



# Southern Traveler

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

MARCH • APRIL 2013

## Families Will Love These Springtime Trips

Alabama Gulf Coast  
Branson  
Memphis and more

## Beyond the Derby in Kentucky Horse Country

## St. Augustine's historical treasures



Voting begins



# Southern Traveler

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## Features

COVER STORY

### 16 Family Time

The South offers a treasure trove of great getaways that you can take with the kids and grandkids this spring.

### 28 LIVING HISTORY

Visitors to St. Augustine, Fla., will discover what makes the country's oldest city a national treasure.



page 35

### 31 KENTUCKY CALLING

This spring, let your spirit soar free while exploring the lively charms of Kentucky Horse Country.



page 31

### 35 Child's Play

Disney's Aulani Resort in Hawaii calls to our inner *keiki* (child) with amazing and relaxing experiences.

### 43 TEXAS-SIZE DEALS

For First Monday Trade Days, small Canton in northeastern Texas balloons into the country's largest flea market.

## Departments

4 TRAVEL TREASURES

6 IN THE NEWS

8 CARD TRICKS

10 DRIVER'S SEAT

42 TIPS ON TRAVEL

46 COMMON CENTS

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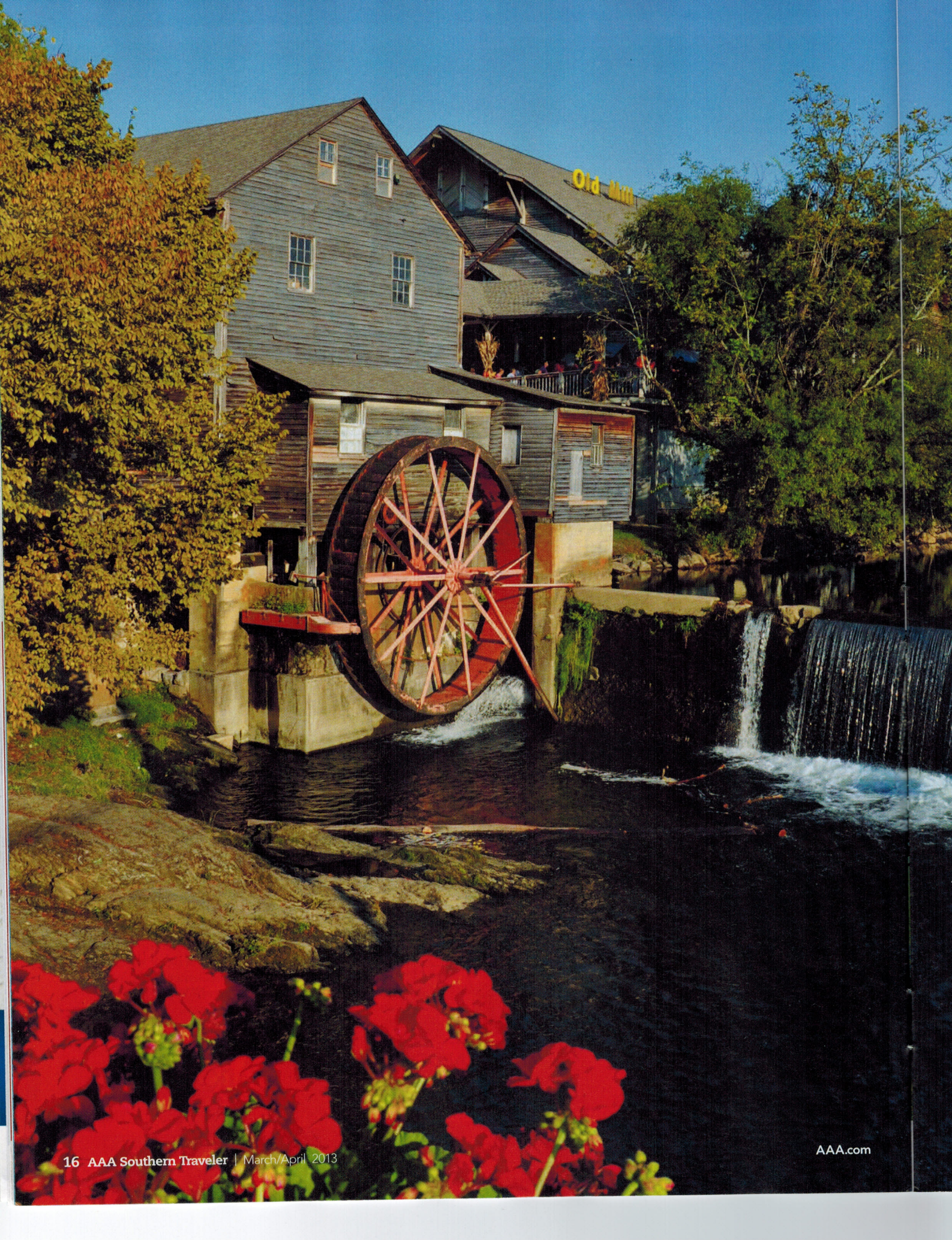
KAYAKING FLORIDA'S CALUSA BLUEWAY

