

AVII AND PARTY OF 1

AN



Sweet Home Alabama

Cook Musuem of Natural Science, Decatur



Whether it's learning about the natural world in Decatur and Gulf Shores, the past and future of space exploration in Huntsville, or the Civil Rights Movement in Selma, we can supply you with itineraries for several Group Tours. Trouble is...deciding which tour to take first. We'll keep adding to the list, you just keep coming for new adventures. **www.alabama.travel**



To learn how your group can experience Alabama, contact Rosemary Judkins at **rosemary.judkins@tourism.alabama.gov** or **334-242-4493.**

WE HELP YOU CREATE UNIQUE ITINERARIES. YOU TAKE ALL THE CREDIT.

The best itineraries are filled with inspiration, entertainment and excitement from start to finish. And that's exactly what you'll find in North Carolina where our scenic tours, cultural attractions, award-winning restaurants and more await your group's arrival. Plan your group adventure to North Carolina by contacting Amanda Baker at 919-447-7765 or amanda.baker@visitnc.com.



visitnc.com/groups





25 Years of Growth



SOUTHERN TOURISM LEADERS LOOK BACK ON A QUARTER CENTURY OF SUCCESS.

Sampling the South



CULINARY TOURS OFFER GREAT WAYS TO EXPLORE THESE SOUTHERN DESTINATIONS.

Music Experiences



GROUPS CAN MEET MUSICIANS AND UNLEASH THEIR OWN CREATIVITY AT THESE MUSICAL ATTRACTIONS.

New and Improved



ATTRACTIONS DEBUTING ACROSS THE SOUTH BRING MORE REASONS FOR GROUPS TO VISIT.

Southern Adventures



BREAK A LIGHT SWEAT AND ENJOY SOME EASY THRILLS AT THESE SCENIC SOUTHERN SPOTS.

PUBLISHED FOR

TRAVEL'SOUTH 💥 USA

3500 PIEDMONT RD. NE, STE. 210 ATLANTA, GA 30305 404-231-1790 WWW.TRAVELSOUTHUSA.COM ON THE COVER: Travelers enjoy a fresh seafood feast in coastal South Carolina.



NICHE TRAVEL PUBLISHERS 301 EAST HIGH STREET LEXINGTON, KY 40507 WWW.GROUPTRAVELLEADER.COM

FOR ADVERTISING CALL KELLY TYNER AT 888-253-0455

MARK TWAIN officially uninvited

WHAT DID MARK TWAIN SAY IN 1883? Who were the Creole Cowboys? And how did Baton Rouge become an independent nation for 74 days? With beautiful museums, delectable food and a vibrant music scene, indulge in Louisiana's culture when you explore its Capital City of Baton Rouge.

Unearth more of the unexpected at VisitBatonRouge.com/explore



AN AUTHENTIC LOUISIANA EXPERIENCE

VISIT BATON ROUGE IS PROUD TO HOST THE 2020 TRAVEL SOUTH DOMESTIC SHOWCASE

BOARD of DIRECTORS



LEE SENTELL DIRECTOR ALABAMA TOURISM DEPARTMENT WWW.ALABAMA.TRAVEL



JAY HALL ACTING COMMISSIONER KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM WWW.KENTUCKYTOURISM.COM

Kentuck

LUKE HOLTSCHNEIDER INTERIM DIRECTOR MISSOURI DIVISION OF TOURISM WWW.VISITMO.COM



DUANE PARRISH DIRECTOR SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & TOURISM WWW.DISCOVERSOUTHCAROLINA.COM



JIM DAILEY TOURISM DIRECTOR ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND TOURISM WWW.ARKANSAS.COM



DOUG BOURGEOIS ASSISTANT SECRETARY LOUISIANA OFFICE OF TOURISM WWW.LOUISIANATRAVEL.COM



WIT TUTTELL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VISIT NORTH CAROLINA WWW.VISITNC.COM

NORTH CAROLINA

RITA MCCLENNY PRESIDENT/CEO VIRGINIA TOURISM CORPORATION WWW.VIRGINIA.ORG



LISA LOVE INTERIM DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GEORGIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOURISM DIVISION WWW.EXPLOREGEORGIA.ORG



D. CRAIG RAY DIRECTOR VISIT MISSISSIPPI W W W. VISIT MISSISSIPPI.ORG VISIT

MARK EZELL COMMISSIONER TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT WWW.TNVACATION.COM

TENNESSEE

TNVACATION.COM

CHELSEA RUBY COMMISSIONER WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF TOURISM WWW.WVTOURISM.COM



Rosie's Gaming Emporium

Virginia's gaming scene grew this year with the opening of Rosie's Gaming Emporium in Richmond. The emporium features 700 gaming machines based on historic horse races. Groups can also arrange meals at Rosie's Kitchen, a casual restaurant with burgers, pizza and sandwiches, or enjoy signature cocktails such as a Rosie's Punch or Blueberry Lemon Drop at Rosie's Bar. This is the fourth Rosie's location in the state; others are in New Kent, Vinton and Hampton.

ROSIESGAMING.COM



THAT VOICE YOU'RE HEARING?

MAYBE IT'S NOT YOUR GPS APP.

almost heaven

The open road. It has a way of calling to us. Here in West Virginia, it's always worth listening to. Because it leads to places that get into your soul. Landmarks and landscapes that are forever etched in your mind. Eventually calling you back to feel it all over again.



WVtourism.com





PARRISH HAS SOUTH CAROLINA AT THE TOP OF THE CHARTS

BY MAC LACY

arius Rucker may have the most instantly recognizable voice in popular music today. As lead singer for Hootie and the Blowfish, and as a major crossover star on his own, the personable vocalist would be a natural as a spokesperson or ambassador for almost any destination in the world.

But it just so happens that Rucker is from South Carolina, and his roots run deep. And his home state benefits from his universal appeal. Clad almost always in a University of South Carolina baseball cap, the internationally known musician is currently representing his home state at numerous tourism events and appearances.

"Darius is on the cover of our 2020 South Carolina visitor's guide, if that tells you anything," said Duane Parrish, the state's longtime tourism director and current Travel South USA chairman. "He has done concerts for us domestically and internationally, and

people love him. He and the band did four concerts in Europe this summer in places like London and Paris."

Fortunately, Rucker doesn't have to stretch the truth to sing the praises of his



"Let's take golf, for instance," he said. "Golfers can literally play golf on the ocean in the morning and, again, in the mountains that afternoon. Our coast is blessed with places as different as Charleston and Myrtle Beach, and as you move inland, we offer the Blue Ridge Mountains and outstanding cities like Greenville, or equine destinations like Aiken and Camden. Our hospitality surprises people — I like to tell people their blood pressure drops by 10 points as soon as they get here."

Parrish wants groups to know that his state has invested more than \$100 million in its state park system during the past eight years and that St. Phillips Island,

> off the coast of Beaufort, has been purchased and prepped for small groups to enjoy photography, birding, oyster roast tours, day hiking and much more.

In South Carolina, Rucker has material to last a lifetime.

DUANE PARRISH

New south

SOUTH CAROLINA

Unity Park

The city of Greenville recently broke ground on the first phase of a new six-acre greenspace: Unity Park. The park will feature a 10-story observation deck that offers visitors scenic views of the nearby Blue Ridge mountain range. Other highlights will include a gathering hall for special events and concerts and a pedestrian bridge and landscaped riverbanks along the Reedy River. The idea for Unity Park was formed in 1907.

VISITGREENVILLESC.COM

CUSTOM CONTENT



AMERICA & BEYOND

SMALL RECEPTIVE TOUR OPERATOR IS MAKING A BIG IMPRESSION

BY VICKIE MITCHELL

ves Fore is excited. He has just fielded a call from an outbound tour operator in Europe who wants Fore to develop a specialized itinerary, one that opens travelers' eyes to the issues of slavery in America.

"For me, this is a fantastic challenge," said Fore. "I am thinking about this nonstop, and I cannot wait to talk to people and do tons of research to see what we can do. I want to create a package that everybody will see and say, 'I want to go on that tour.""

Customized tour packages are the specialty of America & Beyond, a receptive tour operator led by Roger Montgomery, CEO and president, and Fore, vice president of operations. They launched what they describe as a "boutique" receptive tour company four years ago and in that short time, America & Beyond has made a highly favorable impression.

In fact, in December, America & Beyond was named one of Travel South USA's Ambassadors at the 12-state regional marketing alliance's international conference in St. Louis. The award recognizes America & Beyond's work in marketing the American South to travelers. Their tours of the region, from civil rights sites to Delta blues bars and Nashville's sounds, have resonated with European travelers.

Fore marvels at the recognition from Travel South, noting that among 2018's Ambassadors were large receptive tour operators with decades in business. "This is a big honor for such a small company as ours," he said.

BRINGING DIFFERENT SKILLS TO THE TABLE

Montgomery is a native Californian who spent most of his career on Wall Street but keeps a giant RV readied for road trips. Fore was born in the south of France but has lived many years in New York and has for 30 years worked for large receptive tour operators as well as hotels.

Like Fore, Montgomery develops itineraries, but he also puts much of his focus on finances. "We run a very fiscally conservative company. We want to make sure we are around in the long-term, providing for our clients."

Fore's years in travel and tourism mean valuable connections to tour operators, hotels, attractions and other suppliers.

Because both have traveled extensively, Montgomery and Fore can sit down with a client and come up with an itinerary that won't be staid or standard and will also have a marketable price point. "We approach it in a consultative manner," said Montgomery. "Wherever we send tours, Yves or I have probably been there and experienced what they will experience."

America & Beyond has impressed many clients with personal service that belies the company's small size. "The phone numbers on our business cards and emails, those are our cell phones," said Montgomery. "If a client calls outside office hours, the call does not go to a hotline or someone in another country, it rings through to us and we handle it."

Such service does not go unnoticed. "We met with a client--the largest tour operator in



Italy--and the first thing they said to us was, 'When something happens, you have the best customer service and you take care of the problem right away,''' said Fore.

Already, America & Beyond is getting repeat calls from outbound tour operators, ready to develop the next tour.

"Our biggest thrill," said Montgomery, "is when we hear that a passenger has returned to an outbound operator in Europe because they liked what they experienced on that first tourand the tour operator used us-- and then the tour operator comes back to us, because we did such a good job."

FOR MORE INFORMATION





BRING FRIENDS

BITTNER IS A BELIEVER IN THE EVOLVING GROUP MARKET BY MAC LACY

ravel South USA president and CEO Liz Bittner expects to see familiar trends continuing to characterize the travel of domestic groups into her region in 2020.

"We believe smaller groups will continue to reconfigure how the South is enjoyed," said Bittner. "Like many other segments of the industry, groups will seek a smaller footprint when they travel so they can enjoy a more authentic experience while they're here. Authenticity comes in places like a 100-year-old distillery in Bardstown, Kentucky, or Providence Canyon in southwest Georgia.

