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16 Best Things To Do In Fairhope, Alabama 12 Best Things to Do in Decatur, Alabama The Best Things To Do In Mentone, Alabama How Auburn, Alabama, Is Creating A Winning Food Scene–Here's Why You Should Visit Now 16 Best Things To Do In Eufaula, Alabama Top 11 Things To Do In Wetumpka, Alabama How Camp Stew Became A South Alabama Icon 14 Charming Small Towns In Alabama Worth A Visit How to Spend a Perfect Weekend in Guntersville, Alabama The Story Behind The Legendary Cake Ladies Of Andalusia, Alabama 21 Best Things To Do In Gulf Shores And Orange Beach, Alabama The Must-See Sights Of Montgomery Written by Lura Seavey and Lana Law Updated Dec 26, 2023 Montgomery, capital of Alabama, lies in the center of the state on the east bank of the Alabama River. There are a wide range of things to see, including family attractions like the Montgomery Zoo and the unique cow-themed MOOseum. Montgomery's history is one of its most remarkable features, however, and should not be missed whether you are looking for things to do this weekend or planning a vacation itinerary in Montgomery. Considered by many as the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, Montgomery's historic attractions can be found throughout the city. From 1954 through 1960, a young Martin Luther King, Jr. served as pastor for a Baptist Church on Dexter Avenue, a building which became the gathering place for early civil rights activists. In 1955, Rosa Parks started a nationwide movement when she sat in the whites-only section of a segregated Montgomery public bus, and in 1961, the Freedom Riders made history at the city's Greyhound bus station. In addition to having several landmarks on the Civil Rights Trail, Montgomery is home to multiple memorials and museums that examine the area's own past, as well as the Civil Rights Movement on a national scale. Learn more about the city's history and find the best places to visit with our list of the top attractions in Montgomery. Civil Rights Memorial | Danny E Hooks / Shutterstock.comThe Civil Rights Memorial sits across the street from the Southern Poverty Law Center offices, commemorating those who died during the Civil Rights Movement. The memorial is surrounded by a curving black granite wall with the words "until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream" scrolled across. Below the wall is a black granite disc with water flowing over the surface, which is engraved with the names of those who lost their lives in the fight for civil rights. The memorial is located in an open area next to the Civil Rights Memorial Center. Here, tourists will find a variety of exhibits and educational displays, as well as the Wall of Tolerance, which displays the names of visitors who have pledged to work toward tolerance and justice. Visitors may add their own names to the list, which is displayed digitally on the wall of the memorial center. Address: 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.splcenter.org/civil-rights-memorial Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist ChurchThe Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church was founded in 1877 on the site of a slave trader's pen. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr served as pastor here from 1954 through 1960, and a mural inside the church features Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's journey from Montgomery to Memphis. King and his family lived in the church's nine-room parsonage during his tenure, and it now houses the Dexter Parsonage Museum. The home, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been restored to what it was like during the Kings' residence, including a significant amount of the original furnishings. The museum also houses an interpretive center with photographs, exhibits, and timelines, which discuss the civil rights movement in Montgomery and the involvement of the church ministers and members. Behind the museum sits the King-Johns Garden for Reflection, a space set aside for meditation and reflection. Address: 454 Dexter Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.dexterkingmemorial.org/tours/parsonage-museum Montgomery Museum of Fine ArtsThe Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts has a permanent collection of more than 4,000 works, the majority of which are examples of American art from the 1700s through the present. Among these, there is an extensive collection of fragile paper-based artwork including drawings, watercolors, etchings, woodcuts, and engravings by prominent American artists like Winslow Homer and John Marin. Also within the American art collection is an exhibit of regional art, focusing on folk artists and self-taught artists, incuding paintings, drawings, and crafts, with a large quilt collection. In addition to the American art, the museum houses various examples of European art, as well as a collection of African art, which includes sculpture, furniture, textiles, and masks. Another highlight of the museum is its decorative arts gallery, with several examples of domestic and imported porcelain, and the Weil Atrium Gallery, which houses glassworks from various celebrated glassblowers including Dale Chihuly and Tiffany Studios. The museum also hosts traveling exhibitions and educational programs. Address: One Museum Drive, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: Rosa Parks Library and Museum | Mccallk69 / Shutterstock.comThe Rosa Parks Library and Museum is located in downtown Montgomery near the site of her arrest after her legendary stand against segregation. Among the historic artifacts on display are a 1955 Montgomery city bus and one of the station wagons used by the boycotters during their movement to end segregation on public transportation. Other exhibits include photographs, court documents, and even Rosa's original fingerprint record from her arrest. Visitors will learn about the social and political climate of 1950s Montgomery and will be moved as they hear the personal stories of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and other important moments in Civil Rights history. The museum also hosts special events, educational programs, and traveling exhibits throughout the year. Address: 252 Montgomery Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.troy.edu/rosaparks Hank Williams Museum | JNix / Shutterstock.comThe Hank Williams Museum in downtown Montgomery commemorates one of country music's most famous stars. Visitors can view the museum's extensive collection of Hank's personal belongings, including his powder-blue 1952 Cadillac; a Steinway piano; two Gibson guitars; and a large collection of his clothing, from his first childhood cowboy boots to his stage attire. Other personal items include artwork from his home, musical instruments, and everyday items like his shaving kit and shoe-shine kit. Memorabilia includes a variety of awards, including Platinum Records, as well as sheet music, autographed vinyl records, and photographs. Also in Montgomery, the