



BEST OF THE SOUTH

TRAVEL AWARDS

Mama taught us not to brag, but it has to be said—there’s no richer, more soulful place than the South. And we can prove it. From boutique hotels to the best hamburger you’ve ever eaten, here are our favorite new sights, sounds, and flavors across the region.

BY JENNIFER V. COLE

WITH BILL ADDISON, GRAHAM AVERILL, RAUL BARRENECHE, ANDREA BENNETT, BELLE BOGGS, CHIP BRANTLEY, TAYLOR BRUCE, KIM CROSS, BEVILLE DARDEN, PAULA DISBROWE, STEPHANIE GRANADA, JENNIFER KOPF, NELLAH BAILEY MCGOUGH, AND CAROLINE MCKENZIE



BEST NEW

BOUTIQUE HOTEL

It took Texas hotelier Liz Lambert 100 days—what she calls “super-speed”—to transform a circa 1914 Mediterranean Revival eyesore into the finest addition to San Antonio’s River Walk in a decade. Welcome to the **Hotel Havana**, a 27-room property where Liz sheds the ranch minimalism and rock-and-roll posh of her Austin hotels for what feels like the glory days of pre-Castro Cuba. Twelve-foot ceilings and master-craftsman woodwork pair with reupholstered armchairs and couches. (Nothing like bloodred patent leather and neon orange wool to catch your eye.) And the city’s dreamiest rum bar casts a spell. But, as with all of Liz’s projects, it’s the onetime attorney’s handpicked nuances that set the hotel apart. Authentic Cuban movie posters. Wrought iron beds. Brightly colored Smeg fridges chockful of local goodies like Mirasol salsa, Mexican Coca-Cola, and Picosos chile peanuts. This is the new San Antonio made from the best of the bygone. havanasanantonio.com or 210/222-2008. Rates from \$149.

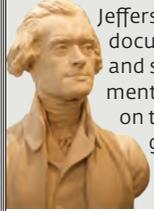


Hotel Havana's main entrance faces Navarro Street in San Antonio.

5 MORE NEW FAVES

Our favorite newcomers, from beach retreats to city stays

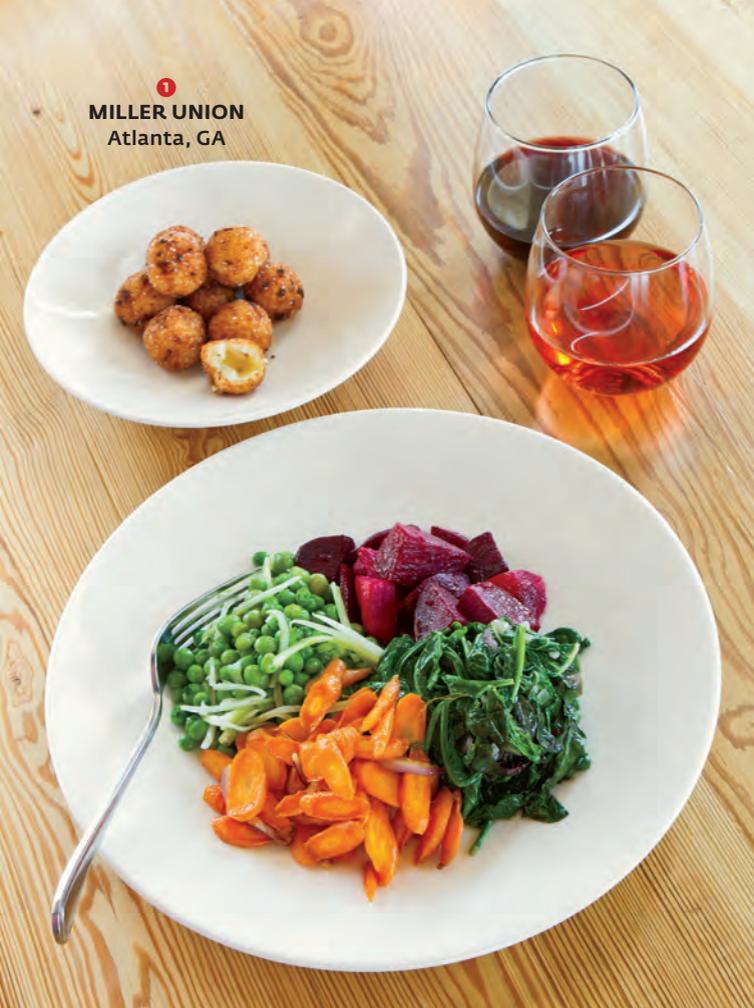
OPPOSITE: LAUREY W. GLENN; THIS PAGE: THE RESTORATION ON KING (2); POSTCARD INN ON THE BEACH; COURTESY THE SEAGATE HOTEL & SPA; ISTOCKPHOTO
THE RITZ-CARLTON: VAN CHAPLIN (2); THE SEAGATE HOTEL & SPA: COURTESY SCOTT WISEMAN/THE SEAGATE HOTEL & SPA; ISTOCKPHOTO
THE JEFFERSON: COURTESY THE JEFFERSON; OYSTER.COM;