"It's not coincidental that another one of the biggest trends we're seeing is the changing inventory being offered by transportation companies across the region," she said. "Where 20 years ago, they featured almost ex-

clusively full-size coaches, we're seeing so much more customized equipment on the road now. Smaller travel groups today have a lot more options to choose from, and they are driving demand for smaller vehicles. "The culinary aspects of group travel will only continue to grow as well," she said. "I can't think of another region in America that is better able to capitalize on the penchant for regional cuisine than we are. From the finest restaurants in Charleston to the barbecue joints across the South, groups are demanding trips that taste different from where they originated.

"In addition to major draws like Nashville or New Orleans, up-and-coming cities are also gaining traction with groups," said Bittner. "Our board of directors met this year in Greenville, South Carolina, and what an eye-opener that was. What they've done in Greenville along their riverfront is remarkable. That is one cool city for a group."

Bittner is worry-free about the delegate experience at her Travel South Domestic Showcase meeting, scheduled for March 8-11 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

> "Hey, we're in Louisiana," she said. "Those folks pull out all the stops. Baton Rouge will be a party. Count on amazing food, decadent drinks and maybe even some fireworks."



LIZ BITTNER

CUSTOM CONTENT



BY VICKIE MITCHELL

tiny clapboard Assembly of God Church in Tupelo, Mississippi, ignited Elvis Presley's passion for gospel music. Later, as his rock 'n' roll career took off, Elvis and his backup singers often warmed their voices by singing spirituals. All three Grammys he won were for his gospel recordings.

"Gospel and Christianity were such a part of him and of this part of the world," said Jan Pannell, sales manager for the Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau.

There's no better place than Tupelo to grasp the role faith played in the life of one of America's most-celebrated recording artists. Elvis spent his formative years in Tupelo; his first guitar came from a store that's still in business downtown.

START THE DAY WITH A DRIVING TOUR

A day in Tupelo might begin with the Elvis Presley Driving Tour. Among the dozen sites are his elementary school and Fairpark, the fairgrounds where a larger-than-life statue commemorates his 1956 performance there. The CVB can provide a complimentary stepon guide.

The drive around town is brightened by colorfully painted metal guitars, a community art project, and downtown murals, all great backdrops for group photos. "One fairly new mural is a Tupelo postcard," said Pannell. "People are forever getting their picture made in front of it."

BUY A GUITAR AT TUPELO HARDWARE

Downtown, at Tupelo Hardware, staff are happy to share the story of Elvis' first guitar, which his mother bought there, and show off its selection of guitars, still a top seller.

Armed with complimentary maps, groups

can then explore downtown, choosing among local restaurants for lunch. Or, they might reboard the motorcoach for a stop at Johnnie's Drive-In, one of Elvis' favorite hangouts.

Because it is tiny and incredibly popular, the best option at Johnnie's, Pannell says, might be to preorder its famous dough burgers and milkshakes, and enjoy them on the motorcoach. Groups are welcome to make a quick walk through Johnnie's and have their pictures snapped sitting in the booth favored by the King.

END THE DAY AT ELVIS' BIRTHPLACE

At the Elvis Presley Birthplace, Elvis' ties to church and song are strongest, especially in the little church he and his family attended, which was moved to the site. His family's two-room home is also open for tours.

In the church, an interactive experience makes visitors feel they are surrounded by worshippers at a 1940s church service.

Late afternoon tours at the site can shift into dinner and entertainment at the event. Sunday night suppers — meat and vegetable meals served any day of the week —add an authentic Southern touch. Before dinner, groups can watch a short movie about Elvis in the center's theater which seats 126.

Elvis tribute artists are a favorite for after-dinner entertainment. There are many in the area, and each artist portrays Elvis at a different point in his career.

"Tribute artists are different than an impersonator," said Pannell. "They are Elvis fans and they love him. They pay tribute to Elvis and keep his image and memory alive."

Like Tupelo, they celebrate a man who, through songs both spiritual and spirited, enthralled millions worldwide.

TUPELO ELVIS FESTIVAL

To hear soulful spirituals, plan a trip to Tupelo June 3-7, 2019 for the annual Tupelo Elvis Festival. Sunday's schedule begins with gospel performances. Tickets are required; this year's show is Sunday, June 7.

WWW.TUPELOELVISFESTIVAL.COM



FOR MORE INFORMATION

tupelo convention and visitors bureau 662-841-6521 visittupelo@tupelo.net jpannell@tupelo.net www.tupelo.net



BY BRIAN JEWELL

t's amazing the difference a quarter-century can make.

This year marks the 25th edition of the Travel South Tour Planner.

Across the board, states throughout the region have seen dramatic gains in tourism, since 1994. Much of that progress has come hand-in-hand with major new tourist developments and initiatives.

We spoke to representatives from six Southern states to find out how their destinations have changed and grown in the past quarter-century.





ARKANSAS' CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Courtesy Crystal Bridges

Arkansas: A presidential legacy

n January 1995, Bill Clinton was in the middle of his first term as president. His popularity helped to shine a spotlight on his home state.

"When Clinton was elected, it put Arkansas on the map," said Jim Dailey, who retired as tourism director at the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism on December 31, 2019.

Soon after Clinton left office in 2001, he announced plans to locate his presidential library in an overlooked area of downtown Little Rock on the banks of the Arkansas River. That announcement spurred a series of developments that revolutionized the city and led to a serious uptick in tourism statewide.

"The presidential library opened during the time I was mayor of Little Rock," Dailey said. "That was one of the greatest anchor assets we could have ever asked for to help us establish a renaissance of redevelopment in downtown Little Rock."

The Clinton library opened in 2004. Seven years later, another major attraction, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, opened in Bentonville, a town in the northwest corner of the state. Bentonville is the corporate home of Walmart Inc., and the Walton family was instrumental in the museum's opening.

"Crystal Bridges opened in 2011, and they've had between 1.5 and 2 million people visit," Dailey said. "Last year, the economic impact on tourism for northwest Arkansas was about \$1.7 billion."

Contemplating the end of his tourism career, Dailey was excited about the future of the Natural State. Several

other major projects are being developed, including the U.S. Marshals Museum, set to open in Fort Smith early this year.

BRING FRIENDS

"This is Arkansas' time to shine and our time to be an economic player in the world of tourism," he said. "We're going to continue to build on the strengths that we have and the basic fiber of what Arkansas is all about."

ARKANSAS.COM

North Carolina: READY FOR ITS CLOSE-UP

f you've ever spent time in North Carolina, you already know that it features stunning scenery, charming towns and talented people. When Hollywood discovered those traits, it opened a new chapter in North Carolina's business community and tourism offerings.

Feature filmmakers first started visiting North Carolina in the late 1980s, with director Dino De Laurentiis opening a studio in Wilmington. Then in the 1990s, the state began making significant investments in its film industry, creating incentives for productions to shoot there. That opened the floodgates for what has become a thriving industry.

"Locations were key to landing film business, and they have played a key role in the productions that have come to North Carolina," said Guy Gaster, director of FilmNC. "And when folks enjoy cinema and TV series

Today, you'll cut a rug on a centuries-old slate sidewalk. Today, you're in Louisiang.

Come take in all of the soul-satisfying sights, sounds, flavors and places Louisiana serves up daily.

Plan your getaway today at LouisianaTravel.com.

© 2020 Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism



LouisianaTravel.com

and see the locations highlighted, they want to come experience those places for themselves."

North Carolina's list of film and TV credits is now long and wide-ranging. Notable recent productions filmed there include "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" and the "Hunger Games" trilogy, which brought massive numbers of visitors to the mountainous western part of the state.

Wilmington, with its coastal charm, continues to land starring roles as well.



Courtesy Visit NC

"The heart of our industry is on the coast in picturesque Wilmington," Gaster said. "We've had projects as big as 'Iron Man 3' there. 'One Tree Hill' and 'Dawson's Creek' both had long runs there too, and they were able to travel and feature other parts of the state, including the Biltmore House and Duke University. Those projects still have people coming. Especially in today's world of streaming entertainment, new fans are discovering those series and finding out they can come visit those places."

VISITNC.COM

South Carolina: NEW NATIONAL PARKS

national park can bring a lot of visitors to an area. Since 2003, South Carolina, a state already popular with visitors, garnered a lot of attention with the designation of three new national parks within its borders.

Many of the park sites were already protected as state parks or other historic areas. But the national park designation takes them to new levels.

"The designation opens doors to national opportunities we may not have otherwise had," said Dolly Chewning, director of tourism sales and marketing for the South

5

4

3

2

1

hello Huntsville, AL

Huntsville, Alabama | huntsville.org Get ready for your adventure in the Rocket City! Marvel at over 120 acres filled with stunning floral collections, aquatic areas, and more at the **Huntsville Botanical Garden**

Shop the nation's largest privately owned arts facility at Lowe **Mill ARTS & Entertainment** and stay for a concert

Hear stories of spies, lies & ghosts while touring our **Historic Districts**, **Historic Huntsville Depot**, and **The Weeden House**

Take a step back in time and witness the birthplace of Alabama's statehood at at **Alabama Constitution Hall Park**

Celebrate the U.S. space program where it all began and the journey back to the moon at **U.S. Space & Rocket Center**...and more!



Pam Williams Tourism Sales Manager 256.551.2204 pam@huntsville.org

we've got space

.LE.org

🚹 HuntsvilleCVB 🕑 @Go2HuntsvilleAL 🔞 VisitHuntsvilleAL #iHeartHsv 🗧

outdoor Adventures | Louisiana (uisine | Premier Shopping



Enjoy southern hospitality just a beat from New Orleans; experience Jefferson Parish. Enjoy festivals year-round, historic districts, shopping and value priced accommodations. Catch the adventure on our swamp and bayou tours, then savor classic Cajun cuisine.



WWW.VISITJEFFERSONPARISH.COM 504.731.7083 | TOLL FREE 1.877.572.7474







Courtesy SCPRT

Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. "It elevates the perception of the stories we have to tell."

South Carolina's first site to receive the designation was Congaree National Park, which preserves some of the oldest bottomland forests on the East Coast. In 2019, historic Civil War sites near Charleston received a joint designation as Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park.

Perhaps the most significant park development came in 2017, when President Barack Obama designated the Reconstruction Era National Historic Park, which comprises a string of historic sites in Beaufort.

"South Carolina has a significant national story, and the national park makes it easier for Beaufort to help people discover the transformative effects of Reconstruction," Chewning said. "Having these national parks provides jobs and fuels recreation and tourism. It also connects people to our history and heritage on a state and national level."

DISCOVERSOUTHCAROLINA.COM

West Virginia: BLAZING NEW TRAILS

n the 1990s, civic leaders in West Virginia faced a conundrum. The southwest region of the state had huge swaths of beautiful mountain landscapes, but they were inaccessible to visitors because they were held by private mining corporations.

"We were primarily a natural resource extraction area," said Jeffrey Lusk, executive director of the Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation Authority. "We had millions of acres of privately held property. So our idea was to go to these owners and create a public body that would allow people from all over the country to come ride ATVs, UTVs and off-road motorcycles."

