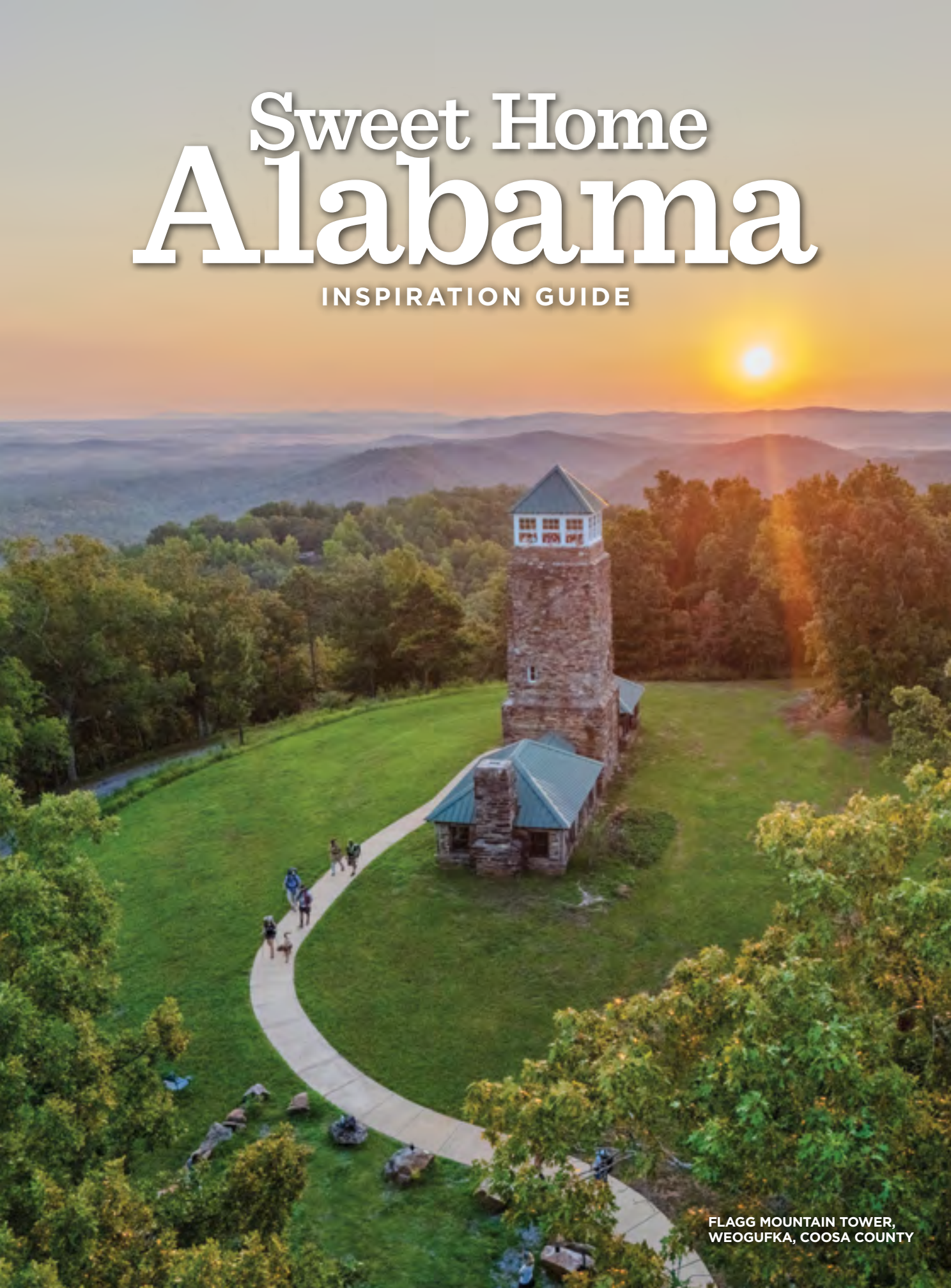
Sweet Home Alabama

INSPIRATION GUIDE



FLAGG MOUNTAIN TOWER,
WEOGUFKA, COOSA COUNTY

THE BASICS

Skim how to use this guide, the ways you can travel to Alabama, the distance between here and other major Southern cities, and a few things to keep in mind once you arrive.

Getting Here

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL AIRPORTS

- **Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport (BHM)** offers nonstop service between 15 cities with American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, Spirit and United Airlines.
- **Huntsville International Airport (HSV)** offers daily flights on American Airlines, Breeze Airways, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines.
- **Montgomery Regional Airport (MGM)** offers daily flights via American Airlines and Delta Air Lines.
- **Mobile Regional Airport (MOB)** offers daily flights aboard American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines.
- **Mobile International Airport (BFM)** offers nonstop flights to and from Orlando through Breeze Airways.

BUS TRANSPORTATION

Greyhound serves 29 cities and towns throughout Alabama, from Alexander City to York.
greyhound.com

TRAIN TRAVEL

Amtrak has train stations in Anniston, Birmingham, Mobile and Tuscaloosa.
amtrak.com

CRUISE PORT

Mobile boasts a wonderful cruise port, the **Mobile Alabama Cruise Terminal**, for sailings to the Caribbean and The Bahamas aboard Carnival Cruise Line ships. It's an ideal drive-to-cruise port, thanks to its ample parking and proximity to restaurants, attractions and lodging.

PLAN YOUR TRIP by scanning this guide to learn about attractions, golf courses, guided tours and lodging.*

Each city in the listings has a location code that can be found on the maps on pages 58, 85, 108 and 134.

The map on page 177 is shaded to define the state's four regions: North, Central, South and Gulf Coast.

Essentials

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

More and more breweries and distilleries are popping up in Alabama, but there are still some "dry" counties that don't sell alcohol at all (although all of these have "wet" cities within them). The legal drinking age is 21.

ALABAMA ACCESSIBILITY

Disabled accessibility is noted in most lodging listings by the icon: ♿. For information about inclusive access at attractions, enter "accessibility" in the search bar at **Alabama.Travel**.

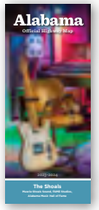
Travelers with physical challenges may call Travelers Aid to inquire about special travel services in Birmingham by calling 205-322-5426.

DRIVING LAWS

All people (passengers and driver) in a vehicle must wear seat belts. Motorcyclists must wear helmets. Child car seats are required up to 6 years old. It is illegal to hold a cell phone in your hand while driving, but hands-free cell phone use is allowed.

TIME

The state of Alabama is in the Central time zone; however, Phenix City, Lanett, Smiths Station and Valley unofficially observe the Eastern time zone due to their close proximity to Georgia.



OFFICIAL STATE MAP

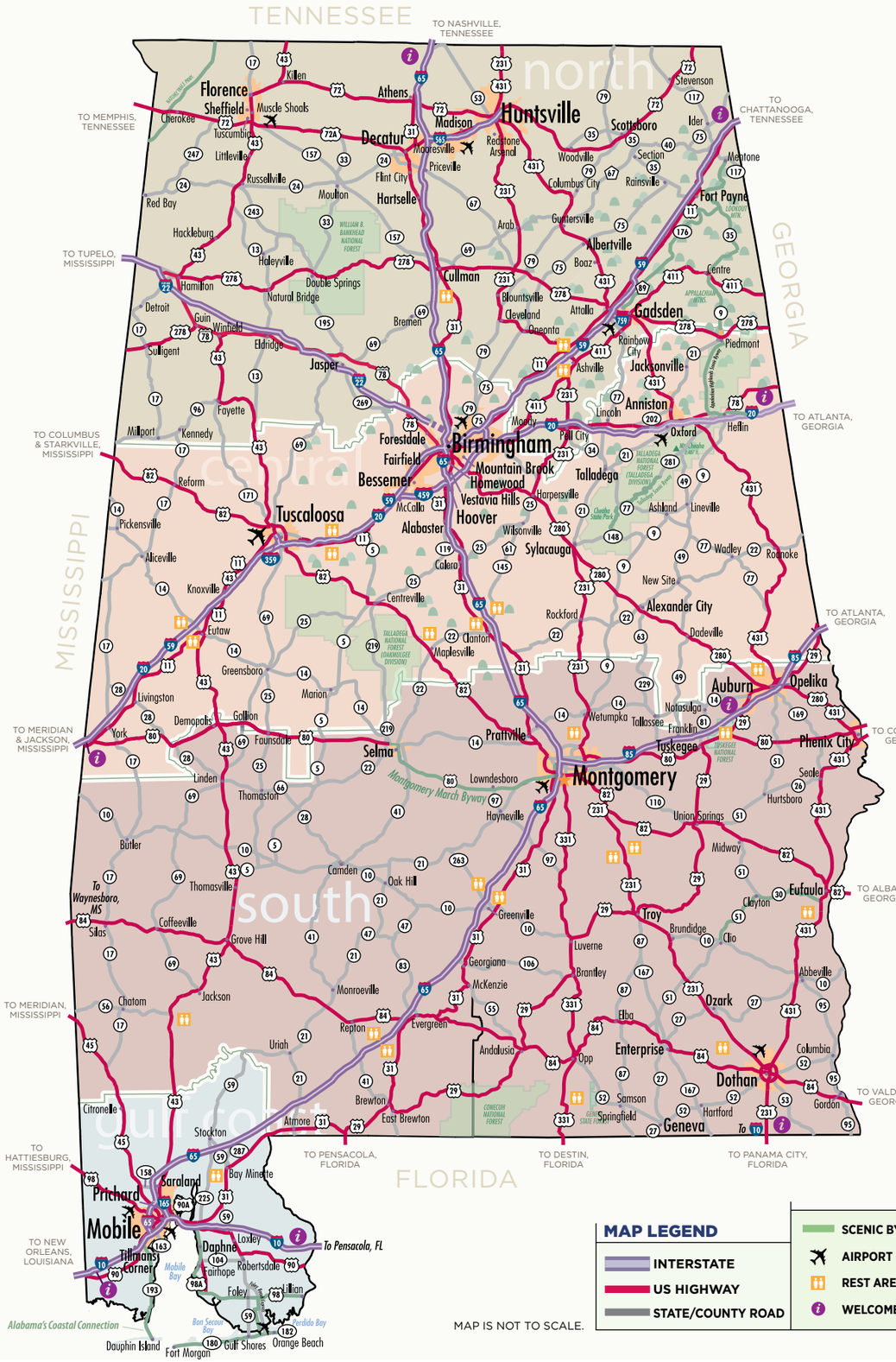
View our interactive maps on Alabama.Travel (under Places to Go) for detailed information, or request an Alabama Highway Map by calling 334-242-4169 or pick one up at any state welcome center.

** Listings information is provided by the business; please call individual properties to verify. No claims are made as to the quality of goods or services.*

How close are you?

Mileage is for general information and may vary based on route taken.

	Gulf Shores & Orange Beach	Birmingham	Dauphin Island	Dothan	Florence/ Muscle Shoals	Huntsville	Mobile	Montgomery	Tuscaloosa
Gulf Shores & Orange Beach	—	320	89	258	398	420	60	231	272
Atlanta, GA	390	147	362	214	252	196	331	159	202
Birmingham	320	—	290	204	118	103	260	92	59
Dauphin Island	89	290	—	231	406	390	37	202	230
Huntsville	421	103	390	305	73	—	361	193	156
Jackson, MS	253	244	221	362	274	342	196	260	191
Knoxville, TN	529	257	543	415	283	212	509	344	314
Memphis, TN	448	243	400	436	155	216	398	334	237
Mobile	60	260	37	198	372	361	—	172	213
Montgomery	231	92	202	112	206	193	172	—	110
Nashville, TN	512	194	480	396	131	116	453	284	247
New Orleans, LA	175	347	147	342	405	445	144	313	295
Tuscaloosa	272	58	230	220	125	156	213	110	—



DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

At Your Fingertips

With just a tap or a click, unlock multiple ways to stay in the know before, during and after your Alabama vacation.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ALABAMA.



Alabama Online

Virtually explore amazing places, engage with other visitors, share photos and get to know Alabama at **Alabama.Travel**. In addition to the 2025 Official Vacation Guide, a digital version of which is accessible via Alabama.Travel, the state's official website is an excellent first resource to begin researching your Alabama getaway. On the home page, check out the recently launched Trip Planning tool, which allows you to customize Alabama vacations, personalizing each itinerary with labeled favorites, locations and events. View the saved locations in a list or on maps whenever you sign in to your account. This tool complements an existing interactive map many travelers use to determine where to eat, what to do and where to stay. Be sure to tag your social posts with #SweetHomeAlabama for a chance to see your images on Alabama.Travel.

ABOUT THE ICONS

Illustrated icons (above) on Alabama.Travel point to experiences that Alabama regularly provides in a distinctive, consistent fashion. Interested in the outdoors? Look for the canoe between the trees icon. Desiring a bit of arts and culture? Look for the theater icon. A couple icons are truly unique to Alabama: the Selma Bridge icon, representing the state's civil rights legacy, and the rocket icon, leading guests to science and discovery.

Mobile Guides

Download these apps for ideas on where to go and what to see.



ALABAMA ROAD TRIPS

Whether you seek a relaxing beach drive, a gleeful shopping spree or a delectable spin through the state's 100 Dishes to Eat, you can find the perfect Alabama road trip using this free, official app for iPhone and Android. A new feature enables you to add locations and help other travelers plan their ideal getaways. **Alabama.Travel/road-trips-app**



ALABAMA CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

Available for iPhone and Android devices, this no-cost, official app traces the state's role in the struggle—and the progress—for equality by introducing the people, places and events that put Alabama in the spotlight of the Civil Rights Movement. Browse a media library to listen to and watch notable events. **Alabama.Travel/civil-rights-app**



Virtual Birding

Alabama presents prime birdwatching opportunities, thanks to its diverse ecosystems that range from hardwood forests and agricultural fields to swamps and coastal wetlands. Such habitat diversity means more than 440 bird species wing through the state. Birders follow, binoculars hanging from their necks, field guides in hand. To help those enthusiasts, Alabama has launched several virtual programs, including a playlist, "Sounds of Happy"; a personality quiz, "Find your Flock"; and "Bird Tales," where you can follow birders on their birding escapades. Find links to those programs at Alabama.Travel, and be sure to share your experience with **#AlabamaBirding**.

SOCIALLY SOUTHERN

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Alabama Tourism Department

Alabamatourism

@TweetHomeAla

Use these favorite hashtags:
#SweetHomeAlabama
#AlabamaTravel
#AlabamaFood

INSIDE

Sweet Home Alabama

THE YEAR OF ALABAMA TRAILS

It's time to get outdoors! Increasingly travelers are seeking vacation spots that enable them to enjoy a touch of nature while stretching their legs. Alabama is delivering both, thanks to trails—hiking, mountain biking and paddling—that are being added, developed and expanded across the state. Alabama is unique in that it holds the southernmost terminus of the Pinhoti Trail, which, via another trail, connects to the Appalachian Trail, making it possible to thru-hike from Alabama to Maine. The state also holds thousands of miles of navigable waterways that range from rushing rapids to languid delta waters. Finally, mountain biking is securing its place, particularly at Oak Mountain and Monte Sano state parks, where networks of world-class trails await. There's never been a better time to experience Alabama than during the Year of Alabama Trails.

Learn more about Alabama trails by visiting Alabama.Travel or scanning the QR code below.



This page: Limestone County Canoe and Kayak Trail

Opposite: ATD/Chris Granger

Sweet Home Alabama

GET READY FOR ALABAMA

Alabama's reach extends beyond its borders. Check out the ways you can prepare for your trip by getting acquainted with the state even before you arrive. BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

Learn more about the All-in-One Ticket by scanning the QR code below.

DOWNLOAD

MAKE VISITING Alabama's top attractions easy and more affordable by purchasing an Alabama All-in-One Ticket. The mobile-ticket program enables you to pay a flat rate and enter as many participating attractions as desired. Multiple ticket packages in one-, two- or five-day options are available. Simply visit **Alabama.Travel** to browse the options and purchase through the web-based platform.

An app to download from your preferred platform is **ALGO Traffic**, an Alabama-developed navigation tool. The app offers real-time data about traffic conditions (including accidents) and travel times, and a map showing construction zones, rest areas and welcome centers. Use the Trip Planner to choose your best route, view live camera images and be alerted to any traffic events, including construction and incidents.

algotraffic



READ

ALABAMA MAINTAINS a strong literary heritage, with several books becoming classics of the American canon: ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** by Harper Lee; ***The Grass Harp, Including "A Tree of Night" and Other Stories*** by Truman Capote; ***Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*** by Fannie Flagg; ***Forrest Gump*** by Winston Groom; and ***Big Fish*** by Daniel Wallace. In 2024, two others were named to the Library of Congress' Great Reads Titles for Each State. For adults, R. Scot Duncan's ***Southern Rivers: Restoring America's Freshwater Biodiversity*** earned the top spot for its stories of rivers and solutions for taking care of them. Charles Ghigna's ***The Father Goose Treasury of Poetry: 101 Favorite Poems for Children*** was recommended as a way to introduce poetry to children through short sentences and beautiful illustrations. For a deep dive into Alabama's Black history, check out Hannah Durkin's ***Survivors of the Clotilda***, which documents the stories of the captives aboard the last known slave ship to come to America, and Alabama Tourism Department Director Lee Sentell's ***The Official U.S. Civil Rights Trail: What Happened Here Changed the World***.