Hank Williams Memorial at Oakwood Annex Cemetery is the singer's final resting place, along with his wife and other family members. The grave site is located on Commerce Street and is a popular tourist destination for country music fans. Address: 118 Commerce Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: A monkey at the Montgomery ZooMontgomery Zoo is a particularly popular Montgomery attraction for families, full of a wide variety of animals from all over the world. The Australian habitat is home to some of the continent's most famous residents, including kangaroos and wallabies. Visitors will find several African animals as well, including cheetahs, elephants, hippos, and giraffes, while Asian residents include the endangered Sumatran tiger and Indian rhino. The South American exhibit includes the emerald tree boa, Chilean flamingo, a wide variety of frogs, and the endangered golden lion tamarin. There is also a North American area with bald eagles, bison, and black bear, as well as a petting zoo where kids can feed the African pygmy goats. There are several opportunities to get up close to the animals, the most popular being the giraffe exhibit, where you can get face-to-face with these graceful giants and hand feed them. Visitors can also watch zookeepers conduct a lion training session, get to know the zoo's three African elephants at the elephant keeper talk, and walk among birds in Parakeet Cove and the South American Flight Aviary. Those who don't mind taxidermy will also be interested in the Mann Wildlife and Learning Museum, which has lifelike displays depicting a variety of animals in their natural habitats. Address: 2301 Coliseum Parkway, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.montgomeryzoo.com Historic water tower in Old Alabama Town, Montgomery, AlabamaOld Alabama Town is a series of more than 50 historic homes and buildings in historic downtown Montgomery, which have been restored to their original state and are open to the public for touring. Each property has been authentically furnished and outfitted to represent life in 19th- and early 20th-century Alabama, and interpreters are available throughout the neighborhood to answer questions. The centerpiece of the buildings is the Ordeman House, and admission includes a guided tour of this home, as well as a map and guide to the remaining properties. Among other remarkable buildings are the 1895 Adams Chapel School; the 1892 Corner Grocery Store; and the stunning Ware-Farley-Hood House, which was built around 1850. Address: 301 Columbus Street, Montgomery, Alabama Alabama Longhorn steerA visit to the MOOseum is one of the more unique things to do in Montgomery, especially popular with younger children. Here, visitors will learn all about Alabama's cattle industry, from its start in 1495 to the present-day, through timelines, history exhibits, and video presentations. You can learn all about cows, from their breeds and complex digestive system to the food and products they produce. Kids can dress up as cowboys and cowgirls in the play arena and learn about beef and food safety in Slim's Kitchen. Another highlight is the "Beef Wagon," a popular place for family photo-ops. Address: 201 South Bainbridge Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.bamabeef.org/p/about/273 Freedom Rides Museum | JNix / Shutterstock.comThe Freedom Rides Museum is located at the former Montgomery Greyhound station, where history was made as the Freedom Riders got off their bus on May 20th, 1961. The station has been restored to appear as it was in 1961 and houses a modest collection of exhibits about the movement that eventually succeeded in ending segregation on public transportation. Exhibits include photographs, documents, and biographies of each of the brave young men and women who were part of the momentous statement. The museum is an official stop on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail. Address: 210 South Court Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: ahc.alabama.gov/properties/freedomrides/freedomrides.aspx Alabama State CapitolThe State Capitol building in Montgomery was rebuilt in Greek Revival style after the original was destroyed by a fire in 1850. This historic building served as both the state Capitol and the Capitol of the Confederacy during the Civil War and was later the backdrop for one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous speeches, delivered at the end of the Selma to Montgomery March for voting rights. Both a National Historic Landmark and a U.S. Civil Rights Trail destination, the capitol building is now a working museum. Visitors can tour the Senate and Old Supreme Court Chambers, the House of Representatives, and the Rotunda. Highlights include historic murals in the Rotunda and trompe l'oeil paintings on the ceiling of the Senate Chamber, as well as the gardens and statues that adorn the five-acre grounds. Address: 600 Dexter Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: Alabama State Archives and History Museum | LMspencer / Shutterstock.comThe State Archives and History Museum explores the history of Alabama through artifacts and historic documents. Artifacts include Native American and pioneer artifacts, as well as a selection of Civil War items, including regimental flags and portrait galleries. In addition, multimedia presentations expand on various moments in Alabama history and explore broader topics like the cotton industry and civil rights. The State Archives in Montgomery was founded in 1901 as the first state archival agency in the nation. This turn-of-the-century building features marble walls and staircases of Tennessee gray marble and Alabama white marble. The second floor of the archives is a room dedicated to former Vice President William Rufus King. The room displays King's personal furniture, silver, china, and some of this clothing. Documents on display allow visitors a glimpse of this fascinating man and the period in which he lived. Address: 624 Washington Ave, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: National Memorial for Peace and Justice | DiAnna Paulk / Shutterstock.comAbout a 15-minute walk from the Legacy Museum is the newly unveiled National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the first memorial in the nation to be made in memory of the African Americans who were affected by slavery, lynchings, and racial injustice. This memorial, covering a total of six acres, includes sculptures, monuments, and artwork, which honor major figures in the Civil Rights movement. Perhaps the most impactful statement is the field of 800 monuments, each representing a county where lynchings occurred, and each engraved with the names of the known victims. These monuments are waiting to be claimed by their respective counties in hopes that acknowledgement of a dark past will lead to a brighter future. Address: 417 Caroline Street, Montgomery, Alabama The Legacy Museum | Mccallk69 / Shutterstock.comThe Legacy Museum is dedicated to preserving the history of racial