	BEST FOR	THE DIGS	YOU'LL LOVE IT IF	DON'T MISS
ROMANCE	 <p>THE RESTORATION ON KING CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA restorationonking.com; 877/221-7202</p>	<p>Historic brownstone's 15 suites blend exposed brick and knotty pine floors with modern conveniences like stainless steel kitchens, iPod docking stations, and in-suite washer and dryer right in the heart of historic downtown. FROM \$260</p>	<p>You want the feel of a sexy Charleston pied-a-terre. Plus: in-room breakfast and nightly wine and cheese.</p> 	<p>The sleek rooftop terrace, an intimate guests-only spot (perfect for an evening cocktail), overlooking King Street (with designer boutiques, fine art galleries, and antiques shops) and the church steeple-spiked downtown panorama.</p>
VALUE	 <p>POSTCARD INN ON THE BEACH ST. PETE BEACH, FLORIDA postcardinn.com; 800/237-8918</p>	<p>The 196-room rehabbed U-shaped Travelodge resurrects 1950s surfer cool with a modern twist. Crisp white bedding, flat-panel TVs, free Wi-Fi, patios with hammocks, and beachy murals make it current. FROM \$99</p>	<p>You're craving style—and a beautiful beach—at a retro price. The hotel, owned by New York restaurant impresario Stephen Hanson, also showcases the barbecue stylings of pitmaster “Big Lou” Elrose and a wide variety of bourbons.</p> 	<p>PCI Beach Bar and Snack Shack. This revamped take on the Swigam, a favorite local beach bar, draws a mix of salty old-timers and hipsters.</p>
CITY STAY	 <p>THE JEFFERSON WASHINGTON, DC jeffersondc.com; 202/448-2300</p>	<p>After a two-year renovation, the 99-room, 1923 Beaux Arts beauty (just four blocks from the White House) isn't new, but it's new to you. Suites have marble entries, velvet couches, and handcrafted chandeliers. FROM \$300</p>	<p>You're a history buff who loves luxury. Look for touches like original Jefferson-signed documents and spa treatments based on the herbs grown at Monticello.</p> 	<p>New in-house restaurant Plume (presided over by former Alain Ducasse chef Damon Gordon) for classic fine dining inspired by Monticello's bounty and executed with a light hand. Plus, an impressive 1,200-bottle wine cellar.</p>
FAMILY	 <p>THE RITZ-CARLTON CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA ritzcarlton.com/charlotte; 704/547-2244</p>	<p>146 eco-luxurious rooms: Bose entertainment systems, flat-panel TVs, rich wood furniture, Frette linens, and floor-to-ceiling windows. You'd never suspect you're at an environmentally focused, LEED-designed property. FROM \$249</p>	<p>You'd like to show your kids they don't have to suffer to love the planet: a rooftop garden, staff uniforms made of recycled plastic bottles, a bike valet, and bedtime stories.</p> 	<p>The beehives on the roof (80,000 honeybees hard at work), and the hotel's honey-pecan ice cream they help produce. “Mother Nature,” takes families on hotel eco-tours and delivers toys and games to kids via wagon.</p>
BEACH	 <p>THE SEAGATE HOTEL & SPA DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA theseagatehotel.com; 561/665-4800</p>	<p>Classic British Colonial meets sporty Palm Beach County: 162 large rooms and suites, outfitted in tropical mahogany woodwork, marble spa baths, crisp white and ecru linens, and sitting areas with wet bars. FROM \$299</p>	<p>You want a beachy, exclusive getaway without paying South Beach prices. Guests get complimentary access to the members-only Seagate Beach Club, with its beachside swimming pool, restaurants, scuba diving, and kayaking.</p>	<p>The aquatic life: a 5,000-gallon lobby aquarium with reef fish, dragon and moray eels, and Technicolor coral; moon jellyfish in the tank at the 245-seat Atlantic Grille.</p> 

BEST NEW

RESTAURANTS

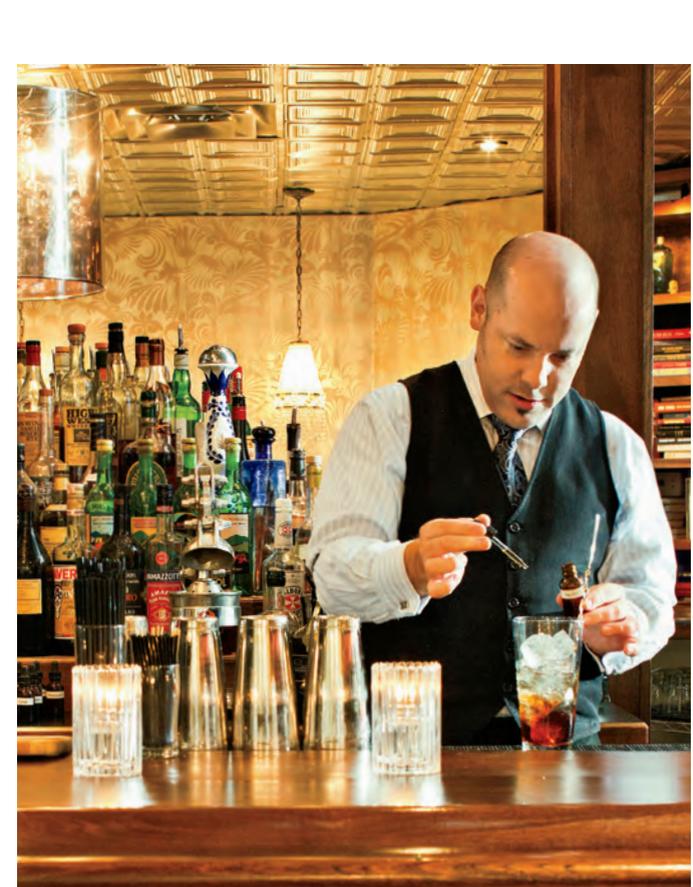
- 1 **MILLER UNION, Atlanta, GA** Modern Southern cooking, stripped of pretension. Here, the luscious regional bounty simply shines. **DON'T-MISS DISH:** Farm egg baked in silken celery cream or the seasonal veggie plate. millerunion.com or 678/733-8550
- 2 **GIGI, Miami, FL** The raucous love child of a down-home Southern diner and a big-city noodle bar. **DON'T-MISS DISH:** Pillowy steamed buns stuffed with shredded pork or brisket. giginow.com or 305/573-1520
- 3 **HUSK, Charleston, SC** The archetype of what chef Sean Brock does best: heirloom Southern food prepared with a connoisseur's sensibility and a deft culinary touch. **DON'T-MISS DISH:** The hyper-local menu changes daily, but the cornbread is constant—crisp, scented with Benton's bacon, and piping hot in a mini cast-iron skillet. huskrestaurant.com or 843/577-2500
- 4 **HAVEN, Houston, TX** Chef Randy Evans's nod to *The Omnivore's Dilemma*—farm-fresh cooking in an eco-conscious environment. (He's even got a cistern for watering the garden out back.) **DON'T-MISS DISH:** Wild boar chili with Redneck Cheddar, a sharp local cheese washed with Texas-brewed Saint Arnold's beer. havenhouston.com or 713/581-6101
- 5 **A MANO, New Orleans, LA** A gustatory celebration of rustic Italian traditions, NOLA-style. **DON'T-MISS DISH:** Housemade salumi or succulent Mississippi rabbit roasted with garlic, olives, and thyme. amanonola.com or 504/208-9280



