

Mississippi: The Natchez Trace

Bike Vacation Only

Go deep into the antebellum South on this stunning tour of Mississippi's Natchez Trace—an ancient trail with deep roots in Native American culture. During this eye-opening tour, your VBT trip leaders will help you experience all sides of Mississippi's past and present—including a stop at the Civil Rights Museum, a tour of grand southern plantations, a visit to an ancient Native American burial ground, and a tour of the historic Civil War battlefield at Vicksburg. Along the way, you'll also discover vibrant local cultural traditions during a southern gospel choir performance and lunch at an historic home in Port Gibson. During your two nights in historic Vicksburg, you'll find yourself steeped in southern traditions—perhaps even relaxing on the very balcony from which Jefferson Davis made one of his final public speeches.

Cultural Highlights

- Roll through centuries of history along the Natchez Trace Parkway, a National Scenic Byway and All-American Road.
- Ponder the legacy of the Civil War at the ruins of the Windsor Plantation.
- Relive the Siege of Vicksburg on a guided tour with a local historian as you tour Vicksburg National Military Park by bicycle.
- Visit the sprawling Emerald Mound, one of the largest Native American ceremonial sites.
- Customize your own "Pilgrimage" of Natchez' stately antebellum homes.

What to Expect

This tour features easy terrain mixed with some rolling hills (most notably on Day 3, inside Vicksburg National Military Park). Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance. This trip is ideal for both beginning and experienced cyclists.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 4-43 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-4 hours

Group size: 14-20 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 71°/48°, April 78°/55°, May 84°/62°, September 88°/65°, October 80°/54°, November 70°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 6.4, April 5.5, May 5.5, September 3.36, October 3.8, November 5.1

DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Warm-Up Ride / Welcome Reception and Dinner

Your Natchez Trace Trail tour begins at the Fairview Inn in Jackson, proud recipient of AAA's elite Four Diamond rating for more than 30 years. During your overnight stay, you'll enjoy your first taste of legendary Southern hospitality.

If you're flying to Mississippi, VBT has arranged a complimentary shuttle from Jackson–Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport to the inn. Shuttle reservations are not required, as the service operates on a “show and go” basis, departing once—at 10:00 a.m.—from the airport. If you arrive after 10:00 a.m., you must arrange your own transportation to the inn at your own expense.

If you are driving to the tour, we recommend parking your vehicle at the Fairview Inn. At the tour's conclusion, you may return here via the VBT van.

At 11:00 a.m., join your VBT trip leaders and fellow travelers at the inn for a safety briefing and bike-fitting session, followed by a short warm-up ride. Your route leads you through a primarily residential area of Jackson, passing the Eudora Welty House—a National Historic Landmark. The Pulitzer Prize–winning author, known for her novels exploring the Southern experience, lived and wrote here from 1925 until her death in 2001. This morning's ride ends at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, which you may choose to visit. Lunch is on your own. On your way back to the hotel, take time to admire some of Jackson's vibrant public art murals.

Later, enjoy a welcome reception at the inn and get to know your fellow travelers. In the evening, accompany your trip leaders for an included dinner at a nearby restaurant.

If you wish to book spa services at the Fairview Inn, VBT recommends making your reservation well in advance of arrival.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Fairview to Museum Warm-Up Ride — 4 miles

Afternoon: Museum to Fairview Warm-Up Ride — 5 miles

What to Expect:

A short warm-up ride takes you along Jackson's quiet residential streets to the Mississippi Civil Rights and History Museums. On the return, you'll pass many of the city's vibrant public art murals.

Cumulative Distance Range: 4 – 9 miles

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Rocky Springs / Natchez Trace Parkway / Arrival in Vicksburg

After a hearty Southern breakfast, you'll shuttle to the starting point of your first memorable ride along the scenic Natchez Trace Parkway. This pastoral route loosely follows the Old Natchez Trace Trail, a nearly 500-mile footpath originally blazed by Native Americans and later used by European settlers to connect Natchez, Mississippi, with Nashville, Tennessee. Traversing lands once belonging to the Natchez, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations, the historic trace became a vital artery for trade and transportation.

In 1938, the National Park Service assumed management of the area, and construction of the modern Natchez Trace Parkway soon began. Completed over 71 years, the result is a cyclist's dream: the entire 444-mile, two-lane paved route is a designated bike path—free of stop signs, stoplights, and commercial traffic. With a speed limit of just 50 mph, it's framed by forests, farmlands, scenic overlooks, and dozens of historic sites.

Begin your ride in Rocky Springs. A 60-minute shuttle brings you to this haunting ghost town, once a thriving community along the Trace. In 1878, yellow fever decimated the population, and the subsequent boll weevil epidemic destroyed the cotton economy. By the 1930s, the last store had closed. Today, the only remaining intact building is the Methodist Church, an antebellum structure built in 1837.

