

BEST OF MISSISSIPPI

introduction by olivia bushardt

William Faulkner once said, “To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.” Our readers truly understand and appreciate the value that comes with intimately knowing a place, and in our fifth annual Best of Mississippi issue, our readers highlight their favorite hotspots from around the state. We’re giving you the very best that our state has to offer in food, fun, history, and true insider knowledge of the entire state. Whether you’re Mississippian by birth or state of mind, a true appreciation of the world lies in recognizing the very best of our roots.



BEST STEAK

Shapley's, Ridgeland

First opened in 1985, Shapley's remains one of Mississippi's favorite restaurants. The commitment to unprecedented quality with selection and choice-cuts of steaks has landed this superior restaurant on the top again. For a superb dinner with an elegant atmosphere, Shapley's is sure to impress. 868 *Centré St., Ridgeland*; 601.957.3753; www.shapleys.ms.

BEST HAMBURGER

Mugshots Grill and Bar, several locations

Select from a variety of gourmet burgers grilled to perfection and served on delicious toasted sourdough buns. From the eight-ounce Middleburger to Anthony's Peanut Butter Burger, these tasty creations will satisfy any burger enthusiast. If you're adventurous, attempt to finish the infamous "The Mugshot" within twelve minutes, or invite a group of friends and share a good meal and night out together. *For locations visit* www.mugshotsgrillandbar.com.

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Mint the Restaurant

Mint, the younger sister to Jackson's Julep, appeared on the restaurant scene in November of 2008, and the combination of Southern style food with a creative twist has been delighting patrons since its grand opening. Serving innovative Southern-infusion cuisine, Mint utilizes fresh ingredients that are unique to the region. The menu changes seasonally, highlighting certain components of each dish and presenting patrons with lighter foods in summer and heavier foods during the winter months. By using locally-grown seasonal foods, Mint gives back to the community and facilitates culinary collaboration between neighbors.

David Farris, co-owner and executive chef for Mint and Julep, develops the recipes and tests them with his manager and co-owner Patrick Kelly. Recipes are constantly being tweaked and changed over time to arrive at a perfect combination of flavors that tantalize all the senses. The specials change regularly, but the popularity of several dishes is bound to keep them on the menu despite the changing season. Pan roasted redfish with grilled corn maque choux, jumbo lump crabmeat, and champagne beurre blanc is one of the most popular dinner dishes, and for lunch patrons cannot get enough of the grouper sandwich on a ciabatta bun with frissée, chipotle aioli, and fresh tomato. Without a doubt, the creativity of Mint will cement the popular restaurant as a Mississippi favorite for years to come. —*Olivia Bushardt*

1000 Highland Colony Parkway, Suite 5002, Ridgeland; 601.898.MINT(6468); www.minttherestaurant.com.



THOMAS BECK

BEST PIZZA

Soulshine Pizza, Flowood and Ridgeland

Boogie on down to Soulshine Pizza. With two locations in the Jackson area, Soulshine Pizza is an offbeat, hip pizza parlor offering a Southern twist to the Italian signature dish. Choose from local favorites such as the "Kitchen Sink" and "The Mississippian," or create your own pizza from dozens of toppings choices. This funky eatery puts the heart and the soul into creative food. 1139 Old Fannin Rd., Flowood; 601.919.2000; 1111 Highland Colony Parkway, Ridgeland; 601.856.8646; www.soulshinepizza.com.

BEST TAMALES

Doe's Eat Place, Greenville and Starkville

Upon first arrival at Doe's Eat Place, patrons walk through the kitchen to country style tables with red and white checked tablecloths. The kitchen is truly the heart of Doe's Eat Place, and the delicious tamales and steaks are evidence for that fact. The hospitality is truly Southern, and you will feel a part of the family as soon as you arrive. 502 Nelson St., Greenville; 662.334.3315; 213 E. Main St., Starkville; 662.324.4005; www.doeseatplace.com.

BEST MEXICAN FOOD

Old Mexico, Philadelphia & Papitos, Madison

For a traditional Mexican dining experience, try Old Mexico, where patrons enjoy large portions of their favorite Mexican food including delicious fajitas and chimichangas. For handmade tortillas rolled fresh everyday, look no further than Old Mexico! 214 Line Ave., Philadelphia; 601.656.6686.

Papitos offers tasty Mexican cuisine coupled with a lovely outdoor dining facility. You'll love the authentic Mexican atmosphere at this great restaurant!; 11 Colony Crossing Way, Ste. 400, Madison; 601.605.0275.



