

JRNY AMERICA

presents

THE BEST BLACK AND INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES IN THE SOUTH

The story of the United States has its foundations in the deep history of Indigenous tribes that lived there long before Europeans arrived – and the America of today was built by the hands of enslaved Black people. These cultures trace their roots to shores as distant as

West Africa and, for Indigenous people, as far back as 20,000 years. This makes the Southern states a rich cultural gumbo, filled with many inspiring tales of the descendants of displaced and enslaved people who were able to overcome oppression to find their own

American Dream. Join Sarah Lee, author of the Windrush Generation novel *An Ocean Apart*, on a journey through the South that tells these fascinating stories through Black- and Indigenous-owned experiences.

Alabama

Experience civil rights history in words and song in Montgomery. Local legend Jake Williams, leads Montgomery Tours (mymontgomerytours.com), and as a child, he took part in the historic 54-mile marches for voting rights from Selma to Montgomery. With private tours taking in significant landmarks in Alabama's state capital and beyond, he also provides a first-hand account of the Southern Black experience.

Other tours cover the story of the Tuskegee Airmen, an African-American military unit, whose members faced segregation while fighting in World War II.

Alternatively, discover the story of The South on a Legendary Tour (wandahbattle.com) with singer and master storyteller, Wanda Battle. She explains: "My work is a tribute to my parents and the Montgomery westside community in which I was born, and which nurtured and protected its children during Segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. I love engaging tour guests to sing with me and talk about issues of social justice, civil rights and human rights."



Photos: Alabama Tourism, Art Meripol, Jamie Martin, Alabama Chris Granger

Arkansas

Sweet potato never tasted better than at family-owned Delta Dirt Distillery (deltadirtdistillery.com) in Helena, which uses crops and grains from its farm to produce vodka, bourbon and gin.

Joe Williams sharecropped the farm's original 86 acres in the late 1800s, then his son U.D. Williams did something rare: using profits from selling cotton and homemade moonshine, he purchased the farm in 1949. Joe's grandson Harvey grew sweet potatoes on the land, then in 2017, his great grandson, Harvey Jr, became intrigued by the idea of crafting vodka from the crop. Three years later Delta Dirt Distillery was born, releasing Sweet Blend Vodka, which quickly gained top international awards. Visit for tours and tastings of the vodka, plus their corn and sweet potato bourbon, and gin.

Don't miss Little Rock's Hearne Fine Art (hearnefineart.com), a gallery exhibiting African-American fine art. Pyramid Art, Books & Custom Framing (pyramid1988.com) in the historic Dunbar neighbourhood runs exhibitions and a plethora of literary events.



Photos: Dreamstime, Pyramid Art/Ebony Blevins, Hearne Fine Art.



Photos: Dreamstime

Georgia

Take in more than 400 years of Black history in Savannah, Georgia, either by walking, road or riverboat. Underground Tours of Savannah (undergroundtoursofsavannah.info) and Footprints of Savannah Walking Tours (footprintsofsavannah.com) offer a range of explorations telling the history of enslaved people, Gullah Geechee history and more.

With a strong identity, distinct culture and language, the Gullah Geechee are a sub-group of African Americans who predominantly live in the Lowcountry regions of the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida, making for a fascinating experience of the history of this region.

Jamal Toure, of Day Clean Journeys (daycleanjourneys.actract.top), leads Gullah-Geechee folklore and African American history tours, with drumming and storytelling.

Savannah Black History Tours' (savannahblackhistorytours.com) offering includes a 90-minute history-filled bus journey, and a two-hour history and soul-food experience.

The tours were created by author and historian Rita Fuller-Yates, who says: "Savannah has a rich Black history dating back to before Georgia was a state. A history that many do not know, understand or appreciate."



Kentucky
 If a 24-year-old widow hadn't stood up to misogyny in the early 1900s, Hotel Metropolitan (thehotelmetropolitan.org) would never have been built. But Maggie Steed knew her town needed a hotel where Black people could stay. Now the hotel, in Paducah, is a non-profit museum dedicated to telling its story.

