THE 2026 RELOCATION GUIDE · EAST TENNESSEE & SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

Moving to East Tennessee?

Start Here.

The honest, local guide to where to live, what it really costs, and what nobody tells you before you move.

For anyone relocating to East Tennessee or Southwest Virginia — Johnson City, Bristol, Kingsport, Mountain City, and the nooks and crannies in between — from anywhere else in the country.

FREE GUIDE | UPDATED 2026

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Appalachian native with 16 years of real estate knowledge.

WELCOME

Hi — I'm April. I know this area like the back of my hand.

I was born and raised in these mountains — Mountain City, Johnson City, Jonesborough — and I've spent sixteen years in real estate, including a stretch in Charleston, South Carolina, before coming back home to sell where I grew up.

That's the whole reason this guide reads the way it does. **I have local knowledge, and I can still see it through your eyes.** I can show you why people fall in love with this region — and tell you, honestly, where the traffic backs up every morning because of a school.

Close to half the people I work with are moving here from somewhere else. They almost all ask the same three questions: *Tennessee side or Virginia side? How close do I need to be to a hospital and real shopping? And what's it actually going to take to get up to that mountain view?*

This guide is the honest version of all three answers, plus the local specifics no listing site will give you. Read it, then call or text me — I'm easy to reach.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Moving here is different · Coming from out of state: what changes · Where to live · What everyone gets wrong · Mistakes relocating buyers make · What to do, and when · What good looks like · Your relocation checklist

CHAPTER 1

Moving Here Is Different

A move to a place you've never lived is one of the biggest decisions you'll make — not just a house, a whole new life: doctors, groceries, your commute, your community.

"Tennessee side or Virginia side?"

THE FIRST QUESTION ALMOST EVERYONE ASKS ME

It sounds simple. It isn't — taxes, schools, and drive times all shift depending on which side of the state line you land on, and this guide walks you through it.

02

How close do I actually need to be?

To a hospital, and to real shopping. The answer decides which towns are even on your list — and it's different for a retiree than for a family.

03

What's it going to take to get up to that view?

This one surprises people. The mountain view is real. The daily drive up to it is the part nobody pictures from a listing photo.

THE PROMISE

This guide is the honest version of all three answers — plus the local specifics no listing site will give you.

CHAPTER 2

Coming From Out Of State? What Changes

YOUR MONEY

It goes further here.

If you're coming from a high-cost metro or a major East Coast or Sunbelt market, you're likely trading a much heavier cost-of-living and property-tax burden for meaningfully more home for the same money.

INCOME TAX

Tennessee has none.

Tennessee charges no state income tax at all — a real, sourced fact. Always confirm your own tax picture with a CPA, since where you earn your income still matters. If your current state doesn't tax income either, that part of your math doesn't change — but property tax rates in many no-income-tax states run notably higher than what you'll see here.

TERRAIN & SEASONS

Mountains, and four real seasons.

If you're coming from flat country or a warm-weather state, the biggest adjustments are the hills and mountains and four real seasons — including winter weather you'll want to be ready for. In exchange: no hurricanes, and mountains out your window.

PACE & SCALE

Small-town scale.

If you're used to a big city, you're trading it for small-town scale — worth knowing if you like urban amenities close by. Home prices here run well under most major Southeastern metros.

Coming from elsewhere in the Southern Appalachians is the easiest adjustment, culturally and geographically — and Johnson City and Bristol still run more affordable than most of the mountain towns people compare us to.

THE COMMON THREAD

No matter where you're coming from, ask about the **Tennessee-side vs. Virginia-side difference on income tax, vehicle (personal property) tax, and schools** — it's the single biggest local variable, and it's covered in full in the pages ahead.

CHAPTER 3

Where To Live

THE FLAGSHIP · JOB & HEALTHCARE HUB

Johnson City, TN

My flagship market and the region's job and healthcare hub (anchored by ETSU and Ballad Health). Johnson City Schools carry an A grade and rank #7 in Tennessee — the strongest school story in the area. **The honest trade-off:** it's the biggest, busiest option in the region, so if you want quiet and space, look outside the city core.