WATCH

IF LIFE DOESN'T ALLOW you to get through a book, that's OK—many of the revered Alabama books have been made into movies. Perhaps the best known is **"To Kill a Mockingbird"** with Gregory Peck playing the beloved Atticus. Tom Hanks' portrayal in **"Forrest Gump"** earned him an Academy Award while also making Alabama's Gulf shrimp a star. **"Fried Green Tomatoes"** shows audiences another slice of Alabama life (and what to do with sliced green tomatoes), and **"Big Fish"** helped put Wetumpka on the tourist map. **"Selma"** reminds viewers why the city and its Edmund Pettus Bridge deserve acclaim for their roles in the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, **"Just Mercy"** tells the emotional story of civil rights defense attorney and Equal Justice Initiative founder Bryan Stevenson. Want a full-on Alabama binge? Then add these others to your list: **"Muscle Shoals," "My Cousin Vinny," "4 Little Girls," "Talladega Nights," "The Miracle Worker,"** and **"Sweet Home Alabama."**



Opposite: courtesy of Zkano, Tom Beckbe, Hammerhead Kayaks, GO-KOT, Bear & Son Cutlery

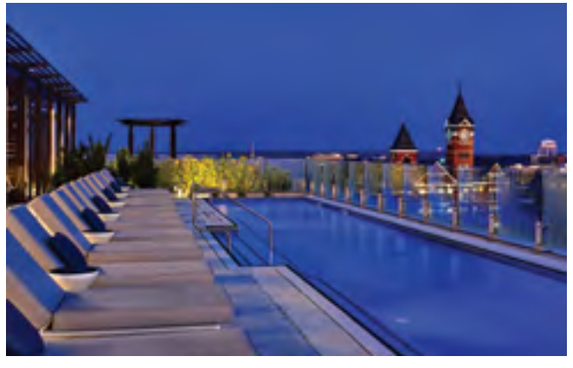
Southern COMFORTS

Having a great vacation has a lot to do with where you stay. Check out (and check into) some of the best accommodations in Alabama. BY RICK HARMON

Whether you are seeking the historic charm of century-old splendor, the pleasure and convenience of modern opulence, or a combination of the two, Alabama has an ideal spot for you to stay. Each promises Southern comfort and hospitality, along with plenty of sweet dreams.

GUNRUNNER BOUTIQUE HOTEL, *Florence*

Named the nation's best boutique hotel in 2024 by voters in *USA Today's* "10Best," the GunRunner Boutique Hotel features 10 luxury suites, each celebrating area design, music and history by honoring local fashion icon Billy Reid, the Muscle Shoals Sound, rock 'n' roll legend Sam Phillips, architect Frank Lloyd Wright and others. Ornate chandeliers mingle with the historical building's brick walls, exposed beams and original wooden floors. There is a 3,200-square-foot common area and a first-class spa, and rooms come with custom sound systems, wet bars and refrigerators.



From left: GunRunner Boutique Hotel, The Laurel Hotel & Spa, Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa, Trilogy Hotel Montgomery

THE LAUREL HOTEL & SPA, *Auburn*

The luxurious Laurel Hotel & Spa, which opened in 2022, is the only hotel in Alabama to be awarded a AAA Five Diamond designation. *Forbes* has called it the South's best new luxury hotel, and *Southern Living, Garden & Gun,* and *Wine Spectator* don't seem to be able to praise it enough. The hotel has a rooftop terrace with heated infinity pool, and a lounge and gardens that supply one of the best views of Auburn University's campus. That said, The Laurel Hotel's major claim to fame is as a foodie paradise, with one of the best and most exclusive restaurants in the state—1856—which seats only 48 guests in its main dining area. A master sommelier manages its two-story wine wall, and, each year, the restaurant welcomes a different acclaimed chef-in-residence.

RENAISSANCE BIRMINGHAM ROSS BRIDGE GOLF RESORT & SPA, *Hoover*

Staying in this 259-room hotel is like a visit to Scotland. Not only does it resemble a modern vision of a Scottish castle, a bagpiper appears each sunset to play Scottish tunes. But the hotel's biggest tribute to Scotland is the fifth-longest golf course in the world, complete with waterfalls and some of the state's loveliest vistas. Its 8,191-yard Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail course has hosted PGA tournaments. For nongolfers, there is a 12,000-square-foot full-service spa and salon, plus hot tubs, a new adults-only pool with cabanas, a family pool, an indoor pool and plenty of activities for children.

From far left: ATD/Chris Granger, courtesy of The Laurel Hotel & Spa, ATD/Chris Granger (2)

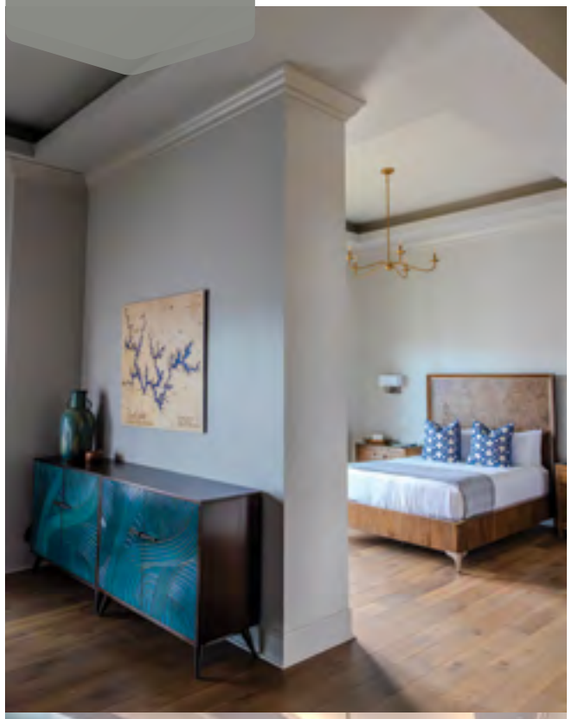




NEW AND OUTSTANDING

TRILOGY HOTEL MONTGOMERY, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION, *Montgomery*

The Trilogy has combined two buildings from the early 1900s and the Murphy House, a Greek Revival mansion built in 1851, to create a hotel in downtown Montgomery that merges the city's past with its future. The luxury boutique hotel, part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, includes a fine-dining restaurant called Kinsmith, two bars, 117 rooms and a ballroom—all within walking distance of the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and the Rosa Parks Museum and within a short drive of the city's new Montgomery Whitewater Park.





NEW AND OUTSTANDING

THE FLYING FIFTY HOTEL, *Cullman*
The Flying Fifty Hotel isn't just the first luxury boutique-style hotel in Cullman, it is a celebration of the town that was founded by German immigrants in 1873. The hotel is named for the group of Cullman citizens who saved the town from financial ruin by convincing King Edward Cigars to move a plant there in the 1950s. Area artisans have helped give every room a specific theme designed to illustrate Cullman's history, culture and people. The hotel uses Alabama-made Red Land Cotton towels and Dream-Fit sheets, the latter made by local manufacturer HomTex.

From left: The Flying Fifty Hotel, Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa

THE LODGE AT GULF STATE PARK, *Gulf Shores*

Nowhere else in Alabama does luxury merge with nature as seamlessly, as beautifully, as at The Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel on the white sands of Gulf Shores inside the expansive state park. A beach-view ballroom with an outdoor terrace overlooks the Gulf of Mexico, as do a pool, a bar and a restaurant with outdoor seating. Savor house-prepared, locally sourced dishes, many including fresh Alabama Gulf seafood. The Lodge also offers guests access to more than 25 miles of educational hiking and biking trails, a nature center, outdoor classrooms, an interpretive center, kayaking, guided Segway tours and nature walks, a butterfly garden, and forests.

MARRIOTT SHOALS HOTEL & SPA, *Florence*

The Marriott Shoals has consistently ranked among the best hotels in Alabama, and that was before its recently completed $25 million renovation. The Marriott Shoals doesn't just offer gorgeous views of the Tennessee River Valley, a lavish spa and an indoor pool, but also it has plenty for younger travelers, including a water park-like outside pool. Check out 360 Grille, a revolving restaurant known for both nice vistas and great food, and the Swampers Bar and Grille, where you can sample some of the music for which the Shoals has become famous.

GRAND HOTEL GOLF RESORT & SPA, AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION, *Point Clear*

This resort, where history and modern luxury converge, was once again named the top resort in Alabama by *U.S. News and World Report,* and *Southern Living* ranked it No. 4 on its 2023 list of best hotels in the South. Built in 1847 to house steamboat passengers, the Grand Hotel has an incredible history, including being fired upon by Admiral Farragut, of "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" fame, during the Civil War. But guests are just as interested in the present, where they can play at the Lakewood Golf Club's two courses, the Dogwood and Azalea, which have helped the Grand Hotel repeatedly make *Golf Magazine's* list of "Best Golf Resorts in America." The Grand Hotel also boasts a top-flight spa, racquet courts, a fitness center, multiple bars and restaurants, an indoor pool, and a lagoon-style outdoor pool with a kids' pool.



Top to bottom: ATD/Chris Granger (2), courtesy of Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail; opposite, top to bottom: ATD/Chris Granger, courtesy of The Hotel at Auburn University



WHERE TO "PAWS" AND PLAY

BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

Knowing a few of the places dogs are not just allowed but celebrated ensures a howling-good vacation for everyone.

FROM AAA DIAMOND LODGING TO POPULAR PLACES TO PLAY, these stops welcome your pooch.

REMY'S DOG PARK
These 6 acres of dog-dedicated space inside Birmingham's Red Mountain Park include three fenced lots, notably a special-needs area for physically challenged, elderly, injured or shy dogs.

THE HOTEL AT AUBURN UNIVERSITY
This AAA Four Diamond hotel accommodates your pup—without a pet fee (barring a noise or property damage complaint)—with its Superior-category rooms; pet-relief areas around the property; doggie treats upon check in; and dining with your dog on the patio of Ariccia Cucina restaurant. Also, the hotel partners with the Auburn University Vet Clinic and offers special rates for pets getting treatment at the clinic.

BATTLE HOUSE RENAISSANCE MOBILE HOTEL & SPA
Indulge yourself and your dog with a stay at one of Mobile's most historic hotels, another AAA Four Diamond recipient. It is located downtown, within a short walking distance of Bienville Square Park, where your leashed pup can stretch its legs while you admire the centerpiece fountain.

PIRATES COVE
Many restaurants in the state allow dogs on their outdoor patios, but Pirates Cove in Elberta stands out for its live music, American fare and location near the water, which swimming breeds love.

THE DOG POND
Dogs are not allowed at Gulf Shores' public beaches, but the Dog Pond at Lake Shelby inside Gulf State Park provides hours of unleashed swimming.

OPELIKA DOG PARK
Sit on a shady bench at the dogs-only space inside Floral Park and watch your pooch romp through well-kept grass and over agility obstacles.

ROCKET CITY DOG BAR
Sip local brews and let your canine play at this dog park-taproom combo that opened in Huntsville last year. Proof of certain vaccinations, age and spay/neuter status is required. Entry fees apply for dogs.

Tail-Wagging Tours

Enjoy these top attractions with your leashed pup.

USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park, *Mobile*
Walk the grounds of the park, which includes a memorial to war service dogs, then park your pooch in a shaded, fan-cooled kennel while you tour the Mighty A and companion USS Drum submarine.

Alabama Music Hall of Fame, *Tuscumbia*
Pick up a dog biscuit at the admissions desk before browsing the exhibits dedicated to Alabama's musical legends—all with your leashed dog by your side. If a potty accident happens, just let the front desk know. They're happy to help.

Chartered Sailings, *Orange Beach & Gulf Shores*
Want an ocean adventure? Set sail on the Gulf of Mexico with your pup, thanks to 1.5- to 2-hour pet-friendly sailings with Back Bay Sailing Adventures and Nicole Fishing Charters.



Top to bottom: having a ball at Remy's Dog Park, a guest on the dining patio at The Hotel at Auburn University

5 Awesome Outdoor Alabama Adventures

BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

From fishing to sailing to bouldering, check out five ways to enjoy the outdoors (beyond the paddling, hiking and mountain biking trails).

1 Fishing the Alabama Bass Trail

Whether you put your reputation on the line in a fishing tournament or just cast in private, the 13 water bodies (lakes, rivers and delta) along the trail are an angler's delight. Among others, locations include Lewis Smith Lake, Lake Guntersville, Logan Martin Lake and Lake Eufaula.



2 Sailing on the Gulf Coast

You can't help but exhale and smile on a relaxing sunset sail. Frolicking dolphins may compete for your attention on cruises out of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores. Most cruises provide snacks or allow you to bring your own.

3 Hunting Everywhere

The entire state is blessed with numerous species to hunt. The No. 1 sought-after animal is white-tailed deer, followed by turkey. Private hunts for upland birds are popular, but unusual game, from alligators to feral hogs, is also hunted.

4 Rock Climbing at Cherokee Rock Village

Tucked away on County Road 70 southwest of Leesburg, this 300-acre park presents massive walls and boulders just begging to be conquered. Purchase gear at the park to be sure you have what you need to make it to the top, where views of Weiss Lake are well worth the climb.

5 Caving in North Alabama

Get your adrenaline pumping with different rappels, crawling through small spaces and crossing deep crevasses on ladders in some of the state's wild caves. Need a guide? Look to Fort Payne-based True Adventure Sports to lead the way to subterranean rewards.

From far left: Sailing on the Daedalus, Cherokee Rock Village



ATD/Chris Granger

Opposite: ATD/Chris Granger; this page: G.W. Carver Museum by ATD/Brit Huckabay; White Cliffs by RuralSWAlabama.org; all others ATD/Chris Granger

ALABAMA ATTRACTIONS are within easy driving distance of Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia and Florida, making them perfect RV destinations. To see 15 of the top RV facilities near popular attractions, check out the numbered RV locations on the map and their descriptions on the previous page.

Turn to page 168 to view additional options for RV camping.



NEAR MISSISSIPPI

Natural Wonder

Dover, England, has its white cliffs, and so does Alabama. Exposed by the flow of the Tombigbee River, the White Cliffs of Epes are layers of the Selma Chalk Foundation. View them either from the river or the U.S. Highway 11 bridge that crosses the river.



NEAR MISSISSIPPI

A Lesson in Perseverance

Tour Africatown, a community founded by former slaves who were trafficked from Benin, Africa, to Mobile. They came aboard the Clotilda, the last known slave ship to enter the United States. The survivors' truths and lives are ones of grit and inspiration.

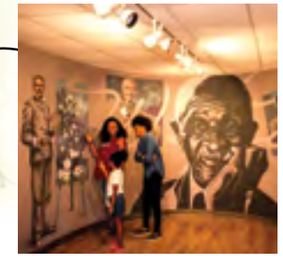


NEAR GEORGIA

Reflecting on History

Horseshoe Bend National Military Park is the site of the 1814 battle Gen. Andrew Jackson led against the Creek Nation. Jackson's victory became a catalyst for the Trail of Tears. Today, a short film, exhibits, interpretive panels and conversations with the area's indigenous people help tell the broader story.





NEAR FLORIDA

More Than Peanuts

Visit the G.W. Carver Interpretive Museum in Dothan to learn about the life and contributions of scientist George Washington Carver as well as the discoveries of other Black inventors.

NEAR FLORIDA

Surf and Sand

Where Alabama meets the Gulf of Mexico, miles of white-sand beaches—some of the most beautiful in the world!—welcome you to play and soak up the sun. Gulf State Park itself harbors 2 miles of strands, plus a lengthy pier from which to fish or watch the sun rise and set.

Opposite: Heritage Motor Coach Resort & Marina in Orange Beach



AT HOME ON THE ROAD

RVers find a range of places in Alabama to pull in overnight, from primitive sites to resort stays to luxurious accommodations, many of which are located within easy distance of unique attractions. BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

The virtues of traveling with a recreational vehicle are many, including bringing the whole family (pets, too!), going where the road takes you and choosing the tenor of your trip. Primitive or polished? Either way, Alabama has you covered.

State parks have long been a standard home-away-from-home for RVers, and in recent years, some Alabama state parks have made improvements to better serve RVs. 1 **Joe Wheeler State Park** and 2 **Monte Sano State Park** were among the first. 3 **Wind Creek State Park**, located on Lake Martin and one of the nation's largest state-operated campgrounds, also has seen upgrades and is expecting more this year, including bigger pads, 50-amp hookups, and water and sewer services. RV sites at Birmingham's 4 **Oak Mountain State Park** have been renovated, and 5 **Meaher State Park** in Spanish Fort, part of Alabama's Gulf Coast, will unveil 46 new RV sites with 50-amp hookups, and water and sewer services.

