



The UNIVERSITY of
WEST ALABAMA

Wallet-Friendly Vacation Destinations

After a long semester of classes, study sessions, essays, and tests, most college students are more than ready for a break. Unfortunately, not a lot of college students have a blank check to cover the cost of a quiet getaway to Jamaica or an action-packed week in New York City. But if you're looking for a budget-friendly alternative to help you get refocused, refreshed, and ready to start again next semester, there is some good news.

Central Alabama is within driving distance to the beach, the mountains, and a few big cities, so you can put together a pretty great vacation without breaking the bank. Here are just a few destinations you can reach in a 3- to 5-hour road trip:

Head South to Alabama's Gulf Coast

Let's be honest: You just won't find more beautiful beaches anywhere, not even in Jamaica. The fine, white sand and emerald water are unique to Alabama's Gulf Coast, and while you can certainly find plenty of luxurious places to sleep, eat and play in this tropical paradise, it doesn't have to be expensive. You'll find plenty of hotels in every price range imaginable, plus the option of camping -- along with hiking, fishing and golfing -- at the Gulf State Park. Like hotels, restaurants also run the price gamut from high-end to food trucks. And if you need more to entertain you than walks on the beach and breathtaking sunsets, you'll find miniature golf, parasailing, dolphin cruises and much more.

Head North to Nashville

The home of country music, this central Tennessee town has become the destination for bridal showers from across the nation. If it's your first time to visit, consider a hop-on, hop-off tour that lets you see the city at your own pace. You'll find lots of Southern history here, with President Andrew Jackson's home, the Hermitage, as well as the Greek-Revival Belle Meade plantation. For music lovers, don't miss a chance to visit the Grand Ole Opry (you can get performance tickets starting at \$40), or the Bluebird Cafe. Or catch a minor league baseball game with the Nashville Sound for as little as \$10. Of course, restaurants in every price range abound downtown, including the original Hattie B's (hot chicken at its absolute finest!).

Head East to the Smoky Mountains

If communing with nature is more aligned with your vacation dreams, consider heading east to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Straddling the border between Tennessee and North Carolina, it offers the best of nature's wonders and the last remnants of Southern Appalachian mountain culture. You'll find accommodations ranging from traditional hotels and bed-and-breakfasts to mountain lodges and cabins. Spend your days hiking Clingman's Dome, the highest peak in the Smokies, or take a

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drive through Cades Cove to see the widest variety of original and faithfully restored 18th and 19th century structures in the national park. When you're ready to return to city life, head to Pigeon Forge or Gatlinburg for your pick of restaurants, and the most entertaining Main Street this side of Disney World.

Whether you opt for a day trip closer to home, a long weekend, or an entire week to unwind and relax, you'll find plenty of places to kick back and have a good time on a budget. And no matter where you travel, you can make your money go further by splitting expenses for gas and hotel with a group of friends. Chances are, it'll be cheaper and more fun!