From Rocky Springs, cycle the Natchez Trace Parkway to Port Gibson, the town Union General Ulysses S. Grant famously deemed "too beautiful to burn" during the Civil War's Siege of Vicksburg. Explore its historic streets and enjoy lunch at a local home.

Afterward, ride to the ruins of Windsor Plantation. Built between 1859 and 1861, Windsor was a grand Greek Revival mansion situated on a 2,600-acre estate. During the Civil War, Confederate soldiers used its

rooftop to observe Union movements. Though it survived the war, the mansion burned down in 1890 due to a careless smoker. Today, 23 of its original 29 towering columns remain, along with a portion of its ornate balustrade.

Following your ride to Windsor, shuttle about 40 minutes to Vicksburg, where you'll stay for the next two nights at two of the town's finest historic inns: Duff Green Mansion and Anchuca Mansion. After settling in, gather for dinner at Anchuca Mansion.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Rocky Springs to Port Gibson — 19 miles

Afternoon: Port Gibson to Windsor — 21 miles

What to Expect:

An hour-long shuttle brings you to the haunting ghost town of Rocky Springs, where you'll pause to explore its evocative beauty. From here, cycle along the scenic Old Natchez Trace Trail to the charming town of Port Gibson, where you'll enjoy lunch in a historic home. Afterward, continue riding to the nearby ruins of Windsor Plantation before shuttling about 40 minutes to Vicksburg.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 40 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3: Vicksburg National Military Park

Riding out from your inn today, you'll cycle through Vicksburg and past scenic overlooks of the Mississippi River. Your destination is Vicksburg National Military Park, home to the nation's largest Civil War cemetery. You'll stop at the Visitor Center to watch a short documentary film, then join a local historian for a guided tour of the park's historic battlefields, featuring reconstructed forts and trenches. The landscapes are solemnly adorned with more than 1,330 monuments and memorials honoring both Union and Confederate soldiers.

Encompassing over 1,800 acres, the park is marked by rolling hills, making today's ride the most challenging of your tour. You'll pause to explore the USS *Cairo* Museum and get a close-up look at the

formidable Union ironclad that, in 1862, became the first ship sunk by a mine. A picnic lunch follows, during which your guide offers deeper insights into the decisive Siege of Vicksburg.

Cycling back to your inn, you may opt to visit the Old Courthouse Museum. This grand antebellum landmark—designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968—houses an eclectic collection of Civil War artifacts, including the tie worn by Confederate President Jefferson Davis at his inauguration.

This evening, enjoy a special southern gospel presentation before dining on your own in Vicksburg.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Vicksburg — 17 miles

What to Expect:

A scenic ride out of Vicksburg leads you to Vicksburg National Military Park. A local historian guides you through reconstructed battlefields, sharing enriching Civil War history along the way. Pause to explore the USS *Cairo* Museum and enjoy a picnic lunch. Later, you may choose to visit the Old Courthouse Museum, a National Historic Landmark that houses an impressive collection of Civil War artifacts.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4: Natchez Trace Parkway / Mount Locust / Emerald Mound

After breakfast, you'll return via shuttle to Port Gibson, where you'll begin another relaxing and scenic ride along the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Today's ride allows you to set your own pace, pausing to take in the parkway's striking vistas as you cycle south toward Natchez. You might stroll through the hardwood and pine forests around Bullen Creek, then regroup at Coles Creek for a picnic lunch with your trip leaders. Afterward, explore Mount Locust Inn & Plantation. Built in 1780, Mount Locust was one of the first "stands," or inns, in Mississippi, offering warm meals and comfortable beds to weary travelers of the Natchez Trace.

Next, pedal to Emerald Mound, one of the largest Native American ceremonial mounds in North America.

Believed to have been built by ancestors of the Natchez Indians between the 14th and 16th centuries, the site spans more than eight acres and features a carefully constructed plateau rising over 35 feet. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

Continuing on to Natchez, perhaps pause to visit the Elizabeth Female Academy. Opened in 1818, it was the first educational institution exclusively for women in Mississippi—and is believed by many to be the first college in the U.S. to award advanced degrees to women.

Your ride concludes at Monmouth Historic Inn, a National Historic Landmark and your home for the next two nights. Indulge in a few games of croquet or take a relaxing stroll through the inn's expansive gardens at your leisure.