injustice and bringing its many aspects into the public awareness. The museum is located on the spot where thousands of slaves were once warehoused while awaiting their unknown fates, within walking distance of the city's former slave auction site and the rail station that supported the slave trade. The museum utilizes a variety of media to discuss how slavery, segregation, lynching, and modern issues of racial profiling and mass incarceration have shaped the nation's history and present. Among its most compelling exhibits are the personal narratives of African Americans who have been subjected to injustice, and the hundreds of sculptures depicting their struggles. There are also major exhibits dedicated to specific issues, including the economics of slavery, life in the Jim Crow south, voting rights, and other topics. The museum is fully accessible to those with mobility issues. Address: 400 North Court Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: museumandmemorial.eji.org Riverfront Park, Montgomery, AlabamaMontgomery's Riverfront Park is an excellent place to find entertainment and activities for the entire family. One of the most popular activities here is a ride on the Harriott II Riverboat, a 19th-century passenger boat that provides scenic cruises, as well as dinner cruises featuring live music and dancing. The riverboat is docked next to the Riverfront Amphitheater, a lovely open-air venue that overlooks the water and hosts a variety of free entertainment, including musical and theatrical performances. Next to the amphitheater is a good-sized Splashpad where kids (and anyone else) can cool off on a hot Alabama day. Also part of the park is Riverwalk Stadium, a baseball park that is home to the Montgomery Biscuits of the Southern League. Parts of the structure incorporate buildings from the former historic train station, and there is also a children's playground on-site. Address: 355 Commerce Street, Montgomery, Alabama Official site: www.funinmontgomery.com Watusi cattleLocated about 20 minutes from the city, this 350-acre park provides a unique experience for all ages. Visitors can explore the park from the comfort of their own vehicle, traveling over three miles of road to see wildlife roaming free in their own environment. Guests are permitted to feed the animals using the park's special dietary grains. Among the park's residents are a variety of large mammals and birds from around the world, including many native to Africa. Exotic residents include zebras, camels, gazelles, water buffalo, Watusi cattle, and emus. The park is also home to deer, llamas, and other domestic wildlife. A highlight of the park is the opportunity to hand-feed giraffes lettuce leaves, getting up-close to the animals. Guests can also hand-feed the birds in the park's free flight aviary, a unique opportunity to interact with hundreds of friendly budgies. There is also a petting area where kids can feed and pet goats and pigs. Admission fees are used not only for the park but to help expand public education, fund habitat preservation, and assist captive breeding programs that help sustain populations of rare and endangered animals. Address: 1664 Venable Road, Hope Hull, Alabama Official site: www.alabamasafaripark.com Map of Attractions & Things to Do in Montgomery, AL Montgomery, AL - Climate Chart Average minimum and maximum temperatures for Montgomery, AL in °C JFMAMJJASOND 14 2 17 4 21 7 26 11 29 16 33 19 34 22 33 21 31 18 26 11 21 7 16 3 PlanetWare.comAverage monthly precipitation totals for Montgomery, AL in mm. 128 138 162 111 105 105 135 92 107 66 115 126 Average monthly snowfall totals for Montgomery, AL in cm. 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 Average minimum and maximum temperatures for Montgomery, AL in °F JFMAMJJASOND 58 35 63 39 70 45 78 51 85 60 91 67 93 71 92 70 88 65 79 52 69 44 60 38 PlanetWare.comAverage monthly precipitation totals for Montgomery, AL in inches. 5.0 5.5 6.4 4.4 4.1 4.1 5.3 3.6 4.2 2.6 4.5 5.0 Average monthly snowfall totals for Montgomery, AL in inches. 0.2 0.1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 Exploring Alabama: Montgomery is home to some of Alabama's top tourist attractions, but there is plenty more to see in this southern state. Just an hour-and-a-half drive to the north, Birmingham has a variety of popular attractions, from important civil rights landmarks like the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to family favorites like the McWane Science Center. Tourists will also find plenty to see and do in Mobile, Alabama's largest coastal city. Mobile is known for its maritime history and lively cultural scene, home to the oldest Mardi Gras celebration in the nation. Civil Rights Landmarks and Attractions: Alabama is home to several stops on the Civil Rights Trail, as are its neighboring states. Tourists can take an easy day trip from Montgomery to see the sites of Atlanta including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Birth Home and National Historic Park, the King Center, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. A longer drive from Montgomery but a straight shot on the highway, Jackson, Mississippi offers the chance to see several more historic civil rights sites. Among Jackson's many popular attractions, tourists will find the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, the Medgar Evers Home Museum, and the Mississippi Freedom Trail. Skip to content All Geography & Environment Human Environment - Archaeological Sites - Cemeteries - Cities and Towns - Counties -- Autauga County -- Baldwin County -- Barbour County -- Bibb County -- Blount County -- Bullock County -- Butler County -- Calhoun County -- Chambers County -- Cherokee County -- Chilton County -- Choctaw County -- Clarke County -- Clay County -- Cleburne County -- Coffee County -- Colbert County -- Conecuh County -- Coosa County -- Covington County -- Crenshaw County -- Cullman County -- Dale County -- Dallas County -- DeKalb County -- Elmore County -- Escambia County -- Etowah County -- Fayette County -- Franklin County -- Geneva County -- Greene County -- Hale County -- Henry County -- Houston County -- Jackson County -- Jefferson County -- Lamar County -- Lauderdale County -- Lawrence County -- Lee County -- Limestone County -- Lowndes County -- Macon County -- Madison County -- Marengo County -- Marion County -- Marshall County -- Mobile County -- Monroe County -- Montgomery County -- Morgan County -- Perry County -- Pickens County -- Pike County -- Randolph County -- Russell County -- Shelby County -- St. Clair County -- Sumter County -- Talladega County -- Tallapoosa County -- Tuscaloosa County -- Walker County -- Washington County -- Wilcox County -- Winston County - Dams/Reservoirs - Historic Structures and Sites - Military Installations - Museums and Cultural Sites - Parks, Zoos, and Public Gardens - Regions - Transportation Natural Environment - Climate and Weather - Geology -- Paleontology - Living Things -- Fauna of Alabama -- Flora of Alabama - Museums, Organizations, and