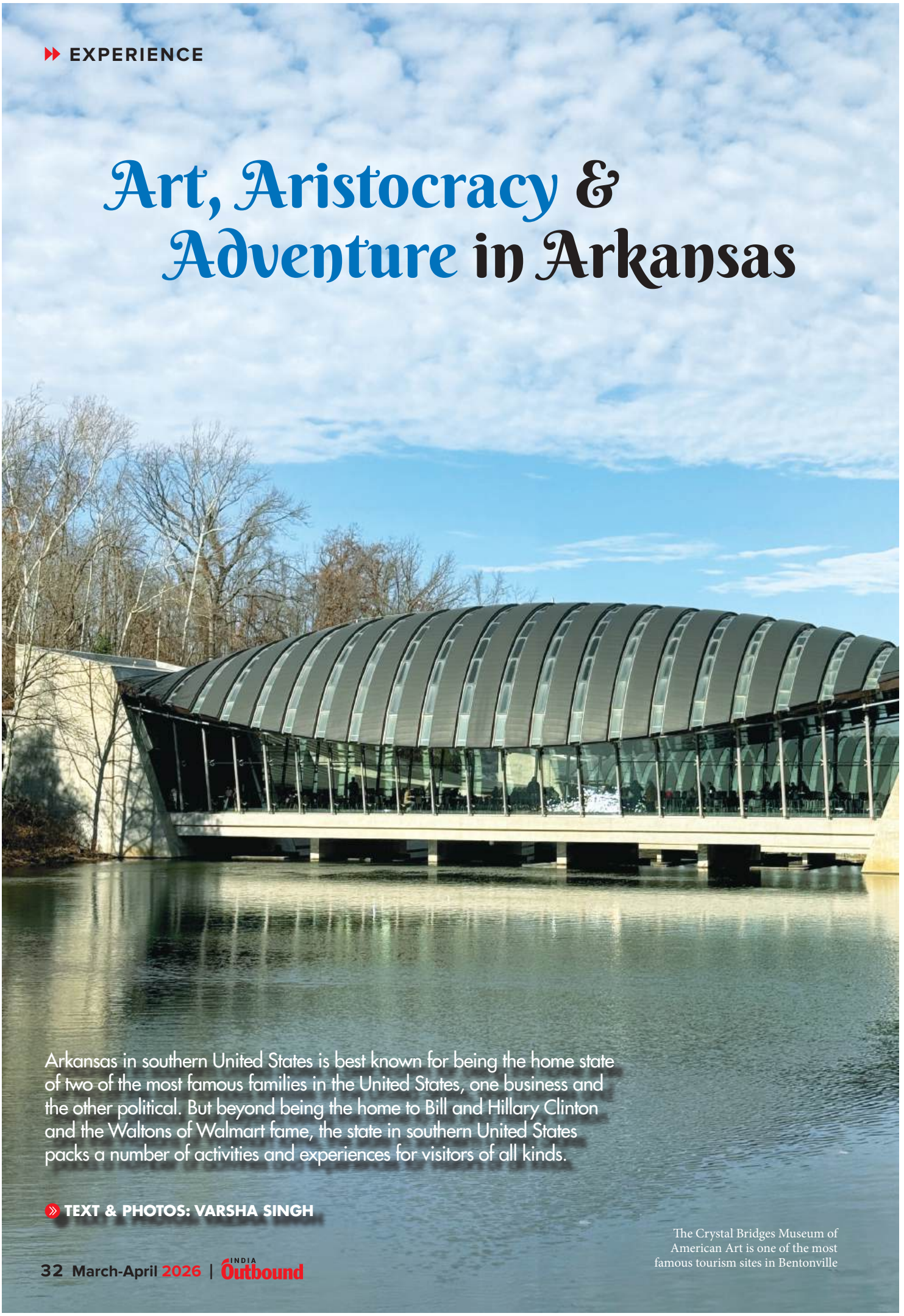
Art, Aristocracy & Adventure in Arkansas



Arkansas in southern United States is best known for being the home state of two of the most famous families in the United States, one business and the other political. But beyond being the home to Bill and Hillary Clinton and the Waltons of Walmart fame, the state in southern United States packs a number of activities and experiences for visitors of all kinds.

TEXT & PHOTOS: VARSHA SINGH

The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art is one of the most famous tourism sites in Bentonville

Attending the Travel South USA International Showcase 2025, when I received the invitation to explore Arkansas as part of a post-show familiarisation trip, I knew very little about the state, besides two of its cities that have gained global fame due to their celebrity residents. One was Little Rock, the town where former US President Bill Clinton served as Attorney General before becoming a two-term President. The other, Bentonville, is the home of Walmart, world's largest retailer and its owners, the Walton family.



But upon exploring the state, even partially, I realised that the state which is relatively unknown in India, packs in quite a few punches as a tourism destination.

Spread over an area of about 138,000 sqkm, marginally bigger than Tamil Nadu, Arkansas is amongst the smaller states in the US, but its smaller size does nothing to take away from its geographical and geological diversity. In the northwest, lies the mountainous Ozarks region, bordered on the southern side by the Ouachita National Forest, while eastern Arkansas has the fertile Arkansas Delta along the Mississippi River.

