

LAKE SHORES TO GULF SHORES

ROADTRIPS USA

ILLINOIS - INDIANA - KENTUCKY - TENNESSEE
ALABAMA - MISSISSIPPI - LOUISIANA

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LAKE SHORES TO GULF SHORES



CHICAGO, IL → INDIANAPOLIS, IN

215 mi/346 km

INDIANAPOLIS, IN → LOUISVILLE, KY

135 mi/217 km

LOUISVILLE, KY → BARDSTOWN, KY →

BOWLING GREEN, KY → NASHVILLE, TN

210 mi/337 km

NASHVILLE, TN → FRANKLIN, TN →

MUSCLE SHOALS, AL → HUNTSVILLE, AL

125 MI/201 KM

HUNTSVILLE, AL → BIRMINGHAM, AL → MONTGOMERY, AL

225 mi/362 km

MONTGOMERY, AL → GULF SHORES, AL

210 mi/337 km

GULF SHORES, AL → MOBILE, AL OR BILOXI, MS

53 mi/85 km OR 150 mi/241 km

MOBILE, AL OR BILOXI, MS → NEW ORLEANS, LA

160 mi/257 km OR 120 mi/193 km

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Chicago, Illinois

Day 1: Chicago, Illinois

Spend your day in Chicago starting at Millennium Park to see iconic landmarks like Cloud Gate (“The Bean”), Crown Fountain, and the lush gardens nearby. Just across the street is the Art Institute of Chicago, home to world-class collections of Impressionist and modern art. Afterward, walk a few blocks to the Chicago Cultural Center to admire its grand interiors and the world’s largest Tiffany stained-glass dome. Grab deep-dish pizza for lunch, nearby at Lou Malnati’s, then hop on the CTA to Lincoln Park. Visit the Chicago History Museum to explore exhibits on the Great Chicago Fire, the city’s architecture, and cultural moments. Stroll through Lincoln Park to the free Lincoln Park Zoo and the picturesque Nature Boardwalk, offering peaceful skyline views.

Return downtown in the late afternoon for a scenic walk along the Chicago Riverwalk or take an architecture river cruise to learn the stories behind the skyline. Dine at a riverfront patio, try the West Loop’s food scene, or opt for another slice of deep-dish pizza. In the evening, catch live blues music at Buddy Guy’s Legends or comedy at The Second City, or relax with a drink at a rooftop bar like Cindy’s or ROOF on the Wit. Your day blends art, history, nature, and city vibes, with plenty of walking and easy public transit connections, offering a well-paced yet immersive experience of Chicago’s cultural richness.

Overnight Accommodation: Chicago, Illinois

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Indianapolis, Indiana

Day 2: Chicago, Illinois → Indianapolis, Indiana

Start your journey early from Chicago and head southeast for just over one hour toward Indiana Dunes National Park, where you can enjoy a quick hike along the sandy lakeshore or admire views from Mount Baldy. Continue forty minutes south to Merrillville for a sweet detour at Albanese Candy Factory, then drive another thirty-five minutes to reach Fair Oaks Farms. This large agritourism stop makes it an ideal spot for a lunch break, offering fresh dairy fare, interactive exhibits, and working farm tours. After lunch, head just thirty-five minutes south to Prophetstown State Park near Lafayette, where prairie walks and a living-history farm showcase 1920s agriculture and Native American culture. Just minutes away, visit Tippecanoe Battlefield to explore the historic 1811 battle site and small museum.

From there, it's forty-five minutes to Titus Bakery in Lebanon, a beloved stop for Indiana's best donuts and an afternoon coffee break. Wrap up your trip with the final thirty-minute drive to Indianapolis. Check into your hotel and then head downtown to explore the lively Bottleworks District. Once the historic Coca-Cola bottling plant, this Art Deco landmark now buzzes with energy and creativity. At its heart is the Garage Food Hall, where you can sample global flavors, enjoy a local craft beer, and soak up the city's vibrant atmosphere.

Beyond Bottleworks, Indianapolis offers an extraordinary blend of culture, history, and recreation, boasting more monuments and memorials than any other U.S. city except Washington, D.C. It is also home to the Indianapolis 500, the world's largest single-day sporting event, and White River State Park, the largest urban state park in the country

Overnight Accommodation: Indianapolis, Indiana

Day 3: Indianapolis, Indiana → Louisville, Kentucky

Head forty-five minutes south from Indianapolis to Columbus, IN, known for its world-class modern architecture and public art. Take a short walking tour of the city's iconic buildings, then stop by Zaharakos Ice Cream Parlor, a 1900s soda fountain museum. Continue forty minutes south to Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge near Seymour for a peaceful walk among wetlands and wildlife. Just ten minutes away, explore downtown Seymour, birthplace of John Mellencamp, where you can view the mural tribute and enjoy lunch at a local favorite such as Lolas Modern Kitchen, with its unique seasonal menus.

