

Birmingham: Taking It to the Streets in Five Points South Road Trip #19

(ABOUT BIRMINGHAM)

Birmingham is Alabama's largest city. Rich in history, Birmingham is known for its industrial past and for its role in the Civil Rights Movement. Today, Birmingham is a center for the arts, entertainment, dining and shopping.

Birmingham [<http://birminghamal.org>] is home to great neighborhoods that are filled with a spirit that comes alive when you walk down the streets and step inside the boutiques and quaint restaurants. For this road trip, visit one of the first (if not "the" first) Birmingham neighborhoods, Five Points South. You will want to overnight to experience breakfast, lunch and dinner the next day in restaurants that serve wonderful food and showcase the rich culinary traditions of Alabama's "Magic City."

Five Points South Walk

Tip: This is an approximate one-mile walk around the Five Points South dining and entertainment district. Most of the restaurants and all of the nightlife establishments in this area stay open late, but the shops normally close at 5 p.m.

History and Statues at Five Points

Start your walking tour after you have checked into the Hotel Highland at Five Points South [<http://www.thehotelhighland.com/>] (1023 20th St. S.; 205-933-9555), which began as an art deco-style medical office tower in the 1930s and was first renovated as a hotel in the 1980s or stay at the historic home that is now Cobb Lane Bed and Breakfast [<http://www.cobblanebandb.com/>] (1309 19th St. S.; 205-918-9090). Of course, you can take this walk from any of the downtown accommodations by adjusting your starting point.

You can also start this walking tour from the Five Points South public parking deck at 2012 Magnolia Ave., as it is centrally located to the tour. As you exit the deck, you will immediately see "The Storyteller" fountain that features a figure of a ram wearing human clothes reading to other animals gathered in a circle. Designed by Birmingham artist Frank Fleming, this landmark is intended to convey the deeply rooted Southern tradition of storytelling in a "peaceable kingdom" setting.

Get the best photograph of The Storyteller by standing in front of the fountain with the church directly in background. If taken from other directions, the photo will include cars along the street that will distract from the beauty of the setting.

Look around the Five Points intersection to find the 1934 statue of Brother Bryan kneeling in prayer. James Bryan (1863-1941) conducted large evangelistic and prayer gatherings in Birmingham and across the region but is most loved and remembered for his tireless work to help the homeless, often giving the coat off his back to someone in need. His habit of calling everyone brother or sister got him the name Brother Bryan. Shortly before his death in 1941, the Brother Bryan Mission was formed to continue his work.

The Five Points intersection, for which the area is named, began as a turnaround for horse-drawn trolley cars that later were replaced by electric streetcars. This line was from downtown Birmingham to the city's first suburb called Highlands, which is why a church, restaurant and avenue bear this name. Here, you will see the elegant Highlands United Methodist Church [<http://www.highlandsumc.net>] (1045 S. 20th St.; 205-933-8751) that has been a part of the neighborhood for more than 100 years.

Highlands Bar and Grill has been named one of the top five restaurants in America by the James Beard Foundation for several years.

Record Store and a Carousel Carving School

Less than one-half block from The Storyteller fountain on 11th Avenue as you walk east is one of two Five Points South record stores that will be of interest to music lovers: Renaissance Records (2020 11th Ave., S.; 205-933-8000). Look across the street from Renaissance Records and beyond the parking lot for Highlands Bar and Grill to see the back of the Hassinger Daniels Mansion, one of the few of those left that once lined Highland Avenue. Artist Ira Chaffin has his studio and Carousel Carving School [<http://www.irachaffin sculpture.com/>] (2028 Highland Ave. S.; 205-602-9026) in this historic home.

