

Abbeville: Yatta Abba Yella Fella Tour Road Trip #15

Abbeville [<http://www.cityofabbeville.org>], a small town tucked away in the southeastern corner of Alabama since 1823, was shrinking into obscurity. Thanks in part to the commitment and passion of a man you have seen on television many times, it is being revitalized. Jimmy Rane, the big guy wearing the bright yellow hat and cowboy boots in TV commercials, known as the “Yella Fella,” headed up a posse of business leaders dedicated to saving their hometown. The changes they’ve made are quite striking.

As other merchants and citizens worked to restore Abbeville’s small-town charm, Rane focused his attention on turning an old Standard Oil Filling Station into office space for his company, Great Southern Wood Preserving, Inc. He also made a 1950s-style restaurant named Huggin’ Molly’s a local mainstay and gave many downtown buildings a facelift.

Each April, and at various other times during the year, you can follow the antics of the Yella Fella. You can also meet a “hugging ghost,” see the former home of a civil rights pioneer, and discover the history and heritage of the place Native Americans called “Yatta Abba,” meaning “a grove of dogwood trees.”

Fill 'er Up (or not) at the Old Standard Oil Filling Station

Probably one of the first sites you’ll reach is the **Old Standard Oil Filling Station** on Washington Street. You can’t get gas here nor can you tour the interior of the building. It houses some of the Yella Fella’s company offices. You can, however, pull in and view the exterior, filling up on a slice of Americana when you do.

Be sure to carry a buddy along and have a camera in hand as this still very retro-looking building makes for good conversation and a great photo opportunity.

Downtown Abbeville is where you will see much of the handiwork of Rane. He has lovingly restored many of the storefronts and office buildings, including the facade of the **Archie Theater** where he used to watch western movies on Saturday afternoons. As the founder and CEO of the world’s leading producer of pressure-treated lumber products, Rane never minds slipping into his whimsical Yella Fella cowboy character to promote the history of Abbeville and bring vivid memories to life for a new generation of residents and visitors.

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Experience a Yatta Abba Weekend

Abbeville is enjoyable anytime of the year. However, Yatta Abba weekend in late April provides an even greater reason to visit. During this special spring event, you can spend

time with area artists and craftsmen, hear live music in various venues, take a driving or walking tour of historic homes and churches (held as part of the Yatta Abba experience and the statewide Saturday Walking Tours), see a parade of antique vehicles and sample food provided by local restaurants, all while strolling through the beautiful and historic area nicknamed “the City of Dogwoods.”

In addition to enjoying a variety of activities, you’re invited to take a trip through time at the **Pioneer Cemetery** [<http://www.cityofabbeville.org/community/old-pioneer-cemetery/>] located behind First Baptist Church at 100 Columbia Rd. Re-enactors stationed at the cemetery will entertain you with stories of the area’s early settlers, prominent families and others. You’ll meet brigadier generals and war veterans, and even learn about Abbeville’s own Cinderella. A burial plot at the cemetery bears the name of one Cinderella Phoebe Hutto Epsy. Of course, it’s not a memorial to the Cinderella from the fairytale, but the mere thought of having perhaps the only burial site dedicated to a Cinderella gives Abbeville boasting rights.

The stories from the grave are endless. One marker bears the names of seven children all in one grave. Another tells of a local citizen who lived to be 110 years old, and yet another remembers Abbeville’s real Huggin’ Molly.

Visitors are invited to take a guided tour to see historic homes and churches in the area or walk along lamp-lit sidewalks, where classics from the Big Band era flow from local storefronts and beckon you to explore even more of beautiful and historic Abbeville. On your journey, you’ll discover retail establishments offering great discounts and diverse shopping opportunities, such as **Town Square Shoppes** and **Dogwood Abbey’s**. You’ll also get to meet wonderful people who value friendships and family traditions and are always willing to give you a glimpse of life in their hometown.

