

The Southern Agenda

GOING SOUTH & BEYOND



★
Editors' Choice

OPENING

For the Birds

WASHINGTON, D.C.

While zoos historically built aviaries around exotic, international birds, when the Smithsonian's National Zoo looked to reimagine its 1928 **Bird House**, it took a local approach. "We wanted to tell the story of our own backyard birds," says Sara Hallager, curator of birds, "which I would argue are just as beautiful as any other bird anywhere else in the world." After nearly fifteen years of planning, and after shutting down in 2017 for renovations, the Bird House will reopen this spring, celebrating such avian stars as the wood thrush,

SOUTHERN AGENDA

D.C.'s official bird. Just inside the historic brick building, visitors pass beneath an original mosaic tile arch embellished with colorful macaws and toucans. The transformed space features expansive skylights treated to prevent bird collisions, and an observatory for live tracking demonstrations. The zoo's first bilingual Spanish/English exhibits immerse visitors in bird journeys through three environments. In the warm and humid coffee farm aviary, for instance, coffee plants grow beneath shady trees, providing layers of vegetation for wintering warblers and tanagers. "It emphasizes how native migratory species moving back and forth between the tropics and here connect us biologically, and hopefully culturally," says Scott Sillett, head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Some seventy-five species of migratory shorebirds, songbirds, and waterfowl fly around in replicas of their natural habitats. "The birds have a big space to roam and explore, and the people have the walkway in the exhibits," zoo staff member Jennifer Zoon says. "It's like we're in their world."

■ nationalzoo.si.edu

HISTORY

Alabama

MEMORY KEEPERS

In 1860, more than fifty years after Congress outlawed the importation of enslaved people, the schooner *Clotilda* sailed from modern-day Benin to Mobile Bay, illegally carrying 110 West Africans. Once the captives disembarked, the captain burned and sank the ship. More than a century and a half later, in 2018, the journalist Ben Raines discovered the first ruins of the *Clotilda* in the Mobile River, renewing interest in the story and sparking a Netflix show, *Descendant*, and a slew of books on the subject (including Raines's *The Last Slave Ship*). Many of the descendants of those aboard still live in Africatown, a community north of Mobile their ancestors founded after emancipation. On February 4 and 5, the *Clotilda* Descendants Association will stage the fifth annual **Spirit of Our Ancestors Festival** to honor the history. "We'll start off with an African tradition where we ask permission from the oldest person in the room for the festival to go for-

ward, and then we call out our ancestors who have gone on and paved the way," says Joycelyn Davis, chair of the event and a descendant of Charlie and Maggie Lewis, who were aboard the ship. Descendants will record interviews, and playwright Terrence Spivey's *An Ocean in My Bones*, written for the event, will run. Later this year, the descendants plan to open the Africatown Heritage House to tell the *Clotilda*'s story year-round.

■ theclotildastory.com



ANNIVERSARY

Arkansas

PLENTY OF
PLUCK

Ozark Folk Center State Park has long been ahead of its time—"its time" being the solidly bygone era of 1820 to 1920. With exhibitions and an apprenticeship program that supports the future of Ozark crafts, the park transplants a century of Ozarkian culture such as knife making, blacksmithing, and fiddle playing into a living time capsule on 640 acres in Mountain View that includes a historic medicinal garden. "I was fortunate to know those old-timers that were at the Folk Center that I grew up with," says Pam Setser, daughter of the park's first manager. "I laugh because I feel like maybe I'm the old-timer now?" A multi-instrumentalist, Setser has performed at the center every year since it opened in 1973. In programs throughout the anniversary year (up next is the Mountain View Bluegrass Festival, March 9–11), hear her and others who carry the torch.

■ arkansasstateparks.com

EQUESTRIAN

Florida

HOOFBEAT HOTEL

True to its name, Ocala's elegant Equestrian Hotel wears its horsey ethos on its sleeve: Sporting art fills the corridors and grand twenty-foot-ceilinged lobby, staff wear Ralph Lauren, and do-not-disturb placards for the 248 rooms read, RIDERS AT REST. (Not to mention the conspicuous number of riding breeches in the queue for lattes and croissants at the patisserie each morning.) The equine vibe goes way beyond decor at the sprawling 380-acre World Equestrian Center that surrounds the hotel—the largest equestrian complex in the United States. With five indoor arenas, nineteen outdoor rings, and stables housing more than 2,800 stalls, the WEC hosts frequent competitions that draw riders from all over, such as the **2023 Winter Spectacular Show Series** (through March 26). Spectators (whether staying at the property or not) can grab a free seat in the hotel-side Grand Arena—or splurge on a VIP table: ringside seats paired with a three-course dinner.