PHOTO COURTESY PEGGY'S FRIED CHICKEN

BEST FRIED CHICKEN

Peggy's

Peggy Webb has been cooking for visitors in Philadelphia for more than forty one years, and although she retired seven years ago, her famous fried chicken continues her legacy. When the telephone company changed to the dial system in the 1950s, Peggy began serving lunch to men who came from all over the state to work, and when they returned to their hometowns, the news of Peggy's Restaurant began to spread. By the early 1960s, so many visitors came to the restaurant daily that Peggy could not cook, serve, and make change. Customers began laying their money on the counter, and soon after a wicker basket was added that still remains today.

Peggy doesn't cook her chicken in a multitude of spices but allows the taste of the tender, perfectly cooked chicken to stand on its own. She has kept the same menu for years, and patrons declare that the food tastes just as good as it did when they visited Peggy's years before. Another feature that hasn't changed is the family-style seating, which allows patrons to sit and talk with other guests. Strangers usually find a connection, whether friends or kin, and they have Peggy and her delectable crispy fried chicken to thank. —O.B.

512 Bay St. E., Philadelphia; 601.656.3478; www.geocities.com/peggysfriedchicken.

BEST APPETIZER

Bonefish Grill: Bang Bang Shrimp, Biloxi and Madison

The restaurant's no-nonsense approach to fish and its many other options has led to many delicious creations, including the much-loved Bang Bang Shrimp. This spicy dish is sure to leave a great impression with diners of all ages. For great atmosphere and dining, you can't go wrong with Bonefish Grill. 2600 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi; 228.388.0009; 201 Colony Way, Madison; 601.607.3334; www.bonefishgrill.com.



PHOTO COURTESY BONEFISH GRILL

BEST FINE DINING

Nick's, Jackson

Known for its elegant and upscale atmosphere, Nick's remains a Mississippi favorite since its opening in 1983. Its old English club feel with rich leather-covered banquettes lends an air of refinement to the restaurant. For candlelight dinner for two, business lunch, or just a fun dinner with friends, Nick's fine American cuisine is sure to impress even the pickiest of diners. 1501 Lakeland Drive, Ste. 101, Jackson; 601.981.8017; www.nicksrestaurant.com.

BEST DOWNHOME/SOUL FOOD

Ajax Diner, Oxford

Located on Oxford's town square, Ajax serves good home cooking, and patrons cannot get enough of the blue-plate special style dishes. With Matty's mom's meatloaf, hot tamale pie, cheese grits, jalapeno corn bread, and loads of Southern vegetables, this restaurant has something for everyone. 118 Courthouse Sq., Oxford; 661.232.8880.

BEST DELI

Sweet Pepper's Deli, various locations

For a casual dining experience, Sweet Pepper's Deli offers an excellent selection of wraps and salads for a quick lunch or dinner. The atmosphere is always upbeat, and amid the flurry of activity, the servers always stop to smile. Visit www.sweetpeppersdeli.com for locations.

RON BLAYLOCK



BEST ITALIAN FOOD

Amerigo, Ridgeland

Amerigo serves classical Italian cuisine with an American and Mediterranean twist, resulting in a Mississippi favorite restaurant. Boasting an intimate atmosphere, friendly servers, and an impressive array of dishes including veal piccata, pasta pomodoro, and tiramisu, this Ridgeland eatery is a perfect dining choice for any occasion! 6592 Old Canton Rd., Ridgeland; 601.977.0563; www.amerigo.net.

OLIVIA BUSHARDT



BEST SUSHI

Little Tokyo/Sakura Bana, Ridgeland and Jackson

Little Toyko and Sakura Bana offer a warm, inviting atmosphere to patrons who visit these Mississippi hotspots. Both restaurants offer a range of sushi, sashimi, and tempura dishes. Their many offerings like the Mississippi roll will leave you wanting more. *Little Tokyo*, 876 Avery Blvd., Ridgeland; 601.991.3800; and *Sakura Bana*, I-55 N., Jackson, 601.982.3035; www.littletokyoms.com.

OLIVIA BUSHARDT



BEST BUFFET

Hamil's, Ridgeland

Serving savory cuisine since 1977, this Southern-style buffet is a popular choice among Mississippians. The homemade yeast rolls, chicken and dumplings, and creamy mashed potatoes are just some of the favorite dishes found at Hamil's. Arrive hungry because the food is so plentiful and delicious you will leave completely satisfied. 480 Magnolia St., Madison; 601.856.4407; www.hamils.com.



BEST SEAFOOD

AJ's on The Lake

With the new location on Township Avenue, AJ's on the Lake has significantly expanded to accommodate the number of patrons clamoring to visit this well-known establishment. Lucy and John Taylor first opened AJ's in 1999 and named the family-friendly restaurant after their two children, Alyssa and Johnny. From the beginning, the Taylors have kept their commitment to providing a superior dining experience for every customer, and with a charming ambiance, dulcet music, and Southern hospitality, John and Lucy have certainly raised the bar for casual fine dining in Mississippi.