Notable People - Physical Features - Reserves and Protected Natural Areas Africa seeks equal partnershipscontributors On the upper side MediocreMost of the zoo was nice. The museum was great and some of the animals in the zoo we could see clearly or up close. Train ride was a bust. Can’t see any animals from the train, only trees and buildings even though their signs say otherwise. Sky ride risky and limited views. Food was extremely over priced. Some of the experiences were broken, closed or remodeling.Review of: Montgomery ZooThis riverfront park and walk offers great views on the Alabama River with creature conforts. Walk along the river or up higher for a different perspective. The réplica 19th century paddle boat ride brings a sense of history to the well kept grounds and seasonal restaurant. The band shell offers great acoustics for medium venue concerts and shows. The Stadium connects to the park. The Rotary Dog park is open to all canine friends. Enjoy the picnic area and get a feel for the old days of the train travel. Get another look at history with the history of Montgomery Panel Project, The park is accessible by a wide walk way from pay by app parking. Christmas holidays bring a whole new look to this area with lights and trees in the spirit of the season .Review of: Riverfront ParkIf short of time, skip the Capitol.The Capitol building is open Mon-Fri. from 8 am – 5pm and it served as the first capitol of the Confederate States of America. There is an elevator at the far end of the building if you want to take an elevator to see the rotunda. There was no guide when we were there. If time is tight, I would skip this site. I did enjoy standing at the entrance of the building and look at Dexter Avenue, this is the place where the Selma to Montgomery Civil Rights March took place on March 25, 1965. Spend 30 min visiting it.Review of: Alabama State CapitolGreat Historical TreasureWe very much enjoyed visiting the First While House of the Confederacy. It is a self-guided tour, but the gentleman (a native New Yorker), who greeted us was very informative. I told that I could have stayed and talked history for hours. It took us about 30 minutes to go through the entire house. The furnishings are exquisite and tgey do have several of Jefferson Davis' personal effects on display. The admission is free, which is amazing for such a historical treasure. It's a great site to see along with the Alabama State Capitol, as it's right across the street. i highly recommend it for anyone interested in history.Review of: First White House of the ConfederacyMy wife and I were in the Destin, Florida area (3 hours away) and did a day trip just for this museum. It was well worth our time and glad we came. Simply put this museum is fantastic and a must see! The staff were friendly and informative. Tip from the staff, go to the Lynching exhibit first, take river ride over to sculpture exhibit, then finish in the Legacy museum to limit exposure to heat of the day. You could spend a couple days but due to our limited time we spent from 11 am to 5 pm to cover as much as we could. All for $5 a ticket.Baptism by fire indeed: great tour, unforgettable Sunday worship service.The relatively short six blocks that make up Dexter Avenue in Montgomery, Alabama contain more history in the U.S. than many entire towns. Bookended by Court Square Fountain (an auction site of enslaved Africans) and the imposing Alabama Capitol building (where Jefferson Davis was inaugurated and the Selma March ended) it also contains the Winter Building (where a telegraph sent to Fort Sumter started our country’s most devastating conflict) and, well, the century-old Chris’ Famous Hotdogs (which has fed three Presidents and every Alabama Governor). Among these landmarks lies the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. Completed in 1889, it was here that its most famous pastor organized the bus boycott of 1955 and rose to national prominence. I made two visits here during my three days in Montgomery. The first was for a formal tour immediately after finishing the same at the Parsonage. My tour guide was nice enough to give me a ride (!) to the church and our small group started with the didactics on the ground floor. An early history of the building was covered, followed by an explanation of the ground floor Civil Rights mural. We then entered the sanctuary, and a more recent history of the church followed with descriptions of the pulpit and windows mixed in. I made a second visit for Sunday services on my last day in Montgomery, attending a formal 10:30 worship service that lasted almost two hours and was given by a very energetic guest pastor, Rev. Chauncey Ballard. Taken as a whole (tour + service) this experience was the highlight of my three days in the town. The historical description by my guide (Elizabeth Monroe) was excellent and focused on many aspects not concerning Dr. King, including the pastorship of Vernon Johns. It also showed the importance of community in any activity, especially that of initiating a national civil rights movement. The building was very much the star here, and a verbal recitation of its accolades by a local resident was fitting. And the service? Whew! As a life-long cultural Catholic my first Baptist experience was equally random, passionate, and welcoming. Combining the two experiences as above is the way to go. Highly recommended and enjoyable.Review of: Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist ChurchIf you are a Hank Williams fan, this is a must see. They advertise 6,000 square feet of display space and it is packed with memorabilia. Contains furniture, clothes, etc., owned and worn by Hank and Audrey Williams. Also contains sheet music, gold records, photos, posters, musical instruments, stage costumes, etc. Just about everything you would expect to find in a museum. Items mostly from the Williams family and other donors. Of special interest is the blue Cadillac that Hank died in en route to his performance. You are not allowed to take photos in the museum, however the proprietor will take your picture in front of the blue Cadillac if you like. Review of: Hank Williams MuseumIf you are expecting a museum, you will not find it at the Civil Rights Memorial Center. This is essentially a visitor's center for the poignant memorial located outside the building. The small collection of exhibits and the video are excellent, and the staff was very welcoming. The center makes an excellent addition to other nearby museums.Review of: Civil Rights Memorial CenterMuseum of Alabama is worth a visitThe building is beautifully maintained -- go to the second floor (there is an elevator to the left of the entrance) and find out about the story of Alabama. There is no entrance fee. The museum covers the story of the American Indians to today, the exhibits are of very high quality. There were 4th grade classes present when we visited. There is a separate room for interactive activities for children. You can easily spend 1 1/2 hr at this museum. The