If refined RVing is more your style, stick around Alabama's Gulf Coast. This region is booming with RV resorts, many of them high-end, but also several that are more laid-back. Inside the gated community of 6 **Buena Vista Motor Coach Resort** in Orange Beach, RVers find larger lots landscaped for privacy, some with full coach houses. Amenities include Wi-Fi, indoor and outdoor pools, full hookups, and a lake stocked with bass and bream. Just a few miles away, 7 **Heritage Motor Coach Resort & Marina** presents similar sophistication on the shores of Bayou St. John. 8 **Camellia RV Park** between Fairhope and Foley caters to travelers 55 years and older. It's a quiet RV park, set among trees and located 1 mile from the boat launch at Fish River and Weeks Bay. Also in the area, 9 **Grand Riviera RV Resort,** 10 **Whispering Pines RV Resort** and 11 **Tropic Hideaway**, located at OWA Parks & Resort, all opened recently. They each feature great amenities, with Tropic Hideaway focused on luxury and top-notch activities within walking distance of Tropic Falls water and amusement park. Near Robertsdale, 12 **Styx River RV Resort**, which caters to families with kids and fills its calendar with loads of family-friendly events, has recently renovated its cabins and two pools.

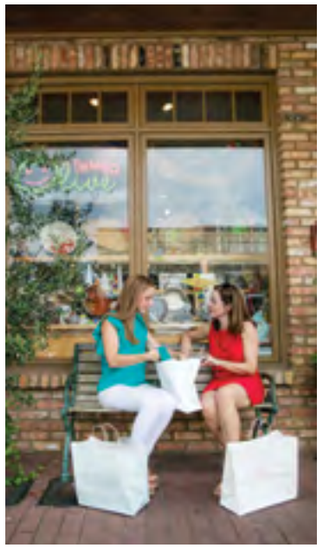
Elsewhere in the state, 13 **Time Away Resort** appeals to RVers interested in racing, thanks to its prime location in Lincoln near Talladega Superspeedway. The setup here includes an onsite pool, playground and half basketball court. In Leesburg, families with kids love 14 **Great Escapes RV Resort Chesnut Bay** because it harbors an onsite water park, for an extra fee, and miniature golf. Rest your eyes and put your ears to work in Albertville by reserving a spot at 15 **Sand Mountain RV Park**, where the Sand Mountain Park's amphitheater welcomes all kinds of bands and musicians. It's an ideal spot to relax as the sun sinks on another perfect day of RVing in Alabama.





Clockwise from bottom left: "To Kill a Mockingbird" play, Monroeville; Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, Calera; The Southern Table, Athens; Fairhope shopping





SMALL TOWN, BIG CHARM

BY ALICIA NOBLE

Escape the big cities and explore delightful hidden gems in Alabama's small towns. Discover new adventures, exciting developments and tried-and-true experiences.

NORTH
Athens

The recent uptick in visitors hasn't taken away from Athens' allure. See for yourself during the annual Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention or Athens Storytelling Festival; while delving into history at Founders Hall at Athens State University, site of the Altar of the New Testament; or while birding or hiking along the Tennessee River at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.

Foodies delight in sampling their way through the town's dining options at favorites, such as The Southern Table, Ro's Grille and The Salty Cod. After eating, stroll the streets to admire antebellum architecture and the surrounding natural scenic beauty.

CENTRAL
Calera

With picturesque Main Street lined with historic buildings housing cute shops and restaurants, Calera extends a friendly welcome. Discover the revitalized downtown, where shops sell antiques, handmade crafts, floral arrangements, essentials for hobbyists and other treasures.

While in the area, explore fascinating landmarks, like the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum and the William R. Ireland, Sr.-Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area. The latter is perfect for hiking and birding. Play a round of golf at the state-of-the-art, Jerry Pate-designed Timberline Golf Club, then relax with a glass of wine or locally distilled spirit at Ozan Vineyard, Winery & Spirits.

SOUTH
Monroeville

Home to Harper Lee, award-winning author of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Monroeville offers visitors a glimpse into her world. Visit the Old Monroe County Courthouse, where Lee drew inspiration for her iconic novel. The courthouse is now home to the Monroe County Museum. Each March and April, the interior serves as the backdrop for performances of a play adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird.* To learn more about the town, take the self-guided, 30-stop walking tour or travel the famous Literary Capital Bronze Sculpture Trail. Take time to pop into the quaint shops and cafes, soaking in the Southern charm that permeates Alabama's Literary Capital.

GULF COAST
Fairhope

Fairhope's bustling boutique scene will sell you things you didn't know you needed. Browse Page & Palette bookstore—bursting with color and character—to find your new inspiration. Indulge in delicious Southern cuisine at cozy cafes or upscale restaurants overlooking Mobile Bay.

Visit the boardwalk at Weeks Bay Reserve, a quaint spot perfect for spotting breathtaking sunsets and local wildlife. You can't miss the vibrant arts scene—galleries like those at the Eastern Shore Arts Center showcase talented local artists and host events year-round. Plan your visit around the Fairhope Arts & Crafts Festival, where creativity truly comes alive before your eyes each March.

Above: ATD/Chris Granger











Above: tea by Myra Beckman, all others ATD/Chris Granger; opposite, top to bottom: ATD/Chris Granger, ATD/Brit Huckabay

mmm, mmm, delicious

BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

ALABAMA IS BLESSED with fertile, dark soil and nutrient-rich waters, so growing, catching and raising ingredients come naturally. That bounty makes it to the table in many forms—as peel-and-eat Gulf shrimp served on a casual beachfront deck, in a daily meat-and-three, as some of the best barbecue in the country, in elevated cuisine that has caught the attention of the James Beard Foundation and in food hubs from Decatur and Birmingham to Auburn and Mobile. Along the way, the state's ethnic foundations have found their way into the state's cookbook, so diners can taste their way through spectacular foodways, where indigenous people relied on corn, pork and seafood; Africans brought okra seeds; the Spanish introduced tomatoes; the French influenced fried oysters; and the British originated bread pudding. For help knowing where to go and what to eat, check out the recently revised 100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama. The options are ever-changing, in concert with new chefs, restaurants, trends and ingredient availability. One thing's for sure, you won't leave the state with an empty stomach.



FIND YOUR GROOVE

Discover the roots of American music in Alabama. BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

Whether you like the heavy beat of rock 'n' roll, the twang of country, the flattened notes of blues or the rhythm of jazz, Alabama's soundtrack holds them all. It's a playlist that mirrors America's because it was here where so many well-known musicians developed their talent or came to record. Today, that legacy is on display—in museums, on tours, in birth homes, on stages and in studios.

The Shoals, comprising Florence, Muscle Shoals, Sheffield and Tuscumbia, in northwest Alabama is the state's tenured epicenter of music. Its legacy extends to early indigenous people who called the Tennessee River, which runs through the area, the "Singing River." But it was in the 1960s that Rick Hall put the region in the spotlight by recording top hits at his **FAME** music studios. His work with Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, coupled with recordings by Rod Stewart, Bob Dylan, Cher, the Rolling Stones and many others at the nearby **Muscle Shoals Sound Studio** forever made this region part of America's music foundation. Sam Phillips' Big River Broadcasting in Florence further cemented the Shoals' place in music history by airing the songs of people he discovered and recorded—Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, B.B. King and others.

For an overview of Alabama's entire music scene, visit the **Alabama Music Hall of Fame** in Tuscumbia. More than 1,200 Alabama musicians are honored through the various exhibits, some of them interactive, such as the 15-foot jukebox and sound booth.

Get a peek into the early childhoods of the "Father of the Blues," W.C. Handy, and country crooner Hank Williams Sr. at their early homes. The **W.C. Handy Birthplace, Museum & Library** in Florence shows off his piano and handwritten sheets of original scores. The **Hank Williams, Sr. Boyhood Home & Museum** in Georgiana whisks visitors back to when he was 12 to 14 years old and learning to play guitar from Black street musician Rufus "Tee-Tot" Payne. Learn more about Hank and his career at the **Hank Williams Museum** in Montgomery.

Once you've made your way through history, come back to the present to hear Alabama sounds during festivals or on the state's many stages. The **Old 280 Boogie** in Waverly is a favorite, as is the **Hangout Music Festival** in Gulf Shores. For live music most any day, check out who's playing at amphitheaters in Huntsville and Birmingham (and elsewhere) or at clubs throughout the state.



Top to bottom: Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Hank Williams Museum

THE YEAR OF
ALABAMA TRAILS

Story by Madison Lasseter
Photography by Chris Granger

Morning mist paints the tree-covered hills far below. It rises from the river, smudging the banks from sight. It cools your cheeks as you snap on your helmet—a "welcome, enjoy," from the day's trail. And you will. Alabama's outdoor trails—including hiking, paddling and mountain biking—offer terrain suited for every ability: boardwalk strolls and steep climbs, lazy waters and side chutes, steady track and gravity plunges. They provide shady spots under live oaks, sun-soaked sandbars and creeks to cool off in mid-visit. And, when the morning mist burns into afternoon sun, then fades into a dusky sky, unload at one of a myriad of campsites tucked within and along those tree-covered hills and wide banks. As you drift to sleep, chirps, croaks and calls crescendo—"welcome, enjoy."











Walls of Jericho, *North* Travel to the northernmost part of the state to experience the Walls of Jericho trail. This notoriously challenging hike begins its 6-mile, round-trip route by carving down a canyon, past creeks and a cemetery, and into its namesake amphitheater, where water cascades and collects and craggy limestone walls rise.

Sipsey Wilderness, *North* The same way a root catches your boot, you're sure to stumble on the Sipsey Wilderness if you look for popular backpacking spots in Alabama. Located in the Bankhead National Forest, the designated wilderness area's trail system is made up of numbered routes. Those interested in carrying in their camping gear can check out Trail 209, a moderate, 6.7-mile, one-way trek.

Lake Lurleen State Park, *Central* Curving alongside a lake, the multi-use trails in Lake Lurleen State Park branch off two trailheads and interconnect, many of them looping. Not in the mood for a long day? The Lakeside Trail obliges, setting off at the South Trailhead and guiding you out for 2 miles to the park's dam, then back the way you came for two more.

Cheaha State Park, *Central* Home to a photo-worthy rock outcropping (that your mom better not see you on!), Cheaha State Park hosts the highest point in the state. It's also home to a series of short, themed hikes, including the Shinrin-Yoku Wellness Trail, meant for sensory forest bathing; the infamously steep Lake Trail; and the Leave No Trace Bigfoot Trail, where you can spot elusive cryptids hidden along the path. Arrive from May to June and you won't be able to miss the pink-tinted blooms of Mountain Laurel, a native flowering shrub that grows throughout the park.

Perdido River Hiking Trail, *Gulf Coast* Snaking through the woods for 17.9 miles, the Perdido River Hiking Trail offers three parking lot access points. Hikers can choose to journey for a day or for multiple, spending the night in a designated campsite beside a campfire on one of the banks along the body of water that gives the trail its name or within the walls of one of the trail's six reservable shelters.

Pinhoti Trail, *North & Central*
Though it rises and falls with north and central Alabama's topography, the Pinhoti Trail maintains a steady course into the hearts of hikers. It's a trail people hear about and then crave to hike, knowing that by putting one boot in front of the other, they're equal parts making history and fulfilling it. The idea for the Pinhoti, a long-distance hiking trail with roughly 170 miles in Alabama—yes, day-trip sections are available—and another 165 in Georgia, was inspired by Benton MacKaye, who envisioned a footpath and spurs that would extend the length of the Appalachian Mountains. Alabama holds the southern end of those old mountains, but the Appalachian Trail has yet to officially come to the state. Nevertheless, the Pinhoti, meaning "turkey home" in Creek, is one of the links, so hikers wanting to traverse more of the Appalachians can pick up the trail at Flagg Mountain.
—By Amity Moore Joyce

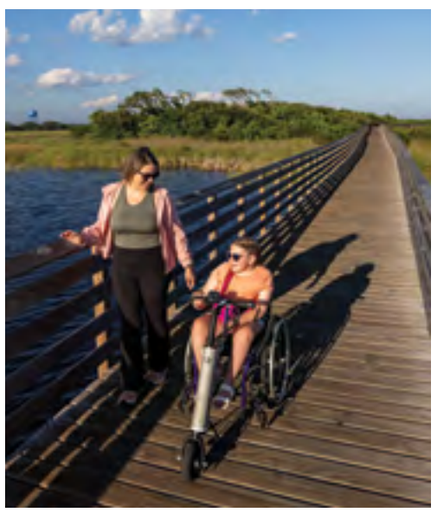
Far left: Mountain Laurel inside Cheaha State Park; **left, from top:** camping on the Pinhoti Trail, inside the Flagg Mountain Tower, hiking the Pinhoti near Piedmont, unpacking at the Duggar Mountain Shelter on the Pinhoti; **this page:** stepping out on the Pinhoti Trail from Flagg Mountain Tower







This page, clockwise from far left: Perdido River Hiking Trail, sandbar at Perdido River, Lake Lurleen State Park, Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail; **opposite, from top:** Conecuh Trail, Bartram National Recreation Trail

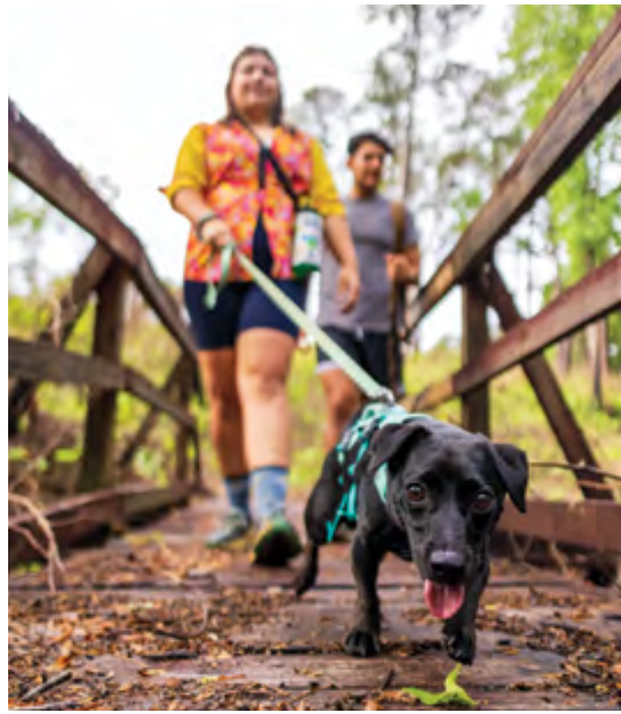




Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail, *Gulf Coast* Equal parts wild and tamed, the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail is a dichotomy that dips you in and out of hushed, oak tree–shaded stretches and the bustle of beach towns. Twenty-eight miles boast nine ecosystems, all along an easy, ADA-accessible path of pavement and boardwalk that's traversed by both alligators and snowbirds. If you want to stay overnight along the path, reserve one of the state park's Outpost campsites, where the platform tents are permanently pitched and running water is available.

Conecuh Trail, *South* A thick bed of longleaf pine needles; the edge of a wooden bridge over a tinkling stream—wherever you can take a seat and take a moment on the Conecuh Trail, do so. Run your hand along knobby cypress. Filter icy water from the much-touted Blue Springs, and snack on a link of smoky Conecuh sausage. Get out your copy of *Carnivorous Plants of the Conecuh National Forest,* courtesy of the Conecuh District Ranger Office, to get educated on the area's captivating flora. A 20-mile trek, the Conecuh Trail offers countless opportunities, including backpacking, to revel in your southern Alabama surroundings.

Bartram National Recreation Trail, *South* Allow towering pines, mushrooms and eye-catching blooms to draw you down the Bartram National Recreation Trail the way they once did for the 1700s-era naturalist, William Bartram, who posthumously lends this path his name. Separate from the longer trail with a similar moniker that runs through the Blue Ridge Mountains, this quiet Alabama route instead showcases 8.5 miles of the Tuskegee National Forest before turning you back.

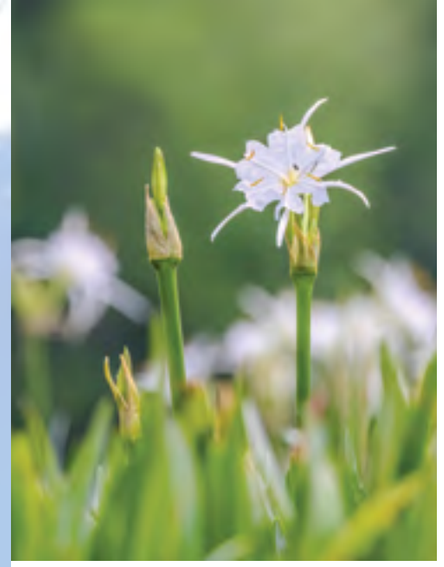


Cahaba River Blueway *Central*

Even if you were to close your eyes and think of the Cahaba River solely in numbers, you'd still be impressed—191 miles of uninterrupted river; 13 fish species found only along those miles; one blueway, waiting to be explored. To experience a (fulfilling) fraction of it all, put in at the boat ramp within the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge for a leisurely 1.2 miles, or plan to paddle in the refuge during the Cahaba Lily Festival to witness the area's celebrated flowers.



[PADDLING]







This page: Cahaba lilies in bloom, Old Cahawba Archaeological Park on the way to the river (you can paddle both the Cahaba and Alabama rivers), on the Cahaba River; **far right:** kayaking among the trees of the Cahaba River; **opposite:** a guided trip inside the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge







Perdido River Canoe Trail, *Gulf Coast* Peer through your binoculars and—what was that? A Swallow-Tailed Kite flying past an Atlantic white-cedar! You might just see an uncommon species or two while you're on the calm 19-mile Perdido River Canoe Trail. Sharing reservation-required shelters and sandy tent spots with the Perdido River Hiking Trail, there's space to stick around for another day of discovery.

