



TAKE A BITE OF THE BLACK BELT

Drive along scenic backroads and eat your way through the Black Belt's mix of cities and charm-filled small towns to get a true taste of this special place and its cultural character. / *by* JENNIFER STEWART KORNEGAY



Image courtesy of Black Belt Adventures.

The old-fashioned road trip is enjoying renewed popularity in these uncertain times, making now the perfect moment to discover the multi-faceted heritage of a hidden gem, Alabama's Black Belt, which encompasses 23 counties in Central Alabama. Black Belt Adventures (BBA), a tourism marketing organization, is taking advantage of this trend and driving tourism in the region with the creation of the "Flavors of the Black Belt" Trail, a county-by-county list that features a broad range of things to see, do and eat.

The Trail was created to increase Black Belt tourism by promoting the region as an interesting and safe destination for a "backroad trip" and to make exploring the area easy and fun. This swath of fertile land running across the center of Alabama got its name for its rich soil but is also

beloved for its equally rich stories as well as a bounty of locally handcrafted foods, the results of its residents' talents and hard work.

Combine this with the area's history and multiple options for outdoor pursuits among its still-wild and scenic landscapes, and you've got a destination that can attract and excite visitors. And that's exactly why Black Belt Adventures was founded: to draw visitors. "We work in collaboration with regional partners such as the chambers, tourism councils, universities and many others on developing creative promotions to attract visitors to the Black Belt region," said BBA director Pam Swanner. "Tourism is an industry, and the availability and bounty of natural resources that provide a variety of both consumptive and non-consumptive

outdoor recreation and the rich cultural heritage and history become very important tools for generating new dollars. It's especially significant to the Black Belt's economy due to the scarcity of other industries."

The resulting visitor spending brings an economic infusion that boosts residents' quality of life in the form of tax revenues and the creation of employment opportunities. "The tax revenues generated provide economic sustainability for the rural communities as well as jobs for the residents," Swanner said. "The spending of salaries and wages by the residents puts additional dollars into the economy. The State of Alabama and the Education Trust Fund reap benefits from those same tax dollars."



PASSPORT TO FUN

The Flavors Trail Passport Program — an interactive aspect requiring participants to seek out specific goodies and quirky finds while also exploring the region’s cultural and historic sites — adds an extra layer to the Trail’s appeal. “Retail outlets that source the hand-crafted products are reporting visitation by those who are participating in the Flavors Trail Passport program,” Swanner said. “Completion of the Passport’s stamping by at least two retail outlets in each Trail qualifies the visitor to enter into a drawing for a weekend at Lakepoint State Park, a guided fishing trip on Lake Eufaula and a guided eco-tour by canoe.”

The “Flavors of the Black Belt” Trail is Black Belt Adventures’ latest initiative and helps people take a self-directed trip using a guide booklet featuring a smorgasbord of food-focused experiences. The trail puts special emphasis on highlighting restaurants, cafes and the region’s bakers, brewers, coffee roasters, sauce makers, candy creators and more, as well as shops that sell their products.

is making great strides, thanks to its ease of use and its detailed list of diverse discoveries awaiting visitors. “The Flavors Trail introduces another compelling reason to visit the Black Belt,” Swanner said. “Developing a promotional campaign centered around these food and beverage creations spurs visitation and builds awareness of the diversity of tourism assets found in the Black Belt.”

While the initial launch of the Trail was delayed due to COVID-19, so far, the effort

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