



SPOTLIGHT ON WEST VIRGINIA TOWNS

By *Caroline Eubanks*

Ever since the state earned America’s newest national park, travelers have flocked to “wild and wonderful” West Virginia. The state is an outdoor lover’s dream, with unmatched hiking, whitewater rafting, and even skiing. But all types of travelers can appreciate the charms of these towns, which you’re sure to want to add to your travel plans.

Fayetteville

Charming Fayetteville is the main gateway to the New River Gorge National Park, made up of over 70,000 acres. There are countless incredible experiences within the national park, including several hikes and world-class rafting, but the most unique is the Bridge Walk, which brings adventurous travelers underneath the iconic

bridge’s 3,000 foot-long span across the gorge. If you’d rather stay on the ground, the park also includes the Thurmond ghost town, a former coal and rail industry town with the former train station operating as a visitors center.

But the town itself is worth a wander, starting at the Love Hope Center for the Arts, a local gallery featuring exhibitions from regional artists. Grab a coffee at Range Finder Coffee, a pint-sized space with local artwork. Fayetteville has great downtown dining like Southside Junction Tap House and Secret Sandwich Society. After a hike, grab a pint at Freefolk Brewery, a popular spot for the post-rafting crowd.

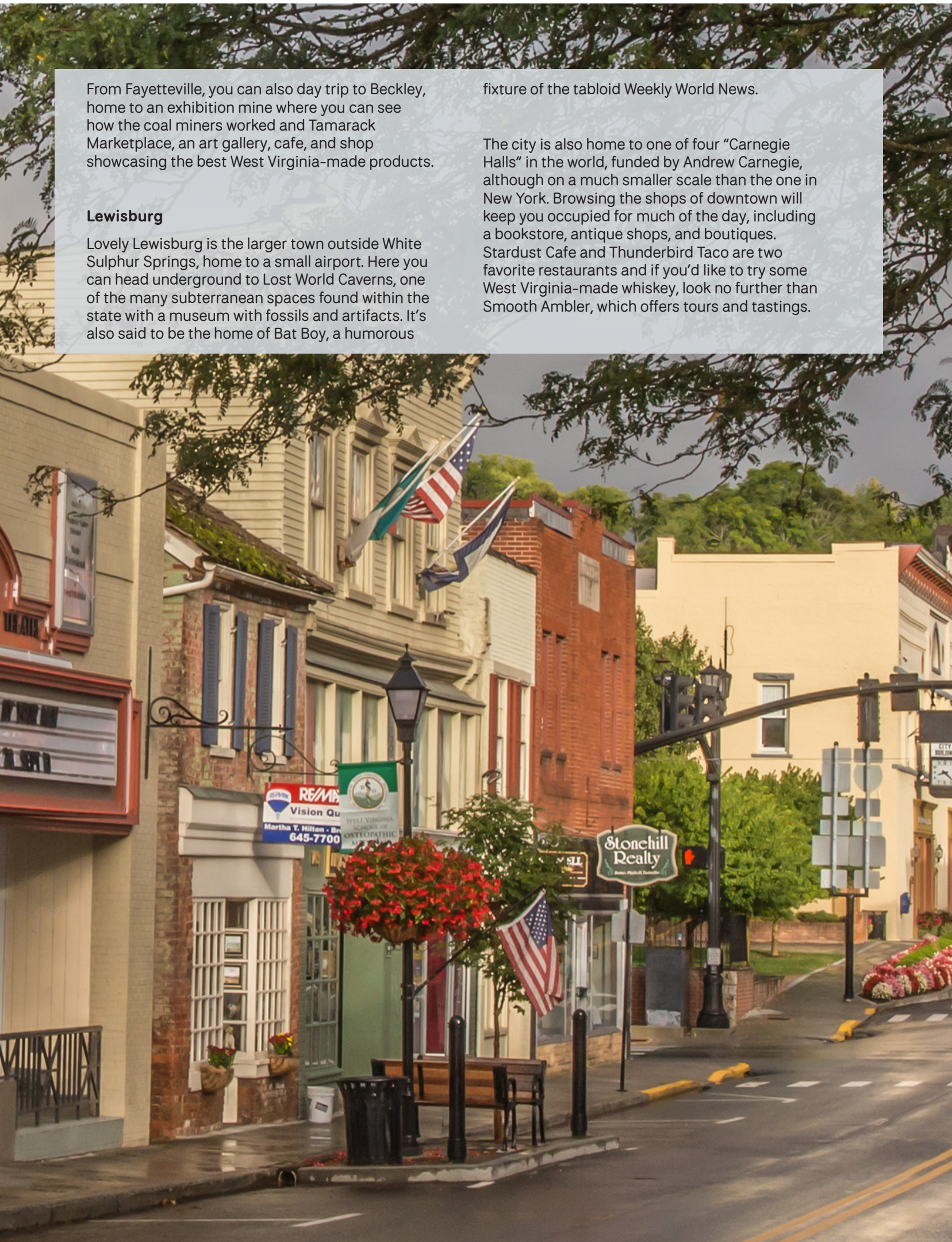
From Fayetteville, you can also day trip to Beckley, home to an exhibition mine where you can see how the coal miners worked and Tamarack Marketplace, an art gallery, cafe, and shop showcasing the best West Virginia-made products.