1
MILLER UNION
Atlanta, GA



2
GIGI
Miami, FL



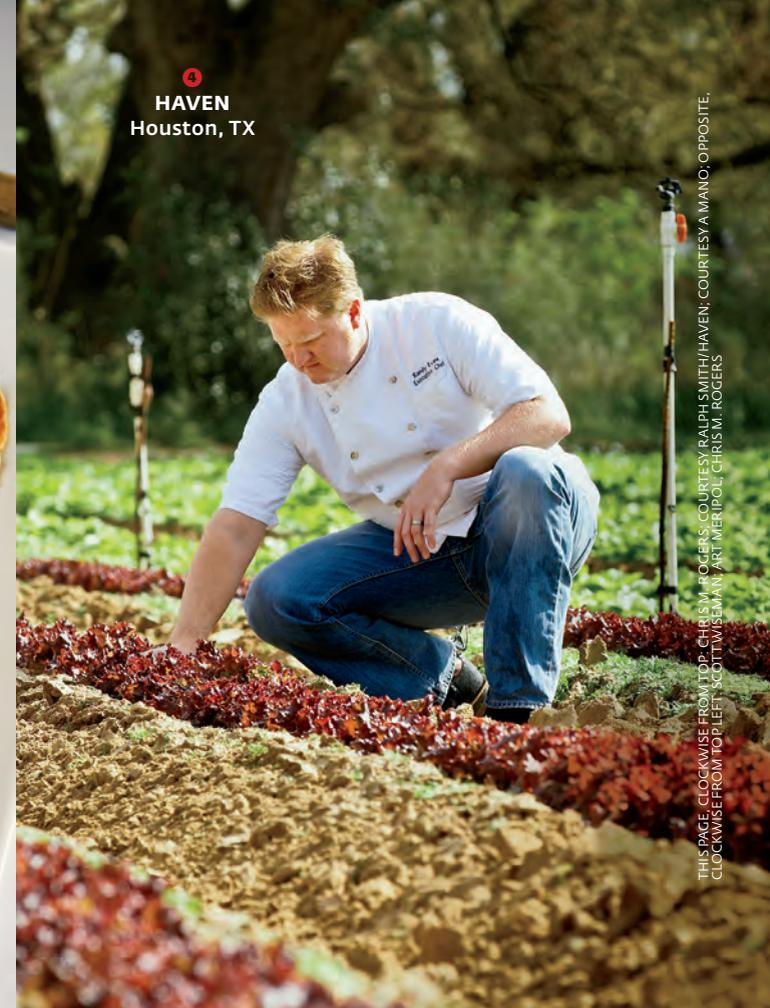
THE SOUTH'S BEST
SPEAKEASIES

WITH THE RISE OF THE CRAFT COCKTAIL MOVEMENT—artisanal ice, house-made infusions, a newfound appreciation for bourbon—it was only a matter of time until we got more suitable digs. Enter the modern speakeasy. The low light and cozy quarters create a Prohibition-era vibe of incognito, while the meticulous bartenders remain entirely conspicuous in their reverence for a well-made drink.

- 1 **THE GIBSON, Washington, D.C.** No signage out front? Check. Unassuming front door? Check. Reservation required? Check. The 48-seat Gibson is a dark, intimate spot along D.C.'s U Street Corridor. You wouldn't call the bartenders "chummy," but watch one spend five minutes building your cocktail—a torched orange peel here, a furious muddle there—and you'll understand the drink is meant to speak for itself. thegibsondc.com or 202/232-2156
- 2 **THE PATTERSON HOUSE, Nashville, TN** Since The Patterson House introduced the modern speakeasy to Nashville in 2009, nowhere in the Deep South has pressed bourbon into such inventive service (e.g., the Bacon Old Fashioned). And the house rules keep it civilized: No seat, no drink. No cell phones. No "shenanigans." thepattersonnashville.com or 615/636-7724
- 3 **B BAR, Miami Beach, FL** Truly underground, the B Bar is accessible only by descending a hidden staircase off the lobby of The Betsy hotel to an unmarked, locked door. Inside it's dusky and tight but plush with maroon banquettes, a reflective vinyl ceiling, and clusters of beautiful people. Bold and bright cocktails, such as the cumin-spiked Sun Virgin, will keep you in the basement all night. bbarmiami.com or 305/531-3934

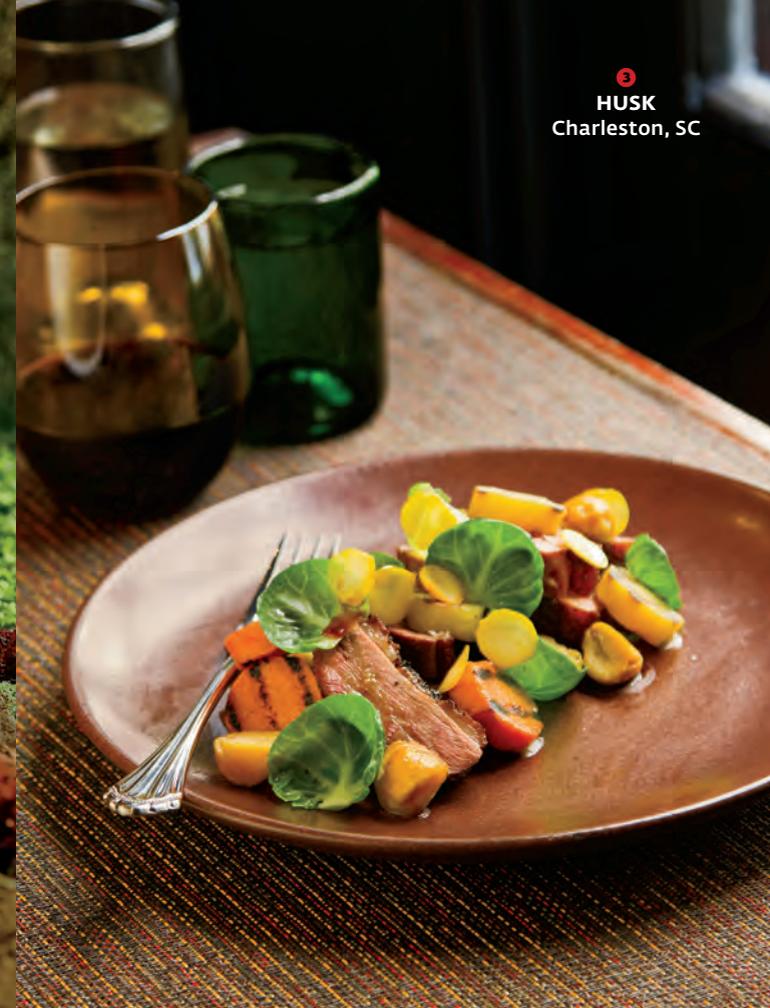


5
A MANO
New Orleans, LA



4
HAVEN
Houston, TX

THIS PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHRIS SMITH; ROGERS. COURTESY RALPH SMITH/HAVEN; COURTESY A MANO; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCOTT WISEMAN, ART MERIPOL, CHRIS M. ROGERS