Don't Miss: The Carved Horses in Hassinger Daniels Mansion

When you walk to the Hassinger Daniels Mansion, make sure you go inside to see the wonderfully carved horses reminiscent of turn-of-the-century carousel. Ask Ira Chaffin to show you his hippogriff, an imaginary carousel animal with a horse's body, wings like Pegasus, a beak

like an eagle's and front legs with claws. Also ask to see the home's original potbellied, iron coal stoker water heater. If time permits, take a short lesson in woodcarving or enroll in a weeklong class. The 1898 mansion is undergoing renovations to become a bed and breakfast so to gain entrance go to lower level of the home, which is by the alley, and look for a sign with two carousel angels. Knock on the door.

Great Restaurants and Beautiful Churches

Rated one of the best restaurants in America, Highlands Bar and Grill

[<http://www.highlandsbarandgrill.com/>] (2011 11th Ave. S.; 205-939-1400) is located across from Renaissance Records, or just a few steps east from The Storyteller fountain. It is owned and operated by award-winning chef Frank Stitt. A signature item on the menu, which consists of a host of culinary delights, is his delicious baked grits, listed on Alabama Tourism's popular "100 Dishes To Eat in Alabama Before You Die" brochure. Highlands Bar and Grill has been named one of the top five restaurants in America by the James Beard Foundation for several years.

Not far from Highlands Bar and Grill is another top restaurant, Hot and Hot Fish Club

[<http://www.hotandhotfishclub.com/>] (2180 11th Court S.; 205-933-5474). Walk the short distance east to the corner of 11th Avenue South and Richard Arrington Boulevard. Across the street at this intersection, 11th Avenue South is ahead, but off to your left; 11th Court is ahead but slightly to your right. Walk up the hill along 11th Court for about 500 yards. Hot and Hot Fish Club will be on the left just before you reach Highland Avenue South. Hot and Hot's chef, Chris Hastings, competed and was the winner on Food Network's show "Iron Chef America." If you are visiting during the summer, be sure to ask for the tomato salad and pickled okra.

Around the corner on Highland Avenue South is Bottega Restaurant and Café

[<http://www.bottegarrestaurant.com/>] (2240 Highland Ave. S.; 205-939-1000), an Italian restaurant housed in a historic limestone building.

Back near the Five Points South fountain, you will find other restaurants that are listed on The Year of Alabama Food website [<http://www.yearofalabamafood.com/>]. You can enjoy pizzas at Cosmo's Pizza (2012 Magnolia Ave.; 205-930-9971), burgers at Chez Fonfon (2007 11th Ave. S.; 205-939-3221), barbecue at Jim 'n Nick's [http://www.jimnnicks.com/location_5_points] (1908 11th Ave. S.; 205-320-1060), and Asian Cuisine and seafood at Ocean [<http://oceanbirmingham.com/ocean/>] (1218 20th St. S.; 205-933-0999). Another popular dining establishment is the Thai restaurant, Surin West [<http://www.surinwest.com/>] (1918 11th Ave. S.; 205-324-1928).

Walk west from The Storyteller fountain on 11th Avenue South to find Charlemagne Record Exchange (1924 ½ 11th Ave. S.; 205-322-5349). Gain entrance to the CD and vinyl record store through a doorway that leads you upstairs. You will see some boutique shops across the street. Continue west on that block and you will pass Surin West and Jim 'n Nick's and end up at an intersection where you will find the more than 120-year-old Southside Baptist Church [<http://www.southsidebirmingham.org/>] with its impressive 25 curved marble steps and six stately columns.

Also at this intersection on 11th Avenue South is the natural grocery and café, Golden Temple Health Foods [<http://goldentemplehealthfoods.com/>] (1901 11th Ave. S.; 205-933-6333). Located in the same building as Golden Temple is the Birmingham Festival Theatre [<http://www.bftonline.org/>] (1901 ½ 11th Ave. S.; 205-933-2383), where plays have been performed since the 1970s. The theater is on the second floor of the building. You enter by going around the corner to the side of the building next to the post office. You will be on 19th Street and at this point walking uphill enough to make a street-level entrance to the upper floor. From the theater, continue walking up the hill on 19th Street South to find St. Mary's-On-the-Highlands Episcopal Church [<http://stmarysoth.org/>] (1910 12th Ave. S.; 205-933-1140), established in 1887.

