Mark your map, pack your seersucker, and practice your “hey, y’alls.” It’s time to explore the South — a place where live oaks meet Atlantic-washed shores, where extraordinary caverns lie below the surface, where blues and jazz clubs blare music ’til late, and where a glass of bourbon is never too far off. We’re here with 25 potential additions to your travel wish list — southern edition — from limelight-loving cities to under-the-radar small towns. Here are 25 of the best weekend getaways in the South.

Related: The 50 Best Places to Travel in 2023

1. Savannah, Georgia
With well-preserved architecture and oaks dripping with Spanish moss, Savannah is easy to fall in love with. A spotlight has been thrown on the city's dining scene in recent years; splashy new openings like The Grey and Common Thread have impressed diners with their Southern hospitality and memorable takes on Georgia-grown ingredients.

2. Bowling Green, Kentucky

For some people, Bowling Green's appeal can be summed up in two words: cars and caves. At the National Corvette Museum, even non-auto geeks might drool at the mint-condition models and prototypes of America's most famous car. (Schedule an assembly plant tour if you want to see these babies in production.) Then go from man-made beauty to natural: Take the underground boat tour of the Lost River Cave, which has been a Native American hunting ground, Jesse James' hideaway, and, of all things, a 1930s nightclub throughout its history. Mammoth Cave National Park isn't too far from here if you're interested in shimmying down into the longest-known cave in the world.

3. Chattanooga, Tennessee
Chattanooga is having a moment. The scenic riverside city leaves a mark on visitors with its mountain scenery and booming downtown filled with hotels, barbecue joints, and hot spots like Easy Bistro & Bar, a French restaurant and raw bar that makes full use of Southern ingredients (regulars love the charcuterie board). At Lookout Mountain, you can behold an underground waterfall and test your nerves on one of the world's steepest passenger railroads.

4. Wilmington, North Carolina

Dawson's Creek and other TV and film productions may have put Wilmington on the map, but there's so much more to this lively riverfront city than Hollywood ties. Stroll the Riverwalk to the skylit Old Wilmington City Market and the rambling Cotton Exchange, a shopping and dining complex spread over several historic buildings. Get Airlie Gardens tickets in advance to see 100,000 azalea trees and a live oak dating back to the 1500s. Wrightsville Beach is 10 minutes away by car, and many other powdery island options are just a bit further. We recommend staying at Dreamers Welcome, a darling design-forward boutique hotel and vacation home.

5. New Orleans, Louisiana
The city that gave birth to jazz, Sazeracs, poker, and po'boys, New Orleans has never lost its groove. NOLA's staying power can be attributed to its unique architecture (a mix of French, Spanish, and Caribbean influences), pleasure-seeking spirit, and live music scene; between Tipitina's, Preservation Hall, Chickie Wah Wah, and countless other jazz bars, you can jam to live sets pretty much every night of the year. This is one of the world's bonafide must-visit food capitals — soak up your Hurricanes with Creole gumbo, oysters Rockefeller, muffulettas, and red beans and rice.

6. Natchez, Mississippi

Natchez, Mississippi is packed with history. Spend time at the Natchez Museum of African American History and Culture and the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, a museum park with prehistoric Native American mounds. Riverboat gambling and annual festivals celebrating literature, film, and music are also big draws. The Natchez Trace — one of the most beautiful places in the country — kicks off here for its 444-mile journey to Nashville.
7. Asheville, North Carolina

This bohemian small city in the North Carolina mountains has been a favorite getaway for over a century. The best Asheville itinerary? Eat, hike, eat again, shop indie, drink a microbrew, repeat. Seasonal and sustainable fare is front and center on local menus, with faves like Rhubarb, Sovereign Remedies, and Cucina 24 making the most of the Appalachian bounty. To work off a meal (and build your appetite back up for the next), try Craggy Pinnacle, a hike popular for the amazing views from its summit, especially when the mountains are ablaze with turning leaves in fall.