■ equestrianhotel.com

■ ocala.wec.net

FOOD

Georgia

A TASTE OF HOME

As Erika Council put the final touches on the new space for her wildly popular **Bomb Biscuits**, in Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward, she handed her contractor a photo of her maternal grandmother standing in her yellow kitchen in Goldsboro, North Carolina. "He went to Sherwin-Williams and found the exact same paint color," Council says. That photo now hangs on the yellow-trimmed walls, alongside a photo of her paternal grandmother, Mildred Council of the beloved Mama Dip's Kitchen in Chapel Hill. Family inspired Council to launch Bomb Biscuits in the first place, first as a pop-up, then in a stall in the nearby Irwin Street Market, and now in a 2,100-square-foot space with a full kitchen and patio seating. Fried chicken biscuits decked out in hot

SOUTHERN AGENDA

honey, lemon pepper sauce, or country ham are mainstays, but Council has added other breakfast favorites and a bar, as well as room for biscuit-making classes.

■ bombbiscuitatl.com

OPENING

Kentucky

FRENCH CONNECTION

Hotel Genevieve, opening in Louisville's NuLu neighborhood this spring, would like to remind visitors that there's more to the city than bourbon and horses—there's art and history here, too. "Why not make this a feminine, rich space?" muses Tenaya Hills, a senior vice president at Bunkhouse, the group behind the new hotel. The rooftop bar and restaurant take cues from Paris, nodding to the French monarch for whom Louisville is named. The lobby bursts with color (no dark wood paneling here). A local market is part convenience store, part art installation ("think 7-Eleven run through an Andy Warhol filter," Hills says) that meanders into the Lucky Penny, a cozy pocket bar. Modern interpretations of Appalachian quilt patterns cover the corridor carpets and bedroom throws. "All of that inspiration converges in a design that feels refined but a bit over-the-top." But fear not, bourbon trail pilgrims. Rabbit Hole Distillery—which partnered with the hotel to create an art garden—awaits just around the corner.

■ hotelgenevieve.com

CONSERVATION

Louisiana

WILD AND FREE

Four years ago, U.S. Forest Service biologist Emlyn B. Smith discovered her first baby Louisiana pine snake in a trap she had set in Central Louisiana's Kisatchie National Forest. "I was so excited I could barely stand up," she remembers—the little reptile, born in the wild, provided proof that a yearslong breeding and reintroduction program for the species was working. Louisiana pine snakes are tan or yellow with a dark dappling of splotches, thick bodied, nonven-

omous, and among the rarest reptiles in the country due to loss of habitat. The remaining snakes live in just three sites in Louisiana, hunting pocket gophers underground in the sandy soil. After continued reintroductions from concerted captive breeding at four partner zoos, the population in Smith's eight-thousand-acre management area rings in at 291 snakes, with more on the docket for release this spring. "The aim is to put them wherever they naturally occur, starting on more public lands," Smith says. "If we give them the habitat, they'll do what they need to do."

■ fs.usda.gov/kisatchie



FOOD

Maryland

MOVED TO TIERS

Historians have long tried to sort out the sweet origin story of the **Smith Island cake**, which comprises up to ten layers of yellow cake held together by seams of chocolate frosting. Some say that before electricity reached the namesake Chesapeake Bay island in the 1950s, home cooks found it easier to bake thinner cake layers in a wood-burning oven. Others note that all the icing kept the cake moist for bakers' husbands who would pack a slice for lunch while crabbing in the bay. "It put our island on the map," says the seventy-five-year-old baker Mary Ada Marshall, who was born and raised there. Fifteen years ago, Marshall played a key role in the cake's designation as the official state dessert, an effort requiring early-morning ferry trips and long drives to Annapolis to shamelessly bribe legislators with slices. The lobbying paid off with national publicity and a booming mail-order business (the number follows; she has no website), especially

around March 25, **Maryland Day**. Marshall bakes up to ten cakes a day and tops each with a state flag on a toothpick.