Bartram Canoe Trail, *Gulf Coast* If the thought of spending the night with alligators in America's Amazon gets your heart pumping (in a good way), set your sights on the Bartram Canoe Trail. Consisting of an upper and a lower delta system, more than 100 miles of adventure are out there. Find respite on a floating platform or in a perching shelter and, for ADA-accessible options, look to Justins Bay.

Sepulga River Canoe Trail, *South* Glide below picturesque bridges and past natural features on the 19-mile Sepulga River Canoe Trail. Although the route's abundant access points allow you to paddle the trail one section at a time, why not strap your camping gear to your vessel and beach early to search for fossils, sun on a sandbar and then let the lapping of the river lull you to sleep?

Clockwise from bottom left: Justins Bay Sunset and Sunrise Shelter on Bartram Canoe Trail, Sepulga River Canoe Trail (Bull Slough Road, near Andalusia), Harold Banks Canoe Trail

Harold Banks Canoe Trail *Central*

When the only company you have is the flop of a fish, the swoop of a bald eagle, the sun warming your shoulders and the fresh evening scent of Cahaba lilies—you're in good company. While Harold Banks is credited as the first person to solo paddle the full 258 miles of the Tallapoosa River from its origins in Georgia to its conclusion at Fort Toulouse in Alabama, the Harold Banks Canoe Trail consists of just 25 of the scenic miles he paddled. It is sectioned into three parts and is perfect for those who want to set out for time spent with nature. Within the third section, Jay Bird Creek, at 6 miles long (with optional side chutes for added challenge), stands out for those who choose to follow the many strokes of Banks' paddle.





Alabama Scenic River Trail, *South* Launch into history when you push off into the Alabama Scenic River Trail, the longest historic water trail in the country, with the original route clocking in at 650 miles. While one can paddle its entirety from Weiss Lake to Fort Morgan in Mobile Bay, smaller South Alabama stretches—such as the 8.3 miles from Haines Island Park to Silver Creek Park—make a great day trip.

Terrapin Creek, *North* Slip into the gently moving flatwater of Terrapin Creek for a family-friendly paddle with your oft-used kayak or with a rental from Terrapin Outdoor Center. This longstanding establishment is not only an outfitter, but also a launch point. For a longer run, put in at Frank Stewart Bridge and take out at State Road 9 near Old Coloma to complete just over 7 miles.

Limestone County Canoe and Kayak Trail, *North* Known as a year-round paddling escape due to the Elk River's controlled water levels, the Limestone County Canoe and Kayak Trail can be customized in other ways as well. Choose from one of five launch points to adjust your time spent on the 21.9-mile route.

From far left: Limestone County Canoe and Kayak Trail (Elk River Mills Road Boat Launch), Terrapin Creek

Spread: Monte Sano State Park

Monte Sano State Park *North*

Two new trails make a ride at Monte Sano State Park even more enticing. Bluebell Holler and Full Monte are two bike-only downhill flow trails. Bluebell, considered intermediate, drops on a short, narrow stretch between trees, over a few rock jumps and across a boardwalk before presenting riders with an impressive wooden berm to tackle. The more advanced Full Monte drops quickly with lots of tight turns and deep jumps. For an easier ride, try Mist Opportunity. A two-way path, this ride gives mountain bikers an easy 0.8 miles out and, on the way back, a chance to soak in the scenery of the upper part of the park.

Cutchenmine Trail, *North* While the centerpiece of Lake Guntersville State Park is the lake, fat-tire lovers look forward to riding this moderate, out-and-back route. You'll have traveled 4.5 miles by the time you dismount. Stop along the way, though, and let the waters beside this double track recharge you for the climbs ahead.

Coldwater Mountain Bike Trail, *Central* Hold on tightly as you plunge down the two gravity trails of the Coldwater Mountain Bike Trail. Found within a 35-mile trail system, these drops are about 1 mile apiece, with one rated as beginner and one rated as intermediate. Bump, bank and get boisterous.

Oak Mountain State Park, *Central* Does lightning strike twice? It does at this state park, where the one-way, downhill flow Lightning trail can be ridden as many times as your legs can handle. Pair it with the newer Tails expert run, featuring jumps, bumps and gaps, or the new, easier 1.5-mile Room Service trail.

Forever Wild Trails at Beaver Creek, *South* With bike repair stations scattered throughout 14-plus miles of color-coded loops, the Forever Wild Trails at Beaver Creek set mountain bikers up for success. Whip along Dragon's Tail Advanced Loop for 1.25 miles or get your start on the not-as-spooky-as-it-seems Zion Cemetery Ridge, a 2.25-mile beginner route.

Chewacla State Park, *South* Hop on the state park's most customizable multi-use option, the For Pete's Sake trail—8 miles of intermediate-advanced riding, with other cheekily named additions. Then, there's the less than 1-mile Dell's Trail, which offers helmet-mandatory features to thrill expert riders.

Full Loop, *Gulf Coast* Zoom around the 12 miles of mountain biking trails on the University of South Alabama's campus. Considered technical, these trails encourage you to come prepared. Keep your eye out for a jaguar (in mascot form)!

Cannonball Run Mountain Bike Trail Area, *Gulf Coast* Boom! No, that wasn't the ghostly sound of artillery from long ago ringing through the air. It was you, sticking the landing within Cannonball Run, a single-track trail area, estimated at 3 or 4 miles and ever-expanding. Made for experienced mountain bikers, this area sits off the otherwise multi-use trail system of Historic Blakeley State Park.

This page: Chief Ladiga Trail; **opposite, clockwise from top:** Chewacla State Park, Oak Mountain State Park, Lake Guntersville State Park, University of South Alabama's Full Loop

Chief Ladiga Trail *Central*

A long, steady track stretches ahead. Trees become a blur to your right and left as you chug along. You make a sound to warn that you're passing through—not a telltale whistle, but a simple call of "On your left!" While dappled sunlight once filtered down onto railroad track and train cars trundling along it, today, it plays across the faces of those who pedal any of the more than 33 miles of the Chief Ladiga Trail, Alabama's first rails-to-trails project. Connecting Piedmont, on the Alabama-Georgia border, to Anniston, the trail provides an unhurried outlet that anyone can use to delight in the area's mountain views and valleys on their own volition; no passenger car needed. It also connects to the popular Pinhoti Trail.









TRAIL 411

Now that you've plodded, paddled and pedaled across Alabama, you've still only trekked a portion of all the state has in store outdoors! Visit these websites to learn more about Alabama's trails.

Alabama Trails Commission ***alabamarecreationtrails.org***

Alabama Trails Foundation ***alabamatrailsfoundation.org***

Alabama Hiking Trail Society ***hikealabama.org***

Scan the QR code for more info.





From left: Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, Rosa Parks statue, U.S. Space & Rocket Center, The Atta

WHAT'S NEW

Be among the first to visit Alabama's newest tourism draws. BY RICK HARMON

EJI ADDS FREEDOM MONUMENT SCULPTURE PARK TO FAMOUS SITES

The Equal Justice Initiative has added 17-acre Freedom Monument Sculpture Park to what are already two of the country's top civil rights sites, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which honors Black victims of lynchings, and the Legacy Museum, which traces the history of slavery in America and shows its continuing and pernicious effects.

The new sculpture park along the Alabama River includes works by some of today's greatest living artists as well as historical artifacts and the National Monument to Freedom. The 43-foot-tall and more than 150-foot-long monument honors the 4 million enslaved Black people freed after the Civil War with inscriptions of more than 100,000 surnames they had officially registered.

EJI is also erecting sculptures outside its Legacy Museum to honor legendary civil rights leaders. A statue of Rosa Parks has already been unveiled and statues of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Congressman John Lewis should soon join it.

U.S. SPACE & ROCKET CENTER ADDS EXHIBITS

The U.S. Space & Rocket Center has launched the Year of Aviation, celebrated with guest speakers and special shows. Additionally, the center is unveiling and reopening its Rocket Park. The renovated outdoor space allows visitors to admire the rockets that put humans on the moon. The center also has put its Pathfinder space shuttle orbiter back on display, following an extensive renovation. The exhibit recognizes the enormous contributions the Pathfinder made to NASA's Space Shuttle Program, which over 30 years and more than 135 missions launched space telescopes and satellites and contributed to the building of the International Space Station. (For more details, turn to page 147.)



From far left: courtesy of EJI (2); courtesy of U.S. Space & Rocket Center; courtesy of The Atta



THE ATTA LIBRARY OF S.T.E.M. & HISTORY

At the juxtaposition of the past, present, and future, the recently opened Atta offers hands-on science, technology, engineering and math exhibits in a building that dates back to 1889. Curators developed most of the exhibits for ages 12 and up, but the augmented reality sandbox appeals to all ages. (Learn more on page 83.)

IMPROVEMENTS MAKE RICKWOOD FIELD THE TRUE WINNER OF MLB GAME

Major League Baseball came to Birmingham and Rickwood Field, the oldest professional ballpark in the United States, on June 20, 2024, and when the St. Louis Cardinals and San Francisco Giants flew back to their own parks, they left behind major improvements and hope. The teams had played the special MLB game: A Tribute to the Negro Leagues at Rickwood, the former home of the Birmingham Black Barons and where Willie Mays began his professional career. Now, Birmingham officials believe there is a chance Major League Baseball could make it a regular event at the park.

Even if that doesn't happen, the game brought the stadium lasting improvements by adding Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility with ramps and seating; a new videoboard in the outfield; an updated gift shop and museum; padding to the outfield walls; more netting in foul territory; improved playing surfaces; and railings, padding and more netting in the dugouts to make them safer. Guided and self-guided tours of the facility are available during the week. On Saturdays and Sundays, Rickwood Field is open only on game days.





From far left: ATD/Jamie Martin, courtesy of Friends of Rickwood/Jeb Stewart, courtesy of The Star at Uptown

CONECUH RIDGE DISTILLERY HAS THE ALABAMA SPIRIT—LITERALLY

The legislature named Conecuh Ridge Alabama Fine Whiskey as the state's official spirit in 2004 even though it was then made outside the state. Bullock County resident and moonshiner Clyde May originated the recipe, and it's his "special Christmas whiskey" that is recognized in the House Joint Resolution declaring the official Alabama spirit. Now, after years of distilling beyond the state's borders, the whiskey has come home to Conecuh Ridge Distillery, which has opened at 248 Clyde May Way in Troy and is the state's first legal distillery attraction.

Clyde May's spirits, including the original Alabama Style, Straight Bourbon, Straight Rye, Special Reserve Straight Bourbon and Cask Strength, are now made in the same area where the well-known moonshiner grew up and later began producing his popular whiskey shortly after World War II. One of May's original copper stills is even on display.

The more than $15 milllion million facility features a distillery, a tasting room, a bottling center, and a visitor center with restaurant, a gift shop and an area to purchase tour tickets. There are five different types of tours, including one for families with young children and people under 21.

BIRMINGHAM TAKES THE MUSIC OUTSIDE

Each year, millions head to the outdoors for quiet and solitude. Birmingham and its partners are betting almost $50 million that people will head outdoors for the exact opposite.

The Star at Uptown, a new amphitheater in the Druid Hills area, is scheduled to open with its first show in June. The amphitheater, which will hold 9,380 visitors, is expected to be a major source of community events and attract some of the country's hottest musical acts.

HUNTSVILLE LAUNCHES MAJOR MUSIC FESTIVAL

Huntsville has gone back to the future with the South Star Music Festival. The festival, which debuted in September 2024, is expected to become the city's premier musical event in the future, but it hearkens back to the city's Big Spring Jam, which, until it ended in 2011, was one of the state's best music festivals.

The two-day festival, held at John Hunt Park in 2024, featured artists Gwen Stefani, Blink-182, Beck, Sublime, Shinedown, Goo Goo Dolls, Jane's Addiction, Ludacris, Jimmy Eat World, TLC, Juvenile and Gin Blossoms.



Regrettably, Hurricane Helene prevented the second day of shows. Nevertheless, organizers are looking forward to future festivals. Be sure to explore some of the premium experiences being offered, including GA+, VIP and Platinum for extra perks, such as expedited entry, assigned viewing areas and others.

ARDMORE WELCOME CENTER BECOMES MORE WELCOMING

After a multimillion-dollar renovation, Ardmore Welcome Center is far more visitor friendly. The center, off I-65 near the Alabama/Tennessee state line, was closed for reconstruction in December 2022, demolished and rebuilt with a modern, open floorplan; more and nicer bathrooms; a huge video wall featuring places to go and things to do in the state; an assortment of flat-screen TVs; and gigantic photos of attractions to go along with the distribution stands of traditional guides and brochures.

"For some travelers this is going to be their first impression of Alabama, and we wanted it to be a good one," says Tourism Director Lee Sentell, who credits the Alabama Department of Transportation for spearheading the project.

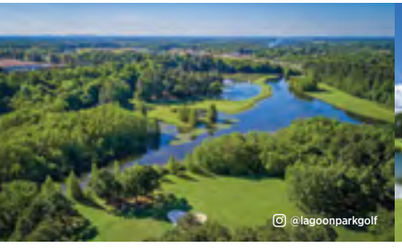
The Lanett Welcome Center, near the Alabama/Georgia state line, was the first Alabama Welcome Center to undergo the new renovations, reopening in January 2022. All eight state welcome centers will be renovated.

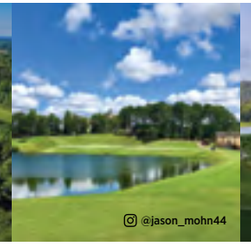
From left: Conecuh Ridge Distillery, Rickwood Field, The Star at Uptown rendering

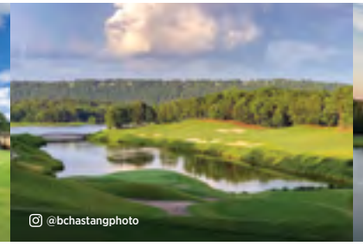


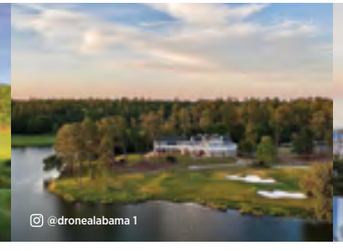
Top: River Course No. 4 at Hampton Cove, Huntsville

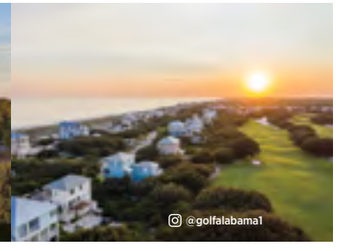
Top: courtesy of RTJ Golf Trail/©2020 Michael Clemmer











ON COURSE WITH RTJ

If you're seeking "runway" tees in combination with beauty and challenge, then haul your clubs to this assortment of courses designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr.

Alabama boasts an amazing collection of the golf architect's best, aggregated into the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. With more than 450 holes on 11 sites, the trail spans the entire state, taking advantage of Alabama's natural topography. Each one offers genuine championship layouts that stand the test of time. Satisfy your need for challenging golf on courses that are playable, not punitive.

Hampton Cove
Huntsville

This northern RTJ Trail gateway is a 54-hole facility with terrain that radically changes from one side of the property to the other. On the picturesque, highly playable Highlands Course, long, waving grasses frame rolling terrain and beautiful bentgrass greens. The River Course is the only Robert Trent Jones layout in the world designed without a single bunker. Water is in play here and on the Short Course, where alternating tees allow golfers to swing every club in their bag.

The Shoals
Muscle Shoals

Two 18-hole championship courses lie between the Wheeler and Wilson dams on the Tennessee River. The Fighting Joe was the first RTJ Trail course to break 8,000 yards, and it can play long (really long, if you play the wrong set of tees), but this course is good, straightforward golf. The 18th green overlooking Wilson Lake will distract you with its beauty, if not its treachery. Also 8,000 yards, The Schoolmaster is a shot-maker's course with narrower fairways and demanding approaches to well-protected bentgrass greens. It's hard to beat the beauty that the 18th holds on the high bluffs over the river, but the waterfall guarding the second green sure comes close.

Grand National
Auburn/Opelika

Robert Trent Jones Sr. is on record saying that Grand National, voted the No. 3 public golf facility in Alabama in 2023 by *Golfweek's* nationwide network of raters, was the single greatest natural site for golf he had ever seen. Today, 32 of the 54 holes that have been developed into the Links, Lake and Short courses drape along Lake Saugahatchee's filigreed shores. Renovated in 2022, the Short Course now has all new tees and TifEagle Ultradwarf greens. Grand National will host the Couples Classic in November 2025.

Highland Oaks, *Dothan*

Although three, nine-hole championship courses, plus the nine-hole Short Course, make up this facility, it's the Highlands/Magnolia combination that *Golf Digest* once named as one of the nation's Great Value courses. That 18 includes Magnolia's 416-yard fifth, where a split-level fairway offers an option off the tee. Marshwood's behemoth par-5 sixth stretches 701 yards from the tops. If you haven't played here in recent years, look forward to TifEagle Ultradwarf greens and a redesigned practice area. PGA Tour Canada's Mackenzie Tour Q-School will be held in March 2025, and the Korn Ferry 2nd Stage Q-School is scheduled for September 2025.