Lewisburg

Lovely Lewisburg is the larger town outside White Sulphur Springs, home to a small airport. Here you can head underground to Lost World Caverns, one of the many subterranean spaces found within the state with a museum with fossils and artifacts. It’s also said to be the home of Bat Boy, a humorous

fixture of the tabloid Weekly World News.

The city is also home to one of four “Carnegie Halls” in the world, funded by Andrew Carnegie, although on a much smaller scale than the one in New York. Browsing the shops of downtown will keep you occupied for much of the day, including a bookstore, antique shops, and boutiques. Stardust Cafe and Thunderbird Taco are two favorite restaurants and if you’d like to try some West Virginia-made whiskey, look no further than Smooth Ambler, which offers tours and tastings.





White Sulphur Springs

Most know this town as home to The Greenbrier, one of the nation's grandest hotels. And for good reason. The stunning hotel attracts thousands of visitors every year, who come to see the colorful Dorothy Draper-designed interiors and tour the famous bunker, which was created to house the government during the Cold War but was ultimately left unused. It didn't become public knowledge until 1992.

But it's not the only landmark in town. The town's former high school is now the Schoolhouse Hotel, a completely ADA accessible hotel with a charming rooftop bar. The small town was also the birthplace

of country music star Brad Paisley and NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson of Hidden Figures fame, both honored with historical markers. There's also an Amtrak station right in town for easy access.

Stop by the Lunch Box for sandwiches and fresh-baked pastries. Gustard's Bistro and Max's on Main showcase local ingredients in their cuisine. The Greenbrier also has several bars and restaurants inside, including Prime 44 West, an upscale steakhouse. Don't miss a nightcap at the storied Lobby Bar, named one of the best bars in America by Esquire, as you admire the 600-pound chandelier hanging from above, which was used on the set of 1939's *Gone with the Wind*.

Where to Camp

As you can imagine, the greater Fayetteville area has plentiful camping, especially inside the national park where the eight primitive sites are tent-only and don't take reservations. Additional campgrounds are open seasonally, especially during rafting season. **The Outpost** has RV sites, tent platforms, and vintage trailers available for rent.

For something unique, check out the **glamping domes in Alderson**, not far from Lewisburg proper. The geodesic domes on 65 acres provide unrivaled views of the night sky and have creature comforts like soaking bathtubs, fire pits, and rentals of e-bikes and kayaks to explore the property.

If you're not staying in White Sulphur Springs' grand hotel, **Pleasant Valley Campground** is a few blocks away from the Greenbrier and the grocery store, offering RV sites with full hookups and onsite camper rentals.

