

I-95, Exit 95



Exterior shot of the Ava Gardner Museum
located at 325 E. Market Street in
Downtown Smithfield, NC.

Ava Gardner

M · U · S · E · U · M[®]

SMITHFIELD, NC



Our Mission

The mission of the Ava Gardner Museum is one of curatorial preservation and historical interpretation. Our unique collection spans Ava's entire life, from her humble beginnings in rural North Carolina to her relaxed final years in London. Our vast repository of Ava's personal and professional artifacts includes photographs, jewelry, costumes, memorabilia, papers, ephemera, and much more.

Ava Gardner Museum
325 E. Market Street
Downtown Smithfield, N.C. 27577



Ava Gardner made fewer films in the 1970s and 1980s, preferring her quiet life in London to any film set. In the 1980s she briefly worked in television, predominantly in television movies or miniseries, though she did also appear in seven episodes of the long-running prime-time soap opera *Knots Landing*. In all of her television work she was the first to be

Visit the Museum

With rotating exhibits, interactive presentations, special events, and expert docents, we offer visitors a multitude of ways to learn about the remarkable life and career of Ava Gardner all year long. Our wish is that you will visit us often in Smithfield.

ADDRESS

325 E. Market St.
Smithfield, NC 27577

We are located in the heart of historic downtown Smithfield. Parking is available on the street as well as in a parking lot behind the Museum building, between Third and Fourth streets.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Friday: 9:30am - 4:30pm
Saturday: 9:00am - 5:00pm
Sunday: 12N - 5pm

ADMISSION PRICES

Adults	ages 18-64	\$12.00
Seniors	65 & up	\$10.00
Military	Active Duty	\$10.00
Teens	13-17	\$10.00
Children	6-12	\$8.00
Children	Under 6	FREE

A special group rate for 10 people or more is offered for \$10.00/person.

Heritage Tours \$15.00/person (10-person minimum required. The price includes Museum admission and is subject to availability. Please call the Museum for details.)

Plan Your Visit

We encourage our guests to discover the many charms of Ava Gardner's hometown, Smithfield, NC. Enjoy delicious meals at our chef-driven restaurants; take a leisurely stroll along the scenic Neuse River on the **Buffalo Creek Greenway**, part of North Carolina's Mountains to the Sea Trail; visit our local boutiques and destination shopping center, the **Carolina Premium Outlets**; explore the exhibit hall at the **Johnston County Heritage Center**; and stay a night at one of our area hotels.

9:30am Arrive at the **Ava Gardner Museum** in historic downtown Smithfield. Watch our introductory video, tour our exhibit galleries, and visit our gift shop for exclusive souvenirs.

11am Take the short walk to the **Johnston County Heritage Museum**. Tour the exhibit hall to learn more about Ava's hometown and the surrounding area, and pick up the Smithfield Walking Tour Map for a stroll through Smithfield, which was founded in 1777.

12pm Grab lunch at one of the restaurants within a short walking distance from the Museum. Choose from comfort food at **The Diner**, soups and sandwiches at **Gotham's Deli**, Italian favorites at **Sami's Pizza and Pasta**, or artisanal, chef-driven specialties at **The Glided Pear Brew House**, or **SoDoSoPa**.



2pm Enjoy the walking trail through downtown. Explore the unique architecture and history of Smithfield at 19 featured stops, and shop at our downtown boutiques like **Evan's Jewelry**, **Jewels Formals**, **The Twisted Willow**, or **The Oak City Collection**.

4pm Visit Ava's gravesite at **Sunset Memorial Park**, located one mile west of downtown. Follow the signs to the Gardner family plot.

5pm Enjoy a delicious dinner at one of our area restaurants by your hotel. Smithfield has eight hotels located one mile from the Museum, adjacent to outlet shopping and dining.

7pm Activities after five include shopping at **Carolina Premium Outlets**, or for movie fans, see what's playing at **Smithfield Cinema** or **The Howell Theater**.

As a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization, all admissions, donations, and gift shop sales go directly to support the mission of the Ava Gardner Museum.