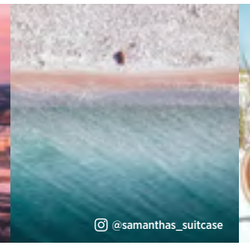
Top: The beaches of Gulf Shores & Orange Beach

GULF COAST

On the beach or in the bay, make Alabama's southern shores your backdrop for fun.

Sand sticking to your heels from a stroll on the shore; a saltwater sheen left behind by teal waters; the briny scent of the sea as you cast a line (or scan a menu), hoping for a red snapper. Along the Gulf of Mexico, every activity is colored by your proximity to the coast. Whirl high above The Wharf on its flashing Ferris wheel in Orange Beach. Pedal under sage-hued Spanish moss in Gulf Shores' Gulf State Park. Peer through binoculars at the kaleidoscopic inhabitants of the Audubon Bird Sanctuary in Dauphin Island. Wander into the muted depths of the battleship-gray USS Alabama, resting proudly near Mobile. And see the Foley area from a whole new angle as you ride the Rollin' Thunder roller coaster, a blue squiggle in the sky. Vacations are vibrant in Alabama's Gulf Coast region.



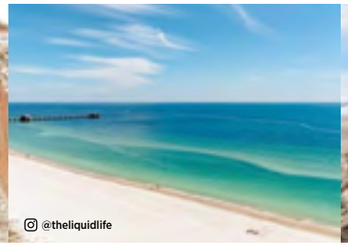














COASTAL PEARLS

Treasures to discover on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

BY MADISON LASSETER



SHORELY UNIQUE

FAIRHOPE TEA PLANTATION, the state's only tea farm and one of the nation's oldest, welcomes visitors for afternoon tea—not morning tea. Owners Donnie and Lottie Barrett recognize and have shared they are "not morning people." So, afternoon tea it is! A visit to the working farm includes a cup of homegrown black or green tea, a discussion of how to grow tea and a how-to for making the perfect cuppa. Reservations are required.

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM OF THE GULF OF MEXICO Rain pounds down and the sea roars around you as you hold fast at the helm. Making it safely to shore, you step aside and let someone else steer the ship simulator. The National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico is multiple decks of interactive fun in Mobile, and its penthouse attraction, Take the Helm, allows you to virtually captain a tugboat or a patrol boat on local waters.

GRAHAM CREEK NATURE PRESERVE Have your nature identification apps ready because Graham Creek Nature Preserve in Foley is filled with flora and fauna—some of the flora being fillable. Looking at you, pitcher plant! Hike the 1.2-mile Pitcher Plant Loop to capture photos of the endangered, carnivorous plants. Or, take advantage of the park's newly added kayak rental system to paddle and hear the calls of creek-dwelling fauna.

From left: ATD/Chris Granger (2), courtesy of Bellingrath Gardens

Coastal Cuisine

Follow the swell of the shoreline—from Bayou La Batre to Orange Beach—to get a literal taste of all the Alabama Gulf Coast has to offer. Start on the deck of Bayou La Batre's **Murder Point Oysters** for bivalves that the family-owned farm boasts are full, rich and creamy. If you're in the area for New Year's Eve, head to Mobile to sink your teeth into a soft, sticky MoonPie, readily available during **MoonPie over Mobile**. And if you miss Mardi Gras season, visit **Three Georges Fine Southern Chocolates** on Dauphin Street in Mobile. Rumor is that they might start making the marshmallow-in-the-middle treats year-round. Prance over to the **Pink Pony Pub** in Gulf Shores to order a round of coconutty bushwackers. And, when you're in Orange Beach, the Red Snapper Capital of the World, you've got to order the famous fish from **The Gulf** *(below)* in the form of its garlicky snapper BLT.



From left: Fairhope Tea Plantation, The Gulf, Bellingrath Gardens & Home



HOME & GARDEN TOUR

Take a break from the sand and seagrass to walk among azaleas and roses at **Bellingrath Gardens and Home** in Theodore. In addition to wandering the 65 acres of gorgeous plantings—something is always blooming—step inside the English Renaissance home to admire the German silver countertops, original furnishings and a collection of artist Edward Boehm's porcelain works.

ON THE BAY. PELICANS PERCH ON PILINGS; LINES JERK AND HOOKS ARE SET; JUBILEES SPLASH FORTH. THE PIERS REACHING INTO MOBILE BAY (AND THE VISITORS WHO WALK THEM) SEE IT ALL—FROM MEAHER STATE PARK'S FISHING PIER IN SPANISH FORT, TO MAY DAY PARK'S RECENTLY UPDATED PIER IN DAPHNE, TO THE LIVELY FAIRHOPE MUNICIPAL PIER.

DAY TRIP TO DAUPHIN ISLAND

Sure, you could drive down to Dauphin Island, but where would the fun be in that? (Admittedly, the fun would be in passing Alabama's bayside gems along Dauphin Island Parkway and Alabama's Coastal Connection. But for the sake of this itinerary, ignore that!)

Take a ride aboard the **Mobile Bay Ferry** instead to sail from the Fort Morgan Loading Dock over to the 14-mile-long island. As you push off into Mobile Bay and an American flag catches the wind overhead, it's easy to romanticize this picturesque mode of transportation. Once you dock, head to **Historic Fort Gaines**, Fort Morgan's parallel. With a tunnel to traipse through, occasional blacksmith demonstrations and a self-guided tour around everything from cannons to a kitchen courtyard, there's plenty to keep you engaged. The same can be said for its next-door neighbor, the **Alabama Aquarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab**, where tanks, interactive exhibits and learning opportunities abound.

Back near the ferry dock, grab a barbecue sandwich from **BGH Cafe** and enjoy it as you laze on the public **Dauphin Island Beach**. Or, chow down on your way to the **Audubon Bird Sanctuary**, where you can meander its trail system in search of winged visitors. Then it's back to the Dauphin Island Loading Dock to return to the mainland via ferry after a day filled with forts, fins, feathers and lots of fun.

48 Hours in Beach Towns

The tug of a sea breeze in your hair; the thump of the Gulf against a hull; people-watching from a beachside cafe patio; and a swirl of seafood pasta on your fork—consider these the snapshots of a vacation spent in Foley, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. **BY MADISON LASSETER**



Friday

EARLY AFTERNOON It's inevitable: You realize you left something at home. Don't worry, **Tanger Outlets** in Foley has you covered. Stop at this medley of coastal-colored shops selling beach essentials, like name-brand sunglasses, bathing suits and more. Then, pivot fully into fun mode at the **Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo** in Gulf Shores. Plan for your two to three hours here to include one of the zoo's animal adventures, such as the South American Adventure with swinging sloths.

LATE AFTERNOON En route to your accommodations, pause at **Burro Azul**, located near a Gulf Shores public beach access, for queso-coated fries and platters of fish tacos. After 4 p.m., check into one of **Gulf State Park**'s lodging options. The Lodge is perfect for families that love classic resort amenities and prefer hotel stays. Additional accommodations are available in the form of lakeside cabins or cottages, two of which are ADA-accessible.

A TOAST TO THE BUSHWACKER!

The Alabama coast's signature drink—the Bushwacker—turns 50 this year! Don't know what all the fuss is about? Then it's time to try the boozy cocktail of rum, coffee liqueur, creme de cacao, coconut cream, ice cream or milk, and ice. Some versions are a milkshake; others are more akin to chocolate milk.

EVENING Nature acts as both a muse and an art supply when your crew watercolors Wolf Bay during a private **Paddle and Paint Kayak Excursion** booked in advance through the **Orange Beach Wind and Water Learning Center**. Once you've worked up an appetite again, head to Lucy Buffett's **LuLu's** in Gulf Shores, where live music and fried crab claws accompany your change in latitude, change in attitude. One of the best things about dining here, particularly with kids, is the thoughtful allergy-aware menu.

Saturday

MORNING You're on vacation, so a breakfast as sugary as the shoreline looks is in order. **City Donut** in Orange Beach has a bakery case full of cakey, glazed, powdered and crunchily topped sweets. *USA Today* readers also voted it as the No. 1 donut shop in the country last year in its "10Best" survey, so it's likely the sweets won't make it to the beach, which is where you're headed today. Public accesses in Orange Beach and Gulf Shores put you on the path to Alabama's amazing white sands and turquoise Gulf waters. When you sign up for a **Sand Castle University** class, there's no need to lug shovels and buckets to the beach; the instructor provides the gear and instruction for this unique course.



AFTERNOON Show off pictures of your creation over craft beers and sodas at **Big Beach Brewing Company** in Gulf Shores, then walk over to **The Galway Irish Public House** for booze-battered fish and chips served with malt-vinegar aioli. With outdoor seating at both locations, a little lingering sand won't hurt. Or, if you're returning to The Lodge for a nap before 2 p.m., first visit **Foodcraft** onsite for a piled-high po'boy.

If you're not napping and still have energy to explore, throw on a sun shirt and familiarize yourself with the local flora and fauna by setting out on the **Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail** or by visiting the park's **Nature Center.**

EVENING In order to enjoy a sunset cruise, an early dinner at The Wharf in Orange Beach is next on the docket. **Villaggio Grille**'s menu is a must-try, featuring shrimp-studded pasta, wood-fired oysters and a decked-out seafood tower. For dessert, peruse the rainbow rows of saltwater taffy in **Yabba's Wacky Snack Shack** in Gulf Shores before taking in the tranquility of a **sunset sail**, available from several charters. The experience will surely start to lull your crowd toward sleep.

Prefer to rally on your last night of vacation? Feel free to stay up and celebrate: The bushwacker—the Gulf Coast's signature drink—turns 50 this year! So, tuck the little ones in bed and hop aboard your pre-booked **Original Bushwacker Tour** for an evening of sips that are as creamy as they are heady.

STAY AWARE OF DAILY SURF CONDITIONS

Text 888777 when arriving to stay in the know. Text "stop" when leaving to no longer receive texts.

FROM FAR LEFT: CHEERS FROM THE ORIGINAL BUSHWACKER TOUR, EASY ACCESSIBILITY TO THE NEW LAKESIDE CABINS INSIDE GULF STATE PARK, AL FRESCO DINING AT COASTAL ORANGE BEACH, THE AQUA CHASER AT OWA TROPIC FALLS, A GIRAFFE ADVENTURE AT ALABAMA GULF COAST ZOO







All images: ATD/Chris Granger

Sunday

MORNING You can't leave the coast without one last look at the water and one more bite of seafood. **Coastal Orange Beach** has you covered on both accounts. Plop down at a waterfront table and order the crab cakes benedict and the signature cinnamon roll topped with caramel icing to share. Drive to Foley and your last hurrah at **OWA Parks & Resort**, where water- and theme-park rides tower and whirl.

AFTERNOON OWA's Tropic Falls begs you to stay for more than just a morning. The amusement park presents 23 rides, including Rollin' Thunder, Twister and Air Racer, plus another reason to don your swimsuit—a water park with a convertible glass roof. Cool off in the lazy river, or race a friend or sibling down the Aqua Chaser. Plenty of other watery rides keep you happily soaked and smiling for photos, bringing your stay in Alabama's beach towns to a scrapbook-worthy conclusion.

Search Alabama.Travel to learn more about Foley, Gulf Shores or Orange Beach.

48 Hours in Mobile

Enjoy an immersive experience exploring the Port City's colorful history, diverse cultural tapestry and distinguished culinary delights.

BY BRITTAIN STOREY



Friday

AFTERNOON While a guided tour would give you the best insights into the history of Mobile—and there are such tours available—you can go it alone at your own pace. Begin your tour of the city with a leisurely stroll through any of the city's seven National Register Historic Districts, each brimming with historical markers and architecture. Pick up information, including a driving tour brochure, from the Mobile Historic Development Commission for background on the districts: **Church Street, Lower Dauphin (LODA), Oakleigh Garden District, Old Dauphin Way, Leinkauf, Ashland Place** and **De Tonti Square**. Stately antebellum homes define the charming Historic Oakleigh District, while diverse architecture is the hallmark of Leinkauf District, Ashland Place District and De Tonti Square District. Eighteenth-century French settlers left their mark in the Church Street District, home to a nearly full-scale replica of **Colonial Fort Condé. Dauphin Street**, named for King Louis XIV in 1711, buzzes with art, people browsing one-of-a-kind shops in **LODA** and historical architecture in **Old Dauphin Way**. In the Church Street District? Don't miss the **Mobile Carnival Museum**, where exhibits interpret the vibrant history of America's original Mardi Gras celebration, which was first held in 1703.

EVENING Unwind from the day over a decadent meal at **LeMoyne's Chophouse**, one of downtown's newest fine-dining restaurants. Dive into the chilled seafood tower, stacked with lobster, shrimp, oysters and mussels, and paired with Champagne mignonette, Meyer lemon preserves and crème fraîche. For the main course, choose from any of the perfectly seared beef cuts, or scan the other entrees for more gastronomic temptations. The tender, herb-crusted grouper melts in your mouth. Alternatively, go to **Red or White Mobile**, equal parts wine shop and restaurant, where 2024 Best Chef of the South semifinalist Arwen Rice performs her culinary magic.

LOCAL FAVORITES

As executive chef at Red or White Mobile, Arwen Rice develops the restaurant's culinary program, which complements the wine program and includes wood-fired pizzas, boards heaped with meats or cheeses (or both), and light bites—which is where the bacon-wrapped dates and smoked brisket pate are found. Yum!





FROM LEFT: CHEF ARWEN RICE FROM RED OR WHITE, FORT CONDÉ, AFRICATOWN HERITAGE HOUSE, USS ALABAMA

All images: ATD/Chris Granger

Saturday

MORNING Gear up for a full day in one of the South's oldest cities with a wholesome Southern breakfast. Savor an order of gouda grits and Alabama's own Conecuh sausage with a side of occasional live music at **Bob's Downtown Restaurant**, a tiny, old-school diner with sidewalk seating. Or, grab an invigorating butter pecan coffee to go from **Yellowhammer Coffee** and sip it while touring **Historic Blakeley State Park**, the Port of Mobile and Mobile Bay by boat. Board the **Delta Explorer** from Blakeley Dock and cruise, via the Tensaw and Mobile rivers, to the bay and bustling port. It's an interesting view with ships coming and going, including Carnival Cruise Line's cruise ships.

NOON A morning on the water calls for a lunch spread of succulent seafood. Head to the **Causeway**, a 7-mile waterfront stretch where you'll find some of the best seafood restaurants in coastal Alabama and amazing views of the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta. Take your pick from **Felix's Fish Camp, BlueGill Restaurant, Original Oyster House, Ralph & Kacoo's, Ed's Seafood Shed** and **R&R Seafood**. Find your fill of Gulf-fresh favorites at any of these local gems.

AFTERNOON For the past few years, Mobile has been in the national news due to the discovery of the Clotilda, the last known slave ship to come to America. To learn more about the ship and the people on it, visit **Africatown Heritage House**, home to **"Clotilda: The Exhibition."** It is a stop on the **Dora Franklin Finley African-American Heritage Trail**, a self-guided attraction that includes a narrated audio tour of the trail's more than 40 sites highlighting the people and places that contributed to Mobile's Black legacy.

EVENING Pull up a chair and sit down to an elegant meal at **Dumbwaiter Restaurant**, where Southern cooking is refined. Last year, Distinguished Restaurants of North America named this beautiful eatery among the best fine-dining spots in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Inside the restaurant, local artisans and tradesmen crafted an interior that reflects the best of historic Mobile. Menu highlights, subject to change, include the half-baked oysters; deep fried pimento; and the "hook to table" entree of fresh fish, stone-ground cheddar grits, bacon-caramelized green beans and Conecuh shrimp cream sauce.

Sunday

MORNING Wake up to a taste of Mobile's French influence at **Mo'Bay Beignet Co.** Decadent, powdered sugar puffs pair deliciously with carefully curated coffees. Order the pecan praline roast, for example—yum! Then, make your way to the **USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park** for a firsthand experience of what life was like at sea aboard the iconic USS Alabama. Round out your visit at the park with a self-guided tour of the USS Drum, a World War II submarine.

AFTERNOON Extend your stay at the memorial park to enjoy lunch. **Stevie's Kitchen** is a beloved Mobile restaurant, known for simple, uncomplicated soups and sandwiches. Its primary location is in Midtown, but Stevie's opened a second location last year inside the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park. Choose your handheld: sandwich, burger, hot dog or pizza. Or, since you're right on Mobile Bay, go for a cup of the award-winning seafood gumbo.

Search Alabama.Travel to learn more about Mobile.



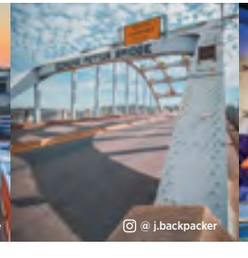
All aboard! Amtrak passenger rail returns this spring with twice daily service from Mobile to New Orleans. Experience an unforgettable and picturesque journey along the communities celebrating Gulf Coast culture, cuisine and attractions. Go to Amtrak.com for more information.