museum is across the street from the Capitol. Don't miss it.Review of: Alabama Department of Archives and History Alabama State Capitol Building Located in the heart of central Alabama, the city of Montgomery holds a strategic place in state, national, and international history. A frontier settlement, it became a center of the cotton kingdom, Alabama's seat of government, and the original Confederate capital. Later, the 1886-87 Lightning Route electric trolley system and in 1910 the Wright Brothers' civilian flying school brought it recognition as a center of technology. During the turbulent civil rights era, Montgomery citizens played a central role in some of its most important events, including the bus boycott and the Selma to Montgomery March. In 2019, the city elected its first African American mayor, Steven L. Reed, who also was the first black probate judge in Montgomery County. He is the son of the former longtime Alabama Education Association associate executive secretary and state Democratic Party official Joe L. Reed. Today, the city is the center of policy and economic development leading the state's rise as a manufacturing and technology center. Early History Before the state of Alabama was even established, the site of present-day Montgomery was an important crossroads that straddled major Native American trade routes, with paths, streams, and the Alabama River connecting the Creek Indians to a wider world. Beginning in the sixteenth century, European intrusions began changing the destiny of the original inhabitants. By 1814, with the signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson, the Creeks had ceded millions of acres, including what is now Montgomery County, to the United States. Richard Montgomery Settlers flooded the area, establishing numerous cotton plantations. With mechanization of textile production, the demand for cotton increased rapidly. The site again served as a crossroads for this emerging industry. In 1817 and 1818, three small settlements sprang up on the banks of the Alabama River, with two of these communities merging in 1819 to form the town of Montgomery, named for Gen. Richard Montgomery, a hero of the Revolutionary War. In 1822, the town became the seat of Montgomery County, itself named in 1816 for Maj. Lemuel Montgomery, an officer killed in the 1814 Battle of Horseshoe Bend. As Alabama settlement expanded, the state legislature looked to relocate the capital from Tuscaloosa, in the west-central part of the state. Montgomery entrepreneur Andrew Dexter, for whom the city's famed Dexter Avenue is named, was among its earliest promoters as the site of the new state capital. He had even reserved a portion of his property, known as "Goat Hill," at the eastern end of Market Street for the location of the state house. In 1846, Montgomery won the long-sought prize when the legislature chose it as the capital city. One of the major points in the town's favor was the Creek land cession that pushed the boundary of Alabama eastward to the Chattahoochee River, thus placing Montgomery quite close to the state's geographic center. Other significant factors included the developing railroads, the free land (Goat Hill), and the funds that the city would raise through a bond issue to finance the construction of the state house. Completed in 1847, the Greek Revival edifice burned to the ground in December 1849. Undaunted, the state funded another building, completed in 1851, that still serves as the capitol today. That same year, the Montgomery & West Point Railroad connected Montgomery with terminals in Georgia, opening central Alabama to the Northeast and Midwest. Inauguration of Jefferson Davis The population of the city grew rapidly in the decades after its founding. By 1850, more than 12,000 people lived in the town, which had expanded to include several hotels, taverns, storehouses, and a cotton warehouse to accommodate the developing cotton trade along the riverfront. The 1850s in Montgomery were marked by prosperity and progress, and the town grew in sophistication. A large portion of that prosperity and progress came from Montgomery’s considerable involvement in the domestic slave trade. This involvement began with the 1808 ban on the international slave trade by the federal government, which unintentionally led to increasing demand for enslaved laborers within the United States. This demand was particularly high in areas of the Deep South like Alabama, which attracted numerous individuals hoping to take advantage of fertile land, freed for purchase by typically corrupt treaties with indigenous inhabitants, to plant cotton. Additionally, the growing demand for domestic and international cotton further increased the value of land and enslaved laborers in Alabama. In 1808, Alabama’s enslaved population was estimated at less than 40,000, but by 1860 it had grown to more than 435,000. A large majority of that increase was a result of the domestic slave trade, through which many thousands of enslaved individuals were forcibly moved from the Upper South to the Lower South. As of the 1850s, Alabama’s domestic slave trade was centered in Montgomery, in part because of the city’s rail and river transportation hubs connecting the Upper South and the Gulf of Mexico. Steamers would come up the Alabama River from Mobile and New Orleans, and railroads connected Montgomery to the Upper South via West Point and Atlanta, Georgia. In 1859, Montgomery had as many slave depots (warehouses where enslaved people were kept prior to sale) as it did hotels and banks. Major depots were located on Market Street (present-day Dexter Avenue) and Lawrence Street, on the corner of Perry and Monroe Streets, and on Market Street between Lawrence and McDonough Streets. Other smaller depots were located throughout the city. (One of the former depots is now the office of the Equal Justice Initiative, which has been instrumental in documenting slavery in Montgomery since its founding in 2012.) The city’s slave market was located near the Artesian Basin, in present-day Court Square. The city's economic connection to the domestic slave trade continued into the Civil War, as slave traders were among some of the wealthiest and most prominent citizens of Montgomery. Signs of the trouble to come appeared as the secession crisis began to heat up. Conflict grew among the secessionists, led by firebrand legislator William Lowndes Yancey, those who vehemently opposed secession, and a substantial moderate element. In the presidBerry, Daina Ramey. The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2018.ential campaign of 1860, Yancey failed to achieve his demands for southern rights at the Democratic Convention and led the southern delegates out, fracturing the national Democratic Party and assuring the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln. The southern states seceded soon thereafter, and Montgomery hosted the constitutional convention for the new Confederate States of America and was selected as the provisional capital. Montgomery