



The Ozark Mountain Town of Branson, Missouri, Specializes in the Unexpected

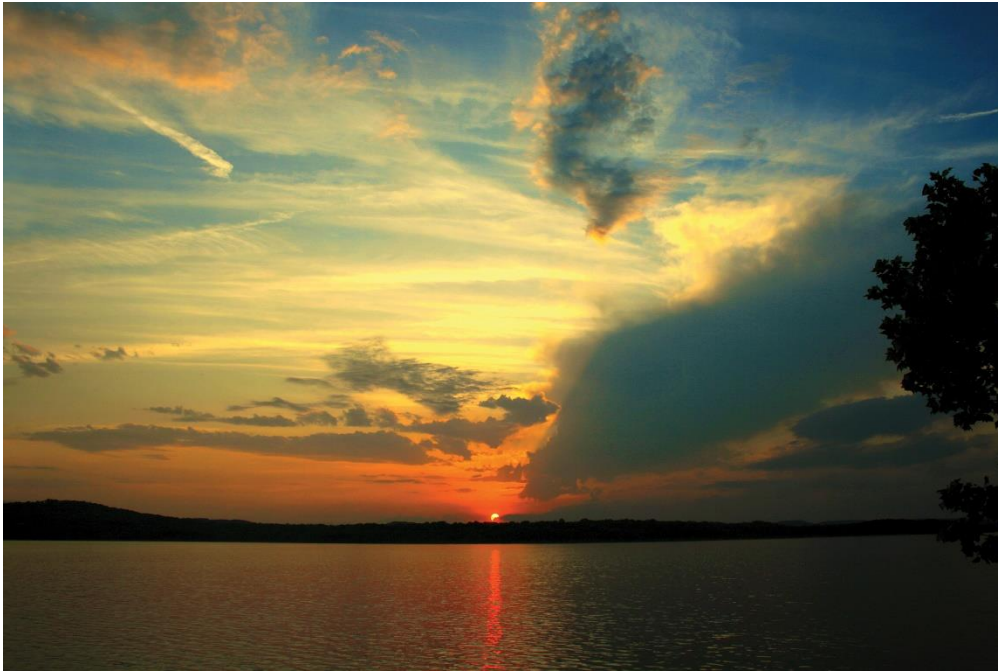
Here we are, on the cusp of Memorial Day weekend – the unofficial launch of the summer travel season – and it just doesn’t feel “right” this year. All 50 states have reopened for business on some level, albeit in modified ways and at different paces. It’s all very surreal. That’s why for this week’s special delivery from [Mindy Bianca Public Relations](#), we’ve chosen to highlight a client destination that never fails to deliver **pleasant surprises**. Every media guest we send to this place returns saying, “That was so different, so much more than I had anticipated. It wasn’t at all what I expected, and I had **SO MUCH FUN!**”

This week’s blast of fun comes from [Branson, Missouri](#), yet another one of MBPR’s mountain-y client destinations. This one is in the **Ozarks**, and it’s stunningly beautiful. If you’ve never been, you may be surprised to hear about the natural beauty of this part of southwestern Missouri, a place that straddles the line between “Southern” and “Midwestern.” In fact, if you’ve never been, you probably have a lot of preconceived notions about what Branson is ... and what it isn’t. I’m here to tell you that you can probably find some of what you expect here; but there’s a whole lot of unexpected, too. And that’s what we want to introduce you to today.

Though there’s plenty of fun to be had indoors in Branson, the experiences that nobody seems to expect are all the outdoor adventures. If you check your history books, though, you’ll learn that the first thing that drew visitors here more than 100 years ago was the beauty of the Ozark Mountains.

Everywhere you turn, there’s gorgeous scenery to be explored. There are endless ways to witness the wonders of nature here – hiking, mountain biking, horseback rides, ATV and Jeep tours, even thrilling ziplines and mountain

coasters ... if you can keep your eyes open! This is also a golfer's haven. In fact, Tiger Woods selected Branson as the home of his first-ever public golf course, Payne's Valley. (It was named to honor the late Payne Stewart, a legendary golfer born in nearby Springfield, Missouri.)



The sun sets over Table Rock Lake, one of three lakes in Branson.