Bentonville: Walmart's birthplace

Tucked away in the northwestern corner of the state, just a few km from Missouri to the north and Oklahoma to the west, Bentonville, in the midst of Ozarks, is not just the Waltons' home, it is also called the Mountain Biking Capital of the World, as it boasts of numerous biking trails, stretching for over 150 km, in the mountains of Ozarks.

Being the home to Waltons, it is no surprise that Bentonville has attractions linked to the family. One of the most famous tourism site in the town is Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art that was founded in 2011 by Alice Walton, daughter of Sam Walton, who is a philanthropist and arts patron.

Free to visit, the museum's permanent collection spans five centuries of American artworks and not every exhibit is displayed indoor as the museum sprawls over 134 acres of lush green land, with numerous exhibits displayed in open air. Besides the exhibits, the museum also offers several trails in the woods, ranging from barely 300 m to about 2 km in length and one can use these trails to even get to Downtown Bentonville.

Other facilities at the Crystal Bridges Museum include a well-stocked library with over 50,000 volumes of art reference material as well as a museum store and a restaurant.

This year, as the USA celebrates the 250th anniversary of its independence, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art will open its expanded galleries in June, adding about 10,600 sqm of new exhibition and event space and increasing the building's size by 50 pc.

Beyond museums, a walk in downtown Rogers is highly recommended as the district seems to have been developed to be discovered on foot. With its brick-lined streets and mom-and-pop stores located amidst art galleries, unique boutiques and gourmet restaurants and even a museum









as the entire town wears a festive look. The centre of downtown is beautifully lit up, using more than 500,000 lights, in what is called the 'Lights of the Ozarks' that are set up by late November and continue through to the New Year.

Not just the town squares or the streets, but every shop and every bar or diner also is decked up for the season and the ubiquitous Santa Claus also makes regular appearances throughout the period, charming not just the children, but adults as well.

Hobb's State Conservation Park

Just over 20 km east of Rogers, in the midst of dense Ozark forests is Hobb's State Park Conservation Centre, one of the biggest draws of tourism to Arkansas and which gives a foretaste of the nature and adventure that visitors to the state can experience.

The drive along Highway 12 to the park itself is mesmerising and raises the expectations of visitors as to what awaits them at the park, which sprawling over 12,000 acres of forest along the Beaver Lake, does not

dedicated to airguns, that is said to display the world's largest Daisy BB gun!

Fayetteville: Christmas markets & creativity in Clintons' town

About 45 km south of Bentonville lies Fayetteville, an upscale city of about 100,000 and home to the University of Arkansas, that is best known as the city where Bill Clinton, a two-term President of the United States, and his wife, Hillary Clinton, who also served as the US Secretary of State in Barak Obama Administration, after her role as the First Lady during the Clinton era, lived. Today, the first home of the Clintons serves as the Clinton House Museum.



Pretty much like Bentonville, Fayetteville, too, offers diverse activities to visitors. And a very engaging and immersive activity that promises to turn every visitor into an artist is a hands-on creative session at Wild Brush Fayetteville. A session here is essentially a guided, beginner-friendly art class that is easy and fun for every participant, with the artists free to choose whatever they want to portray.

Fayetteville has the quaint charm of a small town that is a mélange of the American Midwest and Deep South. In the downtown area, a church spire dominates the street, while the townsfolks and tourists stroll around peacefully, hopping into the bars or stores or just walking around.

In the Christmas period, the charm of Fayetteville is multiplied several fold









disappoint those seeking a variety of experiences, be it exploring nature trails through hiking, biking or even through horse riding.

The park has over 80 km of nature trails, most of them quiet and uncrowded, allowing the visitors to be one with nature and feel the tranquillity of the area.

For those seeking to add the experience of a meal in the midst of this wilderness, the War Eagle Mill is an ideal stop. It is essentially a water-powered mill that dates from 1832 but still functions flawlessly. Visitors here can enjoy meals at the café in the mill, while enjoying the views of the mill in action as well as the War Eagle Creek,



Nestled in a scenic Ozark valley east of Rogers, War Eagle Mill is a working water-powered gristmill dating back to 1832. Visitors can watch the historic mill in action, shop for locally made flours and goods, and enjoy a meal at the on-site café while taking in views of the eponymous creek and an iconic steel bridge over the narrow body of water.

Another spot worth exploring is the Turnpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge which is a sanctuary, spread over almost 450 acres of forests, where rescued wild animals, including big cats, bears and other species are housed and taken care of. Guided tram tours run regularly in the refuge, offering insights into not just the animals, but also the close connections that human caretakers have developed with the wild animals under their care.

These are just a few of the experiences and discoveries that a visitor can have in Bentonville and Fayetteville. However, they are but two cities in this state, situated in close proximity to each other. Arkansas hides a wealth of unique explorations and attractions, that seem to be hiding in plain sight, simply due to lack of adequate awareness in India, a gap which trips like the one I was invited to, can go a long way in fulfilling. IO