Top: Civil Rights Memorial outside the Civil Rights Memorial Center

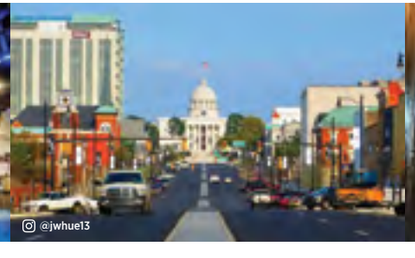
...UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATERS
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR





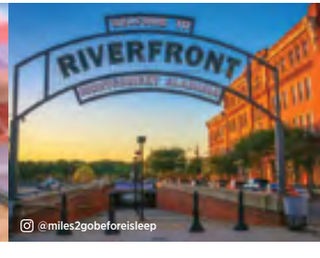














Animal Adventures

Roll down your window and drive through Alabama Safari Park, situated south of Montgomery in Hope Hull. Here, you can interact with zebra, camels, antelope, llamas and watusi cattle, among other exotic beasts. Get out of your car for experiences at the petting area, kangaroo walk-about, lemur island and at the newest addition—the Giant Anteater Exhibit.

From left: Alabama Safari Park, Fort Toulouse, The Atta



SOUTHERN SAMPLER

Alabama's South region is a diverse blend of people, places and stories. Build your itinerary to include these stops to deepen your appreciation. BY LAURA MCGILL

From left: ATD/Chris Granger (2), courtesy of The Atta

EAT A TV DINNER

Dothan

For a menu that is comfortable, not complicated, make a reservation at **KBC**. From the meat-centric Butcher's Breakfast at Saturday's brunch to the Southern Fried Quail for supper, "Top Chef" winner Kelsey Barnard Clark serves up gorgeously plated, wholesome food with genuine hospitality.

STITCH IN TIME

Boykin & Camden

The isolation created by a bend in the Alabama River and later a federal land purchase led to a sustained community in the rural Gee's Bend area. Here, the descendants of the enslaved people who once worked the cotton plantation owned by Joseph Gee cultivated the art of quilt making. Start your journey at the **Gee's Bend Welcome Center**.

WANDER THE WEEVIL WAY

Enterprise

The boll weevils that threatened the city's cotton crops in 1915 are celebrated for forcing farmers to diversify into peanuts, soy and alfalfa, thus ushering in new means of prosperity. Statues of these pests-turned-ambassadors—whimsical 6-foot-tall tributes to bartenders, firefighters and power company linemen—make for amusing selfie stops.

BRING BINOCULARS TO THE BLACK BELT

Bladon Springs

Bladon Springs State Park is one of 32 sites on the **Alabama Black Belt Birding Trail**, which connects through 11 counties mostly in the state's South region. The park's remote and quiet 357 acres appeal to a variety of birds, including Yellow-Throated Warblers, Orchard Orioles, Wood Thrushes and Summer Tanagers.

Lesson Plans

JULE COLLINS SMITH MUSEUM OF FINE ART, *Auburn:* Weighing more than 1,000 pounds, 17 feet in length and suspended from the ceiling, the stunning "Amber Luster," a Dale Chihuly chandelier, is a colorful and jaw-dropping first impression of the museum. Continue your visit through the curated galleries to see the museum's permanent collection, which includes 18th-century Audubon prints and several famous post-modernist paintings, and temporary exhibits. Conclude your tour in the gift shop, where you can purchase items crafted by regional makers.

ALABAMA BLACK BELT HERITAGE AREA, *19 counties:* This recently designated area is home to 10 National Historic Landmarks, including the **Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church** in Selma. The church was the headquarters for the Selma Voting Rights Movement and the starting point for three attempted Selma to Montgomery marches. Additionally, the area has three National Park Service initiatives, including the **Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site** in Tuskegee.

FORT TOULOUSE/FORT JACKSON, *Wetumpka:* At a strategic point near the forks of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, the site was a French fort from 1717 to 1763. With the War of 1812, Americans built a new fort on the site. Here, in August of 1814, the Treaty of Fort Jackson was signed, giving 15 million acres of Creek lands to the U.S. government. Time your visit for one of the fort's events to see reenactors bring this history to life.

THE ATTA LIBRARY OF S.T.E.M. & HISTORY *Abbeville*

When a dancing, talking and wheeling robot greets you, you know you're onto something novel. Such is the case at this new center for technology, science and math learning. Engage with hands-on exhibits, hear inspiring stories from citizens and navigate a touch-screen timeline of regional history.





AN URBAN ESCAPE

Need a break from museums and historical sites? Step into Montgomery Whitewater Park and unleash your outdoorsy side, without leaving the city. BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

Since it opened in 2023, Montgomery Whitewater Park has been making waves, both literally and figuratively. *Time* named it one of the World's Greatest Places 2024 for the way it has engaged the entire community, particularly children and women of color, and its state-of-the-art water conservation methods. The Olympic Team Trials were held here. Finally, it's the newer of only two such venues in the United States.

Here, visitors can paddle like Olympians or simply dip a paddle for the first time, thanks to two man-made, world-class, recirculating whitewater courses. You can sip suds on the patio of Eddy's Restaurant and Bar while overlooking the Class III-IV whitewater action, practice your toe hooks or cross throughs on a 10- to 12-foot-high bouldering wall, listen to live music, play trivia and more. And, now, thanks to some additions that opened in late fall 2024, you can hike and mountain bike more than 3 miles of shady, multi-use trails or take to the skies on a ropes course.

The facility's landsports manager, Wilson Calhoun, is excited about the new activities. "The trails are dirt, not paved," he notes. "They wind through the trees and are nature trails." He adds that the trails are free for hiking and biking, but if you don't have a mountain bike, no problem: Montgomery Whitewater offers them for rent. The trails are also dog friendly, so long as your favorite canine is leashed.

The ropes course features seven ziplines and 16 elements. "It's right up next to the Alabama River, in the canopy of the trees overlooking the river," Wilson adds. "The views are nice."

Still, it's the two whitewater courses—perfect for rafting, kayaking, canoeing or stand-up paddleboarding—that anchor the roughly 120-acre park near Maxwell Air Force Base and I-65. One course is truly an Olympic-style competition course, where Olympians, including Evy Leibfarth, have trained. She is a member of the U.S. Olympic Team for canoe and kayak slalom who competed in an Olympic trial here and earned her spot in last year's Summer Games in Paris. The second is a less-challenging course for amateurs that flows more gently.

To be clear, Montgomery Whitewater is not a waterpark with slides and splash pads. It's an outdoors-focused center for people to learn and enjoy outdoor skills, such as whitewater paddling, bouldering, ziplining and more. It's a space that makes outdoor activities inviting and accessible to everyone.

This page: ATD/Chris Granger









EXPERIENCE THE "UNBOLLWEEVIBLE" IN ENTERPRISE!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE HISTORIC RAWLS, WHOVILLE CELEBRATION, FARMERS MARKET "BO" WEEVIL, EYE CATCHERS ARTWORKS AND POP ART STUDIO

Welcome to Enterprise, where every season offers "UnBollweevible" experiences! Whether you're here for a weekend or longer, you'll always find something exciting going on. Explore history, local restaurants, boutiques, parks, historic downtown and playful boll weevil statues. From festivals and sporting events to a year-round farmers market, Enterprise is the perfect place to shop, dine and be entertained!

FOLLOW THE WEEVILS: From Pests to Ambassadors
Discover whimsical 6-foot-tall boll weevil statues along the Weevil Way trail! Once crop destroyers, these statues now celebrate the resiliency and fun spirit of Enterprise. Capture "UnBollweevibly" fun photos and tag #weevilway. For your guide to all things weevil, visit **weevilway.com**.

YEAR-ROUND FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
Enterprise is buzzing with excitement all year long! From the world's smallest St. Patrick's Day Parade and the Boll Weevil Fall Festival to the Farmers Market Pumpkin Day, the Alabama Sweet Tea Festival, and the whimsical Whoville Celebration, no matter when you visit, you'll find a festival or event that makes your trip truly UnBollweevible! For these events and more, visit **visitenterprise.com**.

EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS IN ENTERPRISE
Step outside and have some fun! Discover scenic trails, cool off at the splash pad or enjoy a picnic in the sun. With playgrounds, a dog park, disc golf, and courts for tennis and pickleball, the city parks, especially Johnny Henderson Family Park, are packed with UnBollweevible adventures for everyone! To find the fun, visit **rec.enterpriseal.gov**.

SHOP AND DINE IN HISTORIC DOWNTOWN
Stroll through a vibrant Historic Downtown District, where unique boutiques, local dining, and lively entertainment await. Don't miss the Farmers Market, offering fresh farm-to-table produce, homemade treats and local crafts year-round. Whether you want to shop, taste, or explore, visit **enterprisedowntown.com** to find all the UnBollweevible things to do in downtown Enterprise!

48 Hours in Montgomery

Montgomery offers a glimpse into American civil rights history, with more sites on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail than any other city in the nation. While it's true that Alabama's capital has been voted one of America's most historic cities, it also keeps things fresh with new attractions and openings. **BY ALICIA NOBLE**



Friday

EARLY AFTERNOON Bide your time downtown, picking and choosing what suits your interest and timeframe. (It's hard to do it all in one afternoon!) Among the highlights is the **Alabama Capitol**, where the Confederacy was created, where Jefferson Davis was sworn in as its president and where Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "How Long, Not Long" speech. Follow King's story and the push for civil rights to the **Dexter Avenue Parsonage**, where King and his family lived while he was minister of **Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church**. Carry on to the **Rosa Parks Museum**, the **Freedom Rides Museum**, and finally the **Civil Rights Memorial Center**. If, however, the Civil War fascinates you, leave the Capitol and head to the **First White House of the Confederacy**, where Davis and his family lived.

AFTERNOON Check into the **Trilogy Hotel Montgomery** at 3 p.m. (or later) and take a moment to appreciate this "intimate new expression of Southern hospitality." The rooms are equal parts sophistication and comfort. (Read more about the hotel on page 9.) Pause and unpack before enjoying part two of your history lesson, picking up where you left off or following a new interest, which could lead to the **Hank Williams Museum**; **Old Alabama Town**, a collection of early 19th- and 20th-century buildings that have been preserved to showcase what life was like in Alabama during those times; and **The Mooseum**, a great stop for kids and those hankering to know about the state's cattle industry.

EVENING Refresh back at the hotel, then walk just a few steps out the front door to **Central**, an upscale yet laid-back restaurant housed in an 1890s former grocery warehouse. Order the signature dish, 1895 Pork & Beans—a twist on a Southern favorite. The culinary team here values local, seasonal ingredients, including fresh Gulf seafood, greens, meats and more, so you can be sure that with each bite, you're getting a true taste of Alabama. Enjoy a post-dinner stroll to **Riverfront Park**, catching the roar of the crowd cheering on the Montgomery Biscuits, a Minor League Baseball team of the Tampa Bay Rays; listening to a concert at the amphitheater; or simply appreciating the quiet flow of the Alabama River.

GET ON BOARD

One of the sites on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, the Rosa Parks Museum occupies the spot where this courageous woman was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white woman. The museum, which holds the bus and other artifacts, examines Parks' story and how her actions impacted the Civil Rights Movement.

Saturday

MORNING Why not start your morning with a cup of java *Food & Wine Magazine* once named the best coffee in Alabama? Sip it at **Prevail Union**, found inside the **Kress Building**, a renovated 1920s-era building that has become another Montgomery site dedicated to educating visitors about past racial inequality. Next, see the **Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice**, with its hundreds of hanging, 6-foot-long, steel monuments bearing the names of Black people who were lynched throughout the United States between 1877 and 1950. From here, take a free shuttle (it runs every 15 minutes) or walk just under a mile to **The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration**, which examines the effect slavery still has on modern society. Buying advance tickets to both sites is recommended since many of the tours sell out daily. Don't miss the newest EJI addition: **Freedom Monument Sculpture Park** sits along the banks of the Alabama River where countless enslaved individuals embarked on their arduous journey in America. Original artifacts belonging to those enslaved Black people create a tangible connection to their lives, offering an interactive way to honor their extraordinary courage and resilience.

NOON It's been a heavy morning, so tuck into some comfort food—Southern-style meat and vegetables at **Pannie-George's Kitchen**. EJI founder Bryan Stevenson loved the food at this Auburn restaurant so much, he convinced the owners to open another near The Legacy Museum. For lighter fare, **Chris' Famous Hotdogs** serves hot dogs covered in its secret chili, just as it's been doing for more than 100 years.

More than 10% of the historical sites designated on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail are located in Montgomery.



From far left: ATD/Brit Huckabay, ATD/Chris Granger (3)

AFTERNOON Duck into a museum for the afternoon. The **Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts**, **The Scott & Zelda Fitzgerald Museum** and the **Hank Williams Museum** (if you didn't go on Friday) share some of the city's arts and entertainment background. Prefer to stay outside? Then visit the **Montgomery Zoo**. In addition to animals ranging from elephants to lemurs, you'll find a petting zoo, parakeet cove and an opportunity to feed giraffes.

EVENING Looking for an unrushed, upscale dinner? Eat elegantly at **Ravello Ristorante**. Chef Eric Rivera's Amalfi Coast of Italy-inspired menu has made it a city favorite. If you want something casual, try **Brenda's Bar-B-Q Pit,** a pick-up-only barbecue joint. Started in 1942, this restaurant was a source of comfort (and great food) for the city's famed Civil Rights Movement. It has no tables, but it does have some of the best barbecue in Alabama. Time your dinner to ensure you make curtain call at the **Alabama Shakespeare Festival**. It's the state theater, one of the top Shakespeare theaters in the country and has earned a national reputation for its original productions, plays and musicals.





FROM LEFT: ROSA PARKS MUSEUM, MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HANK WILLIAMS' FAMOUS CADILLAC INSIDE THE HANK WILLIAMS MUSEUM, SHUCKING OYSTERS AT THE CAPITOL OYSTER BAR

Sunday

MORNING Another morning in the "Vibrant New South City" brings an opportunity to indulge your sense of adventure and desire for physical activity. The new **Montgomery Whitewater Park** offers two whitewater courses for paddlers of varying skill levels, plus nature trails for hiking and biking, a ropes course, a climbing wall, and a restaurant for refueling. (Turn to page 84 for more details.)

AFTERNOON Stick around the **Alabama River** by renting a pontoon boat at the **Capitol Oyster Bar**, where you can later dine on excellent seafood and hear top-notch blues acts.

Search Alabama.Travel to learn more about Montgomery.

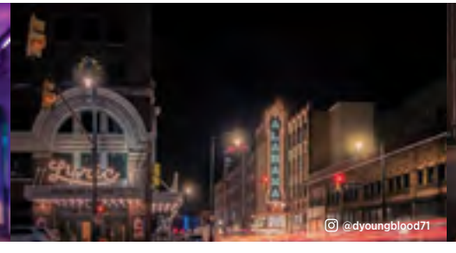
Top: Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum

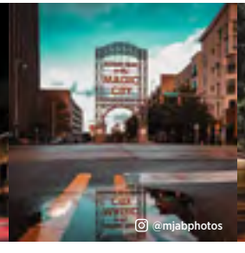
CENTRAL

Center your focus on all the state's heartland has to offer.

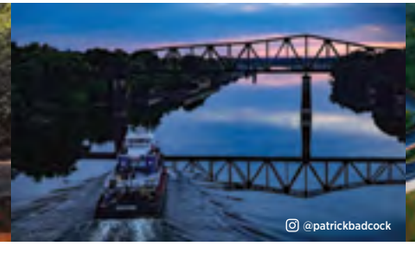
Top to bottom, Alabama is packed with adventure. Little is tucked away, out of sight, out of mind, in the middle. In fact, with the state's highest point poking into the sky, you can't miss the Central region—and you shouldn't. Hike to the aforementioned elevation on Cheaha Mountain. Keep your adrenaline pumping with a spin around Talladega Superspeedway. Or, paddle down the Cahaba River. Water-related and water-adjacent activities abound, with lakeside hikes in big cities like Tuscaloosa and in small towns surrounding Lake Martin. And, of course, with civil rights history ready to be explored in Anniston, plus Birmingham restaurants serving trailblazing fare, central Alabama's indoor pursuits prove just as worthy of your attention.

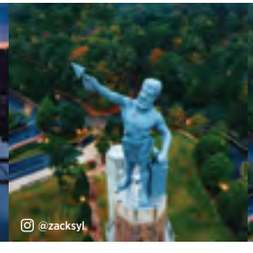
















CENTRAL TREASURES

Treat yourself to the variety of ways that make a visit to Alabama's midlands memorable.

BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE

NATURAL ESCAPES

Lovers of the outdoors find plenty to admire in Central Alabama's varied landscapes. Plan an adventure at **Moss Rock Preserve** in Hoover, where hiking trails meander past rocky outcroppings (and the giant boulders attract climbing youngsters like moths to a flame), alongside babbling streams or into hidden valleys. For stargazers, **Cheaha State Park** in Delta is one of Alabama's Starry Skies South locations, meaning it's a location largely free of light pollution where people can see more stars, more clearly. At the other end of the Earth, the subterranean part, there's **Majestic Caverns** in Childersburg. Join a guided tour to go underground and see the intricate stalactites, stalagmites and other formations.

