

Sweet Home Alabama

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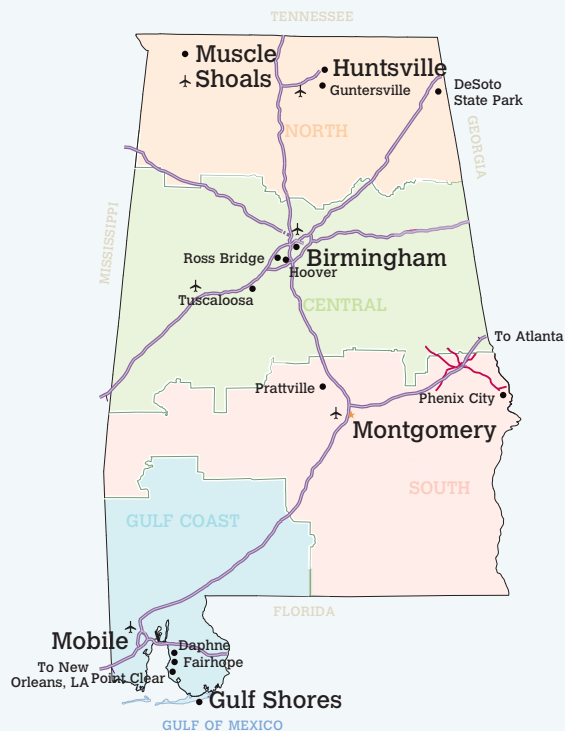
Sweet Home Alabama



Travel Guide 2013

INTRODUCTION

Discover a state 'where the skies are so blue', they were immortalised in the lyrics of the legendary song Sweet Home Alabama, by Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd.



Welcome home to
ALABAMA

12 ways to EXPERIENCE ALABAMA

1. Walk in the footsteps of those marching for freedom across Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge
2. Breathe in fresh mountain air and incredible panoramas at Lookout Mountain
3. Put your hands up for the moon pies at Mobile's Mardi Gras – the ultimate Southern street party
4. Go to the moon and back at the US Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville
5. Soak up jazz and other musical genres in Birmingham's clubs, bars and restaurants
6. Have a cheeseburger in paradise at LuLu's Gulf Shores
7. Follow in the footsteps of music legends like the Rolling Stones and

Aretha Franklin and visit Muscle Shoals' Fame recording studios

8. Watch NASCAR superstars battle it out on the world's fastest superspeedway at Talladega
9. Sign your name and pledge to promote racial justice on the Wall of Tolerance at Montgomery's Civil Rights Memorial Center
10. Search for alligators in the Mobile Tensaw Delta
11. Step on a Segway for a city tour or take a paddle steamer trip down the river, in Montgomery
12. Tee off on the famous Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, with shots ranging from a bluff above the Alabama River to the Azalea-flowered fairways of Point Clear

Thanks to popular culture such as the aforementioned famous song and the film *Forrest Gump*, the name Alabama often evokes expectations of cute country towns and simple living.

However, Alabama's larger cities, such as Birmingham, Montgomery, Huntsville and Mobile offer chic restaurants, stylish bars and superb museums and galleries showcasing the region's exciting history.

Those who hanker after that traditional Southern charm won't be disappointed – Alabama can transport visitors to a place and a state of mind far from the big smoke, where the pace naturally moves slower in the fragrant heat.

Alabama's unpretentious and warm people invite you to explore their diverse state which sweeps

down from the foothills of the Appalachians to the white-sand beaches of the Gulf Coast.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Bordered by Tennessee to the north, Florida to the south, Georgia to the east and Mississippi to the west, Alabama is the physical heart and the cultural soul of the Deep South, and an essential component of any fly-drive holiday to the region.

When should I visit? Most Alabama days are warm and sunny. Spring comes early with temperatures of 15C by March. Summer days average in the mid-to late 20s with some humid periods of 32C-plus. Severely cold weather is rarely a problem!

Getting there: Alabama's regional airports connect with US hubs such as Charlotte, North Carolina, while international hub Atlanta, Georgia, is just a couple of hours' drive from Birmingham and Montgomery.

