

## Mississippi: The Natchez Trace

### Bike Vacation Only

Compelling history and scenic cycling merge seamlessly on this laid-back reel through the Natchez Trace trail. You'll delve into the Old South and antebellum past as you tour storied Civil War battlefields with a local historian and set your own pace on a "pilgrimage" through historic homes and gardens. Stand in awe at an ancient Native American site, explore a fascinating ghost town, gape at mighty Mississippi River views, and take leisure nature walks through forests. Hearty Southern cooking and old-time hospitality at some of the region's finest accommodations round out your experience.

### Cultural Highlights

Explore Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Eudora Welty's longtime home, a National Historic Landmark Roll through centuries of history along the Natchez Trace Parkway, a National Scenic Byway and All-American Road

Step into the past at the atmospheric ghost town of Rocky Springs

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

Visit Emerald Mound, an ancient Native American ceremonial site

Customize your own "Pilgrimage" of Natchez' stately antebellum homes

Stay at a historic inn that has earned AAA's elite Four Diamond rating for decades

### What to Expect

This tour features easy terrain mixed with some rolling hills (most notably on Day 3, inside Vicksburg National Military Park). There is some urban and parkway riding, where traffic is accustomed to cyclists. Our VBT van support shuttle 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:** 15 - 25

**Average Cycling Time:** 00:45 - 04:30

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

Mar 71°/48°, Apr 78°/55°, May 84°/62°, Sep 88°/65°, Oct 80°/54°, Nov 70°/47°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

Mar 6.4, Apr 5.5, May 5.5, Sep 3.36, Oct 3.8, Nov 5.1

## **DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Arrive in Jackson / 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 at the inn, you will enjoy your first taste of legendary Southern hospitality.

If you're flying to Mississippi, VBT has arranged for a complimentary shuttle to take you from Jackson-Evers International Airport to the inn. Shuttle reservations are not required, as the shuttle works on a "show and go" basis, and will make its only departure from the airport at 2:00 p.m. Meet the driver, who will be holding a VBT sign, in the baggage claim area on the ground floor. There will also be a chauffeur in the third lane as you exit the airport from the baggage claim area. He will also be holding a VBT sign. If you are scheduled to arrive at the airport after 2:00 p.m., or if you are delayed, you must take a taxi to the inn at your own expense.

If you are driving to the tour, we recommend that you park your vehicle at the Fairview Inn. You may return to the inn at the end of the tour by way of the VBT van. If you are delayed, or your travel plans change, please contact the Fairview Inn; they will inform your VBT trip leaders.

From 1:00 to 3:30 p.m., join your VBT trip leaders and your fellow travelers at the inn for a safety briefing and bike-fitting session, followed by a short warm-up ride. Your route, which takes you through a primarily residential neighborhood of Jackson, leads you past the Eudora Welty House, a National Historic Landmark, at 1119 Pinehurst Street. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author, celebrated for her novels highlighting the Southern experience, lived and wrote here from 1925 until her death in 2001.

Later, get to know your fellow travelers during a welcome reception at the inn. Then you'll venture out with our trip leaders for an included dinner at a nearby restaurant.

If you wish to enjoy the Fairview Inn's spa services during your stay, VBT encourages you to make your reservations well in advance of your arrival.

Hotel: Fairview Inn

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Jackson Warm-Up: 3 miles

What to Expect: Pass beautiful homes in a historic district on an easy warm-up ride.

## **DAY 2: Rocky Springs / Natchez Trace Parkway / Vicksburg**

After a hearty Southern breakfast, you'll set off to begin what is sure to be a memorable ride along the scenic Natchez Trace Parkway.

This pastoral parkway loosely follows the Old Natchez Trace trail, a nearly 500-mile footpath blazed by Native Americans several centuries ago and connecting Natchez, Mississippi, with Nashville, Tennessee. Traversing lands belonging to the Natchez, Choctow, and Chickasaw nations, this historic route became a vital artery for transportation and trade. In 1938, the area came under the management of the National Park Service, and construction of the modern Natchez Trace Parkway began soon after. It took more than 71 years to complete, but the end result was well worth the wait, especially for cyclists: The entire 444-mile-long, two-lane paved parkway is a designated bike path; has no stop signs or stop lights (and, thus, no cross-traffic); is off-limits to commercial vehicles; features a speed limit of just 50 mph; and is framed by lush forests, fertile farmlands, scenic overlooks, and scores of historic sites.