8. Hot Springs, Arkansas

You might think everything you need to know about Hot Springs is right there in the name. Yes, you're probably here to “take the waters” in Hot Springs National Park. Yet there are also plenty of non-aquatic activities like hiking (including the 26 miles of trails throughout the national park), exploring the lovely Garvan Woodland Gardens, going on a self-guided...
downtown Art Deco tour, and more.

9. Charleston, South Carolina

If Southern hospitality had an absolute epicenter, it’d be Charleston, South Carolina. The city is the real deal in one walkable package, known for candy-colored homes fronted by palmettos and lush gardens shaded by oaks. Yet the city isn’t exactly frozen in time; Charleston’s culinary and shopping scenes are very much of the here and now, and there’s always a new hotel to check out.

10. Louisville, Kentucky

If you like baseball, bourbon, bluegrass, and yes, horses, Louisville is for you. Hop on the bourbon trail at Stitzel-Weller Distillery, a historic distillery now offering tastings, mixology classes, and more. Then trade the malty aroma of local distilleries for the fresh greenery of Central Park or the cool air of Louisville Mega Caverns, where you can go on an underground zip
line 100 feet above the canyon floor. Bed down at museum hotel 21c or the Grady Hotel, a swanky new boutique hotel in an 1883 building whose former tenants included the original designer for Kentucky Derby hats.

11. Bryson City, North Carolina

The town of Bryson City, North Carolina may be small (population: 1,500), but it’s big on outdoor fun. Sitting just south of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Bryson City is a charming little mountain hub for hiking (the national park’s Deep Creek Trail is a favorite), horseback riding, zip lining, brewery-going, and scenic-steam-train-riding. A required stop is The Bistro at the Everett Hotel, right on the town’s main square; the local trout cakes and meatloaf make a welcome meal after a big day in the great outdoors.

12. Nashville, Tennessee

The Nashville renaissance shows no sign of slowing down. Neon-lit honky-tonks partying ‘til the wee hours, country superstars taking the Grand Ole
Opry stage, a booming food landscape encompassing everything from closely guarded hot-chicken recipes and venerable shrines to Southern cooking to James Beard Award-winning kitchens — Nashville's star just keeps getting brighter. Drop your bags at the newly revitalized Hermitage Hotel and get on the dance floor.

13. Saint Simons Island, Georgia

Drive an hour and a half south of Savannah and you find yourself on Saint Simons Island, part of Georgia's Golden Isles chain. Mother nature runs the show here, and it's not always easy to tell where the land ends and the water begins. Expect rivers and creeks surrounded by salt marsh, live oak trees draped with moss (best seen at Avenue of the Oaks), and knockout beaches sweeping along the Atlantic. All that nature time can be peppered with (extremely scenic) golfing, biking, fishing, and visiting an impressive slew of historic sites.

14. Amelia Island, Florida
Welcome to the quieter side of Florida. This sweet barrier island promises shimmering quartz beaches, towering sand dunes, peaceful bike paths, kayak-ready waterways, and a darling historic downtown area. Low-key and laid-back are a lifestyle here, though things pick up considerably during the annual car show (March), shrimp festival (April-May), and pétanque championship (November).

15. Roanoke, Virginia

Tucked into Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, Roanoke, also known as "Star City," is well-known in the area for its small-town charm, Appalachian heritage, and gorgeous mountain views. Mill Mountain Park is home to a zoo, wildflower garden, and hiking trails, and it's topped with a 100-foot steel-and-concrete mountaintop star, illuminated and visible for miles. From there, it's just three miles to the antique cars and trains at the Virginia Museum of Transportation and the Rockwells and Sargents at the (free!) Taubman Museum of Art.

16. Ocracoke, North Carolina
Getting to Ocracoke requires a bit of work. An island in North Carolina's remote Outer Banks, Ocracoke is only accessible by boat or ferry, but those who make the journey are rewarded with sugar-white sands and a bustling coastal village. This is a true escape as nearly all of the island is protected by the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

17. Shenandoah National Park, Virginia

Hikers, drivers, birders, backpackers, anglers, equestrians, astronomy lovers — there's something for everyone at Shenandoah National Park. Part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the park features famous Skyline Drive, a white-knuckle mountaintop ribbon of asphalt; wooded hollows; hundreds of miles of hiking and horse-riding trails; and nearly 100 mountain fishing streams. For epic stargazing, camp or stay at the lodges near Big Meadows.

