **OKG**

Tahlequah is home to *top* the Cherokee Heritage Center and Wagoner is home to *bottom* The Canebrake.



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