AJ's serves Caribbean fare reminiscent of Lucy's South American origin, and with unique dishes such as sevice, plantains, delicious three-milk cake, and fresh seafood, AJ's provides a culinary treasure for all who visit. Every table offers patrons a stunning and different view of the gorgeous lake. With the calming décor and delicious food, AJ's really is a place to "relax, don't rush the meal, and get away from troubles," says John. —O.B.

361 Township Ave., Ridgeland; 601.856.2844; www.ajsgrille.com.



PHOTO COURTESY AJ'S ON THE LAKE



OLIVIA BUSHARDT

BEST PLACE TO RUIN YOUR DIET
Cherokee Inn

For divine Southern style food, the locals know that Cherokee Inn is the place to eat! The fried mushrooms, delicious plate lunches, and po-boys will have everyone saying “yum!” Attempt to save room for decadent pecan pie and lemon icebox for dessert. Either way, the food, service, and fun atmosphere will leave you wanting to come again. 1410 Old Square Rd., Jackson; 601.362.6388.



OLIVIA BUSHARDT

BEST OUTDOOR DINING
Que Sera, Jackson

With their delicious Creole cuisine and New Orleans style décor, Que Sera provides patrons with an unforgettable dining experience. When the weather is pleasant, guests love eating outside on the patio under one of the many umbrellas and ordering top-notch Cajun cooking. 2801 N. State St., Jackson; 601.981.2520; www.queseram.com.



SOPHIE MCNEIL

BEST ROMANTIC SPOT
Walker's Drive-In, Jackson

For a date with that special someone, Walker's provides a romantic yet lively ambiance coupled with superior service and great-tasting food. Located in an old drive-in, Walker's offers a fine dining experience without the pretense and boasts an extensive selection of tasty creations. 3016 N. State St., Jackson; 601.982.2633; Walker's Drive-In.



HULL PHOTOGRAPHY

BEST KID-FRIENDLY RESTAURANT
Sal & Mookies, Jackson

Since its recent opening in 2007, Sal & Mookies has emerged as a popular casual dining choice. With New York style pizzas and an ice cream bar with an ever-changing selection of twenty-four flavors, this hidden gem offers a family-friendly dining experience for kids of any age. 565 Taylor St., Jackson; 601.368.1919; www.salandmookies.com.



OLIVIA BUSHARDT

BEST OTHER ETHNIC FOOD
Keifer's, Jackson

With its mix of Greek and American flavors, Keifer's is an excellent choice for those craving a unique dining experience. Eat outside under one of the covered porches and sample a variety of Greek fare including cottage fries, gyros, and tasty hummus with pita bread. Guests at Keifer's love both the food and the atmosphere, which provides a popular place to socialize with friends long after the meal is finished. 705 Poplar Blvd, Jackson; 601.355.6825; 120 N. Congress St., Jackson; 601.353.4976.



OLIVIA BUSHARDT

BEST COFFEE SHOP
Cups, several locations

This laid-back coffee house is known for its delicious coffee, friendly staff, and commitment to the community by purchasing many items locally. Cups also serves as an art gallery for local artists, which helps create the relaxed atmosphere. Cups is the perfect place to get together with old friends and to meet new ones while enjoying a wonderful cup of coffee. Visit www.cupspressocafe.com for locations.

OLIVIA BUSHARDT

**BEST BARBECUE**

Hickory Pit, Jackson

For true barbeque lovers, Hickory Pit provides savory Southern barbeque bound to delight even the toughest critic. Try a huge plate of barbequed ribs or the pulled pork plate with a side of sweet potato fries and beer-battered onion rings. Add any type of sauce (hot, mild, or sweet) for an intense flavor that will leave you dreaming of more.

1491 Canton Mart Rd., Jackson; 601.956.7079.



MCALISTERS DELI

BEST TEA

McAlister's Deli, several locations

On a hot Mississippi summer day, nothing could taste better than a refreshing tall glass of McAlister's World Famous Sweet Tea. The traditional Southern staple has sparked numerous rumors as to the source of this mouth-watering drink, but this highly prized recipe is under wraps. See www.mcalisters-deli.com for locations.

PHOTO COURTESY CHAR

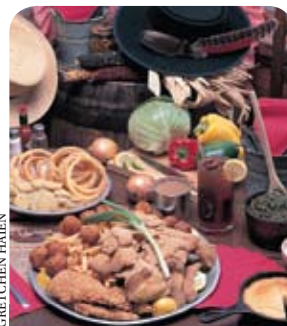
**BEST DESSERT**

Char: Pecan Caramel Butter Crunch Cake, Jackson

Don't let the humble name fool you, Char's Pecan Caramel Butter Crunch Cake served with French vanilla ice cream and topped with cinnamon-braised Granny Smith Apple sauce features an extraordinary mix of flavors designed to delight the taste buds of patrons to this charming restaurant.