AT A GLANCE

Median ≈ $350K

Redfin, June 2026

Schools: A · #7 in TN

ONE TOWN, TWO STATES

Bristol, TN & Bristol, VA

Genuinely two different experiences. Bristol, TN currently runs a bit more affordable than it did last year; Bristol, VA trades roughly $30K lower still, but takes longer to sell — and the city is carrying real budget pressure (the landfill cleanup alone takes about 10% of its budget), which is worth knowing going in. **This is ground zero for the Tennessee-side/Virginia-side decision** — income tax, vehicle tax, and two separate school systems all diverge right here, sometimes within a few blocks of each other.

AT A GLANCE

VA side ≈ $30K lower

but slower to sell

THE VALUE PLAY

Kingsport, TN

Anchored by Eastman Chemical, and currently the fastest-moving market in my footprint — homes here go to pending in about two weeks. Typically $50–90K less than Johnson City for a similar commute radius. **The honest trade-off:** Eastman. Some people move here because of it, and some people don't because of it — it shapes the town either way.

AT A GLANCE

$50–90K under JC

pending in ~2 weeks

MY HOMETOWN · WATAUGA LAKE

Mountain City, TN

The pick for anyone chasing lake life, land, or genuine quiet. Prices run well under the rest of the region. **The honest trade-off:** it's about an hour to Johnson City — but only 30 minutes to Boone, NC, 30 to Abingdon, VA, and 45 to Bristol, which makes it a real option for people commuting to Boone, and a natural fit for retirees, remote workers, and second-home buyers.

AT A GLANCE

30 min to Boone

~1 hr to JC · 45 to Bristol

CHAPTER 3 · CONTINUED

"Tri-Cities" is three cities. The region is a lot more than that.

Johnson City	Kingsport	Bristol
The hub	The value play	TN & VA

"Tri-Cities" technically means three — Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol. But there are so many more nooks and crannies in between that I can show you: Mountain City and Watauga Lake, Jonesborough, Rogersville, Gate City, and the small places that never make a "best of" list.

MEDICAL & SHOPPING ACCESS

Johnson City has the region's major hospital system and the bulk of retail; the further you go toward Bristol, Kingsport, or especially Mountain City, the more you're trading convenience for space, price, and quiet. There's no wrong answer — just know which trade-off you're making.

My honest advice: don't pick a community from a map or a listing photo.

These towns genuinely feel different from each other, and the only way to know which one is right for you is to spend real time in each — which is exactly what I help out-of-town clients do, even from a distance, on a live FaceTime walkthrough.

WANT THE HUB

Johnson City. Hospital system, ETSU, the most retail, the strongest schools — and the most traffic.

WANT VALUE OR QUIET

Kingsport for value with a real commute. Mountain City for lake, land, and genuine quiet.

WANT TO WEIGH BOTH STATES

Bristol. Stand on the state line and compare income tax, vehicle tax, and schools block by block.

CHAPTER 4

What Everyone Gets Wrong

What people assume

"No state income tax" — so I'm done thinking about income tax.

What's actually true

Tennessee doesn't tax your income — but if you live on one side of the state line and earn your paycheck on the other, Virginia's income tax can still apply. **Where your income actually comes from matters more than which state you live in.**

What people assume

Tennessee property tax is "3x higher" than Virginia's.

What's actually true

Tennessee's posted tax rate looks almost four times Virginia's — but because of how each state calculates assessed value, the real, effective tax burden ends up roughly comparable between the two, with Virginia actually running very slightly higher once you do the real math.

What people assume

Mountain views are everywhere here — and cheap.

What's actually true

There genuinely are incredible views here, but they are not on every lot and they are not cheap. **The drive to it and the quality of the view are exactly what people pay for.** A real view is a premium, and the daily drive up to it is part of the price — worth knowing before you fall in love with a listing photo.

THE PLEASANT SURPRISE

Genuine Southern hospitality and a real slower pace of life — which, for almost everyone who relocates here, turns out to be exactly what they were looking for in the first place.

CHAPTER 5

Mistakes Relocating Buyers Make

01 Choosing a community from photos alone

without spending real time in it — these towns feel different from each other, and that only shows up in person (or on a live video walkthrough).

02 Falling for a "view" listing

without checking what the actual drive up to it looks like day to day, especially in winter weather.