Branson is also home to **three pristine lakes** – Table Rock, Taneycomo and Bull Shoals – that boast sparkling water and plenty of fun. In Branson they're calling time on the water "nautical distancing." You can get out there in a canoe, kayak, sailboat, motorboat, paddleboard, jet ski ... you name it! Or you can just get IN the lakes and cool off with a swim in the refreshing, crystal-clear mountain waters. And with all that fresh water comes some amazing fishing. Fun fact: Branson is home to the [History of Fishing Museum](#).

Another fun fact: Branson is also home to the **world's largest roll of toilet paper**. Yep. It's confirmed by The Guinness Book of Records and this super-mega-roll of Charmin can be found at [Ripley's Branson](#). It's 10 feet tall and contains 1 million square feet of TP, which is the equivalent of 95,000 rolls. They say it could last you 1,900 years. Now wouldn't THAT have come in handy back when toilet paper was such a precious commodity in stores?



Believe it or not, the world's largest roll of toilet paper can be found at Ripley's Branson.

Speaking of fun facts, Branson's tourism office created an **online trivia game** so visitors and potential guests can test their knowledge about this small town (population = 10,000) with big appeal. I'm embarrassed to admit that even after countless visits, I couldn't get all the answers right. To test your knowledge, visit this [link](#). (Hint: You stand a good chance of answering at least a few questions correctly if you read this week's entire note.)

You'll see that the first question is about **Time Traveler**, one of my Top 5 Favorite Roller Coasters in the Universe. I don't say that just because I was one of the first people who got to ride it. I say it because it is truly an incredible coaster, one that quite literally turned the amusement industry upside-down when it debuted.



Time Traveler is an innovative roller coaster featuring vehicles that both spin and invert.

The park is closed right now, but we thought you might enjoy a **virtual ride** on **Time Traveler**. Here's some [point-of-view footage](#) that was shot when the coaster opened two years ago. (And I just gave you the answer to one of the trivia questions!)

Because of the nature of that roller coaster, it's a little tough to capture point-of-view footage because the camera is spinning quite a bit. (It gets mounted on the front of a vehicle.) So if you want a more "traditional" ride – and I use that term loosely, because this is another coaster for which the technology was invented for Silver Dollar City (they made a wooden roller coaster go upside-down, which had never been done before) – here's POV footage of [Outlaw Run](#), which also happens to rank among my Top 5 Favorite Roller Coasters in the Universe. Yes ... two of my five are in the same park in the Ozarks! THAT is how special and fun this park and this destination are. Who would expect to find rides that leave the rest of the industry scratching their heads – and green with envy – in a small mountain town?

A lot of people scream on roller coasters, but I laugh. Loudly. **Laughter is my very favorite sound, and everywhere you go in Branson, that's the soundtrack that's playing ... laughter and pure joy.** It's not just kids who are giddy; you also hear moms and dads, grandparents, aunts and uncles having so much fun. Thanks to Branson's central location in the United States, it's a **gathering place for extended families** who have spread out in all directions and who want a place where everyone can come together for **family fun**.

At the heart of it, Branson is about family. Generations of locals have been involved in the town's tourism industry for more than 100 years. Extending a warm welcome to visitors is in their DNA. In short, Branson is a place where families entertain families.

One of the many family businesses I always visit when I'm in town is [Dick's 5 & 10](#), one of the few remaining, honest-to-goodness dime stores in the United States. Dick Hartley opened the store in 1961; these days his son, Steve, and son-in-law, Dave Montgomery, run the place. But not a whole lot has changed in 59 years. They still do things – like inventory – the old-fashioned way. And they still sell classics like paper doll sets, embroidery kits, Tinker Toys and your grandma's favorite perfume. And what can you still get for a dime? Head for the candy aisle. You won't be disappointed.



This is just a small segment of the candy on offer at Dick's 5 & 10.

And now – thanks to COVID-19 – you can actually buy things from Dick’s online. The family never felt the need to offer online sales, but this spring they changed their policies so their thousands of fans who were missing the Dick’s experience could feel somewhat fulfilled at home. Take a peek at all the [online options](#) and see what you remember from your youth. (P.S. The Soda Pop Shoppe is a popular aisle in the store. I do NOT recommend the dill pickle pop, however.)

