

GOING ON FAITH

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SNEAK A PEAK AT COLORADO SPRINGS

CROSSING
THROUGH
KANSAS

AMERICA'S
LAKES

WESTERN
HERITAGE SITES

SOUTHERN
TRAVEL
GUIDE

SONGS OF THE

by GABI LOGAN

SOUTH

When someone says “music” and “the South,” do you think of New Orleans jazz, Nashville contemporary country, Elvis’ greatest hits, Kentucky barn dances, Appalachian rhythms? Or do you think of ’70s and ’80s rock?

Just as the first American settlers laid their roots in the South, most major American musical genres have done the same. From one state to the next or even from city to city, groups can experience the evolution of American music from early African tunes to the origins of today’s chart toppers.



Macon celebrates local hero Otis Redding

courtesy Macon CVB



Nashville's famous Grand Ole Opry

by Ted Denny, courtesy Nashville CVB



The Louisiana Cajun Zydeco Festival showcases the native music of New Orleans

by Cheryl Gardner, courtesy New Orleans CVB

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Nashville's musical roots run far, far deeper than the pop country focus of the television show "Nashville" would lead you to believe. As early as the 1850s, the city was a hotbed of ground-breaking gospel music at the Union Gospel Home, which went on to house the Grand Ole Opry for 30 years before moving to the Ryman Auditorium, one of the most important music venues in the city today.

The Country Music Hall of Fame peels back these layers, walking visitors through a history of not only country music, but also American music generally.

"It tells the story of America's music in a chronological fashion, how music evolved in America and the development of other genres," said Laurel Bennett, executive director of tourism sales for the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation. "A lot of people go into the Hall of Fame skeptical about country music and come out with a new appreciation for how closely all the different genres are connected and that they are in fact all American music fans. Right now they have an exhibit on Bob Dylan."

The expansion in 2014 catapulted the attraction to the status of the world's largest museum dedicated to music.

The elite part of the Country Music Hall of Fame in downtown Nashville is RCA Studio B, where Elvis recorded more than 200 songs. Today, groups tour the studio and also lay down their own tracks. Bennett recommends groups start there in the morning before touring the Country Music Hall of Fame and wind up at the Ryman Saloon for lunch and line dancing lessons, where their Studio B recording sessions are broadcasted to the crowd.

In the evenings, groups can catch a show at the Ryman Auditorium, where the music is played from the original church's hardwood floors and stained-glass windows. It's a bucket-list performance environment for musicians, or the Grand Ole Opry where the performance is heightened by the fact that it is a live radio show broadcasted with commercials. Downtown, all of Broadway rocks from 10 a.m. until 2 a.m. at honky-tonk bars. Out of town, groups can have a more tranquil live music experience at the Fontanelle, a restored historic home run by a group of producers that have filled the space with memorabilia from their chart-topping artists.

visitmusiccity.com

RENFRO VALLEY, KENTUCKY

Country music has become more strongly linked with Tennessee, and Nashville in particular, Kentucky's Renfro Valley's country music legacy is defined only by the Grand Ole Opry. "The Renfro Valley Gatherin'," which began on the airwaves in 1943, is the second-oldest continuously running radio show in the United States after the Opry.

John Lair, a Chicagoan with Kentucky roots who ran the radio show "The Grand Ole Opry Barn Dance," which inspired the "Grand Ole Opry" show, wanted to have a live barn-dance event to match his immensely popular show. He was told him he'd have to turn the venue back into a tobacco barn and no one would come, but today his entertainment center has grown into a 100-acre campus with shops and restaurants.

Nashville is full of urban music venues crowded in on one another, but Renfro Valley's music venues give country music space to breathe,

often quite literally. In John Lair's day, "there'd be some nights where they had 3,000 people here, and they'd open up the sides of the barn," said Renfro Valley sales and marketing coordinator Jerred Harris.

Groups have a wealth of options to enjoy Renfro Valley's energetic country music. Thursday through Sunday, groups can enjoy a new show called the "Hazzard County Hoedown," which "is a tribute to the Dukes with hilarious hijinks with Boss and the Dukes," said Harris. Friday nights typically feature a major headliner like Trace Adkins, and Saturday holds the Mountain Gospel Jubilee for bluegrass gospel and the Renfro Valley Barn Dance that started it all.

During the day, groups can visit the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame to learn more about the origins of Kentucky country music and the Bittersweet Cabin Village, with transplanted structures dating from the 1700s through World War II, to understand the people who produced the music. The Hall of Fame is open seasonally, and the village is open year-round.

www.renfrovalley.com

MACON, GEORGIA

Macon's musical heritage may be a newer phenomenon than many other Southern music capitals, but with bands like the Allman Brothers, powerhouse producers like Capricorn records, and smash-hit solo artists like Otis Redding coming up there, it's the undeniable heart of modern Southern rock and soul.

One of the best ways to get the lay of the land is to take your group on a Rock Candy tour and request Jessica Walden as your guide. One of the company's owners, Walden offers an especially detailed introduction to Macon's music history by incorporating stories from her upbringing as the daughter of Capricorn Records founder Phil Walden. Groups can opt for a step-on guide for a customized driving tour or use Rock Candy as a Friday or Saturday night outing. The walking tours can be customized in length, but typically run two and a half to three hours.

Macon's must-see music stop is the Big House Museum, dedicated to the Allman Brothers Band. The house where the musicians lived, worked and cultivated their unique sound has been restored and redecorated to what the house looked like in the musicians' day, with memorabilia creating individual bedrooms bringing each band member's style to life. By appointment for groups, private tours are also available at The Douglas, a historic music venue where Phil Walden discovered Otis Redding.

For a musical meal, bring your group to H&H, a local soul food restaurant run by Mama Louise.

"When the Allman Brothers were a struggling band, you could tell they were kind of up-and-coming, and they got up the nerve to ask if they could have one plate of food to share," said Macon-Bobb County Convention and Visitors Bureau director of communications Valerie Bradley. "She formed a relationship with the band, and they took her on the road with them on tour. She's still alive and has a chair behind the counter."

www.maconga.org