3
HUSK
Charleston, SC

BEST LEGAL

MOONSHINE

Moonshine, the fiery southern spirit, has gone legit. Long a backwoods legend cloaked in secrecy and shady dealings, the clear (often questionable) hooch was available only if you knew someone who knew someone. Now, this grain distillate sits conspicuously in stores—all taxes paid. Here are five of our favorites to come out of the woodwork. And they actually taste good. **Prichard's Lincoln County Lightning** (prichardsdistillery.com; \$20): With an agave-like aroma, this 90-proof white corn whiskey has a salty, grassy taste. **Buffalo Trace White Dog Mash #1** (buffalotrace.com; \$17): The strongest of the lot, at 125 proof, this raw whiskey delivers an authentic moonshine burn. **Platte Valley Corn Whiskey** (mccormickdistilling.com; \$20): This one's clean, light, and bright, with a subtle pear and vanilla finish. **Virginia Lightning** (virginiamoonsshine.com; \$15): With a chewy sweetness, it's like corn right off the cob. **Junior Johnson's Midnight Moon** (pedmontdistillers.com; \$20): Based on the legendary 'shiner and NASCAR legend's family recipe, it's triple distilled and cut to 80 proof for a smooth, vodka-like sipping spirit.



BEST LATE-NIGHT

BURGER

Every night around 10 p.m. at Atlanta's **HOLEMAN AND FINCH PUBLIC HOUSE**, a staffer reaches behind the crowded bar, retrieves a white bullhorn, and then shouts, "It's burger time!" Astute diners know to arrive at least 45 minutes early to place their order: Holeman serves only 24 burgers each night. It takes time to compose this pedigreed version of a quintessential American hamburger. The kitchen grinds grass-fed beef daily for the thin double patties, toasts the domed bun to a buttery sheen, makes the pickles and ketchup in-house, and crowns the creation, almost patriotically, with a Kraft American single. Southern food revivalist Linton Hopkins, who owns Holeman with several partners, serves the cult beauty late in the evening so the rest of the gastro-pub menu (sublime charcuterie, farm egg and pancetta carbonara, and the city's most progressive cocktail list) won't be bulldozed by its popularity. Not a night owl? The restaurant assembles plenty of burgers for the Sunday brunch. 2277 Peachtree Road, Atlanta; holeman-finch.com or 404/948-1175



1 THE MEAT: Two juicy patties made of a 50-50 mix of rich brisket (for robust flavor) and lean chuck (for balanced texture). The only seasoning? A sprinkling of kosher salt.

2 THE BUN: These hand-shaped mini loaves are a variation on *pain de mie*, a hybrid of brioche and classic sandwich bread that includes milk in the dough for subtle sweetness.

3 THE CHEESE: The staff experimented with Cheddar, Gruyère, and blue before settling on Kraft American cheese because "it melts like no other."

4 THE PICKLE: Frisky pickling spices—mustard seeds, peppercorns, onion strands yellowed with turmeric—often hide among the slices of homemade bread-and-butter pickles.

OPPOSITE: JENNIFER DAVICK, STYLING: ALLISON R. BANKS; THIS PAGE: IAIN BAGWELL, FOOD STYLING: ANGIEMOSIER

BEVERAGES
CLUB
Holeman

THE SOUTH'S BEST
FOOD TRUCKS

Call it Airstream cuisine or meals on wheels: Whimsical food trucks and trailers are the hottest trend in dining. Serving everything from empanadas to fish tacos and frozen pops, these 10 trucks are slinging some of the best chow in the South.



GastroPod Mobile Gourmet in Miami dishes out street eats with a modern twist.

THIS PAGE: SCOTT WISEMAN; OPPOSITE: ROBBIE CAPONETTO

1 BIG TRUCK TACOS, Oklahoma City, OK A cool vibe and creative Mexican street food have created a cult following for this Okie maverick. BTT serves big-flavor tacos such as "The Guardian" (ground bison picadillo with green olives, pico de gallo, and queso fresco), belt-busting burritos, and gorditos. Fresh, flavorful sides, such as scallion-studded rice, black beans, and pickled veggies, and icy bottles of real Mexican Coke keep 'em coming until midnight on Friday and Saturday. 530 NW 23rd Street; bigtrucktacos.com or 405/525-8226

2 EL ULTIMO TACOS, Houston, TX This squeaky-clean truck serves the biggest and best breakfast tacos around, stuffed with scrambled eggs and your choice of bacon, ham, potatoes, *nopalitos* (tender cactus pads), *machacado* (shredded beef), incredible chorizo, or roasted peppers on hand-made corn or flour tortillas. Don't miss the hot green salsa or fresh fruit *aguas frescas*. 7403 Long Point; 713/859-6706

3 GASTROPOD MOBILE GOURMET, Miami, FL Run by an ambitious young chef who did an internship at El Bulli in Spain (one of the world's most inventive restaurants), GastroPod

serves stand-up modern fusion. Try the Old Dirty Dog (smoked short-rib hot dog plunked into a potato bun and topped with sweet/spicy slaw); Bánh Mi Taco with oxtail, trotters, country pâté, and pickled radishes; or a Sloppy José with brisket. *Biscayne Boulevard and 18th Street*; gastropodmiami.com

4 HARVEST MOON GRILLE, Charlotte, NC There is pork and then there is locally raised, slow-roasted pork shank. The difference in such ingredients is what sets this bright orange trailer (owned by Grateful Growers Farm) apart. With a menu that changes weekly, options range from a ratatouille sandwich (grilled eggplant, yellow squash, onion, and zucchini with aioli) to pork gyro on chewy flatbread and crowder pea salad in a red wine vinaigrette. ggfarm.com or 828/234-5182

5 KING OF POPS, Atlanta, GA Hawking exotic frozen fruit bars (made with fresh ingredients from farmers' markets), this whimsical cart holds court in Atlanta's trendy Virginia Highland. With quenching, alluring flavors like chocolate sea salt, blackberry-mojito, pineapple-habañero, and grapefruit-mint, we can see why. *Corner of North Ave. and North Highland, on the*

corner of Buddy's Gas station, right across from Manuel's Tavern; also in Woodruff Park; kingofpops.net