4500 I-55 North, Suite 142, Jackson; 601.956.9562; www.charrestaurant.com.

GRETCHEN HAEN

**BEST CORNBREAD**

Cock of the Walk, Natchez and Ridgeland

With its relaxed atmosphere and country-style cooking, Cock of the Walk provides diners with a laid-back dining and divine cornbread that cannot be beat! Patrons have been eating scrumptious fried catfish at Cock of the Walk since the first restaurant opened in Natchez in 1977, and their heavenly cornbread is still flipped right at your table. 200 N Broadway St., Natchez; 601.446.8920; 141 Madison Landing Circle, Ridgeland; 601.856.5500; www.cockofthewalk.biz.

THOMAS BECK

**BEST BREAKFAST/BRUNCH SPOT**

Julep, Jackson

Julep is a stylish restaurant specializing in nouveau Southern fusion. Sunday brunch, a favorite among patrons, showcases new twists given to time-honored classics such as the banana's foster French toast, catfish taco, and fried green tomato Benedict. Just don't forget Julep's award winning fried chicken and mouth-watering shrimp and grits. The scrumptious menu is bound to delight your taste buds. 4500 I-55 North, Ste. 105, Jackson; 601.362.1411; www.juleprestaurant.com.

GREG CAMPBELL

**BEST BAKERY**

Broad Street, Jackson

Aptly named "Jackson's Favorite Artisan Bakery/Deli," Broad Street Bakery is certainly Mississippi's favorite bakery. Experience the delicious made-from-scratch European breads and pastries, but don't forget the popular sandwiches, quiches, and soups that make this bakery a popular lunchtime spot. 4465 I-55 N, Suite 101, Jackson; 601.362.2900; www.broadstbakery.com.



PHOTO COURTESY PEARL RIVER RESORTS

BEST ATTRACTION FOR KIDS

Geyser Falls, Choctaw

For fun in the sun, Geyser Falls has something for every water-lover from calm pools surrounded by white sand beaches to slippery water slides and wave pools. This popular summertime water theme park is sure to delight all members of the family with its extensive selection of water activities. Your toddler will love spending all day at Lil' Squirts Hollow with special mini-features for small children including a mini water slide. Teens and adults love the Backsplash! and Mt. Everwet water slides for an exciting thrill ride, and everyone in the family will enjoy spending a lazy hour floating along the Roundabout River and cooling off with a dip under the refreshing waterfall. For those who crave a relaxed Caribbean experience (without the plane ride), visit the Beach Club for sunbathing, live music, and good food. Geyser Falls will certainly bring out the kid within all who visit the magical park and bathe in its rejuvenating water. —O.B.

209 Black Jack Rd., Choctaw; 601.389.3100; www.geyserfalls.com.



PHOTO COURTESY PEARL RIVER RESORTS

BEST GOLF COURSE

Dancing Rabbit, Choctaw

With two award-winning courses spanning more than seven hundred acres of luxurious greens, Dancing Rabbit Golf Course is a work of art. Whether you're preparing for your PGA championship or playing a few rounds with close friends, Dancing Rabbit's spectacular views and lush fairways are sure to impress every golfer. 1 Choctaw Trail, Choctaw; 601.663.0011; www.dancingrabbitgolf.com.



GREG CAMPBELL

BEST FAIR/FESTIVAL

Neshoba, Philadelphia

Always a favorite among the locals and visitors since its beginning in 1889, the Neshoba County Fair has something for everyone, from rides for the kids to an antique car and livestock show. Guests travel from all over to visit the fair and catch up with old friends and meet new ones. A trip to Neshoba wouldn't be complete without sitting on the front porch of the Fair Cabin, drinking lemonade, and people watching. 16800 Highway 21 South, Philadelphia; 601.656.8480; www.neshobacountyfair.org.



BONNIE DICKERSON

BEST CAMPGROUND

Roosevelt State Park, Morton

Open year round, Roosevelt State Park is a great destination for outdoor recreational fun. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, spend time in the water with a lake, pool, and waterslide, and in the fall stay a while to watch the leaves change colors. Whether you're picnicking, camping, or boating, this park is great for special events, family reunions, or just a swim in the lake with the kids. 2149 Highway 13 S., Morton; 601.732.6316.

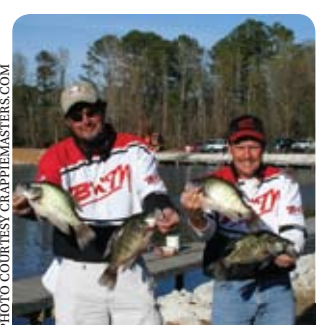


PHOTO COURTESY CRAPPIEMASTERS.COM

BEST FISHING DESTINATION

Reservoir, Ridgeland

Located in Central Mississippi, the man-made, 33,000-acre Reservoir feeds into the Pearl River and provides an ideal spot for fishing. The Reservoir also boasts gorgeous overlooks, trails for hiking and mountain biking, parks, and campgrounds. For wholesome outdoor fun, the Reservoir is a great place to enjoy the sweet Mississippi air! 115 Madison Landing Circle, P.O. Box 2180, Ridgeland; 601.856.6574; www.therez.ms.