served in that capacity for three months until May 1861, when it lost that honor to Richmond, Virginia. During the war, Montgomery remained largely on the sidelines of the actual fighting, instead supplying men and materials to the war effort. The city housed six hospitals and several homes that provided medical services to the sick and wounded. Montgomery was largely untouched by war until April 1865, when federal forces under Gen. James H. Wilson began moving toward the city. The scant Confederate units moved out, but before departing, military and municipal leaders decided to burn some 100,000 bales of cotton stored in local warehouses. The acrid smell of burning cotton greeted Union troops as they entered town in the early morning of April 12, 1865. During their two-day occupation, they destroyed the arsenal, train depot, foundries, rolling mills, nitre works, several riverboats, and railway cars. Montgomery, having suffered little physical damage, saw drastic changes in its social, political, and economic life as freed blacks took positions on the city council and Republican mayors guided the city through the turbulent times of Reconstruction. The free black population built churches and organized educational, civic, and social institutions. These advances began to reverse in 1875, when the Democrats regained control of the state and city governments and imposed white supremacy, although black political influence continued for some time. Modernization Montgomery, ca. 1885 By the 1880s, Montgomery had wholeheartedly embraced new technology and ushered in an era of modernization. In 1886, the city gained fame as the home of the very first electric streetcar system in the Western Hemisphere. A major railroad hub for Central Alabama and its river traffic, Montgomery became the wholesale district for the region. By now a city of more than 17,000, the city boasted cotton brokerages, warehouses, large commercial banks, metal manufacturing, dry goods industries, lumbering, textile mills, and breweries. In 1896, the Supreme Court's decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson established rules for "separate but equal" facilities in rail travel and set in motion drastic societal changes for people in the South. In Alabama, white elites quickly moved to take advantage of the new opportunities for curbing black and poor white political involvement and entrenched existing Jim Crow laws. In 1901, the legislature in Montgomery rewrote the state constitution, which disfranchised blacks and many whites, as the Plessy verdict resonated across the South. Montgomery municipal leaders hastened to pass ordinances designed to separate blacks and whites on trolleys, leading blacks to boycott the trolleys in 1901 and stage a trolley strike in 1906. The outcome was segregated seating on trolleys and, later, on city buses. By then, however, transportation was moving in another direction: upward. ARDMONT Baseball Team, 1920 In 1910, the Commercial Men's Association ignited an interest in flying when it invited the Wright brothers to Montgomery, where the inventors operated the first civilian flying school for three months on the Kohn Plantation west of town. This event was the first of many associations with flight for the city. During World War I, the same land served as Ardmont, a repair depot for Army aircraft, including those from Taylor Field, east of Montgomery. At the same time, infantry troops received training at Camp Sheridan; writer F. Scott Fitzgerald met his future wife, Zelda Sayre, while stationed there. Following the war, Ardmont remained active and, renamed as Maxwell Field, trained hundreds of flyers during World War II. Now Maxwell Air Force Base, today it is the home of the Air University, the advanced educational center for Air Force officers, as well as several other facilities. Between 1940 and 1950, the population increased from 78,000 to 106,000. Many residents lived in the expanding neighborhoods of Cottage Hill, Cloverdale, and the Garden District. Civil Rights Selma to Montgomery March End When black servicemen returned from fighting fascism and imperialism in World War II, they found that their freedoms were still restricted by segregation, just as they had been for decades. Most public places were segregated, and blacks were relegated to the back of the bus on the city's public transportation. Efforts to make the system more equitable failed, but Rosa Parks's arrest for refusing to give her seat to a white man on December 1, 1955, brought startling change. The event sparked a year-long boycott that in turn sparked larger demonstrations, spearheaded by Montgomery religious and civic leaders Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr., and E. D. Nixon, throughout the state for equal justice for blacks. The state capitol served as the culminating point for the Selma to Montgomery March for voting rights in the spring of 1965, and King made one of his greatest speeches there to an estimated 25,000 people. The 1965 Voting Rights Act made a significant impact that paved the way for black registration and participation in the world of politics and government. Hyundai Paint Shop in Montgomery Montgomery owes much to its role as the seat of Alabama government, with the ever-expanding state bureaucracy and other government jobs providing employment to 22.5 percent of the work force in 2016. Maxwell Air Force Base's Air University employs several thousand people and in all sectors pours more than $1 billion a year into the local economy. Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama built a factory in Montgomery in 2002 and began full-scale automobile production three years later, and suppliers who manufacture and furnish parts to Hyundai have added to the numbers of employed as well. Tourism and entertainment provide direct employment for more than 8,000, with another 4,000 in related jobs. Demographics According to 2020 Census estimates, Montgomery recorded a population of 199,054. Of that number, 60.8 percent identified themselves as African American, 31.5 percent as white, 3.8 percent as Hispanic, 2.9 percent as two or more races, 3.2 percent as Asian, and 0.2 as American Indian. The city's median household income was $49,608, and per capita income was $28,720. Employment According to 2020 Census estimates, the workforce in Montgomery was divided among the following industrial categories: Educational services, and health care and social assistance (23.1 percent) Manufacturing (11.3 percent) Retail trade (11.1 percent) Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (10.8 percent) Public administration (10.5 percent) Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services (10.2 percent) Finance, insurance, and real estate, rental, and leasing (5.5 percent) Other services, except public administration (5.2 percent) Transportation and warehousing and utilities (4.9 percent) Construction (3.8 percent) Wholesale trade (2.2 percent) Information (1.2 percent) Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and