■ [410-425-2023](https://www.410-425-2023)

ART

Mississippi

A CENTURY OF WONDER

Erin and Ben Napier's series *Home Town* may have introduced the world to Laurel, Mississippi, when it premiered on HGTV in 2016, but residents of the hamlet have long been acquainted with the rest of the globe, thanks in part to its century-old **Lauren Rogers Museum of Art**. The museum represents a world tour on hyperspeed, where a John Singer Sargent landscape hangs alongside 150-year-old Native American baskets and nineteenth-century Japanese wood-block prints. "In our town, people have grown up now three or four generations with a free museum, and I really think it's helped locals develop an appreciation for art at a young age," says the museum's director, George Bassi. Founded in 1923, the museum will host a weeklong centennial celebration the first week of May. The Lauren Rogers was named for the only grandson in an art-collecting family, who died unexpectedly at the age of twenty-three. "The museum," Bassi says, "was his grandparents saying: If Lauren had lived, he would've done a lot for his community."

■ [lrma.org](https://www.lрма.org)

CONSERVATION

North Carolina

ALL SPRUCED UP

Probably few drivers on the Blue Ridge Parkway realize they're passing through a little-known ecosystem where species like Carolina northern flying squirrels, spruce-fir moss spiders, and saw-whet owls make their homes in high-elevation spruce-fir forests, which grow in the coldest sections of Southern Appalachian peaks. Logging has left these forests a patchwork of their

former glory, but **Southern Highlands Reserve**, a small nonprofit and arboretum that perches atop Toxaway Mountain, is working to change that. "We are growing between eight hundred and twelve hundred red spruce trees a year, and we are going to amp that up with a new greenhouse," says Kelly Holdbrooks, the reserve's executive director, who helped found the Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative. The team and its partners recently ferried a thousand two-and-a-half-foot-tall trees to Whitetop Mountain in Virginia, and this spring, hundreds of red spruces will continue growing in two hoop houses, earmarked for Black Mountain in North Carolina. "I won't live to see the forests we plant, but we don't plant for ourselves," Holdbrooks says. "We are planting for our kids and our grandchildren."

■ [southernhighlandsreserve.org](https://www.southernhighlandsreserve.org)

■ [southernspruce.org](https://www.southernspruce.org)

SPORTING

South Carolina

WILD FUN IN CHARLESTON

If the **Southeastern Wildlife Exposition** (February 17–19) isn't yet marked on your calendar in permanent ink, this just might nudge you to commit: This year the art show and outdoor exhibition, which takes over downtown Charleston, adds a new Sporting Showroom chockablock with decoys, guides, and outfitters in the grand ballroom of the Marriott Hotel, across the street from one of the event hubs at Brittlebank Park. The new feature "will be a relaxed atmosphere where guests can mingle and meet some of the leading hunting and fishing guides from around the world," says SEWE president John Powell. That's in addition to the ninety painters, carvers, and sculptors that exhibit in the SEWE Fine Art Gallery, including this year's featured artist, the painter Ryan Kirby. The Gailard Center will screen the new film *Wings over Water*, coproduced by Ducks Unlimited and narrated by Michael Keaton, and present a special performance by Forrest Galante, a host of Discovery Channel's annual Shark Week. One more tip: Arrive ahead of the listed times to get a good spot

to watch the DockDogs from far and wide in all their jumping, swimming glory.

■ sewe.com



GARDENS

Tennessee

COMING OUT OF THEIR SHELLS

“On a spring day when everything is in bloom, you walk in the gates and are enveloped by color,” says Peter Grimaldi, the vice president of gardens and facilities at Cheekwood, Nashville’s 1930s estate, botanical garden, and arboretum. In March, the property will kick off its eleventh annual **Cheekwood in Bloom** festival to herald the season’s arrival with some 250,000 blooms, among them tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, redbuds, and magnolias. Cheekwood also recently partnered with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to house native turtles, and twenty-four chelonians (another word for turtles)—including red-eared sliders, map turtles, and even a soft-shell turtle—will be enjoying the sun. “It’s the Ritz for turtles,” Grimaldi says of the pond in the Children’s Garden. “They’ll be swimming around and hanging out on logs, putting on a little show for everybody.”