BEST PERFORMING ARTS VENUE

Ford Center, University of Mississippi
Thalia Mara, Jackson

Completed in 2003, the acclaimed Ford Center boasts two performance spaces and hosts a plethora of events ranging from lectures to Broadway shows. The Ford Center remains at the center of University life in Oxford. 100 University Avenue, University; 662.915.2787; www.olemiss.edu/fordcenter.

Located in the heart of downtown Jackson, Thalia Mara is home to the International Ballet Competition (IBC) held every four years. Local, national, and international performers appear at the Thalia Mara, which hosts all types of dance performances, symphonies, operas, and plays. 255 E. Pascagoula St., Jackson; 601.960.1537.



BEST HIKING DESTINATION

Ridgeland Trail, Ridgeland
Tishomingo, Tupelo

For an urbanized hiking trail that combines the location of the city with the fresh air and sunshine of nature, Ridgeland Trail offers visitors the opportunity to engage in outdoor recreational activities without driving into the woods, and all located along the beautiful Natchez Trace.

With thirteen miles of breath-taking hiking trails, Tishomingo provides guests with the opportunity to closely experience nature. Enjoy numerous water activities and expansive campgrounds while viewing gorgeous photographic scenery. Tishomingo is truly awe-inspiring. P.O. Box 880, Tishomingo; 662.438.6914.



BEST PARK

Trustmark Park

At Trustmark Park, baseball is king. The park offers multiple restaurants, picnic areas, a kid zone, and even features a 360-degree concourse that fully encompasses the field—allowing viewers access to every section of seating. The stadium seats 5,500 comfortably in chair-back seats and another 2,200 in general admission seating near the outfield.

Situated next to I-55, I-20, Highway 49, and Highway 80, Trustmark Park is in the perfect location for baseball fans all over the state. And between April and September, the resident M-Braves take the field. Now in their fifth year the team will play 60 games at the stadium this season.

In addition to watching the game, visitors can chow down at various concession stands such as the Basket Catch, Hot Corner Slice, and the Sweet Spot. If you'd like to sit down for a longer meal, Trustmark Park offers the Cellular South Café, a full service restaurant with seating inside and outside, with a view of the right field.

Whether you're there for the food, baseball, or fun with friends and family, Trustmark Park is the place to enjoy it all. —Sophie McNeil

1 Braves Way, Pearl; 601.932.8788 or 888.Braves4; www.mississippibraves.com.





PHOTO COURTESY DUNLEITH

BEST PLACE TO GET MARRIED

Dunleith, Natchez

With a picturesque Greek revival style plantation house and gorgeous grounds, Dunleith is the ideal place for a memorable wedding. Guests stay in the luxurious inn and experience living in a Southern-style plantation house. The Castle restaurant provides delicious food for visitors and guests to this historic inn. 84 Homochitto St., Natchez; 601.446.8500; www.dunleith.com.



PHOTO COURTESY OLD CAPITOL INN

BEST PLACE FOR A WEDDING RECEPTION

Old Capitol Inn, Jackson

With a massive Gala ballroom that opens onto an elegant courtyard and lush garden, the Old Capitol Inn provides couples with the perfect location to host a wonderful wedding reception. The ballroom boasts a built-in dance floor and stage, and the Inn's superior catering selection will make any reception one to remember. 226 N. State St., Jackson; 601.359.9000; www.oldcapitolinn.com.



PHOTO COURTESY MS MUSEUM OF ART

BEST MUSEUM

Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson

Nestled between Thalia Mara Hall and the new Jackson Convention Center in downtown Jackson, the Mississippi Museum of Art is an everlasting figure in the state's art scene. From permanent art works such as photographs by Eudora Welty and traveling exhibits from painter and textile designer Raoul Dufy, MMA offers entertainment for everyone. 380 S. Lamar St., Jackson; 601.960.1515; www.msmuseumart.org



PHOTO COURTESY ALLUVIAN HOTEL

BEST HOTEL

The Alluvian, Greenwood

Walking into the Alluvian, you don't feel like you are deep in the Mississippi Delta. With swanky lounge areas, fresh flowers in each room, a full spa, and restaurant, the Alluvian is one of the best hotels to check in, unwind, and while away the day. 318 Howard St., Greenwood; 662.453.2114; www.thealluvian.com.