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

A LOOK AT THE 2013 FORD TAURUS

**On cover:** The Alabama Gulf Coast beckons to families during spring and summer to enjoy the beaches, water sports, fresh seafood, casinos, museums, and more.

©Katherine Rodeghier photo



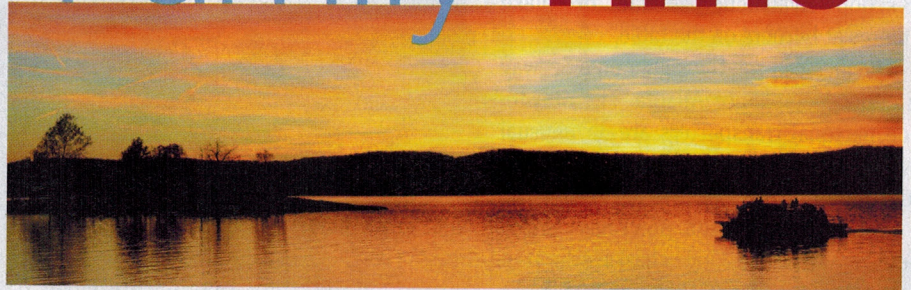
Old Mill



Built in 1830, the Old Mill in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., still operates today. Also on site are a restaurant and general store, where visitors can purchase stone-ground flour produced in the mill.

AAA.com

# Family Time



**The South offers a treasure trove of great getaways that you can take with the kids and grandkids this spring.**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

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Spring is just around the corner, so it's time to plan a family outing as the weather warms and skies go blue. The South is blessed with a variety of vacation destinations to enjoy with the kids and grandkids, from a country getaway to a city escape to a retreat on the beach. So whether you're looking for a weekend escape or an idea for spring break, here are a few favorite family trips.

## BIG CITY BREAKS

Memphis is more than Graceland, so families can wrap a visit to Elvis' home around kid-friendly attractions. Check out the Children's Museum of Memphis with its walk-in Boeing 727 cockpit and the Memphis Zoo where kids can feed a giraffe and visit giant pandas.

Families take the monorail to Mud Island River Park to tour the Mississippi River Museum and play along the River Walk, a five-block-long scale model of the lower Mississippi River.

The venerable Peabody Hotel (AAA Four Diamonds) earns high marks for hospitality and fame for its ducks that march to and from the lobby fountain. Become an honorary "duckmaster" with the Ducky Day Family Package starting at \$340.

All generations get a kick out of LUNCHBOX Eats where lunch is served on red cafeteria trays in a schoolroom setting. It's downtown just south of the FedExForum. The sweet potato pancake breakfast platter is a Food Network favorite at the Arcade Restaurant, Memphis' oldest café, at 540 S. Main. At Kooky Canuck, 97 S. Second St., families rise to the challenge of Kookamonga Burgers. These four-

**Top: Table Rock Lake in Branson, Mo., offers boating, fishing, and other watersports, as well as beautiful vistas at sunrise and sunset.**

**Right: The observation tower at Clingmans Dome is the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the highest point in Tennessee.**



six-, and 12-pound burgers were featured in an episode of *Man v. Food* on the Travel Channel. Save room for dessert: a nine- or 18-scoop Avalanche Sundae or make s'mores at burners on the table.