Tonight, enjoy dinner on your own at one of Natchez's excellent local restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Port Gibson to Lunch — 24 miles

Afternoon: Lunch to Natchez — 19 miles

What to Expect:

Ride from Port Gibson into Natchez, the southern terminus of the parkway, passing several notable sites along the way. Stop to enjoy one final picnic lunch prepared by your trip leaders beneath the shade of creekside trees. After lunch, continue riding to Mount Locust and Emerald Mound before arriving in Natchez.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 43 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Antebellum Pilgrimage / Natchez

Natchez is renowned for its Spring Pilgrimage, an annual celebration of the town's most impressive antebellum homes. The tradition began in 1932, when Katherine Grafton Miller—president of the Natchez Garden Club—was forced to reimagine the club's spring fundraiser after an unexpected cold snap

threatened their garden tours. She proposed inviting visitors inside the city's stately homes, offering a glimpse of what she called "where the Old South still lives and where shadowed highways and antebellum homes greet old and new friends." That first Spring Pilgrimage was a resounding success. Guests—many from the North—were driven from house to house and entertained by hoop-skirted hostesses holding parasols. A well-publicized visit from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939 further cemented the event's popularity. Now referred to simply as "Pilgrimage," it has evolved into a multi-week celebration held each spring and fall. Many of the city's historic homes also offer guided tours year-round.

Today, you embark on your own Pilgrimage—VBT-style—cycling through Natchez's picturesque streets, where fragrant magnolia and dogwood trees bloom in the spring. This morning, ride with your small group to Longwood, an unforgettable (and unfinished) octagonal mansion, for a guided tour. Then continue at your own pace, using your included admission to visit one of the city's grandest antebellum homes, such as Rosalie—renowned for its Federal-style portico and rosewood furnishings—or the Greek Revival-style Stanton Hall.

If you feel parched or peckish, your trip leaders can recommend local favorites. Perhaps stop for a mint julep over lunch at the Magnolia Grill in the historic Natchez Under-the-Hill district. A local favorite, the Grill serves up Southern staples like okra gumbo, crawfish étouffée, and homemade coconut buttermilk pie.

This evening, celebrate your final night in Mississippi with a memorable four-course, candlelit dinner of contemporary Southern cuisine served in the inn's acclaimed dining room.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Antebellum Pilgrimage — 13 miles

Afternoon: The Natchez Trace — 24 miles

What to Expect:

Ride through the historic district of Natchez on "Pilgrimage" this morning, pausing to explore grand antebellum mansions. If you're eager for more cycling, head back out to the Natchez Trace Trail and ride as far as you wish. An additional independent route may also be available for experienced cyclists—ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 – 37 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Your VBT Vacation Ends

Your Natchez Trace Trail tour concludes after an included breakfast at your hotel. VBT's complimentary shuttle will take you to either Jackson-Evers International Airport or the Fairview Inn in Jackson. The shuttle departs Natchez at 9:00 a.m., arriving at the airport around 11:30 a.m. and at the inn by noon. We recommend scheduling your flight home no earlier than 1:00 p.m. Guests needing to reach the airport earlier or later must make their own transportation arrangements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Fairview Inn (Day 1)

Housed in a Colonial Revival mansion built in 1908, this small, luxury hotel in Jackson's celebrated Belhaven district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since 1994, the Fairview Inn has been the proud recipient of AAA's elite Four Diamond award. During your stay, you can unwind with a massage at the onsite spa (advance reservations recommended), stroll through more than an acre of meticulously landscaped herb and flower gardens, or sip a literary-themed cocktail served in the cozy, book-lined Library Lounge. Each of the inn's 18 rooms is air conditioned and features complimentary wireless Internet access.

Duff Green Mansion (Days 2-3)

You'll be stepping into the Civil war era when you arrive at Duff Green Mansion. Learn what daily life was like for Duff and Mary Lake Green as they married, built their home, and welcomed their first child. The home's ballroom was danced in by Jefferson Davis and Ulysses S. Grant. The Duff Green Mansion is one of only four structures in Vicksburg recognized by the Smithsonian Institution and is a member of Condé Nast/Johansens Recommend Hotels and Inns. Built around 1830, the Greek Revival-style Anchuca Mansion is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to legend, Confederate President Jefferson Davis made one of his last public addresses from the property's front balcony. Anchuca Mansion has nine guest rooms, four in the main property and four in the adjacent carriage

house plus a guest house with three bedrooms. Each is comfortably equipped with air conditioning, private bath, and complimentary wireless Internet access. Duff Green Mansion and Anchuca Mansion are located in Vicksburg's Historic District, within easy walking distance of each other and many of the city's restaurants, museums, and other attractions.

Monmouth Historic Inn (Days 4-5)

Bask in Southern luxury at its finest. Built in 1818, the 26-acre, Tara-like Monmouth Historic Inn features lovely gardens and pergolas, a gazebo, bridge-spanned ponds, and walking trails. This magnificent manse was once owned by U.S. Congressman and Mississippi Governor John Quitman. His dream for Monmouth has been fully realized through the loving and careful restoration of the mansion and the addition of seven other buildings to this historic property. Relax and feel at home amid the quiet elegance of the 29 beautifully appointed rooms and suites. Designated a National Historic Landmark, the inn has earned high praise from the likes of Condé Nast Traveler, The New York Times and Architectural Digest. Take your breakfast in Quitman's Retreat, meet for drinks in the Quitman Study, and savor "Chef's Table Dining" during your special farewell dinner.