6 LOS DOS HERMANOS, Birmingham, AL Known locally as Taqueria Guzman or simply The Taco Truck, this bare-bones roadside stand serves up authentic Michoacán-style tacos that range from the familiar (chicken) to the exotic (tongue, fried tripe). Be sure to try the *tostadas de ceviche* (made with tilapia and shrimp), a favorite among regulars. 215 West Valley Ave.; 770/519-3011

7 MAS TACOS POR FAVOR, Nashville, TN You gotta love a taco shop in a colorful Winnebago. Owner Teresa Mason Tweets her location every day and serves items like fish tacos with spicy dill yogurt, cast-iron chicken with roasted tomatillo salsa, and quinoa with roasted potato, corn, and jalapeño. Locals also love the *elote* (grilled corn slathered with mayo and cheese) and pineapple-cilantro *agua fresca*. *East Nashville. Check in with Mas Tacos on Twitter (twitter.com/mastacos).*

8 MMMPANADAS, Austin, TX Warm, flaky, and substantial, the gourmet empanadas here are baked

from scratch and packed with hearty combinations like green chile chicken, chopped BBQ beef, and spinach mushroom (with goat cheese and pine nuts). Grab a pineapple-cinnamon, peach cobbler, or s'more variety for dessert (or the next day's breakfast). 4550 Mueller Blvd.; mmppanadas.com or 512/788-2228

9 ONLY BURGER, Durham, NC As the name implies, Only Burger proudly has one focus: perfect patties served on butter-toasted buns. That means your decisions are mercifully simple. Single or double? Chips or fries? Cheese or bacon or both? There's always a line so make like the Duke students and arrive with cold beer. 3710 Shannon Road; onlyburger.com or 919/724-1622

10 PI ON THE SPOT, St. Louis, MO Follow that pizza! Pi on the Spot is a mobile spin-off of the legendary pizzeria known for both its thin crust and deep-dish cornmeal varieties (like "South Side Classico" with mozzarella, sausage, mushrooms, green bell peppers, and onions). The truck serves different types each day. *Locations and menus constantly updated online; restaurantpi.com or 314/727-6633*



The Avett Brothers:
Scott Avett,
Bob Crawford, and
Seth Avett



NEW KINGS OF

SOUTHERN ROCK

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE
Watch "Pretty Girl from Raleigh" at southernliving.com/talesfromtheroad

The Avett Brothers—they're the best thing to happen to Southern rock since "Free Bird." This string-happy trio (brothers Scott and Seth Avett, and Bob Crawford), former indie rockers who found their niche in punk-inflected American folk rock (that's right), know their way around a song.

No strangers to hard work (Scott and Seth grew up baling hay on their family's North Carolina farm), the boys have built their fan base the old-fashioned grassroots way—one jam session, handshake, music festival, and 100-city string of gigs at a time.

We recently spent a day with the boys on the family farm, where Scott still lives in an apartment above the shed behind his parents' house. These guys are rock stars, make no mistake. They sell out concert halls worldwide. Girls scream their names. But after an afternoon with them, shooting hoops on the cracked concrete pad, playing "dress-up" with an endless supply of Scott's hats, goofing off on a rust-lacquered scooter uncovered in the barn, you realize they're still just good ole Carolina boys. Playful at heart. Devoted to their (growing) families. With an almost-umbilical link to this

Piedmont landscape. It's easy to imagine the pre-rock star versions running heels-to-bottom through pastures and building forts in the woods.

And *that's* what sets them apart from other road warriors of this genre. They aren't just rockers with a Southern sound. Their sound (whinnied bluegrass, soulful harmonies, story-rich songwriting to make a country singer swoon, fist-pumping hooks) continues to evolve. *They* are Southern. In all the ways that matter. And did we mention that they rock? Seriously rock.



BEST NEW

MUSIC FESTS

This past year, we've seen a surge in the star power of smaller, localized festivals, with radio's big dogs joining budding young talent on the bills. Here, a few of the hottest new spots on the circuit:

- **The Hangout Beach Music & Arts Festival** in Gulf Shores, Alabama (hangoutmusicfest.com; May 20-22) is a head-bobbing beach-comber's dream. The lineup for the inaugural Hangout included Alison Krauss and John Legend playing just days after last year's devastating oil spill; all artists gave their profits to coastal recovery.
- **Bayou Country Superfest** (bayoucountrysuperfest.com; May 28-29) takes over LSU's Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with the cream of the boot-scootin' crop, such as Kenny Chesney and Tim McGraw.
- **The Blackwater Music Festival** in Live Oak, Florida (blackwatermusicfestival.com; August 26-28) packs 3,000 fans on the banks of the Suwannee River to see rock and pop's next big stars.
- Aspiring talent is also the theme at **Next Big Nashville** (nbnsunmit.com; September 21-24), with more than 150 hot new (and established) acts performing during the one week in Music City when country lends its spotlight to rock, pop, indie, and folk.

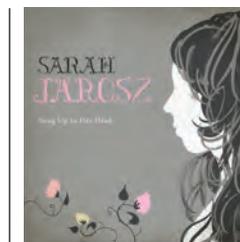
BEST NEW ARTISTS 5 To Download: Southern Standouts for your iPod



DEERHUNTER
Home Base: Atlanta, GA
The Sound: One part psychedelic punk, two parts alternative rock, and a healthy dash of eccentricity. Perfect for skinny jeans-wearing hipsters—and their parents who rocked out in the '60s and '70s.
Breakout Song: "Don't Cry," from the *Halcyon Digest* album, an almost Beatles-esque sound that complements their more left-of-center tracks.



RANDY MONTANA
Home Base: Nashville, TN
The Sound: Country storytelling with a guitar-driven sound. The raspy-voiced Montana, a standout among his "I'm more country than you" peers, breaks the genre's mold but respects its heritage.
Breakout Song: "Like a Cowboy," with poignant lyrics that warn of a lesson often learned the hard way: You can't change a man.



SARAH JAROSZ
Home Base: Wimberley, TX
The Sound: Captivating stories told to a sonic blend of Americana and contemporary bluegrass. This banjo/octave mandolin/guitar/piano-playing songbird is being hailed the next Patty Griffin.
Breakout Song: "Tell Me True," a happy marriage of her songwriting prowess, musicianship, and knack for appealing to any age.



