



AllWays Traveller

Birmingham, Alabama USA

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

# A city on the brink of a sparkling future

Alabama lies at the heart of the American Deep South and is bordered by Tennessee to the north, Georgia to the east, Florida and the Gulf of Mexico to the south and Mississippi to the west.

It is a state rich in the heritage of the American Civil War and civil rights and a welcome for travellers based on the friendliest folk you will find anywhere, fine food and foot stomping music.

While the cities of Montgomery and Birmingham are a 2.5-hour drive from Atlanta, the coastal area of Mobile and the Gulf Shore beaches are the same distance from New Orleans.

The rural northern part of the state, which takes in the small cities of Florence/Muscle Shoals the larger Huntsville and the DeSoto State Park are under two hours drive from Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

This *AllWays traveller*, one of five in the Alabama series, takes a look at Birmingham, the State's largest city, which has experienced triumph and turmoil and is now facing a bright future.

## Ashley Gibbins

Managing editor  
*AllWays traveller*



Alabama Museum of Art



Birmingham Civil Rights Museum



Alabama Zoo

[www.Visitvulcan.com](http://www.Visitvulcan.com)

## A personal view of Birmingham, Alabama

# Birmingham is hot and I am not just talking the weather



Birmingham Civil Rights Museum

By Ashley Gibbins

**This piece of illuminating advice was given to me by Jim Windsor, from Birmingham tourism, as we tucked into omelettes, hash browns, biscuits and grits at Bouges.**

Bouges is one of those wonderful, down to earth, breakfast diners where everyone is just so darn friendly and the food damn good.

What a great way to get a trip to Alabama started.

And Birmingham itself is a place to begin any driving vacation through this friendliest of southern states.

It is a two and a half hour drive from Atlanta, the nearest international gateway.

### **Surprise, surprise**

Flying Delta into Atlanta was a two-fold pleasant surprise.

In days gone by, the American carrier left much to be desired, but this time our trip from London was fine with the cabin crew excellent ambassadors for the airline.

And our last flight into Atlanta, albeit some years ago, was a nightmare.

Bad signage, brusque airport staff and a painful experience clearing Homeland Security.

No longer. From the moment we put our first feet into the terminal there were smiling staff pointing us in the direction of passport control and baggage claim.

Clearing customs was also speedy with lots of helpful 'bodies on the ground to take us through the new, and very efficient, computerised clearance process.

All this means that, by 6pm, we are into our room at the Ross Bridge resort and spa, some 20 minutes drive from Downtown Birmingham.

## While in Birmingham

100 Dishes to eat In Alabama



*100 Dishes to eat In Alabama before you die* is a hugely popular guide to great food in the state.

[www.ilovealabamafood.com](http://www.ilovealabamafood.com)

### **Birmingham Zoo**



Birmingham Zoo, which is one of the states major attractions, has more than 750 animals, in lushly landscaped grounds.

These include monkeys, giraffes, gorillas, rhinos, elephants and big and small cats.

[www.birminghamzoo.com](http://www.birminghamzoo.com)

### **Birmingham Botanical Gardens**



The Birmingham Botanical Gardens is a 67 acre park, displaying 12,000 different types of plants arranged in two dozen different gardens.

These include a formal rose garden, tropical greenhouse and a large Japanese Garden.

Entrance is free.

[www.bbgardens.org](http://www.bbgardens.org)

### **16th Street Baptist Church**

The 16th Street Baptist Church is Birmingham's most famous Civil Rights landmark. On a Sunday morning in September 1963, four African-American schoolgirls were killed.

A bomb set by Ku Klux Klansmen ripped through that side of the church killing four young girls.

[www.16thstreetbaptist.com](http://www.16thstreetbaptist.com)

## The first day on a long-haul trip should be a relaxing one



For our stay in Birmingham we opted for the Ross Bridge (see below), deciding that our first full day in Alabama, after the long-haul flight, should be a relaxing one.

The second day would be the sightseer.

### One day in Birmingham



Birmingham is the largest city in Alabama, with a quarter of the State's population, which is still less than one million.

It was founded in 1871, during the reconstruction of the American South after the Civil War (or War between the States, or the War of Northern Aggression as some in the American South still prefer to call the conflict - but no longer with malice).

This 'new' town looked to grow and prosper on the back of Iron and steel mining and railroading.