Families can see the sights on a Segway in either Memphis or Atlanta. The easy-to-ride personal transporters are an unusual way for teens and adults to zip around on a guided tour.

In downtown Atlanta, don't miss seeing Georgia Aquarium. Whale sharks swim past floor-to-ceiling windows. Separate galleries house beluga whales, harbor seals, penguins, and otters. Next-door at World of Coca-Cola®, visitors head for the tasting room to try 60 Coca-Cola products served around the world. Exhibits and theaters tell the story of Coke, and a bottling line churns out a bottle for everyone.

At CNN World Headquarters, the Inside CNN Studio Tour takes families behind the scenes. In the Control Room, they can take turns giving a weather report or sit at an anchor's desk.

When it's time for lunch, you won't have to leave your car at the Varsity Drive-in,

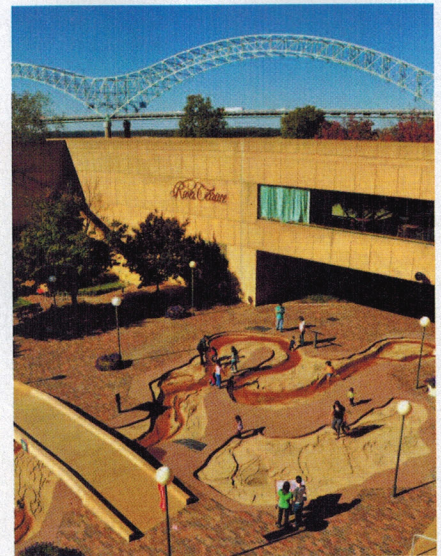


which opened in 1928, and can accommodate 600 cars. Patrons in the know order chili dogs, burgers, fried pies, and onion rings.

End the day at the AAA Three-Diamond Marriott Marquis near Peachtree Center, which is a three-tiered retail mall with dozens of shops and restaurants.

### HEAD FOR THE HILLS

At Great Smoky Mountains National Park, families experience nature on hikes and scenic drives, while in nearby Pigeon Forge, Tenn., they play at amusement venues. Along with go-kart tracks and mini-golf courses, try the Wonders of Flight tethered balloon ride and the interactive science activities at WonderWorks housed in a whimsical upside-down building. At ZORB



**Top left: Families gravitate to the 32 miles of white sand beaches along Alabama's Gulf Coast.**

**Above: A scale model of the lower Mississippi River can be found at Mud Island River Park in Memphis, Tenn.**

Smoky Mountains, family groups with children ages 8 and older can roll down a hill in a plastic globe.