That idea led to the inception of the Hatfield and McCoy trails, a system of scenic off-road vehicle trails on private property that was open for public use. The system debuted in 2000 with 300 miles of trails, and

U.S. Marshals Museum

During the Wild West heyday of the 1800s, more U.S. Marshals died serving the territory around Fort Smith than any other place or time in American history. To commemorate the work of the marshals, the U.S. Marshals Museum will open in Fort Smith this year. The project was first announced in 2007 and is being built with more than \$50 million in privately raised funds. When it opens, the museum will feature both historic artifacts and state-of-the-art multimedia technology.



MUSEUM OF MISSISSIPPI HISTORY - JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

...ON MISSISSIPPI'S WORLD-CLASS MUSEUMS

ONE MISSISSIPPINY STORIES...

DOM

Mississippi's impressive collection of state-of-the-art museums including the acclaimed Museum of Mississippi History - teach, inspire and ignite the minds of generations young and old. **Don't miss out on an excursion sure to educate and enthrall.**



Plan your next Mississippi trip at VISITMISSISSIPPI.ORG/DONTMISSOUT



Photos Courtesy WV Tourism Office





administrators sold 5,000 permits in just three months.

"We knew we had something great," Lusk said. "We've grown every year since our inception. In 2018, we sold 50,031 permits, and over 85% of those were to non-West Virginia residents."

Today the trail system covers 250,000 acres of private property, with commitments from other owners to add up to three times that amount. It is also creating significant economic opportunities in the region.

"We've had over 50 new businesses open up around the trail system — ATV outfitters and lodging businesses that are accommodating our riders," Lusk said. "Our

> outfitters rent ATVs and UTVs and also offer guided tours. They provide you with helmets and machines, then take you on a fully guided tour with a trail lunch. They show you the scenic overlooks and tell you about the history of the area and the towns. They make it a very holistic experience, from hearing about our culture to eating our local foods and going to restaurants you wouldn't have found on your own."

> Lusk said the organization is now conducting an economic impact study and expects to find an annual economic impact of \$40 million to \$50 million from the trail system.

> > WVTOURISM.COM

Louisiana: TRIPLING TOURISM

ouisiana, which has been popular with tourist for decades, has seen remarkable growth industrywide over the past 25 years. And that growth is most notable in areas of critical importance: visitation and economic impact.

In 1994, Louisiana welcomed 17.9 million visitors. In 2018, the state reached



Crystal Bridges, Bentonville



Fayetteville



ARKANSASGROUPTRAVEL.COM



By Human Pictures, courtesy EJI

51.3 million visitors, nearly tripling visitation over a quarter-century. Much of that growth came from Canada, which has tripled in visitation since 1998 to become the state's largest international market.

Those figures alone don't tell the whole story. Hidden in statistics from the past 25 years is the state's remarkable recovery from Hurricane Katrina in 2004. That year, 10.1 million people visited New Orleans and spent \$4.9 billion, according to the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation. The following year, visitation plummeted to 2.6 million visitors, less than half of what it was before the hurricane.

Over the decade that followed, the city bounced back, and its tourism industry made dramatic gains. In 2014, the city received 9.5 million visitors, who spent \$6.8 billion, a record amount at the time.

Today, Louisiana's record-breaking streak continues. The state reports that 237,000 residents worked in hospitality in 2018, up from 158,600 in 1994.

LOUISIANATRAVEL.COM

Alabama: EMBRACING ITS STORIES

wenty-five years ago, few people in Alabama were talking about the state's civil rights legacy. Some of its most pivotal sites were nearly lost to history.

"In the early 1990s, I was working on a travel book about Alabama," said Lee Sentell. "When I came to Montgomery, the Southern Poverty Law Center's civil rights memorial was the only indication that anything had ever happened in Alabama dealing with civil rights. I found the sites where Rosa Parks got on the bus and where she got arrested, and there was no recognition at either site. Troy University was about to build a parking deck over one of them."

Sentell, who now serves as the director of the Alabama Tourism Department, began lobbying Alabama's representatives in Congress for recognition of these

Union Station Attractions

From 1894 to 1978, Union Station served as St. Louis' primary train depot. In the 1980s, it was repurposed as a mixed-use facility. Last fall, a number of new experiences opened at Union Station, including a Ferris wheel, a carousel, mini-golf, a ropes course and a mirror maze. But the biggest news will be the opening of the St. Louis Aquarium at Union Station this winter. The 120,000-square-foot aquarium will house more than 13,000 marine animals. STLOUISUNIONSTATION.COM





Open Doors to Curiosity. Discovery. Belonging.

Step through our doors today. Come explore the many stories that connect us all as Mississippians.

MUSEUM OF MISSISSIPPI HISTORY

222 North Street, Jackson | museumofmshistory.com |





Shine Light on the Power of Courage.

Explore the movement that changed the nation — and the people behind it.

222 North Street, Jackson **mscivilrightsmuseum.com**





MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

Almost Heaven Airstream

The West Virginia Tourism Office is taking its "Almost Heaven" message on the road with the new Almost Heaven Airstream. This refurbished classic American travel trailer was retrofitted to serve



as a mobile visitor center that highlights West Virginia experiences. The Airstream features TV screens playing videos of West Virginia scenic destinations as well as activity stations with post cards and West Virginia trivia, all with John Denver's "Country Roads" playing in the background.

WVTOURISM.COM

sites. That recognition led others throughout the state to build monuments and museums to tell the stories of civil rights pioneers.

"Now, I'm proud to say I'm on the board of the Rosa Parks Museum," Sentell said. "And we recently had the opening of the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum, the world's first lynching museum and memorial in downtown Montgomery. If someone had told me that a museum about lynching would attract 400,000 people in its first year, I would have said it wouldn't happen. But it did.

"People who would never have come to Alabama or Montgomery are coming in significant numbers. The city is seeing motorcoaches in numbers it has never encountered before."

Now, Sentell and Alabama are leading another monumental effort. They spearheaded the creation of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail in 2018, connecting significant historical sites in many Southern states and beyond. Under the guidance of the National Park Service and with the support of Georgia State University, they are now nominating Civil Rights Trail sites for inclusion on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

ALABAMA.TRAVEL



Explore Myrtle Beach



Fresh Itineraries I Diverse Accommodations I Live Entertainment I History & Nature Coastal Carolina Cuisine I Incredible Shopping I Southern Hospitality



800.488.8998 | MyrtleBeachGroups.com

Discover group destinations that are distinctly Georgia, from the mountains to the coast and all the worlds in between. We invite you to...

EXPLORE EXPLORE

NACOOCHEE ADVENTURES Helen

There's no better way to take in the stunning scenery of North Georgia than ziplining through the Blue Ridge Mountain canopy. At Nacoochee Adventures, only a mile from downtown Helen, your group can glide through the trees, set out on ATV excursions, and get immersed in the heritage of the area. Between activities, guides will share local history spanning from the Native Americans to the gold rush and prohibition-era moonshiners.

Photo credit: @kaaaaaaty



NATIONAL CENTER FOR CIVIL & HUMAN RIGHTS Atlanta



Standing proud in downtown Atlanta, the National Center for Civil & Human Rights is a beacon of hope and progress. Like the many civil rights monuments and museums across the state, the draw of the center isn't just the lessons of looking back, but what your group will take away moving forward. *Photo credit: @brittjane_c*

TYBEE ISLAND LIGHT STATION & MUSEUM Tybee Island



Just twenty minutes from the historic and lively port city of Savannah is Tybee Island. Your group will find five miles of public beaches, discover a lighthouse built in 1736, and enjoy plenty of fresh, local seafood. Whether for relaxation on the sand or dolphin tours and sunset cruises on the water, Tybee gives your crew an island getaway right here in Georgia.

Photo credit: @mylittlelifesjourneys





BY ELIZA MYERS

outherners take their cuisine and their hospitality very seriously. They argue about the proper seasonings for boudin or the best way to prepare fresh-caught flounder. And when Southern cooks com-

pete with each other, it's always their customers that win.

Groups shouldn't merely attach meals onto the margins of an itinerary; they should incorporate food into the central focus of a Southern tour. The region offers many food-themed tours full of humor, history and deliciousness that offer more than the typical Southern fare. These tours feature dishes that combine traditional Southern elements with modern culinary innovations that surprise and delight restaurant patrons. GROUPS CAN ENJOY FRESH CRAB CLAWS AND OTHER GULF COAST DELICACIES ON THE MISSISSIPPI SFAFOOD TRAIL





Bham Eat Drink Ride Food Tour BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

hen viewers watched Comedienne Joy take a bite out of the most talked about new dish in Birmingham, Alabama, they quickly developed food envy. Cassandra King, aka Comedienne Joy, developed a foodie following on her restaurant show "Dining Out With Comedienne Joy" on Talk Alabama's TV program. After hearing person after person express a desire to eat like her, she developed a food tour that invited guests to dine at some of her favorite restaurants.

The Bham Eat Drink Ride Food Tour incorporates King's hilarious comedy into an informative tour of Birmingham's culinary hot spots. Her typical four-hour tour stops at four or five restaurants, though she personalizes tours for private groups.

The goal isn't to show groups the same five places but, rather, to introduce participants to hidden restaurant gems. One tour might include hamburgers, Mexican food, cocktails, dessert and her personal favorite: fried chicken.

"The guests come to have fun," King said. "I love to take people around. They don't know where they are going. I like to make it not just some great food, but to try something different."

For example, the tour might stop at a boutique liquor store for unusual adult beverages and shopping. At a local ice cream shop, participants can watch the storeowners make the ice cream before eating it.

The self-described "Queen of Clean" not only hosts a TV show but also focuses on food on her video blog. Her background in comedy means that although her tours center around tasty dishes, they also leave guests rolling with laughter.

Entertained groups keep coming back for more, which is why King recently purchased a second bus for tours. She also plans to expand the business to include a civil rights tour in February.

DININGOUTWITHCOMEDIENNEJOY.COM

Ellijay Wine Country GILMER COUNTY, GEORGIA

isitors never hurry through a winery. Instead, they slow down to sip wine, chat and take in the views. Georgia's Appalachian Mountains provide the scenic backdrop for the five wineries in Ellijay Wine Country.

Groups can explore the vineyards and sample the fine wines at the following local wineries, each just an hour's drive north of Atlanta in Gilmer County and Pickens County.

The Cartecay Vineyards in Ellijay incorporates more than delicious wines into its experience. Groups can take in the vineyard's laid-back vibe by listening to live music on the outdoor patio. The site's 1890s refurbished Tasting Barn can warm a chilly night with its wood-fired stove.