Historic Highlights

Find a solemn, but important, site in the reshaping of America at **Horseshoe Bend National Military Park**. This historic landmark commemorates the pivotal Battle of Horseshoe Bend, where General Andrew Jackson's troops defeated the Creek Nation. That defeat resulted in the ceding of lands by the Creeks and the eventual Trail of Tears. In Anniston, the **Berman Museum** doesn't follow a theme, as evidenced by the display of eclectic artifacts, including Napoleon's grooming kit, Hitler's personal tea service, antique spy equipment and bronze sculptures by Frederic Remington. Really, each item was of interest to collectors Farley and Germaine Berman, who donated a portion of their collection to the City of Anniston to start a history museum.



Left to right: ATD/Chris Granger, ATD/Lance Hardaway, ATD/Chris Granger

From left: Moss Rock Preserve, American Village, Heaton Pecan Farm

BREWING FOR COMMUNITY ANNISTON LOCALS KNOW A GOOD THING WHEN THEY DRINK IT, AND THEY'VE FOUND THAT GOOD THING AT COLDWATER MOUNTAIN BREWPUB. YOU WILL, TOO, WHEN YOU KICK BACK WITH TRAILHEAD PALE ALE, BOMB DOG IPA OR CRITERIUM KOLSCH.



PECANS & PEACHES

For a farm-fresh taste of Alabama's agricultural bounty, drive through Clanton, home to acres of pecans and peaches. The sandy soil here is said to grow sweet, juicy peaches and buttery, nutty pecans. Pick up a basket or bag at roadside stands or markets, such as **Heaton Pecan Farm** and **Durbin Farms Market**, or savor local peaches in **Peach Park's** famous ice cream.

EDUCATION MEETS FUN

AMERICAN VILLAGE, *Montevallo*: Tour the West Wing of Independence Hall, where the immersive exhibition and theater transport you to Boston on the eve of Paul Revere's ride, and Washington Hall, inspired by Mount Vernon. Interpreters in period dress bring history into the present.

SOUTHERN MUSEUM OF FLIGHT, *Birmingham*: This is not your average "do not touch" museum. Here, kids can pilot flight simulators, build aircraft using interlocking blocks or climb into a real airplane. See historic aircraft, including military helicopters and Tuskegee Airmen trainers.

BLUE BELL CREAMERY, *Sylacauga*: Learn how ice cream is made by watching a short video or by observing from a deck inside the Blue Bell Creamery. Then, indulge in a couple of scoops of your favorite. It might be a hard choice, given the 24 flavors available in the parlor. But, as one employee said, "You can have as many dishes as you want; we won't tell anybody." At around $1 per dish, that's an idea your sweet tooth deems affordable. Vanilla remains the most popular, followed by the predictable chocolate, strawberry, butter pecan, black walnut, and cookies and cream.

48 Hours in Birmingham

Alabama's Magic City charms travelers with attractions tied to its iron ore origins, its mark on civil rights and its sports—notably baseball and motorsports racing. Oh, and don't skip a meal while visiting. After all, you've got a seat at the Dinner Table of the South. **BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE**



Friday

AFTERNOON Take a load off in **Railroad Park**, a 19-acre green space that's known as Birmingham's Living Room. Here, locals and visitors gather for recreation, cultural events and simply lounging around. Walk its paths and pause at the interesting water features, including a backlit rain curtain that showers from a bridge into one of the park's ponds. From here, it's an easy walk or drive to one of the downtown hotels: **The Redmont Hotel**, part of Hilton's Curio Collection; AAA Four Diamond **Elyton Hotel**; or the **Kelly Hotel**, a swanky addition to Hilton's Tapestry Collection.

EVENING Before heading out to dinner, sit a spell on the veranda space of **Dread River Distilling** and sip one of its small-batch whiskeys or a craft cocktail, featuring an award-winning spirit from its expanded product line. The distillery complements Birmingham's hotbed of award-winning restaurants and chefs. Among the newest restaurants is **Current Charcoal Grill**, where Asian-inspired fare is served in a chic, approachable setting. It's the second restaurant started by Chef Adam Evans, who also owns **Automatic Seafood and Oysters**. He is a recent James Beard Award winner for Best Chef in the South and a respected contributor to Alabama's culinary scene. Other award-winning upscale options include **Helen**, **Chez Fonfon**, **Bottega** and **Hot and Hot Fish Club**. Due to the popularity of these restaurants, reservations are recommended.

Saturday

MORNING Plan to welcome the day at **Birmingham Botanical Gardens**, where 26 different kinds of gardens grow. But first, order your picnic ahead of time from **Ousler Sandwiches**, found near the botanical gardens. During World War II, it became the first business in the country to sell prepackaged sandwiches. This year, Ousler celebrates 110 years. Because the sandwich spreads—pimento cheese, cream cheese and olive, chicken salad, ham salad, and others—are freshly made Ousler signatures, order ahead to be sure you get your favorite.

BATTER UP!

The Negro Southern League, created in 1920, gave Black athletes who had been pushed out of other baseball leagues due to racism and Jim Crow laws a way to play. The Negro Southern League Museum recalls the highlights and the players with 1,500 signed baseballs, Willie Wells' uniform, a hologram of Satchel Paige, Louis Santop's "Big Bertha" bat and other exhibits.





FROM LEFT: NEGRO SOUTHERN LEAGUE MUSEUM, DREAD RIVER DISTILLING, BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS, SLOSS FURNACES NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Once at the botanical gardens, start at the Southern Living Garden, which was developed by the eponymous magazine to show how a Southern home garden might look throughout the year. At its entrance, the Winter Walk contains plants that reach their peak during the coldest months. The path leads next toward spring and the Southern Flower Border, where bulbs sprout and bloom starting in February. A variety of azaleas, growing throughout summer, surround a charming fountain in another space, while Japanese maples near the Echo Reflecting Pool and Terrace wait until fall for their leaves to turn pumpkin orange and crimson.

NOON Pull out your Ousler picnic, or if you want something meatier, slide into a chair for some smoky barbecue. **Jim 'N Nick's**, **Saw's** and **Full Moon Barbecue** all pile plates full of pulled pork, brisket or ribs that give other reputable barbecue states a run for their taste buds.

AFTERNOON Attend a Minor League baseball game at **Regions Field**, where the Birmingham Barons play their home games. Other Birmingham teams include Legion, the soccer club at **Protective Stadium**; the Squadron basketball team at **Legacy Arena**; and the Stallion football team, also at Protective Stadium. Or, you could explore a completely different sport: high-performance racing. **Barber Motorsports Park** is the place to see IndyCar Series races, American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association competitions, and other car and motorcycle events. It's also where you can get behind the wheel of a Porsche and fine tune your driving skills as part of the Porsche Track Experience.

After some fresh air there, visit the **Negro Southern League Museum** to check out baseball hall-of-famer Satchel Paige's pitches, thanks to hologram projection.

Squeeze in a quick visit to **Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark**, remarkable for its two, 400-ton blast furnaces and roughly 40 other buildings. Walk through the site and gain a better understanding of Birmingham's roots in pig iron.

EVENING Whichever restaurant you missed last night, try tonight. You're on vacation, so, yes, indulge in all the sophisticated dining. For a nightcap, try **The Collins Bar**, where the drinks are custom made to order. If you don't have a favorite cocktail, the bartender will guide you.

Sunday

MORNING Put on your Sunday best and attend a 10:45 a.m. worship service at the historic **16th Street Baptist Church**, a civil rights landmark that has been raising funds for a new visitor center. The church is part of the **Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument** and **Birmingham Civil Rights District**. Wander on your own, or gain knowledge and context by booking a tour with the **Birmingham Historic Touring Company**.

NOON Eat at **Roots & Revelry**, where one of the city's most recommended brunches awaits. Grits are usually part of the fare as well as benedicts made with buttermilk biscuits.

AFTERNOON Spend the afternoon climbing the steps of the recently reopened Vulcan Observation Tower, home of the world's largest cast iron statue—mighty Vulcan—and browsing its companion museum at **Vulcan Park & Museum**. Make it to the top of the original Iron Man for one last look at Alabama's Magic City.

Search Alabama.Travel to learn more about Birmingham.



All images: ATD/Chris Granger

48 Hours in Tuscaloosa

Spreading out from the Black Warrior River in the western portion of central Alabama, Tuscaloosa offers refreshing sips—morning, noon, and night—perfect to fuel your tours of local museums and civil rights sites. **BY LAURA MCGILL**



Friday

AFTERNOON Start your visit to Tuscaloosa at the **University of Alabama**. Get oriented at the new 15,000-square-foot **Catherine and Pettus Randall Welcome Center**, where one of the highlights is the immersive Roll Tide Room. Get ready for an over-the-top, audio-visual football game-day experience! When the chorus of the Alabama fight song fades, learn more about the state's role in mental health treatment, dating back to 1861, with a tour of the **Bryce Mental Health Museum** found inside the welcome center.

Continue your walking tour of the campus, stopping at the **Alabama Museum of Natural History** to ooh and aah over meteorites and fossils, including the official state fossil—the ancient toothed whale, *Basilosaurus cetoide*. Whether you cheer for the Crimson Tide or not, you can appreciate the **Paul W. Bryant Museum**, which pays tribute to the legendary football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant.

Wrap up your campus experience with a photo op at **Tuska**, a massive 19-foot-tall, 7-ton bronze elephant statue near **Bryant-Denny Stadium**. If your party decides to split up and explore different sites, just agree to meet up at **Denny Chimes**, the campus' signature bell tower.

EVENING Get checked in at your hotel and freshen up for dinner. A stay at **The Alamite** delivers boutique charm and makes your dinner decision easy. Simply head upstairs to **Roll Call**, the rooftop bar, for amazing skyline views; small, shareable plates; and fun cocktails. For a location that puts the popular **Riverwalk** at your doorstep, choose **Hotel Indigo**, which also has onsite dining. For dinner away from your hotel, make the short drive to **20/59 Restaurant and Bar** in Cottondale, where you can end your meal with Ms. Cynthia's homemade peach cobbler, named for restaurant owner Melvin Cannon's mother.

ELEPHANT WALK

Tuska, the University of Alabama's bronze elephant, was cast in 11 pieces at a foundry in England. Once at its first location, the NorthRiver Yacht Club, it was assembled in September 2000. Decades later, it was relocated to a podium outside Bryant-Denny Stadium, where, with his trunk reaching for the sky, Tuska symbolizes aspiration and seems to trumpet, "Roll Tide!"





FROM LEFT: TUSCALOOSA MURAL AT EGAN'S BAR, TUSKA STATUE AT UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, TUSCALOOSA RIVERWALK, HERITAGE HOUSE COFFEE & TEA

All images: ATD/Chris Granger

Saturday

MORNING Fuel up for a full day with breakfast at the riverfront location of **Heritage House**. Order from its specialty coffee menu, which features the caramel, vanilla and cinnamon flavor trifecta known as the Bama Blitz. Pair it with a hearty morning sandwich, burrito or bowl.

After breakfast, choose from three options. Swing into action at **PopStroke**, the only Alabama location of this popular technology-driven miniature golf experience. Choose from two 18-hole courses, each one taking about 45 minutes to play. Or, swap the art of the perfect putt for Tuscaloosa's vibrant art scene. The **TCL Public Arts Passport** leads you to murals, sculptures and galleries. Or, head to the West End neighborhood to see what's being crafted at **Tuscaloosa Made**, a makers' space where you can purchase local works and support the artisans.

NOON For lunch, score at **Baumhower's Victory Grille**. The restaurant group, founded by UA and Miami Dolphins football legend Bob Baumhower, has 10 locations in Alabama, including two in Tuscaloosa. Count on a high-energy sports bar scene and really good wings. If a great beer is all you need following that big breakfast, call for a pint of the Crimson Ale Irish Red at **Black Warrior Brewing Company**.

AFTERNOON Recharged and ready for more, your afternoon has three unique choices. Make the roughly 30-minute drive to step back in time at **Moundville Archaeological Park**, a Native American heritage site that preserves what was once the largest settlement of ancient Mississippian culture in what would become America. Today, the park and companion museum interpret the life and times of those early people and the 29 massive, flat-topped earthen mounds they used for housing, civic and ceremonial structures. Choose nearby Northport to visit **Kentuck Art Center**, a gallery of working artists' studios and a nationally recognized hub of folk art. Take home proof of your visit by snapping a selfie with the iconic sculpture of Rusty the Big Dog. Finally, for a lesson in ordinary citizens rising to take action, explore the **Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History Trail**. The self-guided tour encompasses 18 stops.

EVENING Celebrate your last night in town with a special meal at **Evangeline's**, where the seasonal menu can feature delights like the summer peach flatbread. Tip: Get your reservation ahead of time to secure a table.

Sunday

LATE MORNING Before you bid farewell to Tuscaloosa, indulge in brunch at **Jalapeños Downtown Cocina + Tequila Bar**. The spicy entrees and bar selections set the stage for a few more stops around town.

AFTERNOON Stroll along the whole of the **Riverwalk**—4.5 miles and growing—to enjoy one more view of the mighty Black Warrior River. At the Riverwalk's western end, poke around the weathered columns and stone foundation at **Capitol Park**. Those ruins are all that remain from Tuscaloosa's days as the state's government seat from 1826–1846.

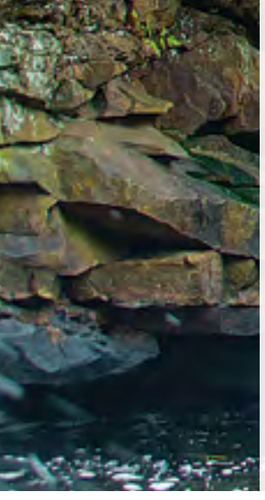
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NORTH

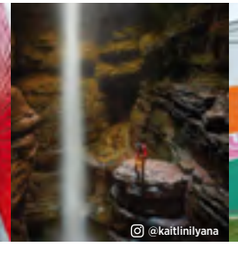
Uncover a unique combination of stunning landscapes, historical significance, cultural vibrancy and uncompromising innovation.

North Alabama is rich in outdoor adventures, including the incredible waterfalls at Little River Canyon and the peaceful paths of Monte Sano State Park. Here, the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains rise, the Natchez Trace Parkway winds and the legacy of indigenous tribes forced westward endures. Experience the lives of American heroes Helen Keller and Jesse Owens, each honored in area attractions. Don't miss the exciting Year of Aviation at Huntsville's U.S. Space & Rocket Center, where renovated spaces and restored exhibits are back on display, and a full calendar of special events awaits. Discover the role music plays in the region, from legendary artists recording in and around the Shoals to rising stars performing at The Orion Amphitheater. The region's unique mix of scenic splendor, historical and cultural depth, and visionary aerospace contributions provides an unforgettable experience.

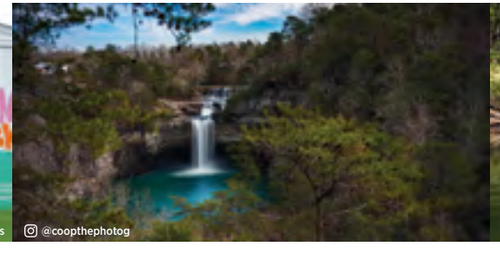




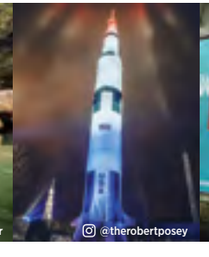




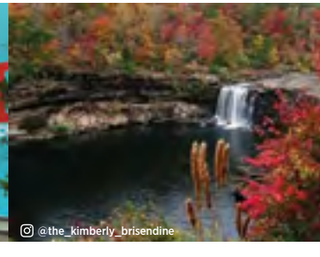












Lip-Smacking BBQ

Throughout Alabama's North region, you can follow the delicious smoky aroma to many barbecue joints, where proud pitmasters have honed their craft with carefully guarded family recipes. Perhaps none is more famous than Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q, which was founded in Decatur in 1925. One hundred years later, it is still winning fans with its Hickory Smoked Bar-B-Q Chicken with white sauce, pulled pork and beef brisket. Happy 100th to Alabama's original white sauce!

From left: Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q, Billy Reid flagship store, boating on Lewis Smith Lake



Left to right: ATD/Chris Granger, Ken Gables, ATD/Lance Holloway

NORTHERN LINKS

From high-end fashion to a journey deep underground, get connected with some of the most interesting stories in North Alabama. BY LAURA MCGILL

HANDS-ON NATURAL SCIENCE

Decatur

Ever wanted to crawl inside a beaver's lodge to see what was going on? You can at the Rivers & Streams exhibit at **Cook Museum of Natural Science**. Other exhibits include the Wonderful World of Insects, where you can see inside an ant colony, and Foundations, where you can play with kinetic sand.

FASHION FORWARD

Florence

Grounded firmly in North Alabama and pulling from the creative energy that flows in the Florence and Muscle Shoals area, **Billy Reid** began his Southern studio 20 years ago. Today, while he still proudly holds to his North Alabama connection with his flagship store, his fashions also can be found as far afield as New York City and Venice, California.

TAKE A CAVE TOUR

Warrior

A cave in North Alabama that was carved from the ocean bed? It's true, and you can experience it yourself with a guided tour of **Rickwood Caverns**. But, be prepared. In order to see the 260-million-year-old formations, you'll cover 1 mile and 365 stairs. Worth it? Most definitely! If you can't make the trek, try the virtual reality tour.