In case that talk of candy made you hungry, I can help by providing a recipe generously shared by [Big D’s BBQ](#). The first time I tried this couple’s BBQ was back when they were operating out of a food truck. I’m not a big carnivore, but I sure was that day. I was hooked from the first bite, gnawing on beef, pork and chicken with reckless abandon. These days Big D’s has gone big-time, with both their own restaurant and a speedy pick-up site in one of the local grocery stores. The Meat Sampler Platter is the way to go, but you MUST order the Pulled Pork Egg Rolls to get things started.

But you know what? We’re not sharing a BBQ recipe with you today. The fact is that I don’t believe mere mortals can make proper BBQ in their own homes; nobody I know has the suitable equipment, time or patience. But Big D’s also creates amazing desserts – last fall they won the title of Best Desserts in Branson – and I think most of us can manage to make one of those at home. This particular sweet might be incredibly easy to make, but it’s a doozy of a pie. Brace yourselves.



*Here's Big D's award-winning Bourbon and Bacon Pecan Pie.
Yes, I'll be making this for my mother-in-law's birthday next month. She'll LOVE it (and me)!*

Bourbon and Bacon Pecan Pie

Ingredients:

- 4 eggs (room temperature)
- ¼ cup minced bacon (crispy is best) **WHAT?! Bacon in pie! Yes, please!**
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 to 3 tablespoons bourbon (to taste)
- 1 cup pecan pieces
- 1 deep dish pre-made pie crust

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 350.
- Cook bacon until crispy and mince into fine pieces.
- Put bacon bits and pecans into the pie crust. Mix the two together to evenly distribute the bacon. Set aside.
- In a large bowl, mix the eggs, sugar, corn syrup, vanilla and bourbon until blended. (Do not use an electric mixer, as it will add too much air.)
- Pour liquid mixture into the pie crust and let stand a minute to allow the pecans and bacon to float to the top. Make sure the pecans are evenly distributed along the top of the pie.

- Place on a pan and bake in the oven for 45 to 50 minutes, until internal temperature reaches 215 degrees. (Baking time will vary depending on the oven. For best results use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of the pie, which should be springy in the center.)
- Remove from oven and allow to cool to room temperature before slicing.

Okay ... I'm betting when I first mentioned Branson, your immediate thought was of **live entertainment**. And you'll certainly find that here. However, the genre of music you can hear and the audiences it appeals to may surprise you. Sure, there's plenty of country music, but there's also gospel and classic rock and Motown and ... well, pretty much everything. The quality of entertainers is amazing, too.

If you ever wondered what happens to people after they've achieved success on shows like "America's Got Talent," look no further than Branson, where hardworking performers of all types – singers, dancers, musicians, even aerialists – earn their own stages and shows so they can pursue and fulfill their dreams. Many of the performers are siblings or family groups, too. I'm pretty sure if you're born in the Ozarks and do NOT have the entertainment gene, they politely ask you to leave ... because everyone I know here can carry a tune.

When the rest of us hit "pause" because of COVID-19, many Branson performers chose to push "record," working in makeshift studios to continue to share their music with fans. A handful of members of [The Hughes Brothers](#) gathered at their family's theater a few weeks ago to record their rendition of Billy Joel's "The Longest Time." I say "a handful" because what you see and hear in [this clip](#) is just 10 members of the family, which includes five brothers, their wives, their children and grandchildren. Their family – and show – now numbers about 50 participants, earning them the title "World's Largest Performing Family" and giving them bragging rights for having the largest cast in Branson. The family will return to the stage tonight.

If you're among the families who have been learning new skills and honing existing talents during your time in isolation, we hope you're inspired to share your gifts with the world just as The Hughes Brothers do. The only talents I've managed to master are alphabetizing my pantry and cleaning out every closet in my home ... twice.

Regardless of how you've been coping with all the drama the spring of 2020 has delivered, as we cautiously re-enter a world that will be so very different from the one we knew before, it's MBPR's hope that we'll all emerge a little better, a little stronger, a little smarter.

We wish you and yours a pleasant holiday weekend. Even if you're in one of the parts of the country where life is still very limited, we hope you'll find a way to do something different and interesting that helps you remember that summer is right around the corner.

Until next Thursday, when we'll be sending greetings from one of the most charming and nostalgic towns in America (and that's the only hint you're getting) ...

Mindy, Ashley, Mallory, Moneé and Sara

As always, if you'd prefer not to receive these weekly armchair adventures, please send me a return email and I'll remove you from the list.