



ESSENTIAL RV ALABAMA: ROLLING LIKE A LOCAL THROUGH SWEET HOME ALABAMA

by Suzanne Wright

Alabama is the undeniable heart of Dixie. And it's iconic in so many ways: BBQ, civil rights, football, music and sweet tea, just for starters. Carved out of wilderness, Alabama ranks first in biodiversity among states east of the Mississippi River, and fifth or sixth in the nation (depending on who's doing the tracking). And it keeps rising as new and ancient species are discovered in its varied ecosystems. You're on Deep South time here, so enjoy the pace and warmth of the people and places, from the pine-ringed piedmont to the coastal plains. As you uncover Alabama's many surprises, you'll soon feel like a (sweet) homegrown native.



NORTHERN ALABAMA

The southern Appalachian Mountains slice through the northernmost part of Alabama, a hub of creativity and ingenuity. The 80-mile long [Appalachian Highlands Scenic Byway](#) winds through lush vegetation, interesting geologic formations and quaint rural communities. Some of music's biggest stars recorded in the celebrated studios of [Muscle Shoals](#), on the Tennessee River; the [Alabama Music Hall of Fame](#) is a testament to the state's musical heritage. The first rocket that powered a man to the moon was designed in [Huntsville](#) and the [U.S. Space & Rocket Center](#) showcases America's space achievements. The downtown [Huntsville Craft Beer Trail](#) can be navigated on foot or by a ride service, so you can get your suds on, safely.

In neighboring Decatur, you must sample the award-winning, only-in-Alabama white sauce at [Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Que](#). Anglers, take note: Alabama boasts some of the best [bass fishing](#) in the country at its northern lakes. The [Bankhead & Sipsey Wilderness](#) is home to the longest natural bridge east of the Rockies, the Clarkston Covered Bridge. [Dismals Canyon](#) is an impressive sandstone gorge once used by Paleoamericans, Native American tribes, and European settlers, featuring a National Natural Landmark with two waterfalls. Tiny glowworms (a.k.a. Dismalites), indigenous to just a few places on earth, twinkle like stars in the canyon at twilight. Guided night tours highlight the splendors of the area.

An unforgettable dining experience in Tusculumbia is a burger and live music at the [Rattlesnake Saloon](#), where you are seated under a stone bluff

Where to Stay: [Monte Santo](#) (Spanish for "mountain of health") [State Park](#) has a limited number of choice sites from which to explore the North Alabama Japanese Garden, the Wernher von Braun Planetarium and numerous hiking and biking trails. [Jay Landings Marina RV Park](#) has 66-full hook-up sites, and free kayak and stand-up paddleboard rentals.





BIRMINGHAM & CENTRAL ALABAMA

Vulcan, the god of fire, reigns mightily—he's the world's largest cast-iron statue—over Birmingham from the summit of [Red Mountain](#). During the Industrial Revolution, men labored in 2,600-degree heat at the [Sloss Furnaces](#), now a steampunk-like National Historic Landmark. Just off I-20 in Leeds, [Barber Motorsports Park](#) exhibits the world's largest collection of motorcycles, while the serene 67.5-acre [Birmingham Botanical Gardens](#) displays 12,000 different plants.

Birmingham's food scene is similarly diverse. Try global eats including falafel and Nepalese dumplings at downtown's [Pizitz Food Hall](#) or modern Indian at one Bay Leaf. You must pay homage to James Beard-winning chef Frank Stitt, who operates four bustling eateries, including [Highlands Bar and Grill](#), where the culinary renaissance started. The upscale, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods of Homewood and Mountain Brook are both bursting with inviting indie shops and restaurants.

No trip to Birmingham would be complete without a reflective look at its history on the [Civil Rights Trail](#). Several churches that were bombed, and the [Birmingham Civil Right Institute](#), unflinchingly recount the struggles of the past decades.

The highest point in Alabama is on the Talladega Scenic Drive, atop Cheaha Mountain, with its inspiring forested vistas, ablaze in autumn and abloom in spring. [The MotorSports Hall of Fame](#), next to the famed speedway in Talladega, encourages visitors to peruse racing cars, motorcycles, and memorabilia.