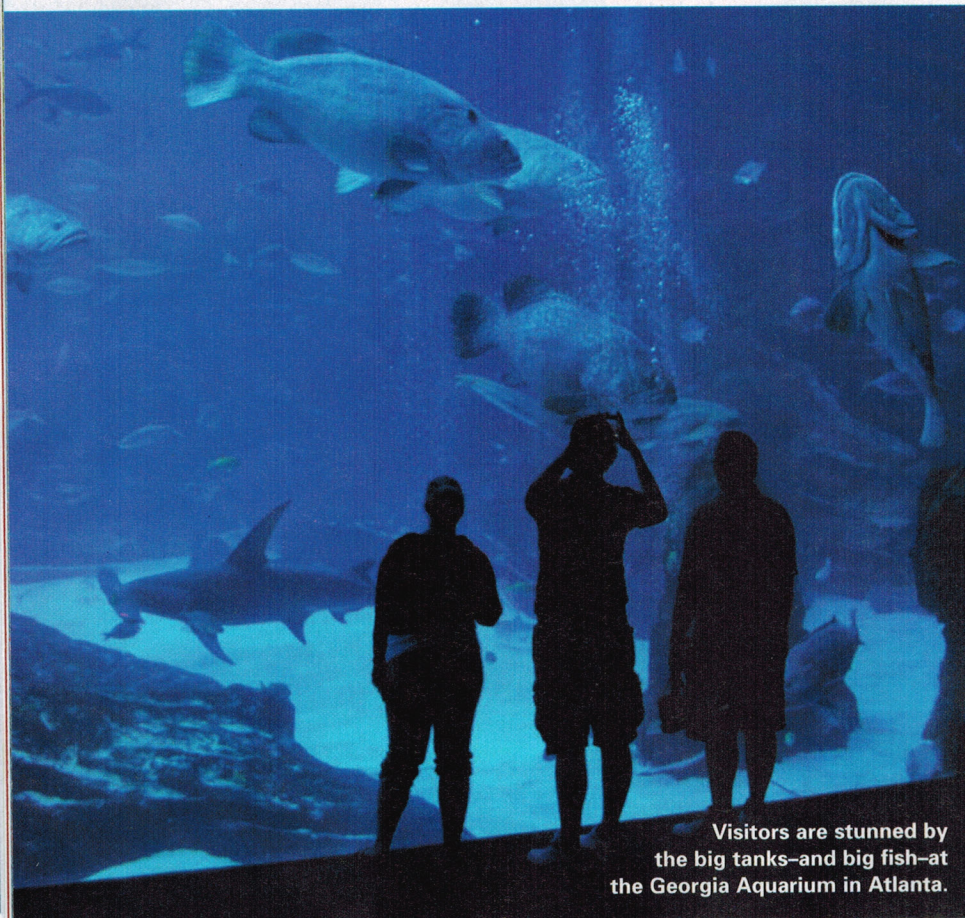
Guests may feel that they are flying on the Wild Eagle, a \$20 million steel wing roller coaster that debuted at Dollywood last spring. The theme park's mountain culture-inspired by country entertainer Dolly Parton—appeals to all generations with rides, crafts, and shows.

Theatrical productions in Pigeon Forge run the gamut from musical variety at the Smoky Mountain Opry, which has a children's skybox for fussy ones, to the Lumberjack Feud, where real lumberjacks compete with axes and saws.

Those who wish for Christmas year-round find it at the Inn at Christmas Place (AAA Three Diamonds), a Bavarian-style inn with year-round holiday décor and a glockenspiel. Furnished condos welcome families at Whispering Pines Resort. Big breakfasts fill tummies at the Old Mill Restaurant, which features Southern cooking at lunch and dinner. For barbecue, Bennett's Pit Bar-B-Que slow-smokes meat over a hickory fire.

The Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge and in Branson, Mo., debuted exhibits this year focusing on the stories of children who were aboard the legendary ocean liner.

Also new this spring in Branson is Outlaw Run at Silver Dollar City theme park.



**Visitors are stunned by the big tanks—and big fish—at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta.**

The \$10 million ride is billed as having the world's steepest drop on a wooden coaster and is the only wooden coaster to twist upside down. Families also can see master craftsmen at work in the theme park and several live shows.

Branson is known for shows, which have diversified from country music to tribute and variety shows. Its more than 50 theaters have more seats than Broadway.

Set in the foothills of the Ozarks in southwest Missouri, the Branson area provides plenty of outdoor activities. At Dogwood Canyon Nature Park, families can hike; bike; fish; ride horses, ATVs, and Segways; or take guided tram or Jeep tours. From the Branson depot, the Branson Scenic Railway makes excursions into the countryside in vintage rail cars.

Hotel rooms and suites at Hilton Promenade at Branson Landing appeal to families as do suites at the Keeter Center at College of the Ozarks. The center is known for Sunday brunch, part of the college's culinary school. At Andy Williams Moon River Grill, which opens for the season on April 1, diners view selections from the late singer's pop art collection and enjoy dishes prepared from his mother's recipes.