PHOTO COURTESY MGM MIRAGE

BEST RESORT

Beau Rivage, Biloxi

Positioned at the heart of the Gulf Coast in Biloxi, the Beau Rivage boasts 1,740 rooms with views of the Mississippi Gulf and the Back Bay. With modern design, plush beds, a luxurious pool overlooking the Gulf, live entertainment, and a collection of restaurants that will satisfy every craving, this resort has it all. And the full service spa, golf, and onsite shopping are icing on the cake. After visiting the Beau Rivage, you may never want to leave. 875 Beach Blvd., Biloxi; 228.386.7111; www.beaurivageresort.com.



RICHARD COOPER

BEST BED & BREAKFAST

The Cole House, Philadelphia

Located near the buzzing downtown sights of Philadelphia, this 1916 Victorian home known as The Cole House has been completely restored. With a sunroom, formal parlor, and dining room, this bed and breakfast offers the perfect weekend getaway. Rooms are filled with comfortable antiques that create a homey feel to help guests relax. 235 W. Beacon St., Philadelphia; 601.656.5433; www.thecolehouse.net.

PHOTO COURTESY VICKSBURG TOURISM



BEST HISTORIC SITE

National Military Park, Vicksburg

In the hills of Vicksburg, a 16-mile tour-road winds through the National Military Park. The park features over 20 miles of reconstructed trenches commemorating the War Between the States. With 1,325 monuments throughout the tour, there is no shortage of things to see in this historic park. 3201 Clay St., Vicksburg, 601.636.0583; www.nps.gov/vick.

SALLY DURKIN



BEST DAY TRIP

Natchez

Situated at the southern end of the Natchez Trace Parkway, Natchez truly transports you back in time to the Old South with antebellum homes and Southern charm. Throughout the year, attend one of Natchez's many festivals or its pilgrimage with fully costumed actors, visit one of its many restaurants, or shop its bevy of antique stores in the downtown shopping district. Natchez CVB, 800.647.6724; www.natchezms.com.

PHOTO COURTESY MS GULF COAST CVB



BEST WEEKEND TRIP

Mississippi Gulf Coast

The Mississippi Gulf Coast is back and better than ever. Visitors can bask on the 26 miles of sandy beaches, take a ferry to Ship Island, enjoy one of the many fabulous resorts, grab a bite at a world-class restaurant, or experience unparalleled shopping options. The Gulf Coast keeps visitors coming back for more. Mississippi Gulf Coast CVB, 11975 Seaway Rd., Gulfport, 228.896.6699; www.gulfcoast.org.

BRUCE NEWMAN



BEST FREE ACTIVITY

Double Decker Arts Festival, Oxford

Taking its namesake from the English bus imported in 1994, the Double Decker Arts Festival in Oxford's courthouse square is a day of activities, food, music, arts, and family fun. 662.232.2367; www.doubledeckerfestival.com.



BEST OFFBEAT DESTINATION

Graceland II, Holly Springs

Beyond the exterior of Paul McLeod's white mansion is a tribute unlike any other—to Elvis and nothing but Elvis.

For over 50 years, Elvis has been a large focus of McLeod's life. McLeod even named his son Elvis Aaron Presley McLeod after the singer.

At Graceland II in Holly Springs, Elvis literally covers every nook and cranny from floor to ceiling. Everything from 45s on the wall in the record room to cardboard cut-outs on the staircase highlight McLeod's love for Elvis.

Just walk up the front steps and knock on the door, Graceland II is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. McLeod will be there to greet you and curate the home. Elvis may have left the building at the original Graceland years ago, but memories of Elvis can always be found at Graceland II. —S.M.

200 E. Gholson Ave., Holly Springs.

PHOTO COURTESY HOLLY SPRINGS CVB





PHOTO COURTESY PERSNICKETY

BEST GIFT SHOP

Persnickety, Madison

In a quaint but distinct green building with purple shutters, Persnickety has been perfecting the gift shop experience since 2001. With superior customer service, free gift-wrapping, and exclusive items, Persnickety has carved its niche. Lotions and candles for quick gifts line the front of the store, while fine china and Peters Pottery can be found upstairs and in the back rooms. Persnickety is full of colorful designs, making every room bright and airy.

Persnickety has continued its success in the formerly abandoned building by adding an additional two-story structure to fill the expanding Bridal Registry. Featuring crystal, china, and other fashionable wedding gifts, Persnickety offers customers an exclusive selection.

Since purchasing Persnickety from Sherri Hilton in 2007, Hearth and Home owners Ben and Randy Rogers have only added more to the store. Soon, Persnickety Kitchen will open in the old Madison Gallery building a few steps away from Persnickety next to the train tracks.

Now in the renovation stage, Ben Rogers says he hopes to have Persnickety Kitchen open by fall. When the store opens, product lines such as GE, Sub Zero, and Viking will anchor the store's offerings. —S.M.