Not far off, the Engelheim Vineyards celebrates the owners' German heritage, since the name means "Angel Home" in German. Owner Gary Engel leads tours through the winery to reveal its winemaking process, and then participants retire to a lovely tasting room for a variety of wine samples. Wine-pairing classes also help



Courtesy Wilmer COC

Courtesy Wilmer COC

By A. Bozwell, courtesy Comedienne Joy





a well crafted experience

To experience authentic Kentucky, spend a day in ShelbyKY for stables, tables and designer labels. You will wish you planned for a few more days.

See what you're missing at VisitShelbyKY.com

SHELBYKY

SHELBYVILLE . SIMPSONVILLE . KY Located between Louisville and Lexington.



By Lucius Fontenot, courtesy Lafayette CVB

guests leave as wine pros. Groups can also book a winepairing dinner.

Travelers can take in a breath of fresh mountain air at Chateau Meichtry in Talking Rock, Georgia. The family-owned vineyard offers panoramic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains while exploring the vineyard, the winery and the tasting room, since all the vineyard's wine is bottled on-site. Guided tours, live music and tastings can also fill an evening at the vineyard.

With a focus on French wine, the Fainting Goat Vineyard serves a range of full-bodied reds, fruity whites and sweet blends. True to the name, the vineyard keeps goats on-site that visitors can pet and play with. Lawn games, mountain views, live music and coffee tastings add to the experience.

ELLIJAYWINECOUNTRY.COM

Cajun Boudin Trail LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

ronounced "boo-DAN," Louisiana's sausage specialty incites controversy about the best way to prepare and cook it. Groups can form their own opinions on the state's Cajun Boudin Trail.

Lafayette is a great place to start the trail, since it boasts a long love affair with the regional dish. Lafayette holds the annual Boudin Cookoff in October where chefs show off their version of the combination of cooked rice, pork, onions, green peppers and seasonings.

To make boudin, chefs run their ingredients through a meat grinder before stuffing it into a sausage casing. Though those are the basics, each recipe is a variation on those foundational ingredients. Groups can sample boudin balls, smoked boudin or seafood boudin at the cookoff event and throughout the year at restaurants and meat shops. Travelers can even take boudin back home with them, since many shops on the trail sell boudin in frozen packs with little travel coolers.

Boudin's roots go back to the French "boucherie," a communal hog slaughter where every portion of the animal would be used. The links of meat produced from those gatherings became known as boudin.

The staple Cajun finger food can be eaten for breakfast, lunch, dinner or all three. To decide which version of boudin to choose, trip planners can consult boudinlink.com, a comprehensive guide to all the boudin in the state. Over 125 reviews, a map and suggestions help groups plan mouth-watering boudin itineraries.

One favorite stop, Don's Specialty Meats, sells over 700,000 pounds of boudin a year. Boudin burritos, boudin tater tots and more variations prove the versatility of the Cajun classic.

> CAJUNBOUDINTRAIL.COM LAFAYETTETRAVEL.COM



By Lucius Fontenot, courtesy Lafayette CVB

"It went from a hobby to a full-time business. We now have 20 tour guides and nine different cities throughout North Carolina."

- LESLEY STRACKS-MULLEMS, TASTE CAROLINA GOURMET FOOD TOURS

Rock Stars Under The Stars

Fred

www.amphitheater.org

www.visitpeachtreecity.com



Photos courtesy Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tours



Taste Carolina Gourmet Food Tours DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

leven years ago, Lesley Stracks-Mullem's foodie brother-in-law paid her a visit in Durham, North Carolina. She planned an elaborate barbecue tour all over western North Carolina to ensure he tasted the best the region had to offer.

"It was as much fun for me to plan as it was for him to do," said Stracks-Mullem, owner and co-founder of Taste Carolina. "I thought maybe there might be a market there. It turns out there was."

Stracks-Mullem started Taste Carolina during the recession at a time when she couldn't find a job after graduate school.

"It went from a hobby to a full-time business," said Stracks-Mullem. "We now have 20 tour guides and nine different cities throughout North Carolina."

The company offers walking tours of North Carolina in Durham, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Wilmington, Charlotte and Asheville. The tours focus on locally owned, farmto-table eating and drinking establishments.

At each stop, participants talk with chefs, learn about the history of the restaurant and enjoy food and drink.

> Tour guides also reveal the history, architecture and culinary landscape of the city in a laid-back, social afternoon or evening out.

> Though weekend tours are open to the public, custom tours can be arranged for any day or evening for groups of at least eight. Each tour lasts about three hours, with five to seven tastings. Participants should expect to be full by the end.

> Groups can include drink stops. Breweries or craft cocktails are frequently incorporated into tours at several of the cities. Alternative drinks are available for participants who don't drink alcohol.

> > TASTECAROLINA.NET



- NEW ORLEANS -PLANTATION COUNTRY

VisitNOPC.com

Architecture is living art out here.

It's easy for your group to feel swept away by the architecture as it is the colorful culture that's inspired by the very people who call Louisiana's River Parishes home.

Explore our architecture on YouTube Watch "An Architectural Gumbo #OutHere" to learn about our region.







Photos courtesy MS Tourism



Mississippi Seafood Trail MISSISSIPPI'S GULF COAST

reshly caught wild seafood has a flavor like none other. To highlight the superiority of the seafood caught off the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the Mississippi Hospitality and Restaurant Association (MHRA) created the Mississippi Seafood Trail.

"I don't believe there is any finer seafood in the world," said Pat Fontaine, executive director of MHRA. "We have some talented chefs throughout our state preparing seafood. Mississippi has won many national seafood competitions."

Over 100 participating restaurants across the state offer a variety of items. To qualify, restaurants must offer at least one wild-caught seafood dish from the Gulf. Everything from po'boy shops to traditional seafood restaurants participate to honor the state's high-quality seafood.

"When it comes to Gulf seafood, there is such variety," said Fontaine. "Trying to make the decision of what to eat depends on whether you are looking for great fish, crab, oysters or something else. All along the coast you are going to experience all different types of seafood prepared in any way imaginable."

Planners can find their quality local seafood for their groups using the trail's website and app. Both include a

map, driving directions, phone numbers and other useful planning information.

App users are encouraged to upload their own seafood photos or relate their experience with an audio recording feature.

Group planners can also encourage their travelers to use the trail's app to find local seafood when dining on their own. Biloxi, especially, features a plethora of dining options on the trail, several of which lie in walking distance of each other.

MISSISSIPPISEAFOODTRAIL.COM


www.visitpeachtreecity.com

Peachtree

Comunity

64

Many

•

more

0

....

worry

LAKE PEACHTREE

rholless Possibilities

Ī



Board & mak

E

Booming Breweries

Craft beer is growing in popularity across Louisiana, and a number of new breweries have opened in different parts of the state. Flying Tiger Brewery in Monroe honors hometown hero Gen. Claire Chennault, an aviation pioneer who led the



Flying Tigers squadron. In Natchitoches, the new Cane River Brewing is housed in a refurbished cotton gin. And Bayou Teche Brewing in Arnaudville makes beers to complement Louisiana cuisine.

LIBATIONS.LOUISIANATRAVEL.COM/BREWERIES





Photos courtesy Foothill Foodie Tours

Foothill Foodie Tours GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Rised on handmade spaghetti by her Italian family, Rose Woelker developed a sophisticated palate at a young age. After a career in Detroit, as an executive assistant and owner of a wedding consultant business, Woelker was familiar also with the art of organization. Once she moved to Greenville, South Carolina,



GOOD TIMES ARE INEVITABLE

BRING YOUR GROUP TOUR TO LIFE.

Hands-on experiences and uncommon access offered exclusively for groups. Plan your group's Live the Life Adventure at **VisitVirginiaBeach.com/GroupTour.**

VIRGINIA OBEACH LIVE THE LIFE-ADVENTURES



Heaven Hill Bourbon Heritage Center

Bardstown is one of the top bourbon-producing destinations in a state known for the spirit, and groups visiting the area will find new visitor experiences awaiting them at the Heaven Hill Bourbon Heritage Center. The visitor center recently completed the first phase of a multimillion-dollar expansion and renovation project that added three new tasting rooms. The renovation also brought a new retail area designed to feel like a home kitchen and living room. HEAVENHILLDISTILLERY.COM







Photos courtesy Foothill Foodie Tours

she decided to put her two skills together to open Foothill Foodie Tours in 2018.

These tours don't stop at the predictable restaurants in Greenville. Instead, Woelker wanted to expose guests to the hidden, local gems of the city, easy to find because of Greenville's cuisine scene explosion.

The tour generally stops at four venues, each promoting a specialty. Tours run at various times for different experiences. The breakfast tour stops at breakfast eateries, including a crepe restaurant for a strawberrycovered crepe.

> "Our dessert tours feature madefrom-scratch European desserts and homemade pastries," Woelker said. "We also have a tour on Wednesdays that is called Lunch With the Artists. While we eat lunch, we can talk with a local artist one-on-one, then have dessert somewhere together."

> Each tour features chats with either chefs or restaurant owners. Woelker incorporates the city's long-reaching history into the tour, including its recent growth in locally owned businesses.

> Groups looking to soak in the city's nightlife can opt for the Vine, Shine and Stein tour for a drinking adventure of wine tastings, moonshine and craft beer samplings. On the similar Craft Cocktail Tour, participants embark on a sophisticated evening of drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

> > FOOTHILLFOODIETOURS.COM



HEAVEN HILL[®] EST DISTILLERY 1935

Come Visit Us Today

We love visitors. So next time you're in town, stop by, say hi, and join us for a Bourbon tour and tasting. Find us in Bardstown at the Bourbon Heritage Center, or in Louisville at the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience.

One Award-Winning Distillery, Two Unforgettable Experiences.

HeavenHillDistillery.com/visit-us.php 502-272-2623

> **Bourbon Heritage Center** 1311 Gilkey Run Rd., Bardstown, KY 40004

Evan Williams Bourbon Experience 528 W. Main St., Louisville, KY 40202

EVAN WILLIAMS BOURBON EXPE



Irans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum

The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum operated as a mental health facility for 130 years. Visitors can enjoy daily walk-in historic and paranormal tours, festivals and events from April through November.



This luxury resort is located on the scenic Stonewall Jackson Lake with breathtaking views from the Adirondack-style lodge or quiet lakefront cottages. Enjoy an irresistible meal, play the Arnold Palmer Signature golf course, pamper yourself at the spa, hike the trails or play on the lake.

Jackson's Mill Farmstead

This historic area has been a steadfast place of learning, leadership and growth for more than 90 years. Famous as General "Stonewall" Jackson's homestead, the old gristmill still stands. This is an important arena for adult education, special events and meetings-and the State 4-H camp.

Appalachian Glass

Appalachian Glass is keeping the tradition of hand made glass alive in West Virginia with offerings of over 500 traditionally produced soda-lime crystal products. Their studio is open to the public for shopping and to enjoy live demonstrations.



W Museum of American Glass

The museum is dedicated to the region and nation's rich glass heritage. The stories of people and processes come to life! See a huge collection of brilliant colored and sparkling crystal glass by dozens of American manufacturers from 1860 to the present.

