

Smoky Mountain Outdoors

Guide Training Program

Smoky Mountain Outdoors (SMO) has a long-standing record of training great river guides. Over the past two decades, we have trained hundreds of guides, many of whom have continued on to other rivers both in the states and internationally. Our training program is not easy—but it is the best.

Several guide schools are held each spring. In order to provide a low trainer/trainee ratio, each class has limited space, so apply early!

Guide school teaches rafting fundamentals as well as international professional standards. Our guide school has a high completion rate and can usually result in a guide position for trainees who successfully complete the training, though our limited number of positions means not all guide school graduates are guaranteed a raft guide position at SMO.

Smoky Mountain Outdoors provides this outstanding guide training program free of charge. In exchange for this free service (a \$600 value), we ask for a non-refundable payment of \$300. This down payment must be paid in full to reserve your space in a guide school. Payment is done over the phone using credit or debit card or via PayPal.

So if it's free, why a down payment?

The down payment covers your portion of the cost of a **black PFD, black helmet, throw bag, guide belt, carabiners, whistle, prusik cord and American Red Cross First Aid and CPR certifications**, all of which are the minimum required equipment for a professional whitewater raft guide. All raft guides at SMO are required to wear all black as a uniformed company policy. Staff shirts will be provided at the beginning of the rafting season. We recommend, as a potential new guide, you shop around for the cost of gear and certifications, plus training, and we assure you will not find a simpler, cheaper or more fair agreement.

Please note: Guide School is free after completion of the full rafting season (Memorial Day to Labor Day). The \$300 down payment simply pays for the entire cost of your gear, first aid and CPR. If a guide leaves before the agreed dates, the additional training cost of \$300 will be taken from their last paycheck to reimburse the company for the cost of training. This is only for first year guides. We are not here to waste your time or money, and we expect you not to waste ours. We are professional and expect the same from our employees. If you are interested in attending one of our guide schools, please send your resume and letter of interest to scott@smokymountainrafting.com. Many applicants also choose to include photos of themselves to show their personalities; this is a great way to put a face with a name.

Please read through all the information provided, as well as our website, before contacting us regarding any questions.

Applicants will be contacted in order they are received and on a qualifying basis.

FAQ's

What can you expect from guide school?

Our guide schools are five day courses. Mornings start at 8 am. We will spend the morning on dry land going over the days lessons. After lunch, it's time to hit the river.

The best way to learn is by doing. Because our classes are small,, we ensure each trainee receives personal attention and training. Expect long days on the river, be prepared and dress accordingly. The day wraps up in the late afternoon with a group debriefing. Meals are not provided during training.

Training continues the following week after the end of guide school. This week will be spent working towards getting “checked-out”. This is to ensure each trainee has a complete understanding of the skills and fundamentals taught during training, while working directly with guests. Please note that not all trainees are guaranteed or offered a position at the end of training. These decisions are made by the trainers and management during training and are based off of trainees skill level, group dynamics, personal drive etc.

Can anyone be a raft guide?

This can be a difficult question to answer. Raft guiding is a physically demanding activity. We require all guides to be able to swim, lift and carry heavy rafts overhead, and to pull themselves from the water into a raft without assistance. We also pride ourselves on excellent customer care and relations, so a positive and outgoing personality is a must.

What will be covered in training?

- Reading water
- Paddle strokes
- Commanding a raft
- Steering a raft
- Maneuvering rapids
- Swimming rapids
- How to right a flipped raft
- How to unwrap a raft
- Equipment care and repair
- River rescue techniques
- Loading and unloading rafts

- River hazards
- How to and the importance of keeping a professional river log book
- Basic work skills, such as dealing with group dynamics, leadership, teamwork, river etiquette, customer service, public speaking, chain-of-command, company procedures and, above all, safety.
- American Red Cross First Aid and CPR Certifications

What do you need to bring?

Spring training can be cold. It's your responsibility to come prepared for long days on the water. Dress warm, and bring any wetsuit or cold water gear you may have. We do not provide warm gear. Inexpensive clothing, such as polypropylene, fleece, warm hats, and wool socks, are highly recommended. Cotton is NOT to be worn on the river; when wet, it draws warmth from the body. Dressing properly for the water ensures comfort, focus while on the water, and most importantly safety. NRS is a great company that specializes in whitewater clothing and equipment.

What can you expect from the start?

You MUST be prepared to financially support yourself for the first few weeks. Until the rafting season starts on Memorial Day weekend, work can be slow. This is a great time for new guides to improve on their skills by practicing and playing on the river. Start saving now.

When is training?

March 12th - 16th

May 7th - 11th

May 14th - 18th

May 21st - 25th

June 4th - 8th

June 11th - 15th

*dates and availability are subject to change due to number of participants

We recommend you arrive only a day or two early to settle and meet the other trainees before training begins. You will receive contact information for your Residential Adviser in your housing welcome packet. Late arrivals will not be allowed to join the training school. Dates are tentative and may be changed or added.

