

Alabama

By Tom Kirvan

SOUTHERN STATE OFFERS AN ARRAY OF TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Widely known as the “Heart of Dixie,” Alabama is home to approximately 5 million people and is generally regarded as the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement in America.

The state has a diverse population, with African Americans making up about 27 percent of the population, one of the highest percentages in the nation. Alabama’s demographics reflect its rich cultural heritage, shaped by Native American roots, European settlement, and African American contributions, particularly in the context of the Civil Rights Movement. The population is spread across urban centers like Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile, as well as rural communities that maintain strong ties to agriculture and traditional Southern life.

Alabama’s geography is as varied as its history, stretching from the Appalachian Mountains in the north to the Gulf Coast in the south. The state covers an area of 52,419 square miles, featuring a mix of rolling hills, fertile plains, dense forests, and coastal wetlands. Northern Alabama is characterized by the rugged beauty of the Appalachian foothills, with scenic rivers and waterfalls. The central part of the state, known as the Black Belt, is renowned for its rich, dark soil, ideal for farming. Southern Alabama offers a subtropical climate with mild winters, hot summers, and warm, sandy beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, which attract tourists year-round.

Alabama has a deeply rooted history that reflects the broader narrative of the American South. After becoming part of the United States in 1819, Alabama’s economy quickly grew based on cotton farming and slavery. The state played a central role in the Civil War, seceding from the Union in 1861 to join the Confederacy. In the 20th century, Alabama was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, with significant events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma to Montgomery March, and the Birmingham Campaign. These events helped shape the nation’s journey toward racial equality and justice. Today, Alabama honors this legacy with numerous museums and historic sites dedicated to preserving its rich, complex history.

Alabama has a diverse economy, with key sectors including manufacturing, aerospace, healthcare, agriculture, and tourism. Historically, agriculture was the backbone of Alabama’s economy, with cotton as the dominant crop. Today, the state remains a leading producer of poultry, cattle, peanuts, and soybeans. Manufacturing has also played a significant role, particularly in the automotive industry, with major plants operated by companies like Mercedes-Benz, Honda, and Hyundai. The aerospace sector is another critical



Fast Facts

Capital: Montgomery

Population: 5 million

Economic engines: Auto manufacturing, agriculture, aerospace, and tourism

Highest point: Cheaha Mountain (2,407 feet)

Primerus Members:

- **Ball, Ball, Matthews & Novak, P.A., PBLI & PDI** (Mobile, Alabama, U.S.)
- **Ball, Ball, Matthews & Novak, P.A., PBLI & PDI** (Montgomery, Alabama, U.S.)
- **Christian & Small LLP, PBLI & PDI** (Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.)
- **Christian & Small LLP, PBLI & PDI** (Daphne, Alabama, U.S.)

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component, with Huntsville being a center for space exploration and defense industries, home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and the U.S. Army's Redstone Arsenal. Additionally, tourism is a growing industry, with visitors drawn to Alabama's historic sites, natural beauty, and cultural festivals.

Montgomery, the capital of Alabama, is a city steeped in history and culture. With a population of about 200,000, Montgomery played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement and was the first capital of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The city is home to significant landmarks such as the Alabama State Capitol, the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, and the Rosa Parks Museum.

Birmingham, the largest city in Alabama, has a population of approximately 210,000 and is known as the industrial and economic heart of the state. Birmingham's history as a center for the steel industry has shaped its development. The state also is the ancestral home of Harper Lee, the famed author of "To Kill a Mockingbird," a novel that helped define the struggle for equal justice in the United States.

Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

- **Gulf Shores and Orange Beach:** The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville is one of Alabama's most popular tourist attractions and a must-visit for space enthusiasts. Known as "Rocket City," Huntsville is home to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center serves as the official visitor center for NASA. The museum features a vast collection of rockets, spacecraft, and interactive exhibits that trace the history of space exploration. Highlights include the Saturn V rocket, one of only three in the world, and the Space Shuttle Pathfinder. The center also offers Space Camp programs for children and adults, providing an immersive experience in astronaut training.
- **Civil Rights Memorial and Center, Montgomery:** Alabama's Gulf Coast is renowned for its beautiful, white-sand beaches and warm waters, making Gulf Shores and Orange Beach top destinations for beach lovers. Located along the Gulf of Mexico, these coastal towns offer a perfect blend of relaxation and recreation. Visitors can enjoy swimming, sunbathing, and beachcombing, as well as water sports like kayaking, paddleboarding, and fishing. The area is also known for its fresh seafood, lively beachfront dining, and family-friendly attractions, including the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo and Gulf State Park, which offers hiking trails, a fishing pier, and a scenic lakeside setting.
- **Civil Rights Memorial and Center, Montgomery:** The Civil Rights Memorial and Center in Montgomery is a powerful tribute to those who fought for racial equality and justice during the Civil Rights Movement. Designed by renowned artist Maya Lin, the memorial features a black granite fountain engraved with the names of 40 individuals who lost their lives in the struggle for civil rights. The adjacent to the memorial, the Center provides educational exhibits, films, and interactive displays that chronicle the history of the movement and its impact on American society.
- **Birmingham Civil Rights Institute:** The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is a museum and research center dedicated to preserving the history of the Civil Rights Movement and its significance in Birmingham. The institute's exhibits tell the story of the struggle for civil rights in Birmingham, known as "The Magic City," and highlight the pivotal events that took place there, including the Birmingham Campaign and the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.
- **Little River Canyon National Preserve:** Located in northeastern Alabama, Little River Canyon National Preserve is a natural wonder that offers stunning scenery and outdoor adventure. The preserve is centered around the Little River, which flows along the top of Lookout Mountain and is one of the nation's longest rivers that runs atop a mountain. The canyon, carved by the river, is known for its dramatic cliffs, cascading waterfalls, and lush forests. Visitors can explore the preserve through hiking trails, scenic drives, and overlooks that offer breathtaking views of the canyon.