03 Assuming "no income tax" applies automatically

without checking where your income is actually earned — or comparing property tax by the posted rate instead of the real effective burden.

04 Underestimating Virginia's vehicle tax

an annual personal property tax — a real, recurring cost that doesn't exist on the Tennessee side.

05 Not weighing hospital and shopping access

before falling for a quieter, more remote community. Know how close you genuinely need to be.

06 Pricing this market off your old one

guessing at what's "normal" here from where you're coming from — and overpaying, or lowballing a home that was priced right, because nobody local was in your corner.

CHAPTER 6

What To Do, And When

When you work with us, you don't have to figure these things out on your own. We give you "homework," and bit by bit — without the overwhelm — we get you here and settled. Here's the order it happens in.

6–12 months out

Start with a conversation — phone, Zoom, or FaceTime with me — about your must-haves: commute vs. quiet, what you need close by, what you can live without. Research schools, shopping, things to do, restaurants, and healthcare, depending on your needs. Talk to a local lender about financing across state lines. And if you're selling where you are, I can help you find a great agent there — we work hand in hand to make your transition easier.

3–6 months out

Get pre-approved and set your real budget, including the tax differences covered in this guide. Visit if you can — and test-drive neighborhoods while you're here. Ruling out the ones you don't like is just as important as finding the ones you do.

1–3 months out

Tour homes — virtually or in person — and make your offer. Once you're under contract, my team and I line up the inspections based on what you need (this matters even more with older mountain-area homes).

Moving month

Close, get your utilities and address changes handled, and give yourself a real first week to settle in before you judge anything.

ONE LOCAL NOTE

Good listings here can move fast — Kingsport homes go to pending in about two weeks right now — so we get your pre-approval done before we tour. It's the difference between an offer that lands and one that doesn't.

CHAPTER 7

What Good Looks Like

A couple from out of state had visited East Tennessee again and again in their camper, and had quietly dreamed for years about actually moving here.

When they were ready, we did the entire search together over FaceTime — touring homes, walking neighborhoods, talking through the Tennessee-side/Virginia-side questions — all from hundreds of miles away.

The very first time they set foot inside their new home in person was the day we closed.

THE HONEST PROMISE BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Distance doesn't have to mean guessing. It just means doing the legwork together, carefully, until you're sure.

KEEP THIS PAGE

Your Relocation Checklist

Thirteen things, in order. Print it, stick it on the fridge, tick them off — we'll work through them together.

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

- [ ] Talk through your must-haves with April — phone, Zoom, or FaceTime
- [ ] Decide how close you truly need to be to a hospital and real shopping
- [ ] Research schools, shopping, restaurants, things to do, and healthcare for your needs
- [ ] Test-drive neighborhoods when you visit — rule out the ones you don't like, too

BEFORE YOU SHOP

- [ ] Confirm where your income is earned — and which state can tax it
- [ ] Compare property tax by real effective burden, not the posted rate
- [ ] Budget for Virginia's annual vehicle tax if you land on that side
- [ ] Talk to a local lender about financing across state lines
- [ ] Get pre-approved — we tour and write offers only with it in hand

UNDER CONTRACT → MOVING WEEK

- [ ] Review the inspections April's team lines up for you — especially on older mountain-area homes
- [ ] Line up the sale of your current home in parallel (April can connect you with a great agent there)
- [ ] Set up utilities and address changes before closing day
- [ ] Give yourself one full week to settle before you judge anything

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Appalachian native. 16 years of real estate knowledge.

HOW APRIL HELPS NEXT

You don't have to fly in blind.

If you're picturing a move here, you don't have to figure any of this out alone. I personally walk out-of-town buyers through properties live over FaceTime, so you can shop a market you've never set foot in from wherever you are right now.

You've got a real team behind you, too — it's not just me; two admins keep your transaction on track from first call to closing day, so you're never guessing what's next.

And because I know this area like the back of my hand, I can show you the beauty of it and tell you the honest, sometimes unflattering truth about it in the same breath — I'll tell you what you need to hear, not just what's easy to say.

REACH OUT ANYTIME

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Call or text is easiest, or send a DM if that's more your speed.
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