18. Macon, Georgia
The birthplace of Otis Redding and Little Richard, the adopted home of the Allman Brothers, and the hometown of country star Jason Aldean, Macon is a small town that's made a big dent in history — musical and otherwise. It's home to prehistoric Indigenous sites, thousands of National Register-listed buildings, and the Tubman Museum honoring African American art and culture. It's not called the “Festival Capital of Georgia” for nothing: Events celebrating music, film, Indigenous culture, sports, and more dominate the Macon calendar.

19. Oxford, Mississippi

Oxford is most famous for being the home of William Faulkner. For decades, the Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner based his life at Rowan Oak, an 1840s Greek Revival mansion. On a self-guided tour, you can wander around the home at your leisure, seeing his typewriter and the plot outline for “A Fable” scribbled on the wall of his study. From the house, take the forested Bailey's Woods trail to the University of Mississippi Art Museum to
see works by Georgia O'Keefe and Man Ray.

20. Orange Beach, Alabama

As far as Gulf beach vacations go, Florida gets all the love, but check out this oft-overlooked neighboring town just over the state line. Laid-back Orange Beach offers the same unbeatable sugar-soft shoreline, plus family-friendly amusement and water parks, dolphin cruises, nature trails, championship golf, fishing excursions, and free concerts.

21. Memphis, Tennessee
In Memphis, the door is always open for barbecue lovers and music fans. The city's Beale Street is a rowdy neon stream of flashing lights, club-hopping pedestrians (this is the one place in the state you can walk around with your drink), and the yowls of electric guitars pouring out of blues joints. Two essential Memphis stops are Sun Records, the studio where Elvis and Johnny Cash recorded, and Graceland, Elvis' private mansion and frozen-in-time stronghold of midcentury kitsch.

22. Key West, Florida

Brimming with “Floribbean” flavor, Key West is so special, it almost doesn't feel real. This coral island 100 miles from the mainland is a sun-soaked playground of tiki drinks, bike rides, Cuban sandwiches, key lime pies, and quirky Bahamian-inspired cottages. It's where Tennessee Williams said he worked best, where Ernest Hemingway came from Paris to “dry out his bones” (and then remained for nearly a decade), and from where the first international passenger flight was made when Pan American Airways jetted seven riders to Havana in 1928. Today, the airline's former headquarters is the sort of easy-breezy restaurant and bar where you could while away an afternoon with fish tacos and a key lime margarita.

23. Washington, D.C.
Monuments and museums (and for a few fleeting weeks in spring, cherry blossoms) may be what get you there, but once you see how rich D.C.’s cultural offerings are, you might just want to extend your stay. Walker-friendly neighborhoods like Georgetown and Dupont Circle, hiking and picnicking at Rock Creek Park, and a surprisingly hip nightlife and food scene are just some of the surprises the town has up its sleeve.

24. Gatlinburg, Tennessee

From Gatlinburg's distilleries and amusement parks to Great Smoky Mountain National Park's waterfalls and wildlife, this neck of the woods is a destination with no equal. It makes an excellent family getaway, packed with kid-friendly trails, park activities, and attractions ranging from the Ripley’s aquarium to the Mountain Farm Museum across the border in North Carolina that gives a glimpse into what mountain life was like a century ago.

25. Charleston, West Virginia
The spirit of the Appalachian Mountains is strong in Charleston. This former frontier town and state capital has more travelers discovering its mountain charms. See what’s fresh at the Capitol Market and fill your bags with wine, cheese, and honey; chase all kinds of outdoor pursuits in Kanawha State Forest; and hit U.S. Route 60 for a corkscrew drive through jaw-dropping scenery.