



Students enjoy a hayride on a 1941 tractor at the Mississippi Agriculture & Forestry Museum in Jackson.

Mississippi's RURAL HERITAGE

Discover the agricultural side of the Magnolia State

Planning travel throughout Mississippi is challenging when faced with making choices from all there is to see and do. From Tunica to Biloxi and Jackson to Corinth, Mississippi has a fun and educational story to tell.

For the outdoorsman there's plenty of action on sea and land, including some world-class golf. From blues and country music in juke joints to big-name entertainers in coliseums and

gaming destinations, there's plenty of entertainment in store for the visitor.

The state's heritage includes the early Choctaw tribe that named the Mississippi River "Father of Waters." A difficult civil rights history has led to having more African-American elected officials than any other state. Memorable Civil War sites highlight important moments in our country's history.

Blend all these alternatives with a

variety of dining options reflecting the culinary contributions of the state's ancestry. Add shopping options from crafts to fashion. You can see there might not be enough hours in the day. Look to Mississippi Tourism to make your planning easier.

The state's tourism office and its partners have developed a series of Trails that explore Mississippi heritage, from the birthplace of the blues to culinary delights. Discovering the agricultural side of the Magnolia State might be the best place to start. (visitmississippi.org/agri-tours-trail.aspx)

Mississippi encompasses a truly interesting diversity of farms, historic plantations, old country stores, pottery studios, and museums that are dependent on the rich Mississippi soil. Likewise, Gulf Coast and freshwater

resources are reflective of its aquaculture industry.

Agriculture is the state's largest industry with 30 percent of Mississippians involved. The **Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum** in Jackson is the perfect place to begin understanding how agriculture molded the state's history. It's truly a step back in time through colorful exhibits, including a 1920s rural town. Special events throughout the year add to the experience with good food and entertainment. The museum's annual Harvest Festival in mid-November is a great addition to any tour. (mdac.state.ms.us/n_library/departments/ag_museum/index_agmuseum.htm)

Landrum Homestead and Village in Laurel is a late-1800s living history/agricultural village. Covering 10 acres, the Homestead has more than 60 buildings, displays and exhibits. Demonstrations are available to groups and feature cooking biscuits on a wood stove, churning butter (with samples!), and grinding cornmeal at the gristmill, plus steam engine operation and blacksmithing. (landrumscountry.com)

The **Delta Research and Extension Center (DREC)** in Stoneville covers more than 1,600 acres and provides a memorable educational experience. DREC specializes in Mississippi staples – soybean, cotton, rice, corn and catfish. Its goal is increasing agricultural and aquacultural production without hindering the environment. Guided driving tours of the facility, including catfish ponds and feeding, can be arranged by calling 662-686-3216. (msucare.com/drec)

Greenwood is home to the **Cottonlandia Museum**. Although the Agri-

cultural Hall exhibits in the museum tell the story of how hard labor built the Delta Region, this museum is really about the 5 A's; art, agriculture, archaeology, animals and antiques. Groups can make arrangements for guided tours. (cottonlandia.org)

Museums are a great place to begin any adventure, but only down on the farm can you get your hands dirty and smell the earth. Blueberry picking begins the last week of May and continues into July at **Blue Rivers Farm & Nursery** in Mt. Olive. With 54 acres of u-pick and commercial production, Blue Rivers is one of the state's largest blueberry producers. Farm tours are available. (blueriverfarmsms.com)

Mitchell Farms in Collins offers for pickin' just about anything that grows. Vine-ripened tomatoes, a variety of peas, butterbeans, blueberries, blackberries and okra make it feel like a backyard garden. Several authentic pioneer structures, some dating back 10 years, are available for touring. (mitchellfarmsms.com)

An important part of Mississippi's economy is aquaculture. Biloxi's **Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum**, operating out of Edgewater Mall until a new building opens in 2013, interprets the Mississippi Gulf Coast fishing industry with exhibits on shrimping, oystering and fishing. (maritime-museum.org)

The **Biloxi Shrimping Trip** is a 70-minute cruise that provides an opportunity to be part of an actual shrimp catch. Combine your trip with a dockside traditional



Agritourism has an educational aspect for youth groups, like this one at a Mississippi cotton field.

shrimp boil for a truly unique tour option. (biloxishrimpingtrip.com)

The **Catfish Capitol Visitors Center and Museum** in Belzoni gives the complete story of catfish from fingerling to frying pan. Mississippi provides more than 40 percent of the nation's supply.

Whether a full-blown agri-tour, or simply an addition to the itinerary, a taste of Mississippi's agricultural and aquaculture heritage will enhance your trip. **LGT**

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