Fly-drives

- Birmingham to Huntsville: 103 miles/2 hrs
- Birmingham to Atlanta, Georgia: 147 miles/2.5 hrs
- Birmingham to Jackson, Mississippi: 244 miles/under 4.5 hrs
- Mobile to New Orleans, Louisiana: 144 miles/2.5 hrs
- Montgomery to Birmingham: 92 miles/1.5 hrs
- Montgomery to Mobile: 169 miles/2.5 hrs
- Gulf Shores to Destin, Florida: 80 miles/under 2 hrs
- Huntsville to Nashville, Tennessee: 116 miles/under 2 hrs
- Huntsville to Memphis, Tennessee: 216 miles/4.5 hrs

(Please note that Georgia is one hour ahead of Alabama)

FOOD, MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT

Alabamians know how to live well and visitors are treated with true southern hospitality: think home-grown comfort food, lively city bars with slick restaurants and live music and charming small towns with quirky boutique shops and coffee-scented cafés.



Sweet INDULGENCE

It's all about enjoying the food and local specialties in Alabama. Dining options range from modern restaurants to unpretentious local diners, but for a real 'Alabama menu' start the day with cheesy grits, grab some shrimp tacos for lunch and finish with fried green tomatoes, a juicy steak and a thick slice of warm peach cobbler.

It's not all home cooking though, because Alabama has plenty of fine-dining restaurants with a modern twist on local produce. Watch chefs serve up hickory-smoked pork loin with roasted okra and pickled cherries at the chef's counter in Birmingham's award-winning Hot and Hot Fish Club.

Montgomery's stylish Alley Entertainment District is home to the quirky warehouse-style Central restaurant which showcases local seasonal produce.



Mouthwatering dishes on the menu include wood-fired half-herb chicken with pimento mac 'n' cheese, but leave room for the Krispy Kreme bread pudding.

And in Huntsville enjoy a smorgasboard of inventive dishes at Cotton Row, famous for its

This page: Clockwise from left: Big Bob Gibson's Barbecue in Decatur; visit Mobile in February for Mardi Gras; live music at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel. **Opposite page:** Dining at Ed's Sea Shed in Mobile Bay.

ever-changing menus inspired by seasonal and local produce.

PARTY ON DOWN

For those who really want to party, Gulf Shores has the ultimate 'holiday feeling'. The resort area is home to some of Alabama's best seafood restaurants, but when the sun dips down behind the sea oats the bars and clubs come alive. The legendary Hangout bar is set right on the white-sand beach and hosts

DID YOU KNOW?

Hank Williams was from Alabama and you can visit a museum dedicated to his short but inspiring life in Montgomery. It holds a plethora of memorabilia including records, stage outfits and Hank's 1952 Baby Blue Cadillac.

"MUSIC LOVERS SHOULD HEAD NORTH TO MUSCLE SHOALS' FAME RECORDING STUDIO. A NAME YOU MAY HAVE HEARD MENTIONED IN LYNRYD SKYNYRD'S SWEET HOME ALABAMA"

its own festival every May, with 2013's impressive lineup including Stevie Wonder and Kings of Leon.

Head east from the Hangout to the stateline separating Alabama and Florida and you'll find the aptly named Florabama bar. Garments from previous revellers hang from the rafters in front of the main stage and live music rocks into the early hours.

If you're in town during Spring, be sure to check if the annual Interstate Mullet Toss is on here.

RHYTHMS OF THE SOUTH

If you're going to Alabama to experience its home-grown music, there are venues across the state playing jazz, blues and country – whether it's in a packed duke joint, or a sophisticated city bar.

You can even try a spirit-filled Sunday morning church service, at the Sixteen Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, complete with a gospel choir which everyone gets out of their seats for!

Music lovers should make the pilgrimage to Muscle Shoals – a name you may have heard mentioned in Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Sweet Home Alabama*. It's home to the Fame recording studio which has seen musical legends like Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Otis Redding and even the Osmonds among the famous to record their voices for the world to hear.