THE SECRET SISTERS
Home Base: Muscle Shoals, AL
The Sound: A musical time machine back to the pure, ethereal country of the 1920s and '30s. Grammy-winning producer T-Bone Burnett (*Crazy Heart*) was so enthralled with the duo, he opened a record label just for them.
Breakout Song: The aching "Tennessee Me," a love song that sounds like it's from the Grand Ole Opry's earliest years.



TRUTH & SALVAGE CO.
Home Base: Los Angeles, by way of Asheville, NC
The Sound: Southern rock. An eclectic mix of rock-and-roll anthems, pop-infused toe-tappers, and ballads—with a touch of twang.
Breakout Song: "Welcome to LA," an infectious tune about Tinseltown, with lyrics reminiscent of vintage Jimmy Buffett and a sound akin to classic Lynyrd Skynyrd.

OPPOSITE: ART MERIPOL; THIS PAGE, TOP: GARY CLARK

BEST NEW MUSEUM

OHR-O'KEEFE MUSEUM OF ART

Biloxi, the Mississippi beach town of funky old motels and shiny new casinos, was never a bastion of innovative architecture. But that changed this past fall with the opening of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art. This \$35 million masterpiece, designed by celebrated architect Frank Gehry, is a mini-village of quirky galleries with billowy metal walls and intentionally crooked angles. It's an ideal backdrop to the heart of the museum's collections: outrageous ceramics by eccentric artist and museum namesake George E. Ohr (1857-1918), the self-professed "Mad Potter of Biloxi."

Gehry designed the galleries to mimic the residential scale of the surrounding East Biloxi neighborhood. "We began to think of the galleries as houses," says Gehry. The result: a modern spin

THE STAFF OF THE OHR-O'KEEFE MUSEUM OF ART poses in front of the "pods," a series of galleries (opening in 2012) that will house ceramics by potter George Ohr.

on traditional domestic architecture, with Gehry interpreting clapboard siding, metal roofs, and even shoofty belvederes with his signature twists and tugs.

Engaging the community took on a new light in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which nearly wiped out the neighborhood and

all but destroyed the unfinished museum complex 18 months before it originally planned to open. Getting the Ohr-O'Keefe rebuilt has energized the renewal of all of East Biloxi. "We never realized we'd be the anchor of post-Katrina rebuilding," says executive director Denny Mecham. And the building continues, with a ceramics gallery and a permanent exhibit of Ohr pots opening next year. Nearly a century after his death, the Mad Potter's spirit is alive and well—and helping turn Biloxi's fortunes around. *386 Beach Blvd.; georgeohr.org or 228/374-5547*

5 MORE MUSEUMS TO VISIT THIS YEAR

- 1 LEVINE MUSEUM OF THE NEW SOUTH, Charlotte, NC.** COURAGE, an exhibit about ending segregation in America's schools.
- 2 MORSE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Winter Park, FL.** Louis Comfort Tiffany's dramatic Daffodil Terrace in a 6,000-square-foot addition.
- 3 NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF ART, Raleigh, NC.** Five thousand years of art in the permanent collection plus rotating exhibits, such as a Norman Rockwell retrospective.
- 4 THE DALÍ MUSEUM, St. Petersburg, FL.** Brand-new \$36 million museum with the largest collection of the surrealist's art outside of his native Spain.
- 5 VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, Richmond, VA.** Pablo Picasso exhibit, with 176 works from the artist's personal collection.

BEST NEW

ARTS VENUE

CONCEIVED BY STARCHITECT SIR Norman Foster, the AT&T Performing Arts Center's **Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House** opened in 2009 to a near-universal bravo. With diamond-cut acoustics and a classic horseshoe-shaped interior, the Winspear seats 2,200 on four wraparound levels laced with gold leaf trim. Suspended above is an LED chandelier, which, with more than 300 acrylic rods, looks like a blown firework in its downward shimmy.

While Dallasites are excited about the type and scale of production the Winspear has made possible, it's the outside of the opera house that really has everyone singing high praises.

The exterior wall of the performance space is covered in solid crimson glass panels, prompting one critic to compare it—in a good way—to a “bright red hatbox,” one that both stands out against the relatively monochromatic downtown and pulls together the city's Arts District into a coherent whole. And a 60-foot-high canopy of aluminum panels fans out from the hall in all directions, screening the grand plaza below from the worst of the Texas sun. Bravo, indeed. 2403 Flora Street, Dallas, TX; dallasperformingarts.org or 214/880-0202



OPERA 101

DRESS THE PART You can never overdress. Opening night and Saturdays tend to be the most formal; otherwise, business attire is standard.

BE ON TIME If you arrive after a show begins, you must wait until intermission to be seated. (The Winspear offers closed-circuit viewing.)

FOLLOW ALONG Operas are sung in the language in which they were written, but many opera houses, including the Winspear, project an English translation above the stage.

BEST NEW

AUTHOR

Belle Boggs, author of *Mattaponi Queen*, shares her thoughts on the unique sense of discovery inherent in Southern travel.

My grandparents' home was in a secluded spot on Lavalette Mountain in West Virginia, but a couple times a year, both of them liked to go. Over the course of their 47-year marriage, they visited every state in the union, steering my grandfather's powder blue Oldsmobile through the hills of Tennessee, the Badlands of South Dakota, the narrow streets of San Francisco. They taught me travel was an accomplishment, something that distinguished you and fed you. (My grandfather was a railroad man; travel was in his blood.) In middle and high school, they made it possible for me to attend far-flung summer programs and even, once, to go to France. Every time I boarded a plane I would carefully and proudly catalog all of my past flights.

Since then, I have traveled enough that I no longer keep a mental list of my plane rides, but I still have vivid memories of the car trips I made with my grandparents along I-95 from Virginia, where I lived with my parents, to Jacksonville, Florida, where they'd retired. We took our time, stopping for dangerous-looking fireworks in South Carolina



BELLE BOGGS, AUTHOR OF MATTAPONI QUEEN, which won the Bakeless Prize in Fiction

and fragrant baskets of peaches and bags of prickly okra in Georgia. I remember my grandmother fluffing her travel-flattened hair and shrugging, saying “No one knows us here,” at IHOPs and Cracker Barrels. I remember the way the landscape changed, the way you could trace that journey through the appearance of longleaf pines, then palmettos, then palm trees, or through the increasingly sandy quality of the soil, which became shockingly white and fine by the time we reached Florida. It's on these trips that I first

understood the South in a panoramic sense, as a living, changing landscape I could examine, admire, and write about. I understood it as a place worthy of travel.