(ilitary) Museum

Childhood friends were drafted into their country's service and only one made it home. A graveside promise was made that "I'll never let anyone forget you guys." More than 18 new exhibits, feature personal and historical items from the Civil War to current day.

Nestled in the heart of West Virginia is a winery whose beauty is almost as exquisite as the fine selection of wines. The winery's magnificent tasting room is constructed from hand cut stones gathered from various parts of the state. Tour the beautifully landscaped grounds and browse their gift shop.

Mann Caves

With the development of three artesian water springs, the distillery was unearthed out of hand dug coal mines. The smooth, award-winning, top shelf spirits (whiskey, vodka and moonshine) are produced and sold onsite. Tours and tastings are available on Saturdays.



WWW.TALAWV.COM 71 ASYLUM DRIVE VIRGINIA



BY ELIZA MYERS



The South boasts a tradition of embracing and combining all kinds of music to create new sounds. Much of America's signature music, such as blues, bluegrass, gospel and country, originated south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Instead of a monument to the past, Southern music is a vital part of the present. Groups wanting a closer look at Southern heritage can go straight to its heartbeat through a music experience. GROUPS CAN WATCH SONGS BEING RECORDED LIVE AT IMAGINE RECORDINGS IN NASHVILLE.





Fame Recording Studios MUSCLE SHOALS, ALABAMA

hose walking past Fame Recording Studios might not have any idea they're standing near hallowed ground. Inside the former tobacco warehouse in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, Fame Recording Studios produced 3,000 songs with multiple top-10 singles and Song of the Year awards.

"It looks very much like it did in the 1970s," said Rodney Hall, co-owner and publisher at Fame Recording Studios. "One of the most fascinating things about the building is that it is an average building but all of this amazing music came out of it."

Aretha Franklin, the Rolling Stones, Little Richard, Etta James, Alabama, the Osmonds and other top artists have recorded hits inside the studio. Duane Allman, later of the Allman Brothers Band, once camped out in the studio's parking lot just to be near the recording sessions before he became famous.

Groups can tour Fame Recording Studios to try to understand why so many artists traveled to the small Alabama town to create music. A lot of credit is given to the founder, Rick Hall, who developed the famed house band, the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section. His ability to nurture talented songwriters led to the studio's description as the "heartbeat of the Muscle Shoals sound."

Tour guides tell stories from Fame Recording Studios' fascinating history, play hits recorded in the building and allow time to examine the recording room, awards and other memorabilia. The 45-minute tour can accommodate up to 70 people.

The studio's gift shop offers music-related mer-

chandise, including a recently recorded album, "Muscle Shoals: Small Town, Big Sound," which features singers like Steven Tyler, Willie Nelson and Demi Lovato performing some of the studio's smash hits for a new generation to enjoy.

FAMESTUDIOS.COM

Ozark Folk Center State Park mountain view, arkansas

hile listeners tap their feet, Ozark Mountains musicians' fingers fly on fiddles, banjos, guitars, mandolins and dulcimers. Visitors can still hear the traditional music of the area thanks to locals who wanted to preserve Ozark Mountains culture. They banded together to open the Ozark Folk Center State Park in 1973.

Today, groups can hear the traditional acoustic music and pre-World War II songs at regular performances at the folk center.

"Music is a big part of what we do here," said Daren Dortin, executive producer of Ozark Highlands Radio and music director for the Ozark Folk Center State Park. "One of the neat things about listening to a concert here is that folks get to experience an intimate performance. It's a smaller venue, and the artists are performing strictly acoustically. It's a great venue for folks to ask questions and visit with the musicians. You can even make song requests."



Photos courtesy Fame Recording Studios





GROUP RATES AVAILABLE

Photos courtesy AR Tourism

From mid-April to mid-November, the living-history park offers regularly scheduled live performances in its 1,000-seat theater. Groups can also participate in "Ozark Highlands Radio," a syndicated program recorded at the park that shares the music and stories of the Ozark region.

The park's American Roots Music Series provides a taste of music from the past from places beyond the Ozarks, such as Cajun, blues, Irish Celtic and cowboy tunes. For a hands-on experience, groups can also book a workshop to develop their musical talent.

Beyond music, the Ozark Folk Center State Park offers a crafts village with

** ARSENAL OF ** DENOCRACY VICTORY MADE IN AMERICA

In the wake of Japan's attack, American soldiers marched into battle while citizens rallied on the Home Front. In ration lines and victory gardens and factories across the United States, they built an Arsenal of Democracy. Experience how the Home Front supported the front lines and helped win the war—at *The Arsenal of Democracy*, a permanent exhibit at The National WWII Museum.



#1 Attraction in New Orleans #3 Museum in the United States #8 Museum in the World



945 MAGAZINE STREET, NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130 504-528-1944 x 222 | NATIONALWW2MUSEUM.ORG/GROUPS



Courtesy Buck and Johnny's

more than 21 artisans demonstrating regional crafts such as basket weaving, broom-making, yarn spinning, doll-making and more. The park sits on 637 acres that include a restaurant, a 60-room lodge, a gift shop and Loco Ropes Treetop Adventure Park.

ARKANSASSTATEPARKS.COM

Buck and Johnny's Zydeco Breakfast

BREAUX BRIDGE, LOUISIANA

roups can start the day by putting on their dancing shoes at Buck and Johnny's Zydeco Breakfast in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. Lively zydeco music draws a line of customers waiting each Saturday morning to enter Buck and Johnny's.

"Everybody in the place has a smile on their face," said co-owner Coatney Raymond. "It's such a great representation of our culture. It is zydeco music at its best. It will put you in the best spirits you could ever imagine."

The eclectic Italian restaurant with a Cajun flair offers an interesting mix of cultures. Cajun flavors especially inspired

let your imagination run wild.



Known as North Carolina's Southern Outer Banks, the Crystal Coast has inspired world renowned authors such as Nicholas Sparks and Kristy Harvey. Let us inspire you with help planning events, selecting outstanding accommodations and making your experience our top priority. We'll make sure everything is perfect so you can focus on making memories, enjoying our beautiful beaches, unique activities and natural beauty.

Call us at 1-888-891-0021 or email groups@CrystalCoastNC.org



BookTheCoast.com



the breakfast menu, with popular items including a boudin-stuffed omelet, grilled boudin or crawfish etouffee grits.

The restaurant normally hosts more than 200 people for each zydeco breakfast event. Groups can arrive at 8 a.m. to ensure seating in the often-crowded venue. Many diners end up shimmying and swaying on the dance floor while the zydeco musicians play traditional instruments like the washboard and the accordion.



Photos courtesy Imagine Recordings

Diners can also order bottomless mimosas or Bloody Marys to go with the festive breakfast.

Located in the old Domingue's Motors, Buck and Johnny's maintains much of the building's original decor with old tin signage, oil can light fixtures and exposed brick walls. The family-owned restaurant also offers live music in the evenings Wednesday through Saturday.

BUCKANDJOHNNYS.COM

Imagine Recordings NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

teve Fishell is no stranger to talent. He built a career working as a musician and record producer with stars including Little Richard, Dolly Parton and Linda Ronstadt. He uses his ability to recognize and curate talent for Imagine Recordings, a working recording studio in Nashville, Tennessee.

Groups of up to 50 people can go beyond a studio tour by watching a song come to life at a recording session. Real artists come in with a new song ready to play. Then after 80 minutes in the studio, the song becomes a fully realized recording that may end up as tomorrow's next big hit.

"You can watch that moment of creativity when a





historyisfun.org

song becomes a new track," said Fishell, co-president of Imagine Recordings. "It's exhilarating. We all love music, yet few of us have the opportunity to see how it is created today. In Nashville's Music Row, there are dozens of top studios with nondescript fronts that give no clue as to what's happening inside. We wanted to pull back that curtain from that inner sanctum to let people observe the whole thing."

Imagine Recordings has recorded over 500 hit country songs. It continues to draw emerging artists and wellknown country musicians such as George Strait, Miranda Lambert, Carrie Underwood and Blake Shelton.

Groups can learn about the importance of the studio to Nashville's music scene before meeting the artist.



"You can watch that moment of creativity when a song becomes a new track." — STEVE FISHELL, IMAGINE RECORDINGS

800 346 1958



Lafayette is at the heart of Louisiana's Cajun & Creole Country, an area known for its award winning cuisine served with a side of live Cajun and Zydeco music. It's no wonder people are heading down south with a smile on their face to experience a culture like no other.



Plan your escape to the Happiest City in America.

LafayetteTravel.com/Groups

Talladega Superspeedway

One of auto racing's most famous tracks is in the midst of an improvement project. In 2018, Talladega Superspeedway started a renovation to improve the fan experience. Highlights include new parking garages and a new infield fan zone that will allow racegoers to see the action closer than ever before. The new facilities were unveiled last spring during a celebration of Talladega Superspeedway's 50th anniversary.

TALLADEGASUPERSPEEDWAY.COM





Courtesy Visit Clarksdale

The journey to an unforgettable dining experience begins when you venture a ways off the main road and follow the bayou as it flows through wetlands and authentic Cajun communities. Your groups can discover generations of unique traditions, culture and flavors in the eating establishments, culinary festivals and events on the Cajun Bayou Food Trail, just 45 minutes south of New Orleans.

lacajunbayou.com/foodtrail



They then listen behind the glass with headphones or in the control room for a behind-the-scenes look at the technical side of the music magic. After the session, participants each receive a recording of the song.

"It gives people the feeling that this is not just a cold, four-walled studio," said Fishell. "It has a soul and a vibe. We always record a new song. This is not a cover song. We are doing the real thing. That is always interesting for people."

Imagine Recordings also organizes teambuilding programs where groups work with a songwriter to pen a new track and then help perform.

IMAGINERECORDINGS.COM

Clarksdale Live Music CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI

ccording to legend, Robert Johnson's early guitar playing made listeners want to cover their ears. After a supposedly making a deal with the devil at the Crossroads in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Johnson returned with a new musical style.

Touted as the birthplace of the blues, Clarksdale has raised many of the most well-known blues artists, such as John Lee Hooker, Ike Turner, Sam Cooke, Muddy Waters and Johnson. Visitors can't fully understand the small country town's roots until they show up at one of the town's many nightly blues concerts or festivals.

Groups can first learn about the Delta region's blues artists at the Delta Blues Museum. The interactive museum sits next to one of the most famous blues joints in the world: the Ground Zero Blues Club. Founded by Bill Luckett and Academy Award-winner Morgan Freeman, the blues club draws fans from around the world.

KENTUCKY ARTISAN CENTER

OPEN DAILY 9-6 WORKS BY 800 ARTISTS ARTISAN CAFÉ & GRILL DEMONSTRATIONS SPECIAL EXHIBITS

SHOP • DINE • EXPLORE



JUST OFF I-75 • BEREA EXIT 77 www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov 859-985-5448 BUSES WELCOME!