CAFÉ CULTURE

For those who wish to move at more of a sedate pace, the Eastern

Deep South Detour

Tiny Gulf Coast harbour Bayou La Batre was the setting for the film *Forrest Gump* and his shrimp fishing adventures with the Bubba. Eat fresh shrimp straight from the boat, surrounded by the tangled rigging and swooping pelicans of a real working fishing port.

Shore of Mobile Bay is a great area for eating, shopping and just pottering. The long, straight road that leads into the affluent towns of Fairhope and Daphne is lined with fluttering Stars and Stripes and gives the odd glimpse through the trees to a beautiful shore-side home with its own jetty.

Home of Winston Groom, the author who wrote *Forrest Gump*, Fairhope's sidewalks are made for sauntering. You can pop in and out of old-fashioned drug stores, boutique clothing shops and art and antique sellers. And there are loads of tempting restaurants, casual cafes and cute ice cream parlours to try too.



NATURE & ADVENTURE

Most visitors to Alabama will explore by car, and a good thing too because it's between the cities that you get to experience the real 'Sweet Home Alabama' – white picket fences and tiny towns with just a dusty rail track running through. Head outdoors to appreciate pastoral countryside, soft-white beaches, rivers and mountains.

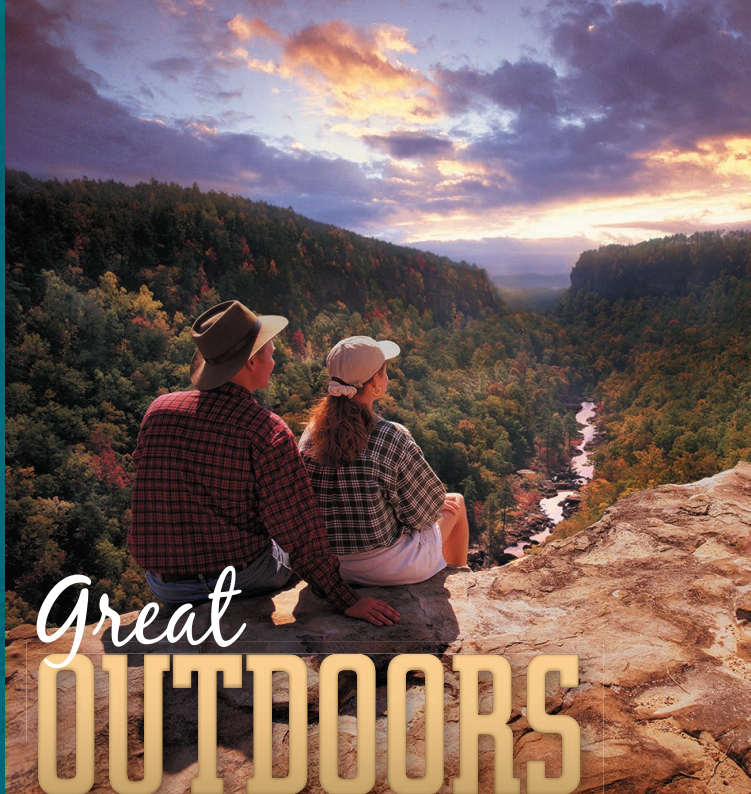


Alabama is home to a million acres of lakes, 1,600 miles of rivers and 22 million acres of forests and has myriad opportunities for hiking and outdoor sports, from the Gulf Coast right up to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

The southern end of the Appalachian mountain chain is home to some of the most diverse and beautiful woodlands in the USA. Tall pines line more than 30 miles of trails at Lake Guntersville State Park on the Tennessee River, where the American bald eagle makes its winter home. You can climb to Alabama's highest point at Cheaha State Park, where there's also mountain bike trails.

HIT THE BEACH

Down south the weather is warm year-round so it's all about



Great OUTDOORS

This page: top to bottom: Little River Canyon at Sunset; Alabama is home to a collection of birding trails. **Opposite Page:** Running on the beach at Gulf Shores; Cycling in summer, Oak Mountain near Birmingham.

embracing the great outdoors. Alabama's best-kept secret is its beaches. The resorts of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach comprise 32 miles of pristine bright-white beaches accessed by wooden boardwalks and backed by waving sea oats.