■ cheekwood.org

GOLF

Texas

FORE THOUGHT

When the preeminent golf course architect Gil Hanse first saw the landscape at the **Omni PGA Frisco Resort**, he couldn’t

believe his eyes. He’d assumed the North Texas topography would be flat, but he instead found an undulating canvas more reminiscent of Texas Hill Country. “I was pleasantly surprised and intrigued by the role Panther Creek would play,” Hanse says of the meandering waterway through what became the Fields Ranch East course. Nearby, the Fields Ranch West course designed by Beau Welling illustrates a philosophy of playability. “The projects I enjoy the most create human moments,” Welling says. “A place to gather with friends.” The entire complex, which opens this spring, is already booked to host six major events, including the Senior PGA Championship in May. Both Hanse and Welling are known for emphasizing sustainability and providing habitat for wildlife. “The wetlands we created have turned out to be one of the nicest features of the entire property,” Hanse says. “We hired a local native plant expert who showed us a palette of thirty species, from which we chose the right density, height, and characteristics.” Ridgelines create exceptional vista points, the better to seek out birdies of both the feathered and fairway varieties.

■ omnihotels.com/hotels/pga-frisco

FOOD

Virginia

LEADING THE WAY

As the grande dame of Southern cooking and one of the first Black women to write a cookbook that didn’t conceal her race or gender, Edna Lewis, who died in 2006, is enjoying a metaphorical homecoming. A daughter of Freetown, a community in Orange County, Lewis grew up learning to prepare game meat and homegrown grains and vegetables. She went on to cook in elite restaurants on the East Coast where Black female chefs were virtually unheard-of, and made a name for herself through her cookbooks, including *The Taste of Country Cooking*. Recently, restaurants around her home county have honored Lewis’s legacy—and the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Edna Lewis Cookbook*—by forming the **Edna Lewis Menu Trail**. Seven Virginia restaurants will add Lewis-inspired dishes to their menus, including hoppin’ John at the Champion

Ice House in Gordonsville and smothered braised rabbit at Vintage Restaurant near Orange. Lewis “made food accessible to people,” says chef Joy Crump of Foode in Fredericksburg. “Her recipes are about simple, humble cooking that makes you feel loved.”

■ visitorangevirginia.com

FOOD

West Virginia

THE WAFFLE TRUTH

The heady smell of freshly baked Belgian waffles emanates from a tiny log cabin at the top of Snowshoe Mountain Resort’s Ballhooter lift, luring skiers and snowboarders with the promise of a warm, buttery treat. The handheld waffles at **Waffle Cabin**’s two West Virginia locations showcase a pearl-sugar crunchy exterior and a soft, fluffy interior, drizzled with semisweet Belgian chocolate. Peter Creyf, a native of Belgium, first brought his made-to-order Liège-style waffles to Boston in 1998, using cast-iron waffle makers and real butter. When the West Virginia transplants and snow-sport enthusiasts Jen Shannon and Gordon McHugh got wind of the waffles at a trade show, they sensed opportunity. “The smell was irresistible, and the taste was even better,” Shannon says, “and then when I heard about the ski-up, grab-and-go concept, I thought, *Who wouldn’t want this on their ski vacation?*” Now the couple serves the portable snacks all season (through March 26) at nearly 4,800 feet atop Snowshoe and at a more approachable Silver Creek slope-side spot.

■ wafflecabin.com

—Larry Bleiberg, Crai Bower, Caroline Sanders Clements, Mike Grudowski, Jordan P. Hickey, Stacey Lastoe, Lindsey Liles, T. Edward Nickens, Anne Tate, and Madeline Weinfield

From time to time, we make our subscriber list available to companies that sell goods and services by mail that we believe would interest our readers. If you would rather not receive such offers via postal mail, please write to Garden & Gun Customer Mailing List, P.O. Box 6318, Harlan, IA 51593-1818, and include a copy of your mailing label or provide your name and address exactly as they currently appear on your mailing label.