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ADVENTURE THIRTY-NINE — OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2023



CATHEDRAL CAFÉ

CLOSED



FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH COFFEE

By Erin St. Pierre

A cup of coffee can be so much more than a way to fuel travel days. Finding the right cup, in the right place, can feel like home.

Living a life of full-time travel is both exciting and complicated. Though it's fun to explore and take in unique experiences, constantly moving can feel disorienting. When our family of four left our stationary RV site and hit the road earlier this year, we learned what it meant to no longer have a place we referred to as home.

Gone were the days when we had our hometown favorites. We no longer knew where everything was in the grocery store, and didn't have reliable haunts or the comfort of being in a familiar setting. And while we took on a life of travel to let go of this comfort, we didn't always want to feel like strangers in a new land—especially when every stop we visited was our temporary home.

By the time we'd reached the second stop on our travels, we discovered a problem we hadn't

Once a church built in the 1900s, Cathedral Café, in Fayetteville, West Virginia, feels like an artists' colony.

anticipated. Unlike the common issues discussed on social media—blown tires, lack of personal space, bad campgrounds—our problem was that we would be outsiders everywhere we went. Like many wandering spirits, my family and I wanted to feel like a part of the communities we were in, not like tourists.

So, we decided to establish roots, however small, in each place we stayed. Our desire to feel like locals, coupled with our need for workspace outside of the RV, led us to an idea: We would use local coffee shops to ground ourselves in the community and culture of each region we visited.

We're picky about which businesses qualify. We look for a certain vibe—a feeling upon walking through the door. If we don't get that feeling, we see ourselves back out. Why? Because it's about more than coffee. It's about being a part of the collective. That's what our favorite shops do—they make us feel like we belong there, like we're home.

On our travels, we've come across several of these businesses that made us feel right at home. Here are a few of our favorites, each with their own unique attributes.

Daniel Boone Coffee Shop, Slade, Kentucky

When I go to a coffee shop, I'm usually just looking for coffee, and sometimes food. But at Daniel Boone

Coffee Shop in Slade, Kentucky, I found a small restaurant, liquor store, gift shop, and campground. Is it the most perfect venue for travelers? Probably.

As you walk through the door, you're immediately welcomed into a fun atmosphere that I would call calm chaos. There's a lot to see—from a smorgasbord of menu options on the chalkboard, to customers occupying the tables or grabbing their orders to go. The frequently packed parking area is a testament to the quality of the food and drinks menu.

Inside, the rustic wood-paneled interior creates a homely vibe. To the left, a gift shop with locally crafted goods, T-shirts, camping supplies, and souvenirs sits between the front counter and the small liquor store (they also served alcoholic beverages at the counter). On the right, plenty of comfortable indoor seating invites customers to sit for a spell.

If you're looking for a place where you can spread out and get some work done, then this is for you. Large tables offer plenty of space to fit laptops, drinks, and food orders. Tables on the enclosed back porch overlook the primitive campground along Red River, providing a great opportunity to catch up on some computer time in between traveling. A visit to Daniel Boone Coffee made us feel like locals.

Cathedral Café, Fayetteville, West Virginia

In downtown Fayetteville, West Virginia, we would have missed the Cathedral Café had we not seen pictures of it online first. This historical stone building was (as the name suggests) once a church, built in the early 1900s.

After stepping through the wooden door, I felt like I'd found an artists' colony. Built-in bookshelves line the blue wood-paneled walls alongside the church's original two-story stained-glass windows, while hand-painted artwork adorns the tables, and works by local artists hang on the walls.

A bulletin board overflowing with local events and activities made it obvious that this café was an important part of the community. General Manager Cassidy Bayes explained how it was that the Cathedral Café became a cornerstone of the town, telling me that it has been in business for more than 20 years. "People just come here to hang out," she said, mentioning that her friends have found her there on her days off. Locals have watched her grow up here. This is her hometown, which makes her the person to see for information on

White Mountain Café & Bookstore, in Gorham, New Hampshire, is so much more than a coffee shop.





the best hikes and paddle routes, and where to find adventure around New River.

The café offers dinner events in conjunction with a local theater group, donates to the annual river clean-up, and sponsors a local sports team. Bayes explained that the business has grown since the New River Gorge became a national park a few years ago, which has created a clientele of both holidaymakers and regulars.

One of my favorite aspects of this church turned eatery was the inclusive menu offerings. Whether you're the type of person who eats everything, have food allergies, avoid gluten, or adhere to a vegan diet, this food scene has something for everyone. Between the decor, the atmosphere, the variety of food and coffee options, and the knowledgeable staff, this community-driven coffee shop ensured that we'll take any excuse we can to pass through Fayetteville again.

White Mountain Cafe & Bookstore, Gorham, New Hampshire

In the small town of Gorham, New Hampshire, tucked cozily into a valley between the rugged peaks of the White Mountains, sits the White Mountain Café & Bookstore. License plates from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont line the parking lot, while locals arrive on foot and bicycle. It is obvious before we even order our coffees that this place has a far-reaching influence.

Like many of my favorite coffee shops, White Mountain Café is so much more than a business that serves much-needed caffeine. Considering the small footprint of the store, it manages to offer a quality selection of books, including a variety of fiction and

non-fiction, and a loaded children's and young adult's section. The café also has puzzles, games, toys, and local souvenirs like magnets, postcards, and stickers for sale.

As cozy as the space is, it's really the view from the large windows that I enjoy the most here as I sit next to the warm yellow wall that divides the space from the kitchen, with the scent of freshly brewed coffee floating around me.

The sporadic hissing of the espresso machine and the chatter from the energetic staff add to the laid-back ambience.

If you're looking for more of a nature vibe—which is totally understandable in this outdoor paradise—the café offers outside seating, where you can enjoy a cup of joe and a pastry surrounded by the majestic beauty of the White Mountains, near the scenic Androscoggin River.

Finding these coffee shops has helped us to adjust to the loss of that hometown feel we miss out on as travelers. With each new café we visit, we feel grounded and connected to the community we're in, even though we won't be there long. And for the brief time we spend it new towns—whether it's for a few days, a few weeks, or a few months—we like knowing where we can go to feel at home. **R**

Erin St. Pierre is a freelance writer and full-time nomad traveling with her family of four. She enjoys discovering America's back roads and writing about places off the beaten path. Follow her adventures on Instagram @fromtheroadtothetrails, or online at www.fromtheroadtothetrails.com and www.erinmstpierre.com.

The original two-story stained-glass windows in Cathedral Café, Fayetteville, West Virginia.