Familiar and strange, old and new, the American South can make it seem as if you are always traveling, always exploring, even when you are driving distance from your home. Go looking for a produce stand and find instead architect Samuel Mockbee's houses made of hay bales and Coke bottles; while waiting for a Georgia Bulldogs game to begin, stumble across “The Tree That Owns Itself.” At a yard sale, casually open a dusty hamper to find it overflowing with frothy debutante dresses.

I love this sense of discovery and expectation, the feeling—so strong in Southern literature—that something surprising, even odd, is just around the corner. But perhaps the strongest reason for travel, and the one I most associate with my grandparents and their yearly trips, is what it reveals about you, removing masks you may not have even known you were wearing. People don't know you there. And for a Southerner, that's no small thing.

BEST BOOKSTORES

5 of our favorite booksellers around the region tell us their picks for the latest must-reads.

ALABAMA BOOKSMITH
Birmingham, AL
alabamabooksmith.com
205/870-4242

Why We Love It: An impressive collection of signed first editions, including hard-to-find collectibles

Must-Read: “Georgia Bottoms by Mark Childress, a beautiful, broke former blue blood works the world's oldest trade.”

MALAPROP'S
Asheville, NC
malaprops.com
800/441-9829

Why We Love It: Their rebel spirit—the “Banned Books” section features oft-prohibited titles.

Must-Read: “Under the Mercy Trees by Heather Newton, about a young man returning to his Southern roots.”

LEMURIA BOOKS
Jackson, MS
lemuriabooks.com
800/366-7619

Why We Love It: The daily blog—watercooler talk for bookworms.

Must-Read: “The Fall of the House of Zeus by Curtis Wilkie, an intense education on Mississippi politics over the past 25 years.”

FAULKNER HOUSE BOOKS
New Orleans, LA
faulknerhouse.net
504/524-2940

Why We Love It: The comprehensive Faulkner collection—works by and about the Mississippi master—plus a veritable compendium of other Southern literary staples (Tennessee Williams, Walker Percy). Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, was written in this very building in 1925 (at age 27), when he lived here.

Must-Read: “Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter by Tom Franklin, a tale of friendship marred by crime and racial strain in a small Mississippi town.”

SUNDOG BOOKS
Seaside, FL
sundogbooks.com
850/231-5481

Why We Love It: An extensive collection on New Urbanism

Must-Read: “The Calliffs of Baghdad, Georgia by Mary Helen Stefaniak, a well-traveled teacher brings tales to a one-room Georgia schoolhouse in 1938.”

OPPOSITE: CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ISTOCKPHOTO; COURTESY MARGOT AND BILL WINSPEAR OPERA HOUSE; THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY RICHARD ALLEN; RALPH ANDERSON; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: PATRICIA BARRETO; STYLING: CAROLINE MURPHY

BEST NEW

DESIGNER

Be still our hearts. It was love at first sight when we spotted Charleston, South Carolina-based **Lucinda Robinson's** airy, feminine line Lucinda Eden in the eponymous King Street boutique (*194 King Street; lucindaeden.com or 843/200-2682*). Our hands-down favorite in a talented crop of Southern designers, Lucinda incorporates classic silhouettes and playful fabrics to unite sophistication and whimsy. "The idea behind my designs is that women ages 16 to 60 can feel comfortable and beautiful in the clothes,"

DESIGNER LUCINDA ROBINSON, foreground, with Junior League provisional members at the Aiken-Rhett House in Charleston, South Carolina

she says. Case in point: her one-size-fits-all Grecian dress, worn to special occasions by everyone from debs to mothers-of-the-bride.

The line officially debuted last March at Charleston Fashion

Week, one of nearly a dozen such events that have popped up in recent years. Fashion weeks now stretch from Austin to Baltimore. Unlike their New York or Milan counterparts, these events forgo couture fashion to highlight up-and-coming local designers. They also put a down-home spin on the traditionally haughty affairs, welcoming more than just socialites and celebrities. (Anyone can get a ticket.) This year, put a little fashionista in your annual girls' trip—and help support local artisans—with a trek to the fashion tents of the South.

SAVE THE DATE

OUR FAVORITE FASHION WEEKS

March 22-26
Charleston, SC
charlestonfashionweek.com; tickets from \$45

April 6-10
Gainesville, FL
gainesvillefashionweek.com; tickets from \$15

August 11-14
Baltimore, MD
baltimoresfashionweek.com; tickets from \$40

August 20-27
Austin, TX

fashionweekaustin.com; kick-off show \$75; many events free

September 29-October 1
Charlotte, NC
charlottencfashionweek.com; tickets from \$35

October 20-23
Alexandria, VA
novafashionweek.com; tickets from \$20

late October
Greenville, SC
fashiongreenville.com; tickets from \$50

FROM LEFT: Hand Painted Silk Dress, \$350; Grecian Full Length, \$575; Swiss Dot Dress in pink, \$425; Grecian Short, \$375; Grecian Tea Length, \$475; Damask, one-of-a-kind original, \$375; Eyelet "Picnic" Dress, \$325; "You Want Me" Dress, \$700; Sari Dress, \$350.

THE SOUTH'S BEST
BLUE JEANS

With a focus on craftsmanship and exceptional fit, Southern-designed and Southern-made jeans are the new denim must-have. Here, our picks for the leaders of the pack

IMOGENE + WILLIE
Nashville, TN
In a gas station-turned-workshop, Matt and Carrie Eddmenson specialize in last-a-lifetime denim with perfectly frayed hems thanks to a looming process called selvedge. *Imogene Stretch*, \$225; *imogeneandwillie.com*

BALDWIN DENIM
Kansas City, MO
Made from coveted indigo-dyed denim, these sleek, sophisticated jeans are so beautiful they'd almost pass for your Sunday best. *The Ten*, \$220; *baldwindenim.com*

RALEIGH DENIM
Raleigh, NC
True to the name, these jeans—from the first pass on the loom to the final hand-stitch—are crafted within a couple of hours of the North Carolina capital. *Union Slim Straight*, \$250; *raleighdenim.com*

LEVI'S WORKWEAR BY BILLY REID
Florence, AL
Fashion phenom Billy Reid adds denim to his Southern gentlemen-inspired label with a limited edition Levi's collaboration. *501-Straight Fit*, \$178; *billyreid.com*

SUCKER
Charleston, SC
Leave it to Charleston to marry seersucker and denim. The result? A dapper but comfortable (think: stretch fit) year-round jean. *Monroe*, \$165; *suckerjeans.com*