Part of the Chitlin' Circuit – a network of venues and accommodations in the segregated South admitting Black entertainers – the hotel hosted Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, B.B. King and Tina Turner. Artists also performed there late at night, turning its Purple Room into a popular juke joint. The hotel still offers overnight stays as well as running guided tours.

Continue the story of the Chitlin' Circuit with workshops, curated art gallery events and library presentations at the Lyric Theatre & Cultural Arts Center (historicallyrictheatre.com) in Lexington.

Both sites are part of the Kentucky African American Heritage Trail (kentuckytourism.com) of more than 50 stops.

Finally, download the Freedom Journey App (pigeon-tech.com/freedom-journey-app) for a GPS-guided tour of key Underground Railroad sites along the Ohio River.



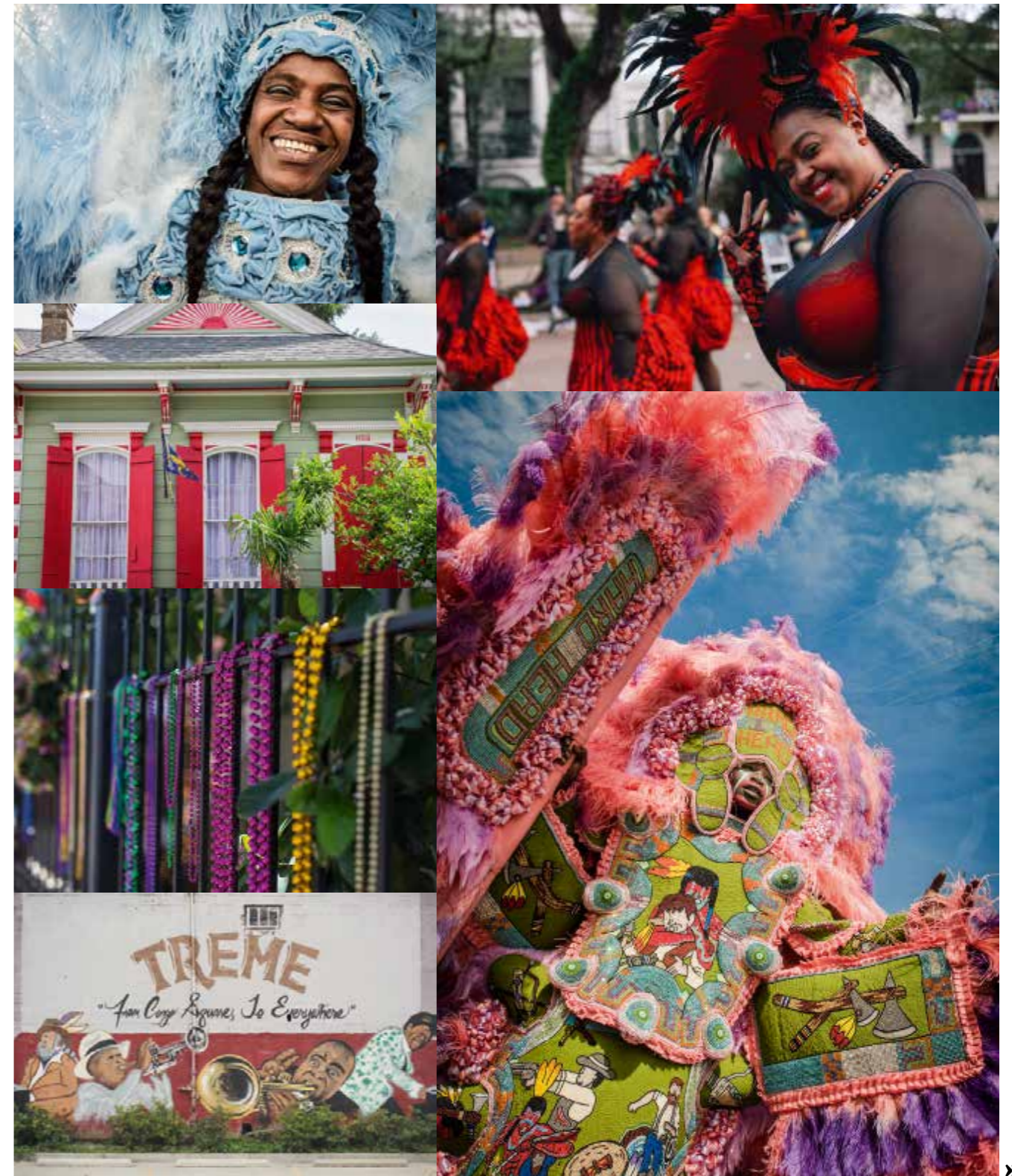
Photos: Kentucky Tourism, Lee P. Thomas, Mike Wilkinson