2078 Main Street, Madison; 601.853.9595.

BEST PLACE TO FIND GREAT FURNITURE

Batte Furniture, Jackson
Miskelly Furniture, Jackson

Since first opening its doors in 1883, Batte has offered luxurious furniture and professional design services, including European antiques. Batte's bridal department, opened in 2004, is the state's leader in fine china, crystal, and other gifts and accessories. Here you will find brands such as William Yeoward, Simon Pearce, Anna Weatherly, and Baccarat. 1010 E. Northside Dr., Jackson; 601.366.0335; www.battefurniture.com

From a small furniture company in a 10,000 square foot building to a 120,000 square foot flagship building, Miskelly's Furniture has been helping furnish Mississippian homes for over 30 years. Now offering the largest collection of furniture in the South, Miskelly's is sure to have something to fit every furniture need. 101 Airport Rd., Jackson; 601.939.6288; www.miskellys.com.

BEST PLACE TO FIND GREAT ANTIQUES

Interior's Market, Jackson

With over 40 dealers, Interior Market is full of upscale, unique finds sure to fit any home décor. After browsing through furniture and fashionable accessories, enjoy a meal in the shop's café, catered by Jackson restaurant Bon Ami. 659 Duling Ave., Jackson; 601.981.6020.

BEST PLACE TO FIND A BARGAIN

Hudson's, several locations

Started by H. C. Hudson in 1938, Mississippi owned and operated Hudson's is the bargain hunter's paradise. From designer clothing to name-brand home décor, Hudson's is truly a "treasure hunt." For locations, see www.hudsonsalvage.com.

BEST PLACE TO FIND ART

Brown's Fine Art and Framing, Jackson;
Southern Breeze, Ridgeland

With almost 45 years in the business, Brown's Fine Art and Framing, located in Jackson's Fondren District, has built a reputation for custom framing and an emphasis on Mississippi artists. A 6,000 square foot gallery displays these native artists with different media such as lithographs, silkscreens, bronze sculptures, paintings, wood, posters and more. 630 Fondren Place, Jackson; 800.737.4844; www.brownsfineart.com;

Located in Renaissance at Colony Park, Southern Breeze is any Mississippian's place to find original artwork. Don't be surprised if the artist is from Mississippi; many of the artists featured in Southern Breeze are native to the Magnolia State. 1000 Highland Colony Parkway, Ridgeland; 601.607.4147; www.southernbreeze.net.

PHOTO COURTESY SUMMERHOUSE



BEST PLACE FOR NEW COLLECTIBLES AND HOME ACCESSORIES

Summerhouse, Ridgeland

At Summerhouse, simple lines and crisp colors are staples in their Ridgeland showroom. This premier design house exudes elegance and functionality and offers design services to suit everyone's taste. 1109 Highland Colony Parkway, Ridgeland; 601.853.4445; www.summerhousestyle.com.

RACHEL HARRINGTON



BEST PLACE TO FIND A FLORAL ARRANGEMENT

A Daisy A Day, Jackson

Family owned and operated, Daisy A Day in Maywood Mart constructs creative arrangements for multiple occasions. In addition to floral arrangements, Daisy A Day also offers gift baskets, cards, and candles. 1220 E. Northside Drive, Ste. 180, Jackson; 800.844.8070; www.adaisyadayjackson.com.

SOPHIE MCNEIL



BEST PLACE TO FIND A GREAT BOOK

Lemuria, Jackson

On the second story of Banner Hall, Lemuria runs the literary gamut with book signings by famous authors, collectors' first editions, an in-house book club, and a knowledgeable staff. From the section of children's books called Oz to signed cookbooks, Lemuria nurtures the idea of browsing for that next good book. Banner Hall, 4465 I-55 N, Ste. 202, Jackson; 601.3667619; www.lemuriabooks.com .

COURTESY BASS PRO



BEST PLACE TO FIND SPORTING GOODS/ OUTDOOR GEAR

Bass Pro Shop, Pearl

A stone's throw from Trustmark Park in Pearl, you can find fishing boats, tents, sporting apparel, and more all in one shopping trip at Bass Pro Shop. This two-story building is not just a store but also an experience that no one should miss. 100 Bass Pro Dr, Pearl; 601.933.3700; www.basspro.com .



BEST PLACE SHOPPING DESTINATION

Renaissance at Colony Park, Ridgeland

Since opening over a year ago, Renaissance at Colony Park has blossomed into one of Mississippi's premiere open shopping destinations. It offers restaurants and stores such as J. Crew, Anthropologie, P.F. Chang's, and Fresh Market—the only ones of their kind in Mississippi. Renaissance draws customers from across the state for its ambiance, variety, and exceptional specialty stores.

Soft background music, multiple fountains, and outdoor sitting areas are just a few of the positive features of this outdoor shopping market, with a distinct European feel. At night, stroll through the "alleyways" of Renaissance draped with lights as if you were in Italy. Even finding a parking spot and driving around the brick lined roundabout gives that feeling of being across the pond.