Deep South Detour

If you're in Montgomery, nature is never far away. Hop aboard elegant 19th century paddle steamer the Harriott II, which is docked near the Entertainment District. From here you can float along the peaceful Alabama River Huckleberry Finn-style, with food, drinks and music.



The beaches are in adjacent resort towns, each with a huge choice of restaurants and bars. However, development is controlled and along the sugary straight is just a single row of condos and a few hotels with direct beach access.

"THE MOBILE TENSAAW DELTA IS A WINDING LABYRINTH OF PEACEFUL REEDED AND WOODED WATERWAYS WHERE ALLIGATORS AND OTHER INTERESTING CREATURES LURK"

In fact, part of the coast, stretching inland between the two resorts, is a state park. A great spot to hang out is at Gulf State Park Pier, where sun-wrinkled fishermen haul in their catch and you can spot schools of fish sparkling under the hot sun. The park has 10 miles of trails and lakeside cabins – and it's just a 10-minute bike ride to the beach.

ANIMAL MAGIC

From Orange Beach, jovial Captain Bill runs Cetacean Cruises. His boat Alabama Cruzin' is just one of many specialising in nature trails, letting visitors see wild dolphins up-close and venturing into the dappled shade of the area's inland swamps and creeks to watch for more wildlife. You can even spy on the residents, as you glide past some of the area's most affluent and idyllic waterside homes.

The 5 Rivers Delta Center, located in the Mobile Tensaw Delta, is a winding labyrinth of peaceful reeded and wooded waterways where alligators lurk. The center operates guided kayak and boat trips, ranging from short sunset cruises to several days camping overnight in the wilderness with 'gator bites' and other refreshments laid on.

There is deep-sea fishing and diving off the coast of the resort towns of Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, where you can also take a coastal kayak, rent jet skis or go parasailing.

ACTION STATIONS

For the active traveller there are plenty of activities, including hiking and mountain biking, to choose from. Alabama has many unique

DID YOU KNOW?

White-water rafting is now available on the Chattahoochee River between Phenix City, Alabama and Columbus, Georgia and is described as being 'as wild as Colorado and as warm as Costa Rica.'

rock formations that people travel miles to climb. Horse Pens 40 in the Appalachian Mountains is a 115-acre historical park with gigantic boulders and scenic cliffs formerly used by Native Americans.

Along the Alabama/Georgia state line, just south of Atlanta, experience the thrill of the "World's Longest Urban Whitewater Course" as you ride in an eight-person raft down the exhilarating Chattahoochee River into downtown Phenix City, Alabama.

North of Atlanta, in Alabama, are the mountain villages of Mentone and Fort Payne where you can hike in a state park or visit Little River Canyon, a National Preserve operated by the U.S. Park Service.

Zip line adventures are available both at the beach and in Birmingham in Red Mountain Park, which also has an amazing obstacle course in the tops of the park's mountain top trees. Or play world-class championship golf on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.



HISTORY & CULTURE

Alabama is awash with history: it was the birthplace of the Confederacy and sparked the American Civil Rights Movement. And with cultural influences from the French, Spanish, British and Native Americans, its architecture and art is never dull.

Where it ALL BEGAN

It was in the state capital, Montgomery, where the breakaway Confederate States of America were born and the telegram which started the Civil War was sealed. You can stand on the spot where Jefferson Davis swore his 'presidential' oath of office in 1861, while close-by is the tiny White House of the Confederacy where he lived.

Throughout the state there are dozens of museums, cemeteries and battlefield sites dedicated to the war that followed on from the South's secession from the Union. You can explore the soldiers' homes at Fort Morgan near Gulf Shores and Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island and their resting place, at Confederate Memorial Park in Mountain Creek, near Montgomery. Some 18 reenactments take place annually across the state and there is even an Alabama Civil War Trail.



LADY ANTEBELLUM

Evoke that Deep South atmosphere and visit the columned mansions of the grand Antebellum period (1812-1860). You can sit on a porch swing, sip on an iced tea and imagine a simpler time when cotton was king.

