

Travel



Clockwise from left: Dolly at the Country Music Hall of Fame exhibition; the Home on Wheels tour bus; Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Opposite, from top: Dolly's childhood home has been recreated; her statue outside the Sevierville courthouse.

# Hello, Dollywood

*The Weekly* enjoys the fun and fanfare at the theme park devoted to Dolly Parton (and even gets to meet her relatives!).

WORDS by TARA WELLS

Standing on the front porch of Dolly Parton's Tennessee mountain home is not quite as peaceful as a baby's sigh. The rumble of a triple-loop roller-coaster is a telltale sign that, while the log cabin looks identical to Dolly's compact childhood home, it is not the same.

This is Dollywood, a theme park devoted to the queen of country music in Pigeon Forge, four hours' drive east of Nashville. Alongside thrill rides, the park celebrates the musician's early days in the Great Smoky Mountains

The Parton family's two-room cabin has newspaper-lined walls, a modest table set for 10 (Dolly is the fourth of



ALAMY COURTESY OF DOLLYWOOD. GETTY IMAGES, INSTAGRAM.

12 children) and not nearly enough beds to go around. Avie Lee, Dolly's mother, decorated the replica with items said to be original family treasures when the park opened 40 years ago.

From Dolly's humble beginnings, she developed a personal style she describes as costing "a lot of money to look this cheap" (her big wigs, bejewelled boots and sparkly outfits are on display in Dollywood). The look was inspired by a woman she saw around Sevierville, the small town closest to their mountain cabin.

Sevierville's historic centre pays homage to its most famous former resident. A statue of young Dolly playing guitar sits outside the county courthouse. The Pines, site of Dolly's first paid gig as a 10-year-old, is now an entertainment venue, where nostalgic diners play duckpin bowling (a smaller version of tenpin) and board games.

## Back to the fifties

Dollywood, 10 kilometres to the south, celebrates Appalachia with hearty southern-style food, including fried chicken with okra. The 1950s Sevierville of Dolly's childhood is revived for current-day visitors. The Pines makes a reappearance, this time as a theatre hosting live shows. There's a white-washed timber chapel boasting a century-old piano, and a recreation of the one-room school where Dolly and her siblings learnt their three Rs.

Dollywood is divided into 11 themed areas and can be explored on one- and two-day passes. The nearby Dollywood's DreamMore Resort & Spa offers easy

transfers to the theme park. [dollywood.com](http://dollywood.com)

## Meet the Partons

With Dolly's 11 siblings, it's hard to visit the area without bumping into a Parton relative.

Niece Heidi Parton has been performing at Dollywood since she was four, and like her father before her, now headlines her own show. Allow time to enjoy this and other live music throughout the day.

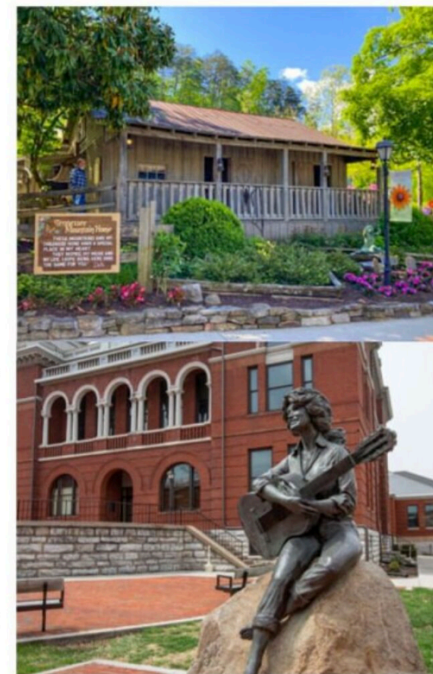
Continuing a family tradition of making moonshine (illegal during Prohibition days), another niece, Danielle Parton, is behind Shine Girl at Sevierville. [shinegirl.com](http://shinegirl.com) and [visitsevierville.com](http://visitsevierville.com)

## The Nashville connection

The day after her high-school graduation, Dolly was on the bus to Nashville. "Music City's" iconic venues

have all been touched by her sparkle: Countless performances at the Grand Ole Opry (the first aged 13), recording hits like *Coat Of Many Colors* at the historic RCA Studio B (now open for tours) and leaving an indelible mark on the Country Music Hall of Fame. Despite the glitz, Dolly keeps returning to the Great Smoky Mountains, both through her songwriting, and an annual visit to Dollywood.

Dolly Parton's SongTeller Hotel opens in Nashville in June. Within it, the Life of Many Colors Museum will display masses of memorabilia, more than at Dollywood's Dolly Parton Experience or Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame. **AWW** [songtellerhotel.com](http://songtellerhotel.com)



## Don't miss ...

Dinner shows are a uniquely American experience. Pigeon Forge offers many, but Dolly Parton's Stampede sets the bar. More than 30 horses and riders perform rodeo stunts and trick riding accompanied by Dolly's distinctive vocals. [dpstampede.com](http://dpstampede.com)