extractive (0.3 percent) Education Montgomery is a center of education in the state of Alabama. It is home to campuses of both Auburn University and Troy University as well as religiously affiliated Faulkner University and Huntingdon College, and Alabama State University, the state's oldest historically black college. Maxwell Air Force Base's Air University is the highest academic branch of the U.S. Air Force. Trenholm State Technical College and a branch of South University offer technical and business related degrees. The city is home to numerous public, private, and church related elementary and secondary schools. Events and Places of Interest Alabama Department of Archives and History The city of Montgomery is home to a large number of historic structures, museums, and monuments. The capitol grounds and building are open to visitors, and are home to the Confederate Monument as well as other statues and monuments to important historical figures, including civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and politician Lister Hill. Adjacent are the First White House of the Confederacy, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and Bicentennial Park, dedicated on December 14, 2019, in honor of the state's 200th birthday. Also located near the capitol are the offices of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the associated Civil Rights Memorial and Memorial Center commemorating people who lost their lives during the civil rights movement. Other sites connected with the civil rights movement include the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, the Dexter Parsonage Museum, Freedom Rides Museum, the Troy University Rosa Parks Museum, and the City of St. Jude Interpretive Center and Garden. Other attractions include the living-history museum Old Alabama Town, the Hank Williams Museum, and the Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald Museum, the W. A. Gayle Planetarium, and the Montgomery Zoo. Located on the eastern edge of the city are the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, both located within the Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park. In 2023, the city opened the Montgomery Whitewater Park, a 120-acre complex featuring a manmade whitewater channel for rafting, kayaking, and canoeing. The park also offers visitors zip lines and climbing structures, hiking and mountain biking trails, live entertainment facilities, and shopping and dining areas. After Washington D.C., Montgomery makes a strong case as the city that has most influenced our nation’s growth. It is the home of the First White House of the Confederacy, where the President of the Confederate States lived in 1861, and the birthplace of the civil rights movement, including the Montgomery Bus Boycotts against racial segregation. Alabama’s third-largest city remains committed to honoring that legacy, attracting visitors hoping to both reflect on its history and revel in new adventures. Visit the city’s many civil rights landmarks, then continue your journey of learning at the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace & Justice. Afterward, enjoy classic Southern cuisine, upscale Italian, or Korean barbecue. Then, sip on a cocktail and peer out over the city from the rooftop of downtown’s newest jewel the Trilogy Autograph Hotel. Visit in summer for plenty of fun tourist activities or in spring, when the weather is pleasant but prices are lower. Here are the best things to do in Montgomery, Alabama. Experience Montgomery. The Equal Justice Initiative’s long-awaited projects The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, alone, justify a trip to Montgomery. Housed in a former slave warehouse, the Legacy Museum tells the story of slavery and racial inequality in America, from the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to today’s endemic of mass incarceration. After you’ve toured the museum, head outside to the adjoining National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the nation’s first memorial dedicated to honoring victims of racial lynching. On the six-acre site, more than 800 six-foot columns symbolize every county in the U.S. where racial lynchings took place. The names of victims are carved into the monuments. The organization's newest development is the Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, a 17-acre site on the Alabama River that opened to the public on Juneteenth 2024. The park tells the story of the more than 10 million Black people who were enslaved in the United States through contemporary sculpture and art pieces, first-person narratives, and historical artifacts. legacysites.eji.org; 400 North Court Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-386-9100 Montgomery was the site for some of the most influential moments and events in our country’s struggle for civil rights. Take a tour of all the major landmarks, including the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King Jr. preached, and the Dexter Parsonage Museum, where Dr. King and his family once lived. dexterkingmemorial.org; 303 South Jackson Street, Montgomery, AL 36104 The Civil Rights Memorial Center and Memorial was dedicated in 1989. The memorial's black granite table features a timeline of the major events of the civil rights movement from 1954-1968. It includes the names of 40 people killed during the movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, and more who were targeted for their civil rights work or were victims of violence. splcenter.org/civil-rights-memorial; 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104 The Rosa Parks Museum honors the life of Rosa Parks, whose arrest for not giving up her bus seat sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a major event in the civil rights movement. Visitors will see historic artifacts like a 1950s Montgomery bus, the original fingerprint arrest record, court documents, police reports, and works of art. Exhibits focus on the political and social climate of the time as well as those behind the bus boycott. troy.edu/student-life-resources/arts-culture/rosa-parks-museum/index.html; 252 Montgomery Street, Montgomery, AL 36104 Learn about the day in May 1961 when 21 young Black and white Freedom Riders stepped off a bus at the Greyhound Station in Montgomery to end racial segregation in public transportation. The Freedom Rides Museum is in that historic bus station and follows the Freedom Riders’ trail through the South, documenting the protests and violence they encountered. The building is an example of how businesses were designed to segregate races.  