And so it did until the great depression of the 1930s saw Birmingham's industrial base collapse and it become one of the poorest cities in America.

The recovery was long and hard but the 21st century sees Birmingham thriving once again.

### A renaissance

Downtown Birmingham is now undergoing a renaissance 'avenue by avenue' with retail outlets and restaurants opening and an increasingly vibrant nightlife, clustered around Five Points South and Lakeview.

### Culture and character

The city is also becoming a traveller destination of genuine calibre.



[www.alabamasymphony.org](http://www.alabamasymphony.org)



[www.alabamaballet.org](http://www.alabamaballet.org)



[www.operabirmingham.org](http://www.operabirmingham.org)

It is the cultural and entertainment hub of Alabama and home to ballet companies and an opera company, all of international standing.

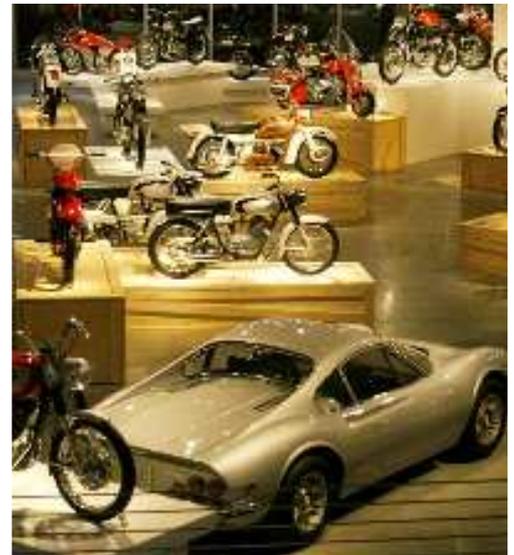
### Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame



The Jazz Hall of Fame exhibits memorabilia displaying Alabama's many contributions to the world of jazz in the historic, art deco Carver Theatre.

[www.jazzhall.com](http://www.jazzhall.com)

### Barber Motorsports Museum



The Barber Motorsports Museum is dedicated to the presentation, interpretation, exhibition and history of motorcycles, vintage vehicles and motorsports.

It is home to over 1200 vintage and modern motorcycles and race cars and the largest collection of Lotus cars as well as other significant makes.

The collection is the largest of its kind in the world and ranges from 1902 to current-year production.

The museum displays common street bikes as well as rare one-off Grand Prix race machinery.

The Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum is located at the 830 acre Barber Motorsports Park that includes a world class 2.38 mile racetrack.

[www.barbermuseum.org](http://www.barbermuseum.org)

## Standing for the city's past, present and future

The Vulcan is a fine place to start a day in Birmingham.



The city's majestic landmark, it is a cast iron statue representing the Roman god of fire, iron, and blacksmiths.

It stands at the top of Red Mountain as the centre point of a small park and offers stunning views of the city below.

There is a small museum charting the industrial rise and fall of Birmingham and the harsh realities of the men who had to suffer the conditions underground.

### The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute



While travelling, particularly on vacation, is invariably geared to leisure pursuits, there are times when one must consider matters of more serious consequence.

The struggle by African-Americans for their civil rights, in the 1950s and 60s, is very much a case in point.

### Never enough time

The problem with visiting anywhere is that there is never enough time to see and do everything.

This was certainly the case with Birmingham. But for a trip that took us through most of Alabama was a great start.

### More information

[www.inbirmingham.com](http://www.inbirmingham.com) and [www.alabama.travel](http://www.alabama.travel).

During this time Birmingham became the hub for non-violent protest against the segregation that was rife in the American South.

A particular focus for this was the 16th Street Baptist Church, now a National Historic Landmark,



The struggle for equal rights for African-Americans gathered momentum during May and June of 1963, with daily sit-ins, mass marches and organised protests.

These were met with strong arm tactics by the police with the use of tear gas, water cannon and dogs on the protesters.

More than 3,000 people were arrested during the height of the troubles, almost all of them high-school age children.

Undeterred, the black and liberal minded communities ultimately successful, leading the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, which is across the street from the 16th Street Baptist Church, is a must see resource that really brings home the appalling consequences of segregation.

It also celebrates the heroic actions of those who were determined to fight for civil rights.

### The McWane Science Center



The McWane Science Center is a science museum located in downtown Birmingham.