Louisiana

From Mardi Gras beads to beignets, tours of New Orleans chart this iconic city's colourful past. 2nd Line Tours (2ndline.tours) provides an immersive dive into the Afro-Creole experience. Its Soul of New Orleans tour explains how the city was once on Indigenous lands known as *Bulbancha*, traces the impact of the Haitian Revolution on its development and explores historic neighbourhoods like Tremé, Congo Square, and the Lower 9th Ward, before covering the impact of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the city 20 years ago.

Studio Be (studiobenola.com/tours) is home to local artist Brandan 'Bmike' Odums' first solo project, depicting stories of revolutionaries, heroes and everyday New Orleanians. Independent and guided tours are available and you can buy pieces from the collection in the gift shop.

"Do drop in" is the friendly phrase that launched the historic Dew Drop Inn (dewdropinnola.com), a stage which hosted the likes of Louis Armstrong and Irma Thomas. Closed for many years, it has been carefully refurbished as an intimate music venue and boutique hotel in the Central City neighbourhood.



Photos: Pableaux Johnson, Katie LaRocca@NewOrleans.com, Paul Broussard, Zack Smith, NewOrleans.com



Mississippi

Indigenous history and culture – and even some American prehistory – is told across Mississippi’s landscapes. The Natchez people inhabited what is now southwest Mississippi between 700 and 1730, and the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians (mdah.ms.gov) was their main ceremonial centre from 1682.

Prehistoric grass-covered mounds dot this 128-acre park – structures which symbolised the tribal community’s relationship with the land. The Great Sun’s Mound and the Temple Mound, have been excavated and rebuilt to their original size. There’s also a museum with more information on the story of the Natchez.

Chahta Immi Cultural Center (choctaw.org) in Choctaw, offers reservation tours and a glimpse into the lives of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. This includes Nanih Waiya, a mound and cave in Winston County, known as the Mother Mound, which is widely considered the home of the Choctaw.

You can even stay at the Choctaw-run Pearl River Resort (pearlriverresort.com), which is renowned for its award-winning golf courses, water park, dining, gaming and spa.

Look out for Chickasaw Heritage Center (chickasawheritagecenter.com), opening in autumn 2026 in Tupelo, promising a comprehensive, state-of-the-art educational experience from a uniquely Chickasaw perspective.



Photos: Dreamstime

Photos: Downtown Greensboro Incorporated, Dreamstime, Discover Durham



North Carolina

Relive history at Greensboro’s International Civil Rights Center & Museum (sitinmovement.org), on the site where four students held a lunch counter sit-in to challenge segregation in 1960. Their action energised the civil rights movement and effected change.

Stay at Historic Magnolia House B&B (thehistoricmagnoliahouse.org), once one of the few places Black travellers could stay before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its guest list included James Brown, Ray Charles and James Baldwin.

In Durham, get creative at one of Beyoncé’s favourite candle and scent emporiums, Bright Black (brightblackcandles.com), and design your own fragrance in one of the workshops held each Saturday. Nightlife is where it happens in Charlotte, with Lorem Ipsum (refugeoncentral.com) listening room spinning vinyl favourites as you sip on cocktails created by mixologist Justin Hazelton.

Another popular hangout, Ten58 Sports Bar & Lounge (ten58clt.com), is owned by American football legend Thomas Davis of the Charlotte Panthers.

