

# A Journey Steeped in Music Traditions on Virginia's Crooked Road

BY CHERIE YURCO



Photos: Cherie Yurco

The Crooked Road, winding through Southwest Virginia, is an experience in music traditions passed down for generations. There are nine major venues plus numerous affiliated venues, jam sessions, and festivals throughout the region. Along the road, you can pull your car over at 26 Wayside Exhibits (yellow arrows on the map) and tune in to a five-minute audio presentation about the music and musicians in each area.

Based on my own experience on the Crooked Road, I have two important pieces of advice. First, bring your instrument! I can't emphasize this enough. Even if you've never played this type of music, you'll find yourself itching to join in the jam sessions (30+) offered in the evening at various locations. Also, leave yourself plenty of time for, not only seeing the many musical sites, but also experiencing the beauty and history of the region. There are numerous museums and hiking and biking trails to explore.

## Here are some highlights of The Crooked Road:

Many people begin their Crooked Road journey in Abingdon, at **HEARTWOOD 5**, "Virginia's Artisan Gateway." Its state-of-the-art interactive map and knowledgeable staff make it a useful stop for planning your journey. Inside you'll find products made by local artisans, including in-instrument makers. There's a restaurant

with old-time music on Thursday evenings, and bi-weekly jam sessions. Luxury accommodations are available nearby at **Martha Washington Inn**, located in the heart of Abingdon, across from the **Barter Theatre**—the longest running nonprofit Equity theatre in the country. Down the street is **Capo's Music Store**, which hosts its own Saturday night jam.

The **RALPH STANLEY MUSEUM 9** in Clintwood, near Stanley's hometown of McClure, tells the story of how Ralph and his brother Carter got started. Ralph Stanley himself nar-

rates the audiophone tour that includes many music samples.

**ALLEN HICKS JAM 10** in Nickelsville is an experience you won't want to miss. Hicks, a retired steel worker turned mandolin maker, converted a barn to create a venue below his workshop. Musicians congregate here every Friday night for jams, dancing, snacks, and lots of fun. After the jam, you can check into the locally owned **Ole Nickelsville Hotel** for the evening. This quaint and comfortable hotel operates like a bed and breakfast.

**8 COUNTRY CABIN II**, in Norton, is the longest continuously running site for traditional music along the Crooked Road and hosts concerts every Saturday night. Another Saturday night venue, the

**CARTER FAMILY FOLD 7** feels like a step back in time. You'll experience bluegrass and old-time music and clogging dancers in a real down-home mountain family setting. Before the 7:30 p.m. show you can visit the Carter Family museum and cabin. A.P. Carter's daughter Janette launched the venue to keep a promise to her father that the family's music would never be forgotten.

**BRISTOL, TENNESSEE/VIRGINIA 6** is where the famed 1927 Bristol recording sessions took place. These sessions were pivotal in the development of country music. This year saw the opening of the state-of-the-art **Birthplace of Country Music Museum** in Bristol, which tells the story of these sessions and their impact. The nearby **Cultural Music Association's Mountain Music Museum** displays one-of-a-kind vintage photographs, mu-

sical instruments, recordings, stage attire, and more, all dedicated to the legacy of area musicians.

Off the Crooked Road Trail, nestled in Wythe county, at an altitude of 3,405 feet, **BIG WALKER LOOKOUT AND COUNTRY STORE 11** offers a spectacular view of the Appalachian Mountains. Opened in 1947, this unique store and 100-foot lookout tower has been family-operated for three generations. On Sundays the live music starts at 1:00 p.m.

**GALAX 4** is called the "World Capital of Old Time Mountain Music" thanks to its **Old Fiddler's Convention** held annually in August since 1935. It's also home to the historic **Rex Theater** where the Blue Ridge Back Roads radio program is broadcast live every Friday night. Nearby, located on the famous Blue Ridge Parkway, the **BLUE RIDGE MUSIC CENTER 3** museum is dedicated to Blue Ridge music and musicians. It also houses a spectacular outdoor music venue, if you are lucky enough to catch a show.

Every Friday night the quaint town of **FLOYD 2** and its old-time **Floyd Country Store** come alive with traditional music at the Friday Night Jamboree. The official starting time is 6:30 p.m., but you'll want to get there earlier as musicians gather and jam in the streets. There's also an in-store jam session every Sunday. While in Floyd, stop by **County Sales**. This retailer holds the world's largest selection of old-time and bluegrass music. From its website, it fills orders from around the world. Stay at the **Bella La Vita Inn**, a local bed and breakfast just outside of town. Owners Lisal and Matthew Roberts will make you feel right at home with a delicious breakfast and lots of knowledge about the local music scene.

Located in Ferrum, Virginia, the **BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE & MUSEUM 1** gallery exhibits explore local traditions, from old-time music to modern quilting, and its Farm Museum lets visitors experience farm life in the 1800s. Every October the institute hosts the **Blue Ridge Folklife Festival**, a daylong celebration of traditional music, crafts, arts, food, contests, games, farm work, and machinery.



For a list of best times to visit, photos, and a video of Crooked Road sights visit: [www.MakingMusicMag.com/the-crooked-road](http://www.MakingMusicMag.com/the-crooked-road).

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