AMERICAN HISTORY



MISSISSIPPI MUSIC



SOUTHERN CHARM





VICKSBURG

The Key to the South

For planning assistance contact, Ashley Gatian, Sales Manager 800-221-3536 • ashley@visitvicksburg.com

VISITVICKSBURG.COM

WE ARE SOCIAL WisitVicksburg



Scan this QR code to visit our mobile site Named because of Clarksdale's reputation as ground zero for blues music, the venue opened its doors in 2001. Groups can attend authentic blues performances and occasional national acts Wednesdays through Saturdays. Most performers continue the tradition of blues forefathers Charley Patton, Waters and John Lee Hooker. Ground Zero Blues Club also serves Southern food, such as grilled catfish, fried pickles and Delta hot tamales.

Beyond the popular club, Clarksdale offers several other blues venues and festivals. Visitors can find live blues music in the city 365 days a year. The Hambone Gallery combines art with music on Tuesday nights. Stan Street painted Cajun chefs, bluesmen and red-haired women in his colorful portraits. Guests can learn about the local artist, then listen to the music that inspired the work.

Other authentic juke joints in the area are Red's Blues Club, the Hopson Plantation and Commissary, and the Juke Joint Chapel at the Shack Up Inn.

VISITCLARKSDALE.COM

Mountain Stage CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

n two hours, a listening experience at Mountain Stage in Charleston, West Virginia, might include a bluegrass band, Scottish performers, pop hits, African beats and country songs. The live music radio show first aired in 1983 to showcase diverse music from traditional to modern. The show still celebrates new and known music by offering five artists opportunities to perform in 20-minutes sets. Groups can attend one of these shows for a superb listening experience.

Episodes play every week on more than 240 National Public Radio stations across America. Twenty-six episodes are recorded each year, mostly at Charleston's Culture Center Theater.

Over the years, the show has featured many artists before and after fame, including Sarah McLachlan, Barenaked Ladies, Nickel Creek and R.E.M. One memorable performance was when Martina McBride asked to perform on Mountain Stage after she was already widely popular.

"When Martina McBride came, she asked what we wanted her to play," said Larry Groce, co-founder and artistic director for Mountain Stage. "I told her our philosophy is that you can play whatever you want to play. So in the middle of her set, she said, 'This is a radio show like no other. They want you to play the music you love.' That is exactly what we want."

Tours can be arranged to learn about the history of the show and the behind-thescenes work that goes into each performance. Groce will also talk about the careful considerations that go into organizing a show featuring all musical genres.

"I get pitched a lot of people," he said. "We hear from agents, record companies and individual artists. On the other hand, we are doing research about people who might not be coming to us. Because there are so many music genres, the pool of people we can choose from is very wide and very deep. It is a juggling act of looking for acts you want." **MOUNTAINSTAGE.ORG**

ROBERT RANDOLPH AND THE FAMILY BAND AT MOUNTAIN STAGE

By Brian Blauser, courtesy Mountain Stage

The world's largest – MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM IS JUST A DOWNSHIFT FROM DOWNTOWN.

Standing amidst the largest motorcycle collection in the world, it's impossible not to feel the energy. More than 1,600 vintage and modern bikes and race cars from all over the world dating back to 1901, all housed in a towering, awe-inspiring museum, are proof of a city that's running wide open. Dig in to everything the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum has to offer, right here at The Dinner Table of the South.

inbirmingham.com/GTL1 | 800 - 458 - 8085



GREATER BIRMINGHAM CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

TAKE YOUR TOUR OVER THE TOP

Missouri's most iconic attraction has reached new heights.

Renovations to the Gateway Arch - including an updated museum, new parks and trails, and more - have transformed the Arch into a completely different experience. But that's just part of what's exciting and new in the Show-Me State. Let us show you what else makes Missouri a top stop for your group tours.



Contact Donna Cordle Gray at DonnaCordle@legacydimensions.com for group info.



SET YOUR SIGHTS ON THE SHOW-ME STATE

New attractions and favorite places make Missouri a top travel spot in 2020

trip to Missouri in 2020 promises a perfect mix of exciting new attractions and perennial favorites that keep getting better year after year.

The new St. Louis Aquarium will take you from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers to the depths of the deep blue sea. The aquarium and other new attractions have transformed historic St. Louis Union Station – once the biggest and busiest train terminal in the nation – into the state's newest entertainment complex. Just outside the aquarium, hop aboard The St. Louis Wheel for a gondola ride 200 feet into the sky.

A new aquarium will add to Branson's mix of family friendly attractions in the coming year. Set to open in summer 2020, the Aquarium at the Boardwalk will focus on fish and fun. A giant octopus sculpture will greet you when you arrive, and a "submarine voyage" and mermaid palace will feature tales from oceans around the world.

The Wonders of Wildlife National Wildlife Museum and Aquarium in Springfield continues to wow visitors with new exhibits and experiences from the earth's most extreme wildlife habitats – on land and sea. Meet the two-toed sloth and two tiny marmosets, who joined the Wonders of Wildlife animal family in 2019.

Wineries have long been a favorite in Missouri despite a historic bump in the road. 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of Prohibition, which curtailed wine production across the country for more than a decade. Today, the Show-Me State is home to more than 130 wineries, including Stone Hill Winery in the picturesque town of Hermann and Chaumette Vineyards & Winery near Ste. Genevieve, settled by the French in the early 1700s. Travel one of 11 wine trails along river bluffs and rolling hills to savor the grape and scenic views.

Distilleries are also flourishing in the state. Tour J. Reiger & Co. in Kansas City to learn how the company, founded in 1887, reopened nearly 100 years after closing its doors during the dawn of Prohibition. Follow the Missouri Spirits Expedition distillery trail to find more than a dozen craft distillers at work.



When the holiday season arrives in Missouri, visitors flock to Branson for an Ozark Mountain Christmas. That tradition continues to grow with dozens of special holiday shows and attractions. Silver Dollar City sparkles during its Old Time Country Christmas celebration featuring more than 6.5 million lights and a new eightstory Christmas tree that towers over the town square.

From amazing aquariums to award-winning wineries to spectacular holiday sights, the Show-Me State offers an array of awe-inspiring adventures all year long.





















BEST CONCERT VENUE!

f

For Concert Dates and Times Visit The Mansion Theatre.com or Call 417-335-2000







PENITENTIARY

OUR EXPERTS TELL THE STORIES. YOU FEEL THE HISTORY BOOK your tour at MissouriPenTours.com

PENITENTIARY





A \$24 MILLION EXPANSION ADDED A DRA-MATIC GLASS ENTRANCE AND LOTS OF EXHIBIT SPACE TO THE ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM.

BY JILL GLEESON



long with incredible food, a thriving cultural scene and epic natural resources, the South is famed for its laid-back, slow-and-steady attitude. But if Southerners take time to smell the roses, they

sure don't rest on their laurels, at least not judging from the wealth of new and revamped attractions popping up all over the South.

Whether it's the debut of a destination with state-ofthe-art storytelling or a bold update to an iconic institution, these landmarks are must-see stops on any tour of the Southern states.



National Museum of the United States Army FORT BELVOIR, VIRGINIA

It's been a long wait, but the National Museum of the United States Army is almost open. Set to debut on June 4, 2020, the institution was first envisioned by Congress some two centuries ago when representatives asked the armed forces branch to create a place dedicated to chronicling its history. The 185,000-square-foot National Museum of the United States Army will be the country's only institution that traces the narrative of the Army from its start to the present day, a feat the museum will accomplish by focusing on the stories of individual soldiers.

"It's meaningful to us working at the museum that everything goes back to the soldier," said Susan Smullen, the museum's public affairs officer. "The visitor is always reminded that there might have been this historic occasion, but it always links back to the human element."

Less than a half-hour outside Washington, D.C., the museum will feature thousands of documents, images and artifacts, including showstopping items in six galleries, like a 27-ton Bradley Cavalry Fighting Vehicle. A cutting-edge Experiential Learning Center will allow group members to find solutions to issues that face soldiers through hands-on exercises. For example, group members might have the chance to diagnose a virtual patient's medical condition or build a virtual bridge in the engineering station.

Smullen has yet to officially announce offerings for groups, but bet on them to include after-hours experiences and packages bundling together things like tickets to the Army Action Center simulation gallery, lunch passes and retail vouchers. The museum is free but will require a timed ticket to enter, and there will be a cost for some special features.

BRING FRIENDS

ARMYHISTORY.ORG

Churchill Downs LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

n all the world, there is no horse racing track as legendary as Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby. To ensure that this jewel, which turns 145 years old in 2020, continues to sparkle as brightly as ever, renovations to the facility occur frequently. In late 2018, just before the Breeders' Cup, workers wrapped up more than \$30 million of remodeling that added features like a pedestrian plaza; a revamped paddock entrance; and a new transportation infrastructure, most notably featuring a bigger, more user-friendly bus depot.

That's great news for groups, but Churchill isn't stopping there. It was announced at the end of October that the racetrack was about to embark on an audacious \$300 million project that will include the addition of a permanent covered stadium, a historical gaming facility and a seven-story hotel on the first turn of the track.

"The rooms will have balconies facing the racetrack so you can watch the horses while you have your morning coffee," said Jordan Skora, Louisville Tourism marketing communications manager. "That's an experience nowhere else in the world offers."



Courtesy U.S. Army

Photos courtesy Louisville Tourism





THE COOLEST PLACE IN HISTORY!

Group-friendly activities & adventures with over 300 affordable rooms just minutes SW of Lexington.

- Award-winning downtown
 Beaumont Inn
 Bright Leaf Golf Resort
 Dixie Belle Riverboat
 Dedman's Drugstore
- Lemons Mill Brewery
 McAfee Jamboree
 Unique Shopping/Dining
 Year-round arts, cultural & music events

www.HarrodsburgKY.com • 800-355-9192





Photos by Henderson Images, courtesy History Museum on the Square

The project is slated to wrap up at the end of 2021, but there are always plenty of special experiences available for groups at Churchill Downs, like the popular Backstretch Breakfast Tour, which features a railside morning meal with a view of the horses' workouts. Live racing group packages are also offered, including one for Derby Day. Tours should be booked through the Kentucky Derby Museum, on the grounds of Churchill Downs.

> CHURCHILLDOWNS.COM DERBYMUSEUM.ORG

History Museum on the Square Springfield, Missouri

here was never any doubt that Springfield's new history museum needed to be located on Springfield's public square. "Our front door leads directly to so many historic sites," said Krista Adams, the History Museum on the

> Square's director of development. "The Trail of Tears passed through the square. The Butterfield Overland stage line, one of the first that traveled west, started in St. Louis, and we were the first stop west. We had Civil War encampments from the two battles that occurred in Springfield, and we're also the site of the very first Wild West shootout. Wild Bill Hickok and Davis Tutt had a shootout right outside our front doors."