Next, drive thirty minutes to Scottsburg for a quick treat at Goat Milk Stuff, a farm shop offering cheeses, soaps, and goat milk sweets. An optional detour just fifteen minutes west is Huber's Orchard & Winery in Starlight for wine tastings, orchard views, and fresh bakery goods. Then, continue for about twenty-five minutes to the Falls of the Ohio State Park in Clarksville, where you can walk among 370-million-year-old fossil beds along the river. Just minutes away, visit Schimpff's Confectionery in Jeffersonville, one of America's oldest family-run candy shops, before crossing into Louisville, KY.

Overnight Accommodation: Louisville, Kentucky

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Seymour, Indiana



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Louisville, Kentucky

Day 4: Louisville, Kentucky

Start your day in downtown Louisville with a visit to the Louisville Slugger Museum to see how iconic bats are made, followed by a short walk to the Muhammad Ali Center for an inspiring look at the boxing legend's life and humanitarian legacy. Stroll along Main Street to admire historic architecture, public art, and contemporary galleries like KMAC and the 21c Museum Hotel. For lunch, head to the historic Brown Hotel to try the famous Hot Brown, or stay nearby for Southern comfort food at Doc Crow's or Proof on Main. In the afternoon, visit the Kentucky Derby Museum at Churchill Downs for an immersive look at the history and traditions of America's most famous horse race, including a guided tour of the racetrack.

On your way back downtown, pass through Old Louisville to admire the country's most extensive collection of Victorian-era mansions. Then unwind at Waterfront Park with a stroll or a walk out on the Big Four Bridge for views of the Ohio River. As the sun sets, head to the NuLu district for dinner at Mayan Café, known for its creative menus and local flavor. If time allows, finish your day with a bourbon nightcap at one of the city's many bars or enjoy city views from a rooftop lounge like 8UP.

Overnight Accommodation: Louisville, Kentucky

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Day 5: Louisville, Kentucky → Bardstown, Kentucky → Bowling Green, Kentucky → Nashville, Tennessee

Start your day in Louisville and drive about one hour southeast to Bardstown, the “Bourbon Capital of the World.” Explore My Old Kentucky Home State Park, stroll the historic downtown, and admire the Basilica of St. Joseph. Visit the Oscar Getz Museum of Whiskey History or stop for a tasting at Heaven Hill or Willett distilleries. For a classic Kentucky lunch, dine at the Old Talbott Tavern, a 1700s inn steeped in frontier history. Optional detours nearby include Bernheim Arboretum to see giant forest sculptures or Abraham Lincoln’s Birthplace near Hodgenville. Continue one and a half hours south to Bowling Green, with stops at Dinosaur World or the massive Mammoth Cave.

In Bowling Green, tour the National Corvette Museum to see rare vintage cars and the famous sinkhole exhibit. For a nature break, visit Lost River Cave and take a forty-five-minute boat tour through an underground river steeped in history. Grab fresh-made ice cream at Chaney’s Dairy Barn or sample local barbecue downtown. From Bowling Green, drive the final one hour south to Nashville, arriving by evening.

Overnight Accommodation: Nashville, Tennessee

Day 6: Nashville, Tennessee

Start your day in Nashville with a morning visit to Centennial Park to explore the full-scale replica of the Parthenon and its surrounding gardens. Then head downtown to the Country Music Hall of Fame, where you'll find exhibits on legends like Johnny Cash and modern stars like Garth Brooks, along with Elvis's gold Cadillac and historic instruments. For lunch, stay near Broadway and enjoy Nashville hot chicken at Hattie B's or barbecue at Jack's Bar-B-Que. Afterward, tour the historic Ryman Auditorium and stroll along Lower Broadway, where honky-tonk bars and neon signs line the street, offering free live music even during the day. Walk across the pedestrian bridge for sweeping skyline views and a quiet break by the riverfront.

In the afternoon, take a short drive to Germantown and stroll past restored brick homes or visit Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park to see Tennessee's history in open-air displays. Have dinner at Monell's, a local favorite known for family-style Southern meals like skillet-fried chicken and mac and cheese. End your day with a classic Nashville music experience, either at the Grand Ole Opry for a live multi-artist show or back downtown for a honky-tonk crawl with live bands and dancing.