South Carolina

Gullah Tours (gullah tours.com), in Charleston, explores the varied challenges and contributions of Black Charlestonians. Their tour visits the Old Slave Mart and Sweetgrass market, where enslaved people were traded to work on rice, indigo and Sea Island cotton plantations. The nature of their enslavement on an isolated island and on coastal plantations created a distinct culture, celebrated today in the Gullah Geechee people's arts and crafts, music, cuisine and unique language.

On Hilton Head Island, Gullah Heritage Trail Tours (gullah heritage.com), includes a stop at Mitchelville (explore mitchelville.org), the first self-governing freedmen's town in the United States, established in 1862.

Charleston's African-American History and Heritage Walking Tour (bulldog tours.com) explores the experiences of African Americans, from the brutality of slavery through to the struggle and oppression of Jim Crow and on to the fight for civil rights.

Meanwhile the International African American Museum (iaa museum.org), which opened in June 2023, after 20 years of planning, is located in the former shipping wharf where approximately 40% of the nation's enslaved people arrived.

The museum offers an incredible opportunity to learn the unvarnished stories of the African American experience across generations, and about the trauma and triumph that gave rise to a resilient people.



Photos: Discover South Carolina, Dreamstime



Tennessee

Pour a large one at Uncle Nearest (unclenearest.com), a whiskey distillery with a fascinating history. Over 160 years ago Nathan 'Nearest' Green became a freeman and put his experience to creating his own spirits. Said to be the founding father of Tennessee whiskey – Nearest created the Lincoln County filtration process – which became the defining quality between Tennessee whiskey and Kentucky bourbon. Take a tour, a tasting, or a blending experience at the Uncle Nearest distillery in Shelbyville to learn more about one of the most awarded Tennessee whiskeys of the past six years.

In Memphis, join A Tour of Possibilities (atopmemphis.com) to discover the city's Black history, taking in the I AM A Man Plaza, National Civil Rights Museum, STAX Museum of American Soul Music, and Beale Street – one of the most famous locations for music in the country.

Then hit the Mbabazi House of Style (mbabazistyles.com) for a shopping experience that blends Afrocentric culture with Memphis flair.

Photos: Dreamstime



Virginia

Tech-forward Virginia offers tours you can take anywhere with Hidden In Plain Site (hiddeninplainsite.org), a virtual reality exploration of Richmond and Roanoke. Locations are brought to life through overlays of their current appearance augmented with historical imagery to tell of lost Black histories.

On the ground, Manumission Tour Company (manumissiontours.com) offers walking and bus tours exploring Black history in and around Alexandria. Tours cover the pre-Civil War history of urban slavery and sites that connect to early African American spirituality, such as Shiloh Baptist Church.

Virginia is also a state of epicurean delights for Black-operated businesses. Join Black Women Who Wine (bwomenwhowine.com) as they discover Virginian wines, one glass at a time, at monthly vineyard meet-ups. Penny's Wine Shop (pennysrva.com) in Richmond – founded by wine enthusiasts and childhood friends who also operate wine club RichWine (richwinerva.com) – serves natural wine, small plates and a seasonal menu.

Photos: Dreamstime

West Virginia

Embrace Indigenous culture when you take part in a Native American powwow at one of the many across West Virginia. Powwow in Parsons (fiverivercampground.com), for example, is at Five River Campground each June, with drumming, dancing, storytelling and food trucks peddling Native eats.

Then discover what it was like to be Black in West Virginia in the 19th and 20th centuries with the National Park Service's African American Heritage Tour (nps.gov/neri) through Summers, Raleigh, Fayette and Nicholas. Featuring 17 stops across four counties, the smartphone app tour can be experienced in-person or virtually. Stops include Camp Washington Carver in Clifftop, which was the first 4-H youth camp for African Americans in the US.

Finally take a tour of The Block (theclio.com), the centre of Charleston's African American community where you'll find buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the home of Mattie V. Lee, the state's first African American female physician.



Photos: Dreamstime