Begin your ride in Rocky Springs. A shuttle (about 60 minutes) brings you to the haunting ghost town, once a thriving community on the Old Natchez Trace trail. In 1878, however, the town's population was decimated by an outbreak of yellow fever, a tragedy compounded further by the boll weevil epidemic, which devastated the cotton fields of local farmers at the turn of the 20th century. One by one, residents abandoned the beleaguered town, and the last store in Rocky Springs closed its doors in the 1930s. Today, one of the only remaining intact buildings is the Methodist Church, an antebellum structure dating to 1837.

Leaving Rocky Springs, you cycle along the Natchez Trace Parkway to Port Gibson, the town that Union General Ulysses S. Grant famously declared "too beautiful to burn" during the Civil War's infamous Siege of Vicksburg. Alight here to explore the historic town and enjoy lunch at a historic home in Port Gibson.

After lunch cycle to the ruins of nearby Windsor Plantation. Built between 1859 and 1861, Windsor was an opulent Greek Revival mansion set on a sprawling plantation spanning more than 2,600 acres. During the Civil War, the four-story property's expansive rooftop was used by Confederate soldiers to observe the movements of Union troops. Although Windsor survived the Civil War intact, irony lent a merciless hand in 1890, when the mansion burned to the ground during a fire started by a careless smoker. Today,

all that remains of the once-magnificent property are 23 of the original 29 columns, each 45 feet tall, and a portion of the elaborate balustrade that once connected them. Following your ride to Windsor, you'll shuttle (about 40 minutes) to Vicksburg where you stay for the next two nights. Your group will stay in two of the town's finest historic inns: Duff Green Mansion and Anchuca Mansion. After settling in, you gather for dinner at Anchuca Mansion.

Hotels: Duff Green Mansion, Anchuca Mansion

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 39 miles

Morning

Rocky Springs to Port Gibson: 18 miles

Afternoon

Port Gibson to Windsor Ruins: 21 miles

What to Expect: Cycle over gentle hills from Rocky Springs to Port Gibson. Wildlife is abundant along your route. Those who would like to continue cycling after lunch can ride to the ruins of Windsor Plantation and back.

## **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 country'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, which feature reconstructed forts and trenches. The battlefields are solemnly dressed by more than 1,330 monuments and memorials to both Union and Confederate soldiers.

Encompassing more than 1,800 acres, the park is rife with rolling hills, making today's ride the most challenging of your tour. You'll alight to explore the USS *Cairo* Museum, enjoying a closer look at the formidable Union ironclad, which in 1862 became the first ship to be sunk by a mine. You'll also pause for a picnic lunch, during which your local guide offers more Civil War insights, chronicling the decisive Siege of Vicksburg.

Cycling back to your inn, you may choose to visit the Old Courthouse Museum. This impressive and imposing antebellum building, which was named a National Historic Landmark in 1968, houses an eclectic array of Civil War artifacts—including the tie that Confederate President Jefferson Davis wore to his inauguration—many of which were donated by local residents.

Tonight, you will be treated to a wonderful southern gospel presentation before enjoying dinner on your own in Vicksburg.

Hotels: Duff Green Mansion, Anchuca Mansion

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 miles

Morning

Vicksburg: 18 miles

What to Expect: Enjoy a ride through the park today. The park has two options that will add 5 miles. The Southern Loop Option adds 3 miles with more monuments dedicated to the Confederate States. Grant's Headquarters adds 2 miles and passes the monument dedicated to soldiers of African descent.

## **DAY 4: Natchez Trace Parkway / Emerald Mound**

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

You'll have the opportunity to set your own pace today, stopping to take in the parkway's striking vistas as you cycle south toward Natchez. For example, you might pause for a stroll through the hardwood and pine forests around Bullen Creek. Regroup at Coles Creek for a picnic lunch with your trip leaders, then explore the Mount Locust Inn & Plantation. Built in 1780, Mount Locust was one of the first "stands," or inns, in Mississippi, providing warm meals and comfortable beds to weary Natchez Trace travelers.