Ava's Story

AVA'S CHILDHOOD

On Christmas Eve 1922, Jonas and Mary Elizabeth "Mollie" Gardner welcomed their seventh child into the world, Ava Lavinia Gardner. The large close-knit Gardner family made their home in the rural North Carolina community of Grabtown, seven miles east of Smithfield. They lived in a white, two-story farmhouse surrounded by acres of land they cultivated to grow tobacco and cotton.



DISCOVERY STORY

Before starting college, Ava traveled to New York City in the summer of 1939 to spend time with her older sister Beatrice "Bappie" Gardner. During the visit, Larry Tarr, Bappie's husband, made several portraits of Ava and placed one in his studio's window, attracting the attention of Barney Duhan, who posed as a MGM scout looking for a date with Ava. Larry and Bappie decided to send Ava's photo to MGM anyway, which led to a screen test and a seven-year contract. Ava, chaperoned by Bappie, would travel by train to Hollywood in August 1941.



HOLLYWOOD

Ava spent her first five years in Hollywood playing small, often uncredited roles. Her career took off when MGM loaned her out to Universal Studios for an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Killers* (1946). Ava's casting as the quintessential femme fatale Kitty Collins would elevate her to leading lady status. At the beginning of the 50s, Ava was poised for some of her most celebrated film roles. In 1951 alone, she starred in the melodrama *My Forbidden Past*, the romance *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, and the musical *Show Boat*. Later, she would appear in such acclaimed films as *Mogambo* (1953), *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), *On the Beach* (1959), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1964). Over the course of her five-decade career, Ava would star in over 60 productions and become an international film icon.



LOVE

In her first two decades in Hollywood, Ava fell in love and married three successful entertainers – Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw, and Frank Sinatra, the greatest romance of her life. Although her marriages were brief, she deeply loved her spouses and stayed friends with all of them for the rest of her life.

"IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER AGAIN, I'D LIVE IT THE SAME WAY. MAYBE A FEW CHANGES HERE OR THERE, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL. THE TRUTH IS, HONEY, I'VE ENJOYED MY LIFE. I'VE HAD A HELL OF A GOOD TIME."

Ava Gardner

Ava's Story



LATER LIFE

By the mid-1950s, Ava was tired of the constant glare and scrutiny of the entertainment press, so she left Hollywood and moved to Madrid, Spain. For more than 10 years, she fully embraced the city's vibrant culture of Flamenco dancing and bullfights. Then, in 1968, Ava was ready to shift to a quieter life, which she found by moving to London, England. She would stay in her adored Ennismore Square apartment for the rest of her life. During her years abroad, Ava returned to America often for her career commitments and to visit family in her beloved North Carolina.

LEGACY

Throughout her award-winning career, Ava never forgot her humble beginnings. Once she achieved professional success, Ava contributed her time, money, and celebrity status to social, political, and humanitarian causes near to her heart. In the 1960s, she became a lifetime member of the NAACP, and she also raised funds for philanthropic organizations like the March of Dimes, the American Cancer Society, and the American Red Cross. In her final years, she directed her estate's trust to commit all future funds earned to non-profits and charities which advance medical research and animal welfare. Her legacy of generosity continues today through the work of the Ava Gardner Trust which supports St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Queen Victoria Hospital, and the Ava Gardner Museum.



MEMBERSHIP

Our "Ava Advocate" membership program offers Ava fans a unique set of special benefits while also funding the work of the Ava Gardner Museum. For a small annual fee, you can help us continue to preserve and share our world-class Ava Gardner collection.



GIFT SHOP

With new and exclusive items added throughout the year, our store is the perfect place to find special items for the Ava Gardner fan in your life. If you can't drop by, shop online for books, recipe cards, or the annual Ava Gardner calendar (a popular choice).



SUPPORT US

By making an unrestricted donation to the Museum, you join our devoted community of supporters and help us meet our most urgent operational and reinvestment needs. If you would like to extend your donation into an ongoing legacy, we also accept planned gifts.



VIRTUAL EXHIBITS

Unable to visit us in person? We've created virtual programs to bring the Museum directly to you. Our virtual exhibits translate our physical exhibits into a digital experience, and our "Ava Chats" feature in-depth conversations about Ava's life and career. Visit our online gift shop to access these programs.



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Join our email list to receive our newsletter, and visit our blog for in-depth content about the Museum's collection and Ava's life, career, friends, and family.

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