> The History Museum on the Square memorializes these events and more with an interactive facility that uses the very latest technology to immerse groups in the city's colorful past. For example, the Birthplace of Route 66 gallery offers not only retro neon signs and a working jukebox from 1947, but also a hands-on experience that allows visitors to drive down a screen version of the famed road, complete with engine noise and horn honks. Springfield, which is on the famed roadway, is responsible for giving it its name. Other galleries feature a video-projected creek group members can "splash" in, and a chamber where they can pick up a replica Colt pistol and shoot at a target from the same perspec-

MAKE YOUR PLAY TO GETAWAY

GET THE MOST FOR YOUR GROUP

For more information on incentives for you and your group or to book your group, call toll free 1-877-778-8138 email: CheMotorcoachTm@caesars.com





CHEROKEE, NC

MURPHY, NC

Must be 21 or older to enter casino floor and to gamble, and must present a valid state or federal photo ID upon request. Know When To Stop Before You Start.® Gambling Problem? Call 1-800-522-4700. An Enterprise of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. ©2020, Caesars License Company, LLC. tive Wild Bill had on that fateful day.

The 18,000-square-foot museum, which opened its doors last August, offers groups escorted tours through its six permanent galleries, walking tours to historic sites in downtown Springfield and even step-on bus tours.

HISTORYMUSEUMONTHESQUARE.ORG

Mosaic, the Jekyll Island Museum JEKYLL ISLAND, GEORGIA

osaic, an institution dedicated to exploring the rich history of Jekyll Island, might be a renovation of a previous museum, but it has little in common with its predecessor. While the former museum was housed in quarters so antiquated they lacked air conditioning, Mosaic, which opened in April 2019 after a fiveyear, \$3.1 million redo of the 122-year-old structure, is a modern stunner. Showcasing five distinct eras in the Georgia barrier island's past, with exhibits from the "Native American Era" to the present-day "State Era," it houses more than 2,000 objects.



Courtesy Jekyll Island Authority

"Our front door leads directly to so many historic sites. The Trail of Tears passed through the square."

- KRISTA ADAMS, HISTORY MUSEUM ON THE SQUARE

Farm Tours, Bourbon Tours, Trains on Main, and the Underground Railroad...



70 mins. from the Ark Encounter & Creation Museum



Tourier Group Darks & EDEE Trip Assistance with w

Tourism Group Perks 💑 FREE Trip Assistance with your Oldham KY Stay!

Georgia Aquarium

When it opened in 2004, Atlanta's Georgia Aquarium was the largest aquarium in the world. Now, it's getting even bigger. A project called Expansion 2020 will feature a redesigned entry as well as a new shark gallery with floor-to-ceiling windows that will help guests learn about these misunderstood creatures. The expansion will also give the aquarium opportunities to grow its conservation and education efforts. The new areas are scheduled to be unveiled this fall. GEORGIAAQUARIUM.ORG







Photos courtesy Jekyll Island Authority

Thanks to an updated climate control system and expanded space, Mosaic can properly preserve and display historical gems like a Native American dugout canoe made of Jekyll pine and stylish Louis Vuitton luggage that belonged to members of the Jekyll Island Club during the glamorous Gilded Age Club Era. Other exhibits include a Studebaker that plays old radio ads and music when guests press the pedal, and a working period neon sign that once advertised the old Jekyll Hotel. These artifacts mesh beautifully with the archi-workhorses — that still remain, including fireplaces,

high lofted ceilings and stable doors.

"Groups can enjoy a number of experiences from Mosaic," said Alexa Orndoff, director of marketing and communications at the Jekyll Island Authority. "We have our popular trolley tours to see the historic district and visit some of the original homes of the Jekyll Island Club's first members. Or, try more unique experiences like 'critters and cocktails,' where our island biologists introduce you to some of our wildlife education ambassadors, and 'historic cottage crawls' where groups can mingle like the millionaires. They all provide groups an opportunity to make their gatherings more meaningful."

JEKYLLISLAND.COM



Courtesy West TN Delta Hertiage Center



RACE TO LOUISVILLE WITH YOUR NEXT GROUP

36

Get away to a city that groups have been racing to for over 145 years. Find one of a kind attractions like the Kentucky Derby Museum and historic Churchill Downs, along with iconic museums like the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory, Muhammad Ali Center and the World's only Urban Bourbon Experience.





Learn more at GoToLouisville.com/TravelProfessionals | #LouisvilleLove

DELTA SPIRIT. ~~• **SOUTHERN SOUL.**

In Greenwood, the easy rhythm of the Delta dances with timeless Southern charm. Come experience mouthwatering culinary traditions, the legend of blues icon Robert Johnson, inspiring history and authentic hospitality that are sure to captivate your imagination for a day, a weekend and forever.



SAVOR THE CULINARY TRADITIONS AT THE VIKING COOKING SCHOOL * EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF BLUES LEGEND ROBERT JOHNSON * LUXURIATE IN A TRULY UPSCALE SPA EXPERIENCE * HIT THE RIVERS & BACK ROADS * AND MORE!





START PLANNING YOUR GETAWAY TODAY AT VISITGREENWOOD.COM | 662.453.9197

225 HOWARD STREET GREENWOOD, MS 38930

f 🗃 🖌 #1

West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center BROWNSVILLE, TENNESSEE

pened in 1998, the West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center just keeps getting bigger and better. Already boasting the West Tennessee Cotton Museum, the West Tennessee Music Museum and the Hatchie River Museum, the center added the Tina Turner Museum in 2014 after acquiring the historic Flagg Grove School. The singer, born Anna Mae Bullock, attended the school in nearby Nutbush; today the building, filled with stage costumes, gold records and more, stands next to the last home of local blues great Sleepy John Estes. And in May 2019, West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center executive director Sonia Outlaw-Clark cut the ribbon on a covered pavilion and stage area, a boon to the center's popular annual events.

"We had three bluesmen from Brownsville who were pioneers in the industry in the early 1900s," said Outlaw-Clark. "We kind of try to keep that tradition alive with the Exit 56 Blues Fest, which we hold Memorial Day weekend. We do a special tribute to women and the blues on Sunday, with all women performers. And on the fourth weekend of September, we have our Tina Turner Heritage Days. Friday night is a fan gathering, and on Saturday we do tours to Nutbush. They also all go to the church in Nutbush that she used to attend for Sunday services. And Saturday night is the big Tina tribute concert."

Group leaders can also book guided tours of the museums or even the surrounding area at the center.

WESTTNHERITAGE.COM

Asheville Art Museum Asheville, North Carolina

he more than \$24 million expansion of the Asheville Art Museum wasn't the easiest project, but then anything great takes time. The 54,000-square-foot institution's new look debuted last November following a three-year effort that involved linking three buildings together through historic preservation, the restoration of existing spaces and brand-new fabrication. The update boasts a light-filled glass entrance that replaces the old lobby; 70% more gallery space, including the SECU Collection Hall's 10 new



By Ursula Gullow, courtesy Asheville Art Museum

galleries; and a rooftop cafe and sculpture terrace overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains.

But it's not just the spectacular renovation that makes the Asheville Art Museum so special.

"We have a depth of knowledge, understanding and artworks that represent southern Appalachia and western North Carolina," said Kristi McMillan, the museum's adult programs manager. "So, we can tell the story of how artists working here were influenced by American art at large and how American art at large was influenced by this region"

McMillan said it's difficult to pick any particular favorite artwork because, as an active collecting institution, new works are constantly coming into the museum. But groups touring the facility might want to keep an eye out for Willie Cole's "Stowage," a variation on woodblock printing that uses symbolism to examine African American cultural identity.

The museum can provide groups of 10 or more private guided tours.

ASHEVILLEART.ORGN

worldofcoca-cola.com ©2020 The Coca-Cola Company. All Rights Reserved.

world of CocarGola



BY JILL GLEESON



rom still forest glens to serene lakes, skyhigh mountain vistas to spectacular geological formations, the South is blessed with a landscape so untamed and beautiful that it's both a pleasure and a privilege

to play within it.

Groups touring Southern states can enjoy a range of activities that will set adventurous spirits soaring without intimidating other travelers who might prefer their fun a little milder. Hiking iconic trails, hanging with woodland friends furry and feathered, taking to the water or just watching it fall, strolling dazzling bridges both natural and man-made, the South serves it all up at the following spots you'll love to explore. SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK IN VIRGINIA OFFERS ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WILDLIFE VIEWING.





Shenandoah National Park LURAY, VIRGINIA

ou just might call Shenandoah National Park the park that President Herbert Hoover helped build. In 1929, not long after taking office, Hoover purchased 164 acres for his rustic weekend retreat in what would shortly become Shenandoah National Park. He donated Rapidan Camp, which sheltered luminaries including Charles Lindbergh, Thomas Edison and Winston Churchill, to the commonwealth of Virginia in 1932. It officially became part of the 300-square-mile park three years later.

Today, groups can hop shuttles down to the secluded property on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains from Memorial Day to mid-October and tour the three remaining buildings of what's been dubbed the original Camp David. But Rapidan isn't the only storied land within Shenandoah. The Appalachian Trail extends for 101 miles through the park's gently rolling landscape, thick with oak, hickory, maple and hemlock. Group travelers can indulge in everything from soothing strolls to strenuous hikes on it and other popular trails like Stony Man, which leads to an overlook high above the valley floor.

Groups also might want to take advantage of Shenandoah's step-on guide service. According to Helen Morton, director of sales and marketing of Delaware North at Shenandoah National Park, along with other pleasures, the tours "stop at Byrd Visitor Center in the Big Meadows area. You get a great overview of the park there, and they've got a wonderful film, too. And then groups might go out for a walk in the meadow and have lunch at the lodge. It was dedicated in 1939, so we just celebrated 80 years. Shenandoah really offers a lot of visitor services for those coming into the park."

GOSHENANDOAH.COM

Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE

ith so much to see and do within its 3,500 acres, Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium was made for group travel. Adventurous guests will want to explore the park's ropes course and 40 miles of hiking and biking trails; those looking for less adrenaline-charged activities can experience Bays Mountain's state-of-the-art planetarium, a barge ride across the park's 44-acre lake and a renowned nature center that's home to wolves, bobcats, foxes and more.

"We are very fortunate and blessed to have the inventory and facilities that we do, and thankfully, so much of that centers around our natural resources," said Rob Cole, Bays Mountain's park manager. "We work very fluidly with groups and can do special programming depending on what they'd like to experience. We are able to tailor everything in such a way that we can break them into smaller groups and rotate those groups around to accommodate their needs so that everybody gets the same experience or a different experience, if that's what they prefer. We can also provide catered meals through our Farmstead Museum."


Courtesy NPS

By Rob Cole, courtesy Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium

Tour life with the Lowcountry tides.

Meet the coastal town that will transform your next tour: Beaufort, SC. With over 70 historic sights to see, a walkable downtown, unique Gullah-Geechee heritage and freshcaught cuisine, Beaufort is the charming Southern destination motorcoach groups can't stop talking about.