Don’t Miss: Unique Dining Experiences

While in Abbeville, be sure to visit **Huggin’ Molly’s Restaurant** [<http://www.hugginmollys.com/>] (129 Kirkland St.; 334-585-7000). Legend has it that the town was once inhabited by a friendly ghost named Molly. She was supposedly seven feet tall and “as big around as a bale of cotton.” As told by the Yella Fella, Molly would walk the city streets at night and if she saw you, she’d chase you down, scream in your ear and give you a huge hug – hence, the name.

You can’t always count on a big hug from Molly, but what locals and visitors have come to count on is getting a cherry Coke, some Molly’s Fingers and a heaping helping of home fries at the restaurant named in her honor. An old-timey soda fountain beckons guests to sit, sip and enjoy. On any given day, you could probably feel the spirit of Molly lurking about, and if it’s left up to Jimmy Rane, you might even spot the Yella Fella dining at the table next to you. Huggin’ Molly’s is open Monday through Saturday, with extended hours for the soda fountain on certain days.

Another dining option and local favorite is **Jimmy's Barbecue and Smokehouse** (103 Kirkland St.; 334-585-0312). This eatery, owned by Jimmy Money, in downtown Abbeville is about as famous for its pizza as it is for its barbecue, if not more so. The restaurant is open Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m., and Sunday, 4-8 p.m.

More To Explore in Abbeville

Before leaving Abbeville, be sure to pull to the side of the road to read and photograph the historic marker (one mile west of U.S. Hwy. 431 on AL Hwy. 10) near the farmstead where **Rosa Parks** lived as child. While many people tend to connect Montgomery, Ala., with the 42-year-old seamstress who made history as the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement in America,” few realize that the little girl born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee spent a short part of her childhood in Henry County.

Parks moved with her family to her grandparents' 260-acre farm on the outskirts of Abbeville shortly after she was born on Feb. 4, 1913. In 1915, she and her mother moved to Pine Level. She married Raymond Parks in 1932. In 1943, she joined her husband as a member of the NAACP. Parks championed her first cause for civil rights when she returned to Abbeville and Henry County in 1944 to investigate the alleged rape and abduction at gunpoint of a young African-American woman by seven white men.

Today, a small rundown wooden house with a battered tin roof in the middle of Abbeville farmland is all that remains of the place that cradled Parks as a baby. The roadside marker, however, serves as a testament to the genteel woman who was not afraid to fight the giants of racism and prejudice in the South. In taking on the case of injustice in Abbeville, Parks was already in the process of launching a movement that would ultimately change the world.

If you have the time, consider adding Dothan or Eufaula to your Yatta Abba Yella Fella tour experience. You just might see the Yella Fella anywhere, as he is well known throughout the Wiregrass region of Alabama and each of these cities is only about a 30-minute drive from Abbeville.

Where To Stay

For overnight accommodations, the Best Western Abbeville Inn [<http://book.bestwestern.com/bestwestern/selectHotel.do>] (1237 U.S. Hwy. 431 S.; 334-585-5060) provides reasonable accommodations for those wishing to experience everything there is to see and do in the local area. For other options, Eufaula boasts beautiful Lakepoint Resort State Park Lodge, several hotels and a bed and breakfast facility. More than 30 hotel accommodations are located in Dothan.

About Abbeville

Abbeville is the county seat of Henry County. It is located in southeastern Alabama in the Wiregrass region and, according to local history, was known as Yatta Abba by the Creek inhabitants. Abbie Creek runs through the town. Future Alabama governor William Calvin Oates established a law practice in the town in 1859. During the Civil War, he raised a company of Abbeville men that fought at Little Round Top in the Battle of Gettysburg. Today, Abbeville is called “the City of Dogwoods” because they still bloom along Abbie Creek and are abundant in many other parts of the city.

Getting There

Abbeville is approximately two hours (89 miles) from Alabama’s capital city of Montgomery. From Montgomery, take U.S. Hwy. 231 S. toward Troy. In Troy, turn left on AL Hwy. 10 and continue to Abbeville.

To share questions or comments about this road trip, please email marilyn.stamps@tourism.alabama.gov [*marilyn.stamps@tourism.alabama.gov*].