If the grand architecture was not enough, the excellent list of retailers (that keeps growing) is sure to bring in customers. National retailers such as Bath Junkie, J. Jill, and Ann Taylor as well as local shop owners are all tenants. —S.M.

1000 Highland Colony Parkway, Ridgeland; 601.519.0900; www.renaissanceatcolonypark.com.

PHOTO COURTESY MARKETING ALLIANCE



BEST SOURCE FOR THE WELL-DRESSED MAN

The Rogue and Good Company, Jackson

At the top of the hill on I-55, gentlemen will find the latest duds for the weekend or night out on the town. For the forth-straight year, Jackson's Rogue has claimed the top spot in our readers' choice for Mississippi's premier men's clothing shop. 4450 I-55 N, Jackson; 800.GO.ROGUE; www.therogue.com.

BEST PLACE TO FIND ANTIQUE JEWELRY

Juniker Jewelry, Jackson

Since 1944, Juniker Jewelry has remained a family business with antique and estate jewelry, as well as new, high-end pieces. Now with its fourth generation in the business, Juniker Jewelry offers over 60 years of experience to help you pick out the perfect piece of jewelry. 4500 I-55 N. Highland Village Suite 116, 601.366.3754; www.junikerjewelry.com.

BEST SALON OR DAY SPA

Aqua the Day Spa, Jackson and Ridgeland

With a long menu full of facial treatments, massages, body treatments, manicures, and pedicures, Aqua the Day Spa offers two locations in the Jackson area for relaxation and rejuvenation. Aqua caters to every age group. Its relaxing atmosphere rivals even the best-known national spas. 4465 I-55 N, Jackson; 601.362.9550 or 1000 Highland Colony Parkway, Ste. 8001, Ridgeland; 601.898.9123; aquathedayspa.com.

BEST FITNESS CENTER

Courthouse Racquet and Fitness, Jackson Metro

With five locations, the Courthouse offers a multitude of healthy lifestyle services to many residents in the Jackson area. With cardio machines, group exercise classes, pools, tennis courts, physical therapists and personal trainers, the Courthouse has services to help everyone looking to stay in shape. See website for locations, www.ms courthouse.com.



JAMES PATTERSON

BEST SOURCE FOR THE WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

CoatTails, Ridgeland

CoatTails is undeniably chic. From the mother-of-pearl walls in the dressing rooms to the hardwood floors to the posh furniture, CoatTails is the place for the newest, modern apparel. You can always be assured CoatTails is carrying the latest and most fashion-forward trends just by looking at the displays as you drive down Ridgeland's Jackson Street.

Opening its doors in 2006, owner Carolyn Voyles wanted a place for every woman in Mississippi to get great fashions previously not sold in the state.

"I have always had a love for fashion. We opened CoatTails because we wanted to offer the people of Mississippi, who have the same love for fashion, a large selection of unique items," she said.

If you cannot decide on the perfect outfit, Voyles suggests asking one of the associates or get an idea from one of the fashion shows playing on one of the multiple flat screen televisions.

"The selection and customer service at CoatTails sets it apart from others," she said. "Our talented staff's ability to help our customers look their absolute best continues to amaze me." —S.M.

CoatTails, 111 West Jackson Street, Ridgeland; 601.853.1313.

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► BEST OF MISSISSIPPI
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BEST PLACE TO FIND GREAT BABY ITEMS

Sweet Dreams Interiors,
 Madison

With a large selection of furniture, bedding, clothing, and toys for any new born, Sweet Dreams Interiors is the destination for all things baby. While cribs and rocking chairs display soft bedding and throws, Sweet Dreams Interiors also offers modern printed baby slings and accessories sure to make any baby's room complete. 1896 Main St. Ste. D, Madison; 601.856.2080.

BONNIE DICKERSON



BEST PLACE TO FIND NEW JEWELRY

Liz Henry, Jackson

Nationally recognized jewelry design house Liz Henry Jewelry in Fondren is a Mississippi treasure. With nods in multiple national magazines and pieces owned by many celebrities, Liz Henry is a great source for fashion-forward jewels. And rest assured that every piece is hand-made and hand-strung. From thin gold chains to cameo earrings, Liz Henry Jewelry is creatively crafted to suit any taste. 2906 N. State St. Suite 101, Jackson; 601.362.8337; www.lizhenryjewels.com.



BEST BRIDAL SHOP

Bridal Path, Jackson

For high fashion bridal designers worthy of New York's fashion week, look no further than the Bridal Path. For the third year in a row, Bridal Path has wowed us with gorgeous designs and a fabulous selection worthy of your special day. 4465 I-55 N. Ste. 104, Jackson; 601.982.8267; www.thebridalpathinc.com . m

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