BeaufortSC.org



inner coastal

LOOK FOR US AT TRAVEL SOUTH OR CALL US AT 843.525.8526





HIGH-SPEED AIRBOAT **SWAMP TOURS GUIDED BY LOCALS**



504.689.2005 **AIRBOATADVENTURES.COM**

ADVENTURES

Jean Lafitte

LEISURELY PONTOON CAJUN ADVENTURES!



ADVENTURESOF JeanLafitte.com



By Krystal Haney, courtesy Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium

It shouldn't be surprising that the creators of Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium have so fiercely protected its natural marvels while providing the public unparalleled access to them.

The city of Kingsport hired the National Audubon Society to help design the park, and its first director was a representative of the illustrious conservation organization. When development began in 1968 at Bays Mountain, the facilities could handle just 100 cars a day; 50 years later, more than 200,000 people visit the park annually.

BAYSMOUNTAIN.COM

Bridgewalk NEW RIVER GORGE. WEST VIRGINIA

uspended 876 feet over the second-oldest river on the planet, the New River Gorge Bridge is not only the third-highest bridge in the country, it's also the longest single-span arch bridge in the Western Hemisphere. Bridge Walk, which takes groups on an amble down the 3,030-foot length of the bridge's catwalk, offers a memorable way to experience this incredible engineering feat and the scenery that surrounds it.



THE CATWALK

EXPLORING BAYS MOUNTAIN PARK



TENNESSEE

SkyBridge

Gatlinburg's Skylift Park is already a popular attraction for travelers who want to take in the beauty of the Tennessee Smokies from atop a mountain peak. Now, adventurous visitors can experience even more thrills with the Gatlinburg Skybridge, which opened at Skylift Park last spring. This 680-foot pedestrian suspension bridge is the largest in North America. Made of wood and featuring a 15-foot-long glass section, it hangs about 140 feet above the forest floor. GATLINBURGSKYLIFT.COM

For some, it's an exhilarating bucket-list adventure. For others, it's a way to take control of their fear of heights. For most, it's accessible and easy to navigate.

Before heading out on the catwalk, which runs 25 feet below the bridge, group members are secured to the structure with safety cables. The first step might seem like a bit of a doozy, but the catwalk is solid plate, which helps calm any lingering nerves. By the end of the two-hour guided walk, guests are far more focused on the beauty of the landscape below than how high they are above it.

According to Bridge Walk guide Doug Coleman, it's never a bad season for groups to stroll the catwalk.

"Much is made of fall foliage, and rightfully so," he said. "But a lot of people like the wintertime. It's easier to see the contour of the land with snow on the ground and the leaves off the trees. Springtime is my personal favorite, when trees like paulownia, dogwood and redbud are blossoming. I always encourage my guests to bring a camera. You'll want to take lots of pictures."

BRIDGEWALK.COM











Once your meetings are complete, entertainment galore among the Great Smoky Mountains await. The many meeting facilities in Pigeon Forge provide space for groups of all sizes, from 20 to 12,000. These facilities are conveniently situated mere minutes from hundreds of family-friendly activities, including shows, Dollywood, unique dining experiences, museums and so many more ways to make work fun.

PIGEONFORGEMEETING.COM INFO@LECONTECENTER.COM

Aquarium of the Gulf Coast

A new aquarium opening this spring will give visitors to Mississippi's Gulf Coast a new way to learn about marine life from the Gulf and beyond. The Mississippi Aquarium is set to open in Gulfport at the end of



April. The \$93 million facility will sit on more than five acres of beachfront property and will feature more than 1 million gallons of saltwater and freshwater exhibits. Highlights will include a 30-foot-long immersive tunnel and large-scale outdoor exhibits.

MSAQUARIUM.ORG



Courtesy Ha Ha Tonka State Park

Ha Ha Tonka State Park LAKE OF THE OZARKS, MISSOURI

here's a story to go with the picturesque castle ruins at Ha Ha Tonka State Park, but it's a bit of a tragic one. Around the turn of the 20th century, Kansas City businessman Robert McClure Snyder visited the northern Ozark Mountains, promptly fell in love with the area and decided to build a palatial vacation home overlooking



GROUPS SAVE! FOR DETAILS. CALL 757-282-2819 OR CONTACT GROUPSALES@VAFEST.ORG





www.GeorgetownKy.com 888.863.8600 Kentucký BE INSPIRED

SINCE 1769 SOME ELLEBRATING 250 YEARS

> CONTACT US FOR YOUR FREE VISITORS MAGAZINE 800.366.2427 | #DiscoverSTC DiscoverStCharles.com (f) (())(())(())(())

Historic Main Street - Saint Charles, Missouri

DISCOVER SAINT CHARLES

DRYGOODS PECK BROS HAR

Embrace the texture, rich history, and authenticity of a city that has been welcoming visitors for 250 years. When doing so, we're sure you'll see your own reflection.



enjoy the show



Courtesy Discover South Carolina

what would eventually become the Lake of the Ozarks. But before Snyder could spend even one night in it, he died in an auto accident. His sons finished the project, but just two decades later, in 1942, a fire burned the building to the ground.

Groups will discover more at Ha Tonka than the fairy-tale-like ruins and its gorgeous view. The park, which bears an old folk name believed to have been created by settlers in honor of the Osage Native American tribe, is also a prime example of karst topography.

"Our bedrock has been dissolved away," said park naturalist Jacob Bryant, "and that's left the park with many caves, sizable sinkholes, natural bridges and springs. Ha Tonka is really the best of both worlds when it comes to resources. We also have a rich cultural history starting with the Osage and then the early settlers and the Snyders, as well as some of the finest examples of oak woodlands and glades that you'll find in Missouri."

Blessed with opportunities for kayaking and fishing, and plenty of hiking trails and boardwalks for all skill levels, Ha Tonka also offers specialized group programs about topics such as the castle, Ha Tonka Spring and the park's large natural bridge.

MOSTATEPARKS.COM/PARK/HA-HA-TONKA-STATE-PARK

Issaqueena Falls WALHALLA, SOUTH CAROLINA

ssaqueena Falls, which sits nearly surrounded by South Carolina's Sumter National Forest, is the stuff of legend. According to a story that originated 250 years ago, Issaqueena was a Cherokee princess who fell in love with an Oconee brave. Her father didn't approve of the relationship, as fathers in romantic folk tales never seem to do, so Issaqueena was forced to flee. She leaped across the falls, successfully evading her pursuers, and lived happily ever after with her lover.

Issaqueena Falls is accessible via a short path that leads to a platform built about three-quarters of the way up the 100-foot-tall cascade waterfall. Active group members can hike down to the bottom or head off to the area's second feature.

"We call this attraction a twofer because Stumphouse Tunnel is within a few hundred feet of the falls," said Tim Todd, executive director of the Discover Upcountry Carolina Association. "It was begun in 1856. The tunnel was supposed to be part

VOTED "TOP LOUISIANA TOURIST ATTRACTION" BY USATODAY 2017





WORLD PREMIERE MAY 2020

Playing May - July

THE STORY OF STEPHEN and the apostles

only at the NarroWay Theatre

NarroWay

"The must-see of 2020!"

LIVE THEATRE AND DINNER

Call for Great Group Rates and More Info! 803.802.2300

just outside of Charlotte NC I-77 Exit 90

Find more great shows and see all NarroWay offers online

NARROWAY. NET



VISITNATCHEZ.ORG 800.647.6724

Lynsey Smith Director of Sales lynsey@visitnatchez.org 601.446.6345 of the Blue Ridge Railroad that would have linked Charleston to Cincinnati. They got 1,600 feet of it built, but the money ran out. And then in April of 1861, we had a little occurrence at Fort Sumter in Charleston that kicked off what we call the War of Northern Aggression. With all of that going on, the tunnel was never finished."

Like the Issaqueena Falls, Stumphouse Tunnel is close to parking; however, the road leading to the attractions is not accessible to motorcoaches. Group leaders should reach out to the Discover Upcountry Carolina Association to schedule shuttle vans from a nearby Forest Service office to the attractions.

> VISITOCONEESC.COM/ STUMPHOUSE-PARK

Natural Bridge State Resort Park SLADE, KENTUCKY

atural Bridge State Resort Park takes its name from the magnificent 78-footlong sandstone formation that rises 65 feet over Daniel Boone National Forest. Formed by what is suspected to have been an earthquake, Natural Bridge can be reached by hiking up about 500



Courtesy Discover South Carolina

Passenger Ferry

Last spring, the North Carolina Ferry System added a passenger-only route from Hatteras Island to Ocracoke's Silver Lake Harbor, giving travelers a way to explore the island's central village without a car. The 98-seat Ocracoke Express Passenger Ferry



will take visitors straight into Ocracoke, where they can explore the village, rent bicycles or golf carts or board a free shuttle for transportation around the island. Ocracoke is known for its beaches as well as its Blackbeard history.

OUTERBANKS.ORG



YOUR GROUP'S NEXT ADVENTURE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE

AGNES MARIE

Far Away



When you bring your group to Tybee Island, you're bringing them to a world of wonder. Take in Tybee's vibrant ecosystem on an a beach ecology walk, or frolic with the dolphins in the sparkling Savannah River on a dolphin tour. Challenge your group to climb to the top of the historic lighthouse, and hang out with the turtles at the newly-renovated marine science center (opening mid-2020).

PLAN YOUR GROUP'S GETAWAY AT VISITTYBEE.COM



Photos courtesy Natural Bridge State Resort Park

feet in elevation. Groups can also take the less taxing sky lift, a peaceful 15-minute ride to the top of the ridgeline. Once there, visitors are free to wander the 25-foot-wide geological wonder.

There's plenty to capture the fancy of groups at the park, including canoeing, kayaking, fishing and birding. Serious birders are enthusiastic about the warblers that flock there May through June. There's a lodge and restaurant on-site, and a celebrated hoedown has been held summers there for about the past 50 years. The event, which features a square dance caller, brings in upward of 800 local residents and visitors on a busy night.

The park can accommodate groups with a variety of programs including tours of the bridge, nature hikes and presentations about the area's history. Whatever aspect you choose to focus on, said Brian Gasdorf, Natural Bridge State Resort Park grounds and trail supervisor, you're going to see spectacular diversity.

"We have so many different rocks that are exposed at the surface," he said, "including silkstone, limestone, dolostone and black shale. There's also an amazing variety of plant life, which leads to a wide diversity in wildlife, like bears, bobcats and beavers. As a naturalist, it's kind of like being a kid in a candy store."

KY.GOV/PARKS/RESORTPARKS/NATURAL-BRIDGE

Three National Parks One Incredible Destination



Wright Brothers National Memorial

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

Cape Hatteras National Seashore

For group adventures, contact Lorrie Love; love@outerbanks.org, or call 877-629-4386 AmericasFirstBeach.com The Outer Banks® OF NORTH CAROLINA





Plan your adventure at ArkEncounter.com (South of Cincinnati)



NORTH CAROLINA | SOUTH CAROLINA | TENNESSEE | VIRGINIA | WEST VIRGINIA



WWW.TRAVELSOUTHUSA.COM