Next, you pedal to Emerald Mound, one of the largest Native American ceremonial mounds in North America. Believed to have been built and consecrated by ancestors of the Natchez Indians between the 14th and 16th centuries, Emerald Mound covers an area of more than eight square acres and boasts a carefully constructed flattened plateau rising more than 35 feet. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

Continuing on to Natchez, perhaps you'll pause to visit the Elizabeth Female Academy. Opened in 1818, it was the first educational institution exclusively for women in the state of Mississippi—and, many believe, the first college in the United States to award women advanced degrees. Our ride concludes at Monmouth Historic Inn, a National Historic Landmark. You'll stay here for the next two nights, perhaps indulging in a few games of croquet or a taking a relaxing stroll through the property's expansive gardens during your leisure time.

You'll find a number of excellent options for dinner on your own in town tonight.

Hotel: Monmouth Historic Inn

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 42 miles

Vicksburg to Natchez: 42 miles

What to Expect: You ride into Natchez, the terminus of the parkway. Passing many sites to visit, you will be stopping to enjoy one final picnic lunch prepared by your trip leaders, under the shade trees next to the creek. Continue on to Mount Locust and Emerald Mound before arriving in Natchez.

## **DAY 5: Antebellum Pilgrimage / Natchez**

Natchez is known for its Spring Pilgrimage, an annual tour of the town's most impressive antebellum homes. Katherine Grafton Miller, president of the Natchez Garden Club, came up with the idea in 1932, when an unexpected cold snap jeopardized the club's annual fundraiser: guided tours of members' lushly landscaped, magnolia-, azalea-, and camellia-filled gardens. Deciding to bring visitors *inside* the stately homes, Miller envisioned the event as an opportunity for others to see "where the Old South still lives and where shadowed highways and antebellum homes greet old and new friends." Visitors, many of whom hailed from the north, were personally driven from home to home and regaled with tales told by ladies wearing hoop skirts and holding parasols. The first Spring Pilgrimage in 1932 was a resounding success, and a well-publicized visit by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939 further cemented the tradition, which continues to this day. Now referred to simply as "Pilgrimage," it has grown into a multi-week event, occurring in both spring and fall. What's more, many of the city's historic homes offer guided visits year-round.

Today, you mount your own Pilgrimage, VBT-style, cycling through the picturesque streets of Natchez, which in spring are lined with fragrant magnolia and dogwood trees. This morning, you will cycle together to Longwood, an unforgettable (and unfinished) property featuring a unique octagonal design, for a tour together. Then, you can set your own pace, pausing when you like to take advantage of your included admission to another of the city's grandest antebellum homes, all of which are designated National Historic Landmarks. Enjoy guided tours of Rosalie, known for its Federal-style columned portico and ornate rosewood furniture, or Greek Revival-style Stanton Hall.

Should you feel parched, you may wish to stop and savor a mint julep over lunch at the Carriage House Restaurant, located on the grounds of Stanton Hall. The Carriage House is the locals' choice for Southern culinary staples like fried chicken, buttermilk biscuits, and warm pecan cobbler.

On the last night of your stay in Mississippi, you'll be treated to a memorable four-course, candlelit dinner of contemporary Southern cuisine in our inn's acclaimed dining room.

Hotel: Monmouth Historic Inn

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 - 36 miles

Morning

Antebellum Homes: 12 miles

The Natchez Trace: 24 miles

What to Expect: Ride through the historic district of Natchez on "Pilgrimage" in the morning. Need more cycling? Head back out to the Trace and cycle as far as you wish.

## **DAY 6: VBT Bicycle Vacation ends / Depart for home**

Your Natchez Trace trail tour concludes after breakfast. VBT's complimentary shuttle will take you to either Jackson-Evers International Airport or to 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 at noon. We suggest you schedule your flight home no earlier than 1:00 p.m.

Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.