THE SOUTH'S BEST
NEW SHOPS

Phoebe Howard's fresh take on traditional Southern decorating shows her rare talent for creating timeless, elegant, and truly livable rooms with her signature mix of restrained patterns, natural textures, and soothing colors. Walk through them one by one in her newest stores, **Max & Company** and **Mrs. Howard**, housed together in one of Charlotte, North Carolina's treasured historic buildings. Like her other shops in Jacksonville and Atlanta, the feeling is more gracious Southern home than retail space. From the curtain hardware to the table settings, you'll find inspiration in each fully decorated room. We love how artwork and accessories pop against monochromatic backgrounds—Phoebe likes to say she's married to beige but has "affairs with color." For her, it's not about the way a room looks, but the way you feel while you're in it. *1001 East Morehead Street, Charlotte, NC*; *phoebehoward.net* or 704/376-8900

5 MORE NEW FAVES

CLOTHING Ann Mashburn, well-edited and sophisticated fashion classics (Atlanta, GA; *annmashburn.com*). **STATIONERY** Rifle, the first bricks-and-mortar location for this stellar note card designer (Winter Park, FL; *riflepaperco.com*). **PROVISIONS** Ellerbe Fine Foods, a foodie's general store (Fort Worth, TX; *ellerbefinefoods.com*). **ARTS & CRAFTS** Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, a modish gift shop that celebrates Virginia artisans (Richmond, VA; *vmfa.museum*). **LIFESTYLE** Bee, proving you don't have to sacrifice style for an eco-sensitive living space (Atlanta, GA; *bee-atlanta.com*).

BEST NEW
SHOPPING STREET

Chattanooga's Warehouse Row has refashioned itself since the 19th century as a Civil War fort, later as a textile warehouse district, and still later as an outlet mall. But we think its latest iteration, an industrial-chic cluster of boutiques, is a keeper.



AMANDA PINSON JEWELRY—Amanda has impeccable taste, a lifelong love of jewelry, and a stunning knack for match-making her loyal followers to the collections from Pomellato, Irene Neuwirth, Temple St. Clair, and others in her ethereally white atelier—a sparkly departure from the industrial character of the building. *amandapinsonjewelry.com*



REVIVAL UNCOMMON GOODS—Co-owner Rodney Simmons has three rules for curating the showroom: 1) never be formulaic, 2) select products from around the world with "an editorial eye," and 3) combine the goods in perfect vignettes. The result? A delightful mash-up of antiques, modern upholstery, and luxury gifts. *revivaluncommongoods.com*



EMBELLISH—As a consultant for Carlisle, a line of women's apparel, Embellish owner Terri Holley discovered she couldn't find the right shoes for her clients, so she opened up a shoe store of her own. This jewel box boutique showcases fashion-forward labels like Cordani, Diane von Furstenberg, Tory Burch, and Robert Clergerie. *embellishshoes.com*



DREW LEWIS—Hip Atlanta menswear purveyor Drew Lewis makes shopping feel like an afternoon in a British gentlemen's club: modern clean lines, dark hardwood floors, vintage bar stools, and stacks of books. Browse the racks of Billy Reid, Jack Spade, and Rag & Bone clothing with your gin-gin mule in hand. Yes, they serve cocktails. *drew-lewis.com*

OPPOSITE: RALPH ANDERSON. STYLING: CAROLINE MURPHY; THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: DEBORAH WHITLAW, LLEWELLYN; ROBBIE CAPONETTO; PAGE 102, TOP TO BOTTOM: KENNAN HARVEY; ROBERT CABLE/GETTY; PAT AND CHUCK BLACK/LEVY ALAMY; BACKGROUND: ISTOCKPHOTO; PAGE 103: SKIP BROWN

BEST SOUTHERN

ADVENTURES

From wildflowers to waterfalls, here are the best new ways to explore the Southern landscape all year long.

SPRING: HIKE THE REVAMPED ROAN MOUNTAIN

Roan Mountain is a collection of rare mile-high bald knobs hugging the North Carolina/Tennessee border with 360-degree views worthy of a Julie Andrews solo. Hike a choice half-mile section of the Appalachian Trail leading to Round Bald, a 5,826-foot-high meadow along Roan with postcard-worthy views. Wildflowers bloom in spring, and June brings flowering purple rhododendron. Roan was closed to day hikers in 2010 for trail rehab and grassland restoration, so the mountain has never looked better. Visit Footsloggers Outfitters in Boone for maps. footsloggers.com or 800/262-5121



SUMMER: GO CASCADING IN SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Want to feel like a kid again? Take a plunge into a cold mountain stream on a hot summer day. Shenandoah Mountain Guides specializes in this sort of time travel with its cascading trips in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. Cascading combines hiking and swimming to get you off the beaten path to some of the most secluded waterfalls. Wade through crystal-clear pools, hop from boulder to boulder, and swim laps at the base of 40-foot cascades. Take it up a notch with a secure rappel off one of those picturesque falls. teamlinkinc.com or 866/455-8672; bikes \$75 per person



FALL: EXPLORE THE NEW RIVER GORGE

Fall colors are stunning when viewed from the ground, but they're downright electrifying when zipping through the leaves 200 feet above terra firma. Ziplines are all the rage in the South (think Costa Rican canopy tour through Southern hardwoods), but West Virginia's Adventures on the Gorge may have the others beat. Why? Location. Stay at one of their cabins near the rim of the 1,000-foot-deep New River Gorge and you can zip through the trees like Tarzan, hike to views of the gorge in fall bloom, even raft the Gauley River, which becomes a white-water paradise during September and October dam release season. onthegorge.com or 800/252-7784; zipline and canopy tour, \$109; full-day rafting trips from \$104



WINTER: CROSS-COUNTRY SKI CANAAN VALLEY

Cross-country skiing may seem so...Nordic...but the South has its own hub of skinny-ski activity. White Grass Touring Center is nestled inside Canaan Valley, West Virginia, a high-elevation dale that received 250 inches of snow last winter. Even more surprising? You don't have to be an Olympic athlete to enjoy this low-key adventure. One lesson from a White Grass pro will have you gliding along gentle forest roads and snow-covered meadows with ease. White Grass maintains 31 miles of trails. Pack a lunch and ski from warming hut to warming hut; they're often stocked with chocolate and whiskey. whitegrass.com or 304/866-4114; Lesson, rental, and use fee: \$45 total