Interesting Cobb Lane

Southside has its own cobblestone street, Cobb Lane. To find it from St. Mary's-On-the-Highlands, walk east on 12th Avenue South one block to 20th Alley, turn right and walk one more block. Look for the brick-lined lane ahead and slightly to your right. This is Cobb Lane, a street narrow and short enough to make it fun to walk and discover several establishments including the Blue Monkey Lounge [<http://www.bluemonkeylounge.com/>] (1318 Cobb Ln.; 205-933-9222), which claims to be Birmingham's oldest martini bar.

The Cobb Lane Bed and Breakfast [<http://www.cobblanebandb.com/>] (1309 19th St. S.; 205-918-9090), which gets its name from the street, backs up to Cobb Lane and fronts the street around the corner. This B&B is a National Register of Historic Places property that was built in 1898. If this is where you are staying, you are "home." If you checked into The Hotel Highland or parked at the Five Points parking deck, it is a short walk back. Walk to 13th Street and turn right, walk two short blocks to 20th Street South and turn left. Walk two blocks north on 20th Street South to reach the five-point intersection and your beginning point.

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Music and More

On your way back along 20th Street South, you will walk by several establishments that routinely have live music and are listed in Alabama Tourism's "100 Places To Hear Live Music in Alabama:"

[<http://www.yearofalabamamusic.com/venues?utf8=%E2%9C%93&city=Birmingham&genre=>] Courtyard Oyster Bar and Grill Southside (2015 Highland Ave. S.; 205-558-4995), Dave's Pub [<http://www.davespubsouthside.com/>] (1128 20th St. S.; 205-933-4030) and Crush [<http://www.crushbirmingham.com/>] (2001 Highland Ave. S.; 205-202-4006), in the same building where Bell Bottoms and Louie Louie's were once located.

Once you have decided to experience this road trip for yourself, call ahead to the key destinations you wish to visit to make sure they will be open during the time of your visit.

Nearby

You are only a three-minute drive up the hill to Red Mountain and Vulcan Park and Museum [<http://www.visitvulcan.com/>] (1701 Valley View Dr.; 205-933-1409). The view of Birmingham from this park is spectacular and even better if you go up to the pedestal on which the statue to the Roman god of fire and forge, Vulcan, stands. Vulcan is the largest cast iron statue in the world. A tour in the park's museum will explain Birmingham's past iron and steel history.

Many other historic and interesting places to visit are included in the "Taking It to the Streets, Downtown" [<http://www.alabama.travel/road-trips-and-trails/birmingham-taking-it-to-the-streets-downtown/>] walking tour.

Parking in Birmingham

The Birmingham Parking Authority [<http://www.bhamparking.com/>] (205-254-2330) operates 10 parking garages and two surface lots downtown, including the one at Five Points South. Some facilities will require that you have payment in quarters to exit late in the evening when attendants are off duty. There is also metered street parking.

The Blue Line Dart Trolley [http://www.yourcitycenter.com/Live_Play_TakeTheDART.aspx] runs north and south on 20th Street downtown with a turnaround at Cobb Lane on the south end and the Birmingham Civic Center on the north end. The cost is only a quarter. The trolley runs every 10 to 20 minutes Monday through Saturday and every 40 minutes on Sunday. There are trolley stops near the many hotels located on 20th Avenue and near the Cobb Lane B&B. After 5:30 p.m., the trolley alters its north turnaround and passes the Redmont and Tutwiler

hotels. If you ride, don't be alarmed if you pull the cord to request a stop at Five Points South and the trolley continues. Because of the design of the Five Points intersection, the trolley stops are in safe departure points about a block away. There are also two other trolley circle routes, a red and green line, that operate in downtown Birmingham. Go to the Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitor's Bureau [<http://birminghamal.org/>] for complete tourist information (2200 9th Ave. N.; 205-458-8000).

To share questions or comments about this road trip, please email Grey Brennan [grey.brennan@tourism.alabama.gov].