Overnight Accommodation: Nashville, Tennessee



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Muscle Shoals, Alabama

Day 7: Nashville, Tennessee → Franklin, Tennessee → Muscle Shoals, Alabama → Huntsville, Alabama

Begin your journey from Nashville early with a quick thirty-minute drive south to historic downtown Franklin, TN, where preserved 19th-century buildings house charming boutiques, antique shops, and cafés like Merridee’s Breadbasket. Stroll down Main Street to admire the beautifully restored architecture or stop into local galleries and music shops that celebrate the town’s artistic spirit. History enthusiasts may want to visit the Carter House or Lotz House, both tied to the Battle of Franklin, offering a glimpse into the area’s Civil War heritage. After soaking up the small-town charm and Southern hospitality, continue just over two hours southwest into Alabama’s famed Muscle Shoals region, a pilgrimage site for music lovers. Visit legendary recording landmarks such as Fame Recording Studios and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, where artists like Aretha Franklin, The Rolling Stones, and Lynyrd Skynyrd created some of their greatest hits. The studios now operate as both working spaces and museums, offering a fascinating glimpse into the birthplace of the “Muscle Shoals Sound.” After soaking in the soulful history, drive about an hour and a half east to Huntsville, AL, nicknamed “Rocket City.” Spend the afternoon exploring the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, home to massive Saturn rockets and hands-on exhibits that highlight the nation’s space exploration legacy. If time allows, browse the creative studios and galleries at Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment or unwind with a stroll through the historic Twickenham district. Wrap up your evening with dinner at a local favorite before settling into your hotel.

Overnight Accommodation: Huntsville, Alabama

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Birmingham, Alabama

Day 8: Huntsville, Alabama → Birmingham, Alabama → Montgomery, Alabama

Depart Huntsville in the morning and head about an hour and a half south to Birmingham. Take in panoramic skyline views from Vulcan Park and learn about the city's industrial past at the base of the world's largest cast-iron statue. Explore the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and grab lunch at a local Southern or barbecue favorite downtown. If you are looking to expand your itinerary, Birmingham is a perfect place to add an overnight stay. Upon leaving Birmingham, continue forty minutes south to Montevallo's Orr Park, where whimsical tree carvings line a riverside trail blending folk art and nature. From there, it's a quick fifteen-minute drive to Calera to visit the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, featuring historic train cars and exhibits on Alabama's rail heritage. Next, travel twenty-five minutes to Clanton's Peach Park for homemade peach ice cream or cobbler, then take a short detour to Confederate Memorial Park in Marbury for a glimpse into the state's Civil War history. Drive another twenty-five minutes to Prattville, where you can wander through towering bamboo at Wilderness Park and explore the historic downtown area along Autauga Creek. Make the final twenty-minute drive to Montgomery, arriving in time for a civil rights landmark visit or dinner downtown.

Overnight Accommodation: Montgomery, Alabama

Day 9: Montgomery, Alabama → Gulf Shores, Alabama

Begin your road trip from Montgomery and drive about thirty minutes south on I-65 to Fort Deposit for a sweet stop at Priester's Pecans, a classic roadside shop with Southern pecan candies, pralines, and ice cream. Continue another thirty minutes to Georgiana to visit the Hank Williams Boyhood Home & Museum, where country music fans can explore the early life of the legendary singer. From there, drive twenty minutes to Evergreen and stop at the Conecuh Sausage Company gift shop to sample or take-home Alabama's famous hickory-smoked sausage. Continue for forty minutes to Atmore to visit the Poarch Creek Indians Museum, showcasing the heritage of Alabama's only federally recognized Native American tribe through historical and contemporary exhibits.

Next, drive about twenty minutes to Stockton and enjoy a hearty country lunch at the Stagecoach Café, known for its Southern buffet featuring fried chicken, catfish, and homemade banana pudding. From Stockton, head southeast for the final hour stretch to reach Gulf Shores or Orange Beach by late afternoon. Unwind on the white-sand beaches or explore Gulf State Park or the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge before dinner at a local seafood spot.

Overnight Accommodation: Gulf Shores, Alabama



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Gulf Shores, Alabama



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Orange Beach, Alabama

Day 10: Gulf Shores, Alabama

Start your day in Gulf Shores with a peaceful walk through Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, where the Jeff Friend Trail offers an easy loop through coastal forest and marshland rich with birdlife. Then drive west to Fort Morgan Historic Site, a 19th-century brick fortress that played a key role in the Civil War and overlooks the mouth of Mobile Bay. After exploring the fort's tunnels and scenic ramparts, enjoy a relaxed waterfront lunch at Tacky Jack's 2 at Fort Morgan Marina, where you can savor shrimp po'boys, fried alligator, or a frozen Bushwacker with a view of the bay. In the early afternoon, head back east through Gulf Shores and drive to Orange Beach, stopping at the small but informative Orange Beach History Museum to explore local fishing and Native American heritage.