## HIT THE BEACH

Alabama's 32 miles of Gulf of Mexico coastline offer a haven for families who love their fun in the sun. Sugar-white sand squeaks between toes on beaches along the communities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. Gulf State Park sits on 3.5 miles of beachfront and has a modern beach pavilion. Its fishing pier extends more than a quarter mile and has rods to rent.

Inshore and offshore charter fishing options abound. The only trolling alley on the Gulf—made from obsolete voting machines—and the nation's largest arti-



**Above:** Pulled by a 110-ton steam engine, the Dollywood Express train passes through the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

**Left:** The march of the ducks has been a tradition at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tenn., for 80 years.

ficial reef help fishermen bring in a satisfying catch.

For water adventures off the Gulf, families kayak on bays and backwaters with Fairhope Boat Company. On tours with Sailaway Charters, they get an education on fishing, as they see how oysters are harvested, blue crabs are trapped, and shrimp are caught.

When it's time to eat, local seafood ranks high on menus. King Neptune's Seafood Restaurant is known for big Royal Red shrimp, blue crab, oysters, and, for dessert, fried cheesecake. Its lunch special draws a crowd.

Lodging is split between hotels, such as the AAA Three Diamond Island House, where all rooms face the Gulf and have balconies, and rental condo developments, such as Caribe.

Farther west, the Mississippi Gulf Coast also has rental condos, resorts and hotels, including several with casinos for adults in the family.

On Ship Island, a barrier island off Mississippi, families can enjoy a fine



**Al Sawyer prepares platters of delicious seafood at his King Neptune's Seafood Restaurant in Gulf Shores, Ala.**

beach, as well as tour Fort Massachusetts, completed in 1866. They learn about sea life on the Biloxi Shrimping Trip and the habitats of swamps, marshes, and barrier islands on Eco-Tours of South Mississippi.

Back on land, the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport, Miss., ranks among the nation's top 50 children's museums. Near the Louisiana border, the \$44 million Infinity Science Center opened last year at the NASA Stennis Space Center with a theater and exhibits that introduce rocket science to budding astronauts.

When families want to find time together, the South has numerous destinations—many close to home—to enjoy. ●

*Katherine Rodeghier is a contributor from Western Springs, Ill.*

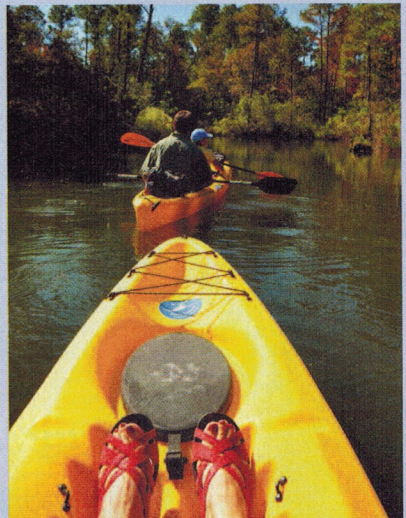
## BEFORE YOU GO

For more information, contact:

- Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, (800) ATLANTA (285-2682), [www.Atlanta.net](http://www.Atlanta.net)
- Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau, 800-296-0463, [www.explorebranson.com](http://www.explorebranson.com)
- Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism, (800) 745-SAND (7263), [www.gulfshores.com](http://www.gulfshores.com)
- Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau, (888) 633-9099, [www.memphistravel.com](http://www.memphistravel.com)
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, (888) 467-4853, [www.gulfcoast.org](http://www.gulfcoast.org)
- Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism, (800) 251-9100, [www.my.pigeonforge.com](http://www.my.pigeonforge.com)

To visit these Southern family destinations, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, reservations, TripTiks® and TourBook® guides. A list of offices to serve you is on page 3 or visit [AAA.com](http://AAA.com).

Order free information about Branson, Mo., and Mississippi through the Free Travel Information Card, found in this issue between pages 48 and 49 or online at [AAA.com/Traveler](http://AAA.com/Traveler).



**Visitors to the Alabama Gulf Coast can go beyond the beach with kayaking trips into the area's scenic bays and backwaters.**