Where to Stay: [The Birmingham South RV Park](#) is a convenient, amenity-rich locale from which to access the city's attractions, while Talladega's [Clear Creek Cove RV Resort](#) is a favorite for long stays.







CENTRAL ALABAMA

Justice travel—the bridge between tourism and human rights—is a meaningful way to experience this region. [Civil rights history](#) comes alive on the 54-mile [Selma to Montgomery March Byway](#) that meanders through gentle rolling hills in the state's midsection. Pause in tribute at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge on the banks of the Alabama River, where Martin Luther King, Jr. asked marchers to kneel and pray as the battle for voting equality raged. [The Tuskegee Airman National Historic Site](#) also tells the fascinating story of pioneering African-American World War II pilots.

At its peak in the 14th century, [Moundville Archaeological Park](#) was the largest city in America north of Mexico. Situated on the Black Warrior River south of Tuscaloosa, the panoramic landscape offers a peek into the Mississippian culture that once flourished here. [Old Cahawaba](#), near Selma, was once the state's first capitol, but it's better known as Alabama's most infamous ghost town. Guided walking tours of the Black cemeteries and other points of interest depart from Orrville.

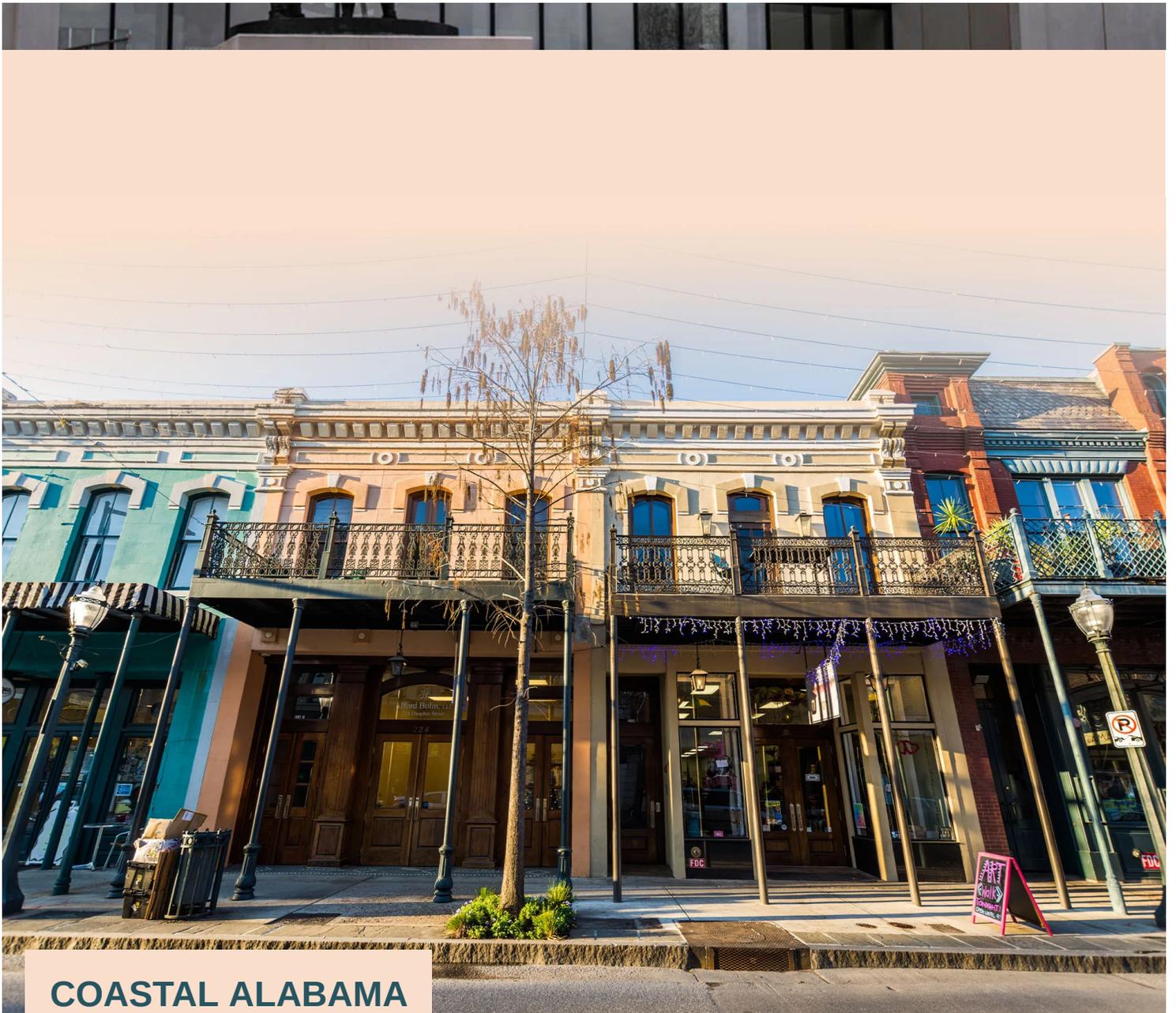
In the grasslands expanse of the Black Belt Prairie, wildlife watchers and photographers find inspiration. [Black Belt Adventures](#) offers hunting, fishing, rafting, and zipline excursions. In Hope Hull, the drive-through [Alabama Safari Park](#) is home to giraffes you can hand-feed along with camels, deer, gazelles, and zebras, and a petting zoo for the littles.