Continue to the Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach, where you can browse regional art, watch glassblowing at the Hot Shop, and relax by the bay at Waterfront Park. As evening approaches, drive to Perdido Pass and enjoy dinner at The Gulf, a breezy open-air restaurant built from shipping containers right on the beach, offering fresh seafood and Gulf views as boats cruise by. If time allows, end your day with a stroll through The Wharf or catch a sunset from the pier.

Overnight Accommodation: Gulf Shores, Alabama

Biloxi, Mississippi

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Day 11: Gulf Shores, Alabama → Mobile, Alabama or Biloxi, Mississippi

Leaving Gulf Shores or Orange Beach, begin with a 30-minute drive to Alligator Alley in Summerdale, where boardwalks cross a cypress swamp home to hundreds of alligators. Continue 40 minutes west to Fairhope on Mobile Bay, a charming town of galleries, boutiques, and the scenic Fairhope Pier. Another 40 minutes brings you to Mobile's Battleship Memorial Park to tour the WWII-era USS Alabama and USS Drum.

For those overnighting in Mobile, spend the afternoon exploring downtown. Enjoy lunch at Wintzell's Oyster House, stroll Dauphin Street or Bienville Square, then visit the History Museum of Mobile or the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. A side trip to Dauphin Island offers Gulf beaches, birdwatching, and Fort Gaines. In the evening, dine downtown and sample the city's lively nightlife.

If continuing west, drive 50 minutes on I-10 to Ocean Springs, Mississippi, home to the Walter Anderson Museum of Art and a walkable downtown area of shops and cafés. Just 15 minutes farther, Biloxi awaits with its lighthouse, beachfront boardwalk, and fresh seafood restaurants, or try your luck at a waterfront casino before settling in for the night.

**Overnight Accommodation: Biloxi, Mississippi, or
Mobile, Alabama**

Day 12: Mobile, Alabama or Biloxi, Mississippi → New Orleans, Louisiana

Whether starting today in Mobile, AL, or Biloxi, MS, both routes offer a rich mix of history, culture, and scenery on the way to New Orleans. From Mobile, AL, head west about an hour along I-10 to reach Biloxi, a city known for its casinos, seafood, and Gulf Coast heritage. From Biloxi, continue just thirty minutes to Long Beach to marvel at the legendary Friendship Oak, a sprawling live oak believed to be more than 500 years old. A quick twenty-minute drive brings you to Bay St. Louis, where Old Town's galleries, waterfront boutiques, and seaside cafés invite a leisurely stop. If time allows, detour five minutes into Waveland for the Ground Zero Hurricane Museum, a poignant look at resilience after Katrina. Continue for twenty minutes to Pearllington and the INFINITY Science Center, NASA's visitor hub showcasing rockets, Apollo mission artifacts, and a scenic nature boardwalk. Crossing into Louisiana, stop at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge near Irish Bayou for a boardwalk stroll through marshlands, or opt for a 2-hour boat tour of the nearby Honey Island Swamp. Wrap up with a final twenty-minute ride into New Orleans, arriving in time for beignets, Creole cuisine, and live jazz in the French Quarter.

Overnight Accommodation: New Orleans, Louisiana



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New Orleans, Louisiana

Day 13: New Orleans, Louisiana

Start your day in New Orleans with beignets and café au lait at Café du Monde, followed by a relaxed walk through the French Quarter. Explore Jackson Square, St. Louis Cathedral, and Royal Street's art galleries and architecture. Then head to the National WWII Museum in the nearby Warehouse District for a powerful and immersive look at America's role in World War II. For lunch, enjoy a muffuletta or po'boy at Cochon Butcher or Napoleon House. Afterward, ride the St. Charles streetcar to the Garden District to admire 19th-century mansions and stroll leafy streets lined with historic homes. Stop by Magazine Street for coffee, boutique shopping, or a light snack before heading to City Park.

In the late afternoon, visit the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Besthoff Sculpture Garden in City Park, where you'll find everything from Impressionist paintings to modern outdoor sculptures. As evening sets in, enjoy a classic Creole dinner at Brennan's or a casual seafood meal at GW Fins. End your day with live jazz on Frenchmen Street, where small clubs like The Spotted Cat and d.b.a. offer authentic music in a laid-back atmosphere. If you have the energy, take a nighttime stroll down Bourbon Street to experience the city's electric nightlife.

Overnight Accommodation: New Orleans, Louisiana