SOLEMN LESSONS

Scottsboro

Step inside the historic **Joyce Chapel** in Scottsboro and be transported back to the 1930s to face the harsh truths about race-based injustice. At **The Scottsboro Boys Museum**, learn the story of nine young African Americans, who were falsely accused of raping two white women and taken to trial.

4 Ways to Water

SPLASH AT THE WATER PARK: Make a day of it with a visit to a water park. Race down slides, get drenched standing under one of those giant tipping-over buckets and float along a lazy river. Find these features or others at **Sand Mountain Park** in Albertville, **Pirates Bay Waterpark** in Leesburg, **Wildwater Cullman** and **Point Mallard Park** in Decatur. Be sure to confirm seasonal dates before you go.

ROLL ON THE RIVER: The mighty Tennessee River drapes across North Alabama, entering in the northwest corner and exiting in the northeast corner. In between, you can find plenty of locations to get on the river for water fun. A favorite access point for residents and visitors is **Ditto Landing** on the southern edge of Huntsville. Put in your boat, or launch for some meditative kayak fishing.

SEE THE FALLS: There is just something magical about the sound of water cascading, crashing on the rocks below. Waterfalls spill throughout the region, from **Shangri-La Falls** nestled deep in the **Bankhead National Forest** in Double Springs, to **DeSoto Falls** at **DeSoto State Park** in Fort Payne, to **Noccalula Falls** in Gadsden. Visit NorthAlabama.org to get your **Waterfall Trail Passport** and check in at each location via GPS.

LAKEFRONT VIBES: Kick back at one of north Alabama's many lakes by first reserving your spot at a lakeside cabin. Take a guided fishing trip to reel in a big catch, rent a pontoon boat to cruise the lake, or bring your own boat and dock at local marinas. Choose your lake experience at Pickwick, Wilson, Wheeler, Guntersville, Weiss or Lewis Smith.



48 Hours in Huntsville

Alabama's Rocket City welcomes science nerds, nature lovers, art appreciators, craft beer enthusiasts, foodies and just about anybody else for an out-of-this-world weekend. **BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE**



Friday

AFTERNOON Here's the thing about Huntsville: It doesn't take itself too seriously. Sure, many of the residents—and visitors—run in brainiac engineering and rocket science circles that would blow minds, but even they need reprieve from their intellectually demanding work. The city delivers with its casual, approachable vibe set against a backdrop of innovation and progress. When you arrive, drop your car with the valet and register at the AAA Four Diamond **106 Jefferson**, which sports mid-century charm, a welcoming rooftop bar and an excellent location downtown. You could walk out the hotel's doors and within a quarter mile, stretch your legs at **Big Spring International Park**, but a new trail has opened at **Green Mountain Nature Preserve**, found about 12 miles south. Hike across terrain dotted with boulders and quiet woodlands on the Green Mountain Trail North for 1.5 miles one way (from Astalot) to 3.2 miles one way (from Riverview).

As time permits, pop into **Harrison Brothers Hardware**, located within a four-minute walk from the hotel. This 1897 general store brims with made-in-America products—things you didn't know you needed but are definitely buying. It also houses the **Historic Huntsville Museum** and its **"Brick by Brick: The Legacy of Henderson and Daniel Brandon"** exhibit, which celebrates the masonry accomplishments of the Brandon brothers and their transition from enslavement to economic independence. Recently, the National Park Service added the museum and the Harrison Brothers Building to its Reconstruction Era National Historic Network.

EVENING Pick a place for dinner. **1892 East Restaurant & Tavern** presents local, seasonal American fare. Any of James Beard Award nominee Chef James Boyce's restaurants—**Cotton Row** (fine dining), **Commerce Kitchen** (elevated comfort food), **Pane e Vino** (pizzeria) and **Grille on Main** (steak and chop house) — also make delicious options. To pair dinner with a show, make a reservation at **Rhythm on Monroe**. It is located inside the **Von Braun Center**, so it's literally steps to catch a performance.

The music scene in Huntsville is growing, as evidenced by the opening of **The Orion Amphitheater**. *Rolling Stone* recognized it as a top spot for concerts, and native Alabama musician Jason Isbell says it's one of his new favorite venues. If you're more of a spontaneous, decide-when-I-get-there traveler, then chances are good you'll find some great shows at **Stovehouse** and **Campus No. 805**, home to the recently relocated **St. Stephens Music Hall**.

FOR YOUR ARTSY SIDE

Formerly a thriving textile mill, Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment is today the largest privately owned arts facility in the South and provides space to about 200 working artists, including luthier Danny Davis. Pop into his Tangled String Studios, or any of the other spaces, to see makers at work and to shop their finished pieces.

Saturday

MORNING Swing into **The Moon Bakeshop** for pastries, breakfast sandwiches, and coffee or tea, and then spend the rest of the morning in awe at the **U.S. Space & Rocket Center**. It's the Year of Aviation at the rocket center, so all things aviation are being recognized through special lectures, events and planetarium shows! The theme also coincides with the rocket center's 35th anniversary of its Aviation Challenge camp program, open to children and families. When you want to understand Alabama's stellar role in rocketry, this center is the one to visit. Feel what it's like to shoot into space, see Mars' habitat, and view one of the world's largest collections of rocket and space memorabilia. Exhibits include Saturn V, the Pathfinder space shuttle and NASA's SLS rocket.

NOON For Southern cooking served in a family-friendly space, grab a seat at the **Blue Plate Cafe**. It's a traditional meat-and-three joint where the specials change daily and the promise of a homecooked meal has been part of Huntsville's dining table for more than 20 years. Don't skip the cheesy hashbrown casserole!



FROM LEFT: LOWE MILL ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT, COMMERCE KITCHEN, HUNTSVILLE BOTANICAL GARDEN, U.S. SPACE & ROCKET CENTER

The Pathfinder space shuttle orbiter was integral to NASA's Space Shuttle Program, which over 30 years and more than 135 missions launched space telescopes and satellites and helped to build the International Space Station.

Search Alabama.Travel to learn more about Huntsville.





All images: ATD/Chris Granger

AFTERNOON Leave room in your dessert stomach for the best chocolate in the nation, at least according to the voters of *USA Today's* "10Best." Find it at **Pizzelle's Confections**. Even if you don't like chocolate, the clever names and art-like candies are worth a look.

Next up—fresh air. Do as locals do and take full advantage of the outdoor recreation at **Monte Sano State Park**. Only 2 miles from downtown, trails here connect with **Burritt on the Mountain** atop Round Top Mountain. Tour 19th-century **Burritt Mansion** and learn about farming in the 1800s from interpreters in period clothing doing hands-on demonstrations.

EVENING Have an adult night out on the **Downtown Huntsville Craft Beer Trail** or the **Downtown Huntsville Craft Cocktail Trail**. No matter which one your follow, the vibe will be fun and the styles of beer or mixed drinks will definitely be part of the conversation.

Sunday

MORNING Perk up with a mug of coffee on the **Downtown Huntsville Craft Coffee Trail**. About 10 coffee shops share their best roasts, lattes, drips and more. Take your java with you to the **Huntsville Botanical Garden**, now home to a 20-foot-tall troll, created by artist Thomas Dambo. The colossal creature is the focus of the new Mother Earth Troll Garden, a space where whimsy, art and nature converge. Navigate a maze and crawl through tunnels in this fantastical space.

AFTERNOON Turn your ear and cheers toward the city's burgeoning sports scene. The recently formed **Huntsville City Football Club** plays at Wicks Family Field inside **Joe Davis Stadium**. The **Huntsville Havoc** hockey team skates at Von Braun Center. At Toyota Field in Madison, the **Rocket City Trash Pandas** turn your Huntsville visit into a home run.

OUTDOORS

Seek outdoor adventures in a state that offers an endless variety of them.

Let the gentle spray of majestic waterfalls envelop you as the roar of cascading water drowns out everyday concerns. Relax while walking sugar-white sand beaches, paddling gorgeous lakes and rivers, and taking shady hikes through towering forests. Enjoy more adrenaline-fueled fun by sending up your own cascades of water while jet skiing, experiencing some of the country's best rock climbing, visiting some of the nation's most spectacular caves or challenging yourself with a hike through the Southern Appalachian Mountains on the roughly 335-mile Pinhoti Trail, which connects with the Appalachian Trail. Cast your line in a state known for some of the world's best bass fishing, hunt for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, bobwhite quail and other game, or simply observe a birding paradise and discover the rich biodiversity that has earned Alabama's Mobile-Tensaw Delta the title of America's Amazon. Alabama has it all. To see some of the adventures that await you, visit **outdooralabama.com**.

GLAMPING UNDER THE STARS

More than ever, campers want their dose of nature to come with an abundance of comfort. Local businesses and Alabama's state parks have responded with all kinds of options, including luxury.

BY AMITY MOORE JOYCE



Left to right: Wish Upon a Star, Timberline Glamping at Wind Creek State Park, The Destination Glamping Resort



This page and opposite: ATD/Chris Granger

An elevated tent on a backcountry trail near the beach. Air conditioning and a king-sized bed in a safari-style tent just steps from a treasured lake. A fully furnished geodesic dome tent or tiny home overlooking wilderness-like scenery. Thanks to innovative leaders in lodging and increased funding to Alabama State Parks, this variety of camping is available throughout the state.

GLAMPING, which comes from combining "glamorous" and "camping," continues to gain fans, so lodging facilities, including several Alabama state parks, are presenting a range of accommodations that allow visitors to experience the outdoors with home-like amenities.

Several state parks still have traditional camping, but they also have options that come with beds (in different sizes) outfitted with fresh linens, electricity, and air conditioning and heating. The fully furnished safari tents at **Wind Creek State Park** on Lake Martin near Alexander City, for example, welcome families with a king bed and two bunk beds, two queen beds, or one queen and one bunk bed. They are ideal for families who want a rustic experience but also want a Keurig-made coffee, a mini fridge and other conveniences. Each glampsite here is outfitted with hammocks, a wood fire ring, camp chairs and more.

In Dadeville on the banks of Sandy Creek (which feeds into Lake Martin), **The Destination Glamping Resort** has been named a Best Glamping Spot in the United States as part of *USA Today's* "10Best." Here, too, campers find safari tents with one or two bedrooms and private deck and hot tub. All you really need for these kinds of stays is your clothes; pretty much everything else is provided. Down on the Gulf of Mexico, **Gulf State Park** appeals to sunseekers looking for a plot on the sand. While not directly on the beach, outpost campsites, each outfitted with raised, military-style tents and cots, dot the **Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail**. Thru-hikers and bicyclists using the trail may rent the outposts by the night (two-night minimums are required for weekends and other occasions) to enjoy sleeping among the tall pines and scrub oaks.

Outside the state park's boundaries but backing up to the backcountry trail stand the new glamping tents of **Timberline Glamping Co.** Opened in August 2024, these hardly-roughing-it safari tents make a stay near the beach—and Gulf State Park—easy.

Seven tiny houses at **Roland Cooper State Park** offer respite near the Alabama River and Dannelly Reservoir while ensuring certain amenities. Each tiny cabin comes with a gas range, microwave oven, coffee maker and fridge with an ice maker. Ice while camping? That's a luxury!

If you aren't sure which kind of glamping experience would suit you best, explore the many options at **Wish Upon a Star**. The vacations here along the banks of Blue Water Creek in Rogersville spin from tiny homes and cute cottages to geodesic domes and round glamping tents. The burbling creek, crackling campfire and excellent stargazing ensure you feel like you're escaping the everyday. Whether you're here or at another glamping spot, reconnect with yourself, loved ones and Alabama's version of Mother Nature.

Visit Alabama.Travel for more on camping.



BRINGING THE OUTDOORS INTO FOCUS

BY RICK HARMON



Imagine the most beautiful photograph of a landscape you have ever seen. Now, multiply that by the thousands and place yourself and your family into these masterpieces. Welcome to Alabama.

WHO BETTER TO SHOW the beauty of Alabama's outdoors than the people exploring it? The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, in conjunction with the Alabama Tourism Department, holds an annual Outdoor Alabama Photo Contest in which amateur photographers can enter photos taken on their in-state adventures. Here are some of the winning entries.

YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHERS

Blue Crab in the Fowl River *(previous page)*
First Place
Photographer: Emerson Barnett, age 14
Location: Theodore
Experience: It's not just tourists who love Alabama's natural beauty. This blue crab, one of more than 6,350 animal species in one of the country's most biologically diverse states, enjoys catching some rays along the Fowl River.

COLD-BLOODED CRITTERS

Tree Frog *(right)*
First Place
Photographer: Christopher Baker
Location: Madison
Experience: Even during an outdoor adventure, sometimes you just want to branch out and catch a little rest, and maybe a fly or two if you are a green tree frog. This species is found throughout the state.

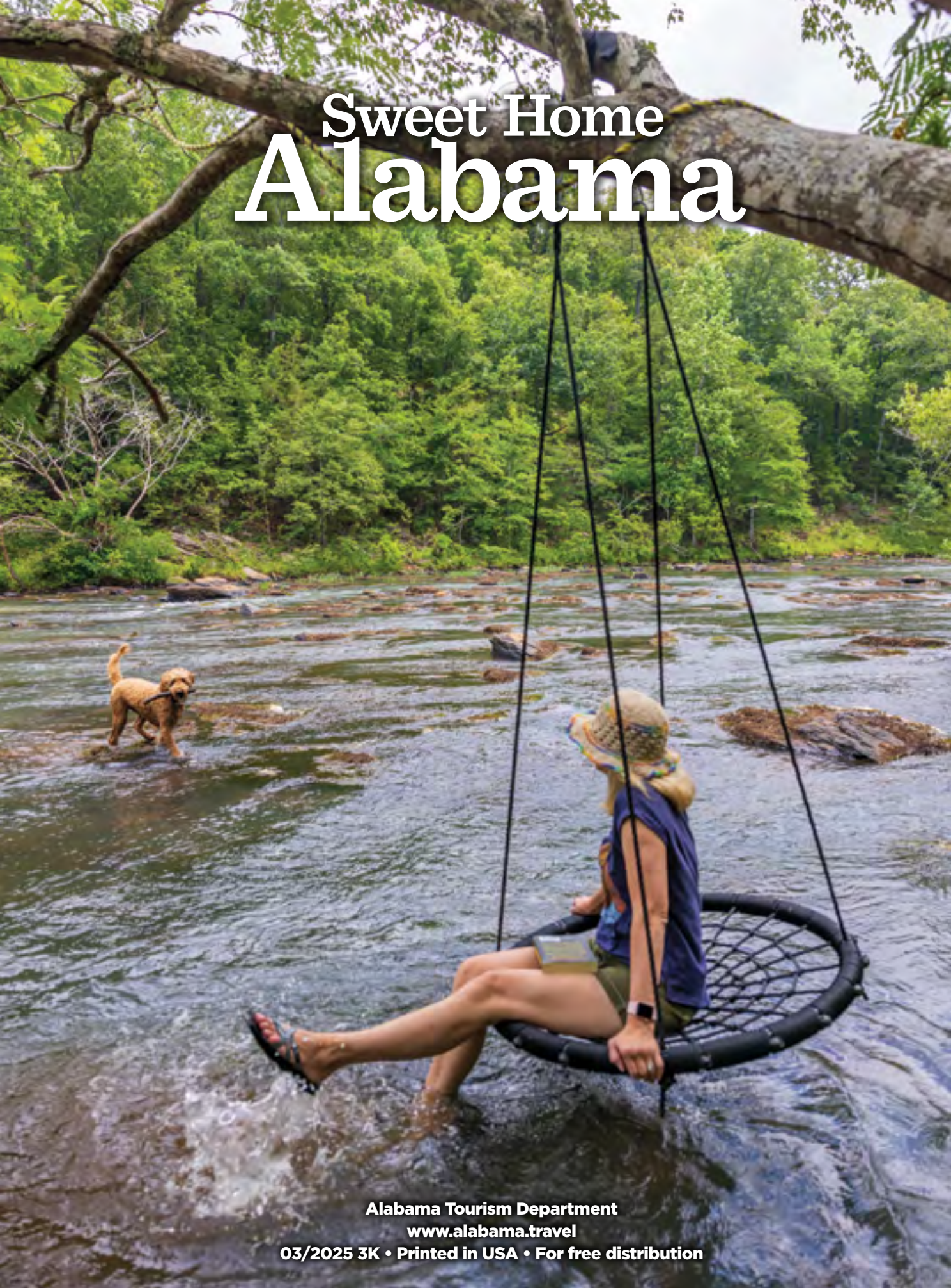




NATURE-BASED RECREATION

Water Skiing *(left)*
Third Place
Photographer: Benjamin Smith
Location: Tuscaloosa
Experience: You glide along the surface, balancing yourself as you are pulled ever faster on the sun-kissed water. Your vacation is an experiment in balance—balancing speed, exhilaration, adrenaline and agility with beauty and the surprising tranquility you feel.

Visit outdooralabama.com/outdoor-alabama-photo-contest to see more winning photographs and to submit your images for future contests.



Sweet Home Alabama

Alabama Tourism Department
www.alabama.travel
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