The state-of-the-art science center, aquarium and 280-seat IMAX Dome Theater is housed in the historic and refurbished Loveman's department store building.

Inside are more than 9,000 square feet (800 m<sup>2</sup>) of interactive exhibits, including the Challenger Learning Center of Alabama, created in memory of the Space Shuttle Challenger Flight 51-L crew.

The World of Water exhibit showcases more than 50 species of marine and freshwater aquatic life.

[www.mcwane.org](http://www.mcwane.org)

### Birmingham Museum of Art



The Birmingham Museum of Art has one of the finest collections in the Southeast USA, with more than 24,000 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings and decorative arts.

The Museum's collection of Asian art and its Vietnamese ceramics, in particular, are considered among the finest.

The Museum also houses the Kress Collection of Renaissance and Baroque paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts from the late 13th century to 1750.

[www.artsbma.org](http://www.artsbma.org)

## A place to stay in Alabama : The Ross Bridge



By Ann Mealor

**Like a modern medieval castle - complete with fairytale turrets - the AAA Four Diamond Ross Bridge Renaissance Resort and Spa majestically overlooks the gently rolling, pristine greens and drives of its Robert Trent Jones designed golf course.**

Inside, this hugely impressive hotel has a feel of an old hunting lodge with its high wooden beam ceilings, iron chandeliers, big comfy leather chairs and huge fireplace.

After a long flight and drive from the UK, Ashley and I were more than happy to spend our first evening relaxing on the veranda outside the lobby lounge sipping margaritas and locally brewed draft beer.

The hotel is set within the grounds of the golf course, with its woodland, lakes and manicured greens, which provides spectacular views from many of its 259 bedrooms.

The rooms are large and well furnished with balconies on which to relax and enjoy the scenery.

I also appreciated the good quality Aveda toiletries that were provided.

Each bedroom has a fridge for cooling beer or wine, which can be enjoyed whilst catching the Alabama sunsets.

### Piping in twilight

A Scottish piper in full traditional dress plays at twilight every evening at various locations within the grounds.

The Ross Bridge resort is large and spacious with an attractive pool area featuring waterfalls, water jets, a hot tub and plenty of comfortable loungers on which to lie down and read a book, have a snooze or just soak up the rays.

Everywhere is exceptionally clean and well maintained.

### A must for golfers

The course at the Ross Bridge is a must for golfers and there is also the fully equipped spa and gym,



### The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail



The Clubhouse and Brock's restaurants serve tasty and generous helpings of fried chicken, steak, or catfish.

The lobby lounge, sports bar and restaurants are all pleasant and comfortable. Ice cold water, refreshingly flavoured with fresh mint and lemon is available all day in reception.

Staff are friendly, efficient and helpful as one would expect from a chic and luxury resort of this calibre.

The Ross Bridge golf course, and the nearby Oxmoor Valley course, form part of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

This is a stunning collection of 11 championship golf courses in Alabama.

Each course is linked to a five star resort hotel in destinations including Huntsville Montgomery, Mobile and Muscle Shoals.

[www.rtgolf.com](http://www.rtgolf.com)

# A snapshot of Birmingham, Alabama



16th Street Baptist Church



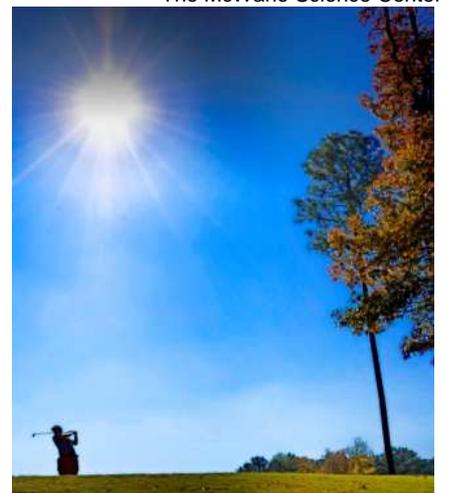
American Village



The McWane Science Center



Birmingham Zoo



The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail





Grab your keys. It's time to take an Alabama road trip.

This *AllWays traveller to Birmingham*, is one of five *AllWays traveller* features in the Alabama series.

The others are :

Montgomery

Mobile Bay

Gulf Shores

North Alabama

To download these visit : [www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

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[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)



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[www.itwalliance.com](http://www.itwalliance.com)

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Ashley Gibbins



Ann Mealor