ahc.alabama.gov/properties/freedomrides/freedomrides.aspx; 210 South Court Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-414-8647 Want additional insight into the civil rights landmarks you’re seeing? Book a tour with historian and storyteller Wanda Battle or activist and artist Michelle Browder, who leads a trolley tour centered around civil rights and her Mothers of Gynecology monument, which honors four Black women who were the enslaved experimental subjects of controversial physician J. Marion Sims, who is often referred to as the "Father of Gynecology". anarchalucybetsey.org; 17 Mildred Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-296-3024 Credit: Experience Montgomery If you need some time to decompress after a day of reckoning, head to the city’s lovely Riverwalk, where you can stroll by the famous Harriott II Riverboat, see Riverwalk Stadium (home to the Montgomery Biscuits minor league team), and maybe even catch the faint melody of a concert at the Riverwalk Amphitheater. funinmontgomery.com/facilities/recreation-sports-culture/riverfront-facilities In addition to legendary civil rights champions, Montgomery also served as home to some of the country's most famous literary and music icons. Learn more about F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald at the couple’s former home in the historic Cloverdale neighborhood. The museum even allows guests to stay in two period-decorated suites dedicated to the writers. While you’re in the area, check out the collection of locally owned cafés, boutiques, and shops in this quaint neighborhood. Head back downtown to find an all-encompassing tribute to country music pioneer Hank Williams at the Hank Williams Museum. Inside you’ll find the most complete collection of Williams memorabilia including his instruments, clothing, and personal items. thefitzgeraldmuseum.org; 919 Felder Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36106thehankwilliamsmuseum.net; 118 Commerce Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-262-3600 Credit: Experience Montgomery One of Montgomery’s latest developments, Montgomery Whitewater is an outdoor recreation complex anchored by a man-made whitewater course that brings the great outdoors to the doorstep of downtown. Situated on 120 acres just off I-65 and on the Alabama River, Montgomery Whitewater offers its namesake whitewater rafting trip, as well as kayaking, flatwater activities, climbing walls, and a full-service restaurant. montgomerywhitewater.com; 1100 Maxwell Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-746 6530 Credit: Experience Montgomery Birmingham may be Alabama’s culinary capital, but Montgomery certainly isn’t lacking in the department of delicious food. Vacations are cause for celebration, and there’s no better place to toast to your adventure than at one of the city’s fine-dining restaurants. Feast on internationally influenced Southern dishes made with local ingredients at Central. Conjure up the Amalfi Coast with simple but elegant Italian fare at Ravello Ristorante. Vintage Year, a wine shop turned fine dining restaurant, wows with its decadent steak and excellent wine list. central129coosa.com; 129 Coosa Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-517-1155 ravellomgm.com; 36 Commerce Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-356-2852 vymgm.com; 405 Cloverdale Road, Montgomery, AL 36106; 334-819-7215 Lunch plans may begin and end at Martin’s Restaurant, a longstanding meat ‘n’ three known for perfectly crisped fried chicken. Vegans should try plant-based café Plant Bae, and those looking for a break from the familiar should visit D’Road Café for Venezuelan breakfast and lunch. themartinsrestaurant.com; 1796 Carter Hill Road, Montgomery, AL 36106; 334-265-1767 plantbae.net; 175 Lee Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-676-2961 droadcafe.com; 121 Montgomery Street, Montgomery AL, 36104; 334-328-2938 To truly be transported outside the city, follow locals to hidden gem Capitol Oyster Bar. Overlooking the Alabama River, this classic seafood shack has all the makings of a favorite beachfront restaurant—just minus the ocean. Order a dozen oysters on the half shell or a pound of Cajun-seasoned Royal Red shrimp, and enjoy the view (and frequent live music) from the expansive back deck. capitoloysterbar.com; 617 Shady Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-239-8958 Don't leave the city without exploring Korean cuisine thanks to the city's large Korean-American population. Treat yourself to Korean Barbecue at locally owned restaurants like So Gong Dong Tofu & BBQ or Kalim Korean BBQ. facebook.com/SGDalabama;1633 Eastern Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36117; 334-593-8400 kalimkbbq.com; 5806 Woodmere Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36117; 334-356-2285 Credit: Experience Montgomery When you need an afternoon pick-me-up or something to get you going in the morning, head to local roaster Prevail Union for a great cup of joe in a contemporary space. Hilltop Public House, on a hill overlooking downtown in the charming Hilltop neighborhood, caters to daytime drinkers with locally roasted coffee blends and pastries. Once the sun goes down, it transforms into a hip hangout with craft beer, cocktails, and game nights. A few blocks away, Baristas and Barristers operates under the same dual business model. Attorney Monica Whiting transformed a historic Victorian house in downtown Montgomery into a comfortable third space for the entire community. During the day, folks meet over coffee in cozy dining rooms. From 5 p.m. on, the house's bar is open for craft cocktails, cigars, and plenty of chatter. Other spirited beverages can be found at Common Bond Brewers, a production brewery with seasonal offerings in its taproom. prevailcoffee.com; 39 Dexter Avenue, Suite 102, Montgomery AL, 36104; 334-416-8399 publichouse.hilltopmgm.com; 3 North Goldthwaite Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-239-7752 bandbcoffeebar.com; 547 South Lawrence Street, Montgomery, AL 36104 www.facebook.com/Commonbondbrewers; 424 Bibb Street, Suite 150, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334- 676-2287 Credit: Experience Montgomery Montgomery is spotted with cozy Airbnbs and has its fair share of nationally recognized hotel chains, but the newly opened Trilogy Autograph Hotel offers the best of both worlds. The city’s first boutique hotel, Trilogy honors downtown's history by transforming three historic buildings (two warehouses and a Greek Revival mansion) into one stunning community gathering space. Order the Duck Trilogy at on-site restaurant Kinsmith, then take an elevator to the impossibly cool rooftop bar Waterworks. There you’ll find lush plant walls, sky pods overlooking downtown, and a generous menu of beer, wine, and craft cocktails. trilogyhotelmontgomery.com; 116 Coosa Street, Montgomery, AL 36104; 334-440-3550 In Montgomery, unique experiences are everywhere. Places where world-changing moments happened. It’s no surprise Men’s Journal named Montgomery a “best place to travel for the resilient, ever-optimistic traveler”. From world-class theater and museums to first-class family entertainment at The Montgomery Biscuits, the city's minor league baseball team, and a fabulous zoo. There are even new rooftop hotspots to sit back, relax, and take in the sights and sounds of Montgomery’s vibrant nightlife.


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