No visit to central Alabama would be complete without checking out the rival campuses of Auburn University (in [Auburn](#) of course) and the University of Alabama in [Tuscaloosa](#), where football is king and coaching is legendary. Iron Bowl tickets are hard to come by for the casual fan but tailgating is as common as fried pickles come Saturday in the fall. All you need to know are the battle cries—just be sure to use War Eagle! and Roll Tide! in the midst of friendly crowds.

Where to Stay: Lakeside [Gunter Hill Park](#) is a peaceful, tree-shaded option in Montgomery; just three miles off of I-85 near Auburn University, [Chewacla State Park](#) hosts 30 rigs up to 60 feet in length and provides a climate-controlled bath house. In fact, the Auburn-Opelika area boasts at least [seven top-notch stays](#) for those who roll into town with an RV.







COASTAL ALABAMA

Once known as "The Paris of the South," [Mobile](#) was (surprise!) the original birthplace of Mardi Gras. Its splendid downtown effortlessly melds 300-year old history with modern energy, a melting pot that embraces all visitors. [Bellingrath Gardens and Home](#) is a beloved 65-acre ode to South floral pageantry, and is especially showy in the spring. Collectively known as "America's Amazon," the five rivers that flow into Mobile Bay afford unsurpassed opportunities for recreation. [The Alabama Delta Resources Center](#) will orient you to the marvels of this area. [Alabama's Coastal Connection](#) links the quaint and quirky towns characterized by a generations-deep lifestyle of beaches, bayous, lagoons, and the "Big Water" of the Gulf of Mexico. Historic [Fort Morgan](#), at the mouth of Mobile Bay, has protected these shores since the early 1800s; the Milky Way is often visible at the end of the peninsula near the ferry.

[Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge](#) (French for "safe harbor") has multiple ecosystems: sand dunes, salt and freshwater marshes, scrub forests, fresh water swamps and uplands. Dubbed the "Sunset Capital of Alabama," [Dauphin Island](#) hosts the Audubon Bird Sanctuary and the Sea Lab. Straddling the line with Florida, the [Flora-Bama](#) is the most sung about beach bar in the world and home of the boozy Bushwacker "milkshake." The powder fine, white-sand beaches of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores literally squeak beneath your feet here in the "Redneck Riviera." The picturesque Utopian-founded colony of Fairhope is the place to stroll the pier, shop local, dine and browse books at [Page & Palette](#). Perched right on the bay, The [American League Post](#) 199 doubles as the town's living room, hosting

many family-friendly events. Every day just before 4 p.m., the [Grand Hotel](#)—established in 1847—in Point Clear, salutes its military with a patriotic procession and Civil War Cannon firing.

Where to Stay: Popular year-round, RVers must book in advance. [Historic Blakley State Park](#) offers secluded pull-thru sites, and a launch from which to traverse “America’s Amazon,” the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta. Other excellent options are Gulf Shores’ [Island Retreat RV Park](#), and [Gulf State Park](#) with nearly 500 full hookup, paved pads.