The port of Mobile was America's

This page: clockwise from left: The Vulcan statue in Birmingham is the largest cast iron statue in the world; Montgomery Capitol building; Lowndes Interpretive Center, Selma. Opposite: Oakleigh Mansion, Mobile; Civil War re-enactment

third busiest during the cotton boom and the first capital of French Louisiana. Wandering the leafy streets of the Oakleigh Historic District takes you back in time but also lets you peer into the porches of some of the city's most beautiful homes. Oakleigh itself is a beautiful old plantation house, meticulously restored and filled with antiques that tell the story of its occupants.

Sturdivant Hall is the grandest of Selma's buildings, tucked away



"EVOKE THAT DEEP SOUTH ATMOSPHERE BY VISITING AN ANTEBELLUM MANSION. SIT ON A PORCH SWING, SIP AN ICED TEA AND IMAGINE A SIMPLER TIME WHEN COTTON WAS KING"

DID YOU KNOW?

Montgomery is where feisty Rosa Parks challenged segregation by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. Visit the museums dedicated to her and Dexter King Church and parsonage where Martin Luther King Jr. plotted the bus boycotts



amongst the quiet backstreets lined with trees dripping in Spanish moss. The mansion was built by slaves in the 1850s and showcases the days when Southern hospitality was in full swing. See it at dusk, when its white columns glow against the inky sky.

CIVIL RIGHTS LEGACY

Alabama is famous for its role in the struggle for equality between black and white Americans. These days, the state's informative museums explain civil rights issues to those who perhaps can't imagine a world where people were forbidden to eat together, use the same wash rooms, or even play football together.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is poignantly located across the street from the 16th Street Baptist Church where four young girls were killed by a Ku Klux Klan bomb in 1963 and it takes visitors on a fascinating journey from the days of slavery to the modern struggle for equal rights.

But it's not just in the big cities where the story of Civil Rights is told. For instance, who would guess that the sleepy riverside town of Selma, where the porches creek in the breeze, was the place that sparked a

monumental protest march?

Despite it being a constitutional right, black people in Selma and many other places were denied the vote through intimidation. When Selma came to the notice of Martin Luther King, a series of protests followed, resulting in the death of a young man, beaten by state troopers.

When 600 protestors tried to cross Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge to march to Montgomery they were beaten back. Following King's preaching of non-violent protest, globally televised images of unresisting protestors being beaten made the world sit up and take notice, leading to the President passing the Voting Rights Act.

Deep South Detour

Head to the tiny country town of Monroeville. Dominated by its courthouse, it's where Harper Lee, author of the famous novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* grew up and was inspired to write about racial injustice. Learn more at the courthouse museum and the Beehive Café and bookshop.

MAKE YOUR WAY

Choose an Alabama itinerary to suit you! Perhaps you need to keep the kids entertained, but the adults happy too. There are routes for those who want to get off the beaten track and have an adventure. Or if you've had enough excitement you can always just relax and enjoy the sunshine...or the golf!



FAMILY FORTUNES

Day 1-2: Refresh in Atlanta

Fly into Atlanta and visit its top family attractions: Georgia Aquarium and Coca Cola World.

Day 3: Get spaced out in Huntsville

Check out the US Space and Rocket Center, which is home to the mammoth 363-foot Apollo-era Saturn V rocket, and get a real taste of what it's like to be an astronaut in the G-Force Accelerator.

Day 4: Back to the future in Birmingham

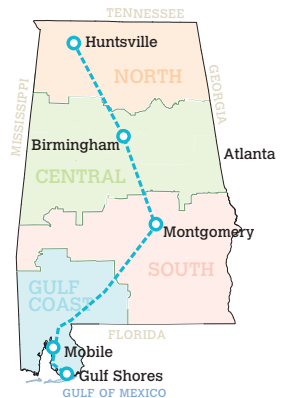
Continue the science theme at the interactive McWane Science Center with its IMAX theatre.

Alternatively, visit the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute for a moving and educational explanation of the Civil Rights Movement.

Day 5: Ride of your life in Montgomery

Visit the Rosa Parks Museum & Children's Wing and learn how one individual can make a real difference. Afterwards, hop on a Blake's Segway Tour around Montgomery's riverfront.