Where is training held?

Training is held at our outpost on the Pigeon River in Hartford, Tennessee. Detailed directions to the outpost and housing will be given once accepted into the training program.

Smoky Mountain Outdoors
3299 Hartford Road
Hartford, TN 37753

What can I expect if I am offered a position at SMO?

We hire on a seasonal basis. Our peak season runs Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Between those dates, you are required to work each Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday. The other three days of the week can be spent however you wish. We do not guarantee full-time work to anyone in the spring or fall. We are a very high volume rafting company that runs at a quick pace.

Working at Smoky Mountain Outdoors

Smoky Mountain Outdoors (SMO) was established in 1993 by owner Daniel Jennette. What started as a small outfitter with a single raft, van, and trailer, has grown to a powerhouse in the industry. With a outstanding staff of over 80 raft guides and 30 support staff, during the peak season we can take 1,200 guest down the river in a single day.

The River

The Pigeon River has two commercially rafted sections, The Upper and The Lower. The Upper Pigeon River is a six and a half mile stretch of Class III-IV whitewater. The Lower Section is a five mile scenic Class I-II section. The Pigeon River is a dam-released river, flowing on a scheduled release from 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The spring season begins in March and offers a variable, natural flow.

Our Staff

We have a diverse, fun-loving staff of 80 raft guides- and growing. Most guides are in their early twenties and attend college, though some are much older and are a joy to have around and to learn from. It's an experience like no other and will stay with you for years to come. We are a tight-knit group, often spending our time off together. Each week, the company hosts a staff dinner where everyone can take an evening to relax and enjoy a meal and fun at the outpost.

SMO Standards

We consider our standards among the highest in the industry. We do not tolerate the use of narcotics or illegal drugs. In the case of an accident, on or off the river, drug testing can be requested by management. We do not allow drinking under the age of 21, and we do not allow our staff to smoke or chew tobacco while working, on outpost property, or in view of a guest. We expect all employees to maintain specific standards and guidelines regarding appearance, language, customer relations, hygiene, and conduct. You must be able to pass a pre-season drug test to be employed at Smoky Mountain Outdoors.

Personal Appearance

How you look and conduct yourself on and off the water is a reflection of SMO. We are often complimented on our staff's appearance, which in turn reflects the professional experiences we strive to provide. Our guides are required to come to work freshly showered and wearing a staff shirt and black shorts. A black PFD and a black helmet are required on the river. Visible facial piercings are not permitted, and tattoos should be covered. Jewelry, makeup, and perfumes should be minimal and in good taste. Shorts should be of reasonable length and material.

We expect our guides to:

- Work long hours during rush periods and not be subject to burnout and moodiness.
- Maintain a good sense of humor and cooperative attitude in dealing with co-workers and customers.
- Complete and assist in daily opening and closing duties.
- Enjoy working outdoors under all conditions, which at times may include long, wet, windy, cold, and/or low water conditions.
- Possess a high degree of initiative. You must be a self-starter, prompt, and flexible.
- Be a team player
- Be able to communicate honestly and openly with co-workers and accept criticism.
- Take pride in a job well done and be willing to give suggestions for improvement.
- Provide the highest standard of customer care and professionalism.
- Show up to work on time, looking professional with a positive attitude and an eagerness to work.

Where will I be living?

The housing and outpost are located riverside in Hartford, Tennessee. Hartford hardly qualifies as a town, but we love it. The closest supermarket is 15 minutes away. If you feel like getting out and stretching your legs, the Smoky Mountain National Park is only minutes away. If you want a night out on the town, Knoxville and the University of Tennessee are an hour to our west and the eclectic mountain town of Asheville, North Carolina is an hour to our east.

Guide housing is available at a cost of \$75 a month and is deducted from your paycheck monthly. Our accommodations vary, but roughing-it-easy describes our rooms. The rooms are furnished with a mattress platform (twin) and not much else. Bedding is not provided, so bring what is suitable for your comfort level (mattress, sheets, sleeping bag, pillows, etc). Rooms do have electricity but wi-fi is available only at the outpost during non-business hours.

You will be sharing accommodations with another guide of the same sex. A roommate will be picked for you based on the personality profile you complete with your housing form, but being flexible is a must. If you have someone who you want to room with, both you and the other person must request this on their housing forms. Some guides prefer our tent camp, aka "Gypsy Camp." Tent camping is free. Others choose to rent off-property. If you have a tent, bring it, you never know where and when you may need it.

Shower and bathroom facilities are provided for men and women. A communal guide kitchen is provided for all guides, but pots, pans, plates etc. are not provided.

Pet Policy

We love dogs and cats, but for the safety of our customers, guides and the pets themselves, pets are NOT allowed on SMO property.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. Send your application and information in as soon as possible to ensure a spot in one of our guide training programs. We look forward to reading your application and getting to know you.

Sincerely,

Scott Woodson
Operations Manager
Smoky Mountain Outdoors
scott@smokymountainrafting.com