

# A Grownup Road Trip

9 days of great food, views and blues

By KITTY BEAN YANCEY

• **Remember those** wild road trips of your youth—a beat-up car, greasy spoons, endless miles of interstate? Nostalgia aside, I wanted a grownup road trip. So with my friend Barry Blechman, I planned a nine-day cruise through the South. The guidelines: no chain motels, fast food or long stretches on the freeway.

We were still on a budget, but unlike when we were in our 20s, we researched and made reservations. Then we rented a vehicle in Washington, D.C., where we live, and booked flights home from Louisiana. And off we went!

## **Washington, D.C., to Nashville** 802 MILES

We break up the drive with a stop in Abingdon, Virginia, where we catch a frothy British farce at the Barter Theater (patrons once traded products for tickets). After spending the night in a cushy two-poster bed at the 19th-century Martha Washington Hotel and Spa, we head for Music City. A stay at Nashville's swank Hermitage Hotel is a splurge but near Printers Alley, where a singer scats like Ella at Bourbon Street Blues and Boogie Bar.

In the morning, we tour the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and pretend to cut a demo. We decide Nashville is now as much hip urban as it is Ole Opry.

➤ **Not to be missed:** Cocktails (bacon old-fashioned, anyone?) at the Patterson House.

## **Nashville to Memphis** 212 MILES

After eggs, ham and secret-recipe biscuits at the Loveless Cafe,



**Clockwise from top:** The Loveless Cafe, road trippers Yancey and Blechman, Loveless' hot biscuits and jam, dancers at a zydeco breakfast in Louisiana.

with photos of star patrons lining the walls, we tool down tranquil Natchez Trace Parkway to Memphis' River Inn of Harbor Town. Its rooftop bar offers stunning sunset views. The morning is all about Elvis at Graceland.

➤ **Not to be missed:** Ribs at Rendezvous; blues on Beale Street.

## **Memphis to Natchez, Mississippi** 293 MILES

We hit the "Blues Highway," Highway 61, stopping in Clarksdale, known for its Delta Blues Museum and juke joints. At the Shack Up Inn, we spend \$90 to stay in a simple, renovated sharecropper's shack.

The next day we cut through the countryside to Natchez's Monmouth Historic Inn.

➤ **Not to be missed:** Barbecue and live music at Clarksdale's Ground Zero Blues Club.

## **Natchez to Lafayette, Louisiana** 134 MILES

Son of a gun, they know how to have fun on the bayou. We board a skiff for a Cajun Country Swamp Tour. Gators sun on logs; herons soar. And the food: We gorge on gumbo, sausage and crawfish étouffée. Later we crash at a \$90 apartment listed on Airbnb.

The perfect wrap-up to our grownup trip: breakfast with dancing to music by the Zydeco Bad Boys band in Breaux Bridge.

➤ **Not to be missed:** Bloody Marys at Café Des Amis. ■

*Kitty Bean Yancey is a Washington, D.C.-based travel consultant and writer.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY LOVELESS CAFE; COURTESY ARLEIGH GREENBLAT; COURTESY LOVELESS CAFE; TIM MUELLER; ROUTE-SIGN ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY TEXAS STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES COMMISSION