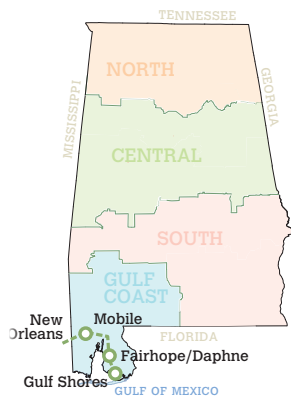
Day 6: Nature calls in Mobile Bay



All-aboard the USS Alabama battleship, to see what life at sea is like. Wildlife-centred pursuits include Mobile Zoo, holding rescued reptiles at Alligator Alley or spotting octopus and turtles close-up at the Estuarium, Dauphin Island.

Day 7 onwards: Be a beach bum!

Relax on 32 miles of white sand beaches lapped by the warm, calm Gulf in Gulf Shores or Orange Beach. If the kids are still bored, there are cruises, crazy golf and more.



PAMPERING & PARTYING

Day 1-2: Kick-start in the Big Easy

Relax, eat a po' boy sandwich and soak up the atmosphere of New Orleans' French Quarter.

Day 3: Luxuriate in Mobile

It was Mobile, not New Orleans, that held the first Mardi Gras. Head to party HQ Dauphin Street, for lively bars and restaurants. Alternatively, check into the historic Battle House Renaissance Hotel and Spa and watch the sun set over the city's art deco skyscraper from the rooftop with a glass of wine.

Day 4-5: Shop 'til you drop

Explore the cute little towns of Fairhope and Daphne, popping in and out of its bijoux boutiques and cooling off at the ice cream parlour. Then relax in a bubble bath at Marriott's top-rated spa at the Grand Hotel. Blissful treatments include aromatherapy and manicures.

Day 6-7: Blame it on the sunshine in Gulf Shores

Stop in Foley for the Tanger Outlet Center, where you'll find over 150 brand name stores, from Banana Republic to Ralph Lauren. Then on to Gulf Shores to let your hair down.

ACTION STATIONS

Day 1: Bright lights, big city

Fly into Atlanta or Nashville for a big city start to a rustic adventure

Day 2-3: Mountain madness

The DeSoto State Park and Little River Canyon National Preserve are home to spectacular waterfalls. Activities include rock climbing, kayaking, hiking or wild cave tours at Sequoyah Caverns.

Day 3: Where eagles fly

Lake Guntersville State Park near Huntsville attracts huge numbers of migrating bald eagles during the

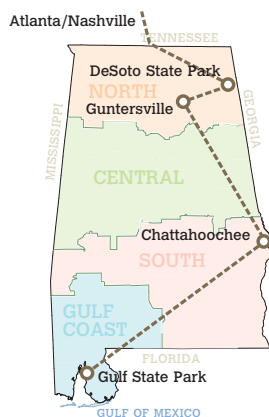
winter. Around the lake is a fishing center and hiking and horse trails.

Day 4: Go wet 'n' wild

Head to the Chattahoochee River Whitewater course between Alabama's Phenix City and Columbus, Georgia. Raft the longest urban whitewater course in the world or try kayaking and paddleboarding.

Day 5 onwards: Swamp versus sea

Try the Hummingbird Zip Line and fishing off the pier and Gulf State Park. There's also deep sea fishing charters or swamp kayaking and camping under the stars in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.



ALABAMA TEE PARTY

Day 1: Swing to the music

Choose from two Muscle Shoals golf courses: The Fighting Joe was the first trail course to break 8,000 yards; the traditional tree-lined Schoolmaster hugs the Tennessee River.

Day 2: Bunker down in Birmingham

Beautifully carved into the rolling terrain of Shannon Valley, the 18 holes of Ross Bridge are the longest course in the world and challenge

top golfers with elevation changes, water and natural obstructions.

Day 3: Capitol day in Montgomery

Choose between the Judge, with views of the Capitol dome and the shimmering Alabama River; the pine and cypress-lined swamps of the Legislator; or the secluded Scottish-links-style Senator course.

Day 4: Fairway to celeb heaven

The Lakewood Golf Club's Azalea and Dogwood courses in Point Clear have hosted President Gerald Ford and comedian Bob Hope.

