

Fabulous Fall Drives

The Rosenbaum House, Florence, Ala. | Photo by Bob Gathany

3 GREAT DAY TRIPS FROM HUNTSVILLE

BY DIANA LaCHANCE

You don't have time for a vacation but a bubble bath just isn't cutting it when you need to get away for a while. The solution? A day trip to one of the many vibrant little towns within easy driving distance of Huntsville!

To make things easier, **spark** has put together a short list of things to see and places to be in three nearby destinations - Franklin, Tenn.; Florence, Ala.; and Monteagle, Tenn.

Florence, Alabama

Part of The Shoals area, Florence is known as Alabama's Renaissance City. It is home to the University of North Alabama, which gives the city its youthful vibe, but its sophisticated arts scene also makes Florence a magnet for renowned artists and performers.

WHAT TO DO

1. **GO BACK IN TIME.** Each October, Florence hosts the Alabama Renaissance Faire, an immensely popular, free two-day event that recreates the medieval period while combining education and period entertainment. This year it's Oct. 22-23. (www.alarenfaire.org)
2. **TAKE A HOMES TOUR.** Several notable residences can be found in and around Florence, including the Rosenbaum House, built in 1939 by architect Frank Lloyd Wright (www.wrightinalabama.com); the W.C. Handy Home and Museum, birthplace of the "Father of the Blues;" the ruins of the Forks of Cypress, an 1830s Greek revival plantation house; and Pope's Tavern, which served - among many roles - as an inn and hospital in the 1800s.
3. **APPRECIATE THE ARTS.** Pay a visit to the Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts, where you can get passes to all five Florence City Museums (www.kennedydouglasscenter.org). For the 21 and up crowd, the Sam Phillips Music Celebration Oct. 15-16 is an outdoor live music experience in downtown Florence that grows in popularity each year (www.samphillipsmusic.net).

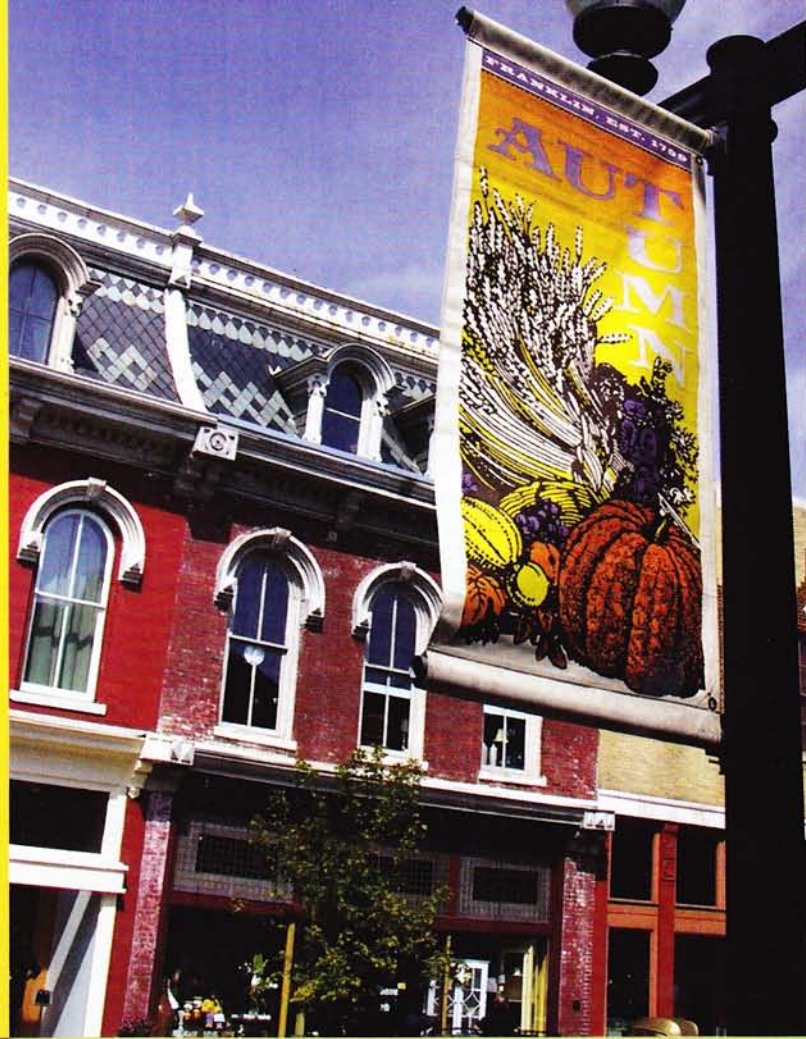
Franklin, Tennessee

The heart of Williamson County, Franklin is known for its rich heritage dating back to the late 1700s. But this town isn't just for history buffs; there's something for everyone, from wine tastings and fiddling competitions to shopping and dining along historic Main Street.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. ATTEND A FESTIVAL.** No matter what time of year you visit, odds are good that Franklin will be having a celebration of some sort. This season, there's the family-friendly Pumpkinfest street festival on Oct. 29, with arts and crafts, live music, a kid's area, and barbecue and chili cook-offs (www.historicfranklin.com). Wine Down Main Street is Nov. 4, a ticketed event featuring wine tasting, live music and shopping in the historic downtown area. (www.winedownmainstreet.com).
- 2. BRUSH UP ON YOUR HISTORY.** Franklin is located on the Tennessee Civil War Trail and is home to the Carter House and Carnton Plantation, which served as a hospital during the bloody 1864 Battle of Franklin and is now the site of the McGavock Confederate Cemetery. Carnton was immortalized in the 2005 *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Widow of the South*.
- 3. SHOP (AND EAT) UNTIL YOU DROP.** Franklin's 15-block historic district is packed with one-of-a-kind shops and eateries (www.historicfranklin.com), with many more housed in the Factory at Franklin, a converted Depression-era factory complex that also features a farmer's market, culinary school and theater (www.factoryatfranklin.com).

Monteagle Winery



Historic Main Street, Franklin, Tenn.

Monteagle, Tennessee

Spanning three counties in the bucolic Cumberland Plateau, Monteagle is both an outdoor lover's paradise and a tranquil escape from big-city living. Rock formations, woodlands, waterfalls and streams attract hikers, fishermen and rock climbers from miles around, while the relaxation-seekers are drawn to Monteagle's cozy inns and quiet, old-time eateries.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. TAKE A HIKE.** Whether you hit the Fiery Gizzard Trail, trek the Savage Gulf, or simply gaze at Greeter Falls, you'll relish the spectacular natural beauty afforded by the South Cumberland State Park (www.friendsofscsra.org).
- 2. WINE AND DINE.** Spend the day sipping Moonlight Lace and Ross Creek Red at the Monteagle Winery (www.monteaglewinery.com), then grab a bite to eat at Papa Ron's, Blue Water Lodge, Pearl's, Blue Chair, Jim Oliver's Smoke House Restaurant, or the five-star High Point Restaurant, a 1929 converted mansion rumored to have been financed by mobster Al Capone.
- 3. FREE YOUR MIND.** Just west of Monteagle sits the University of the South in Sewanee. Dating back to the mid-1800s, this iconic Southern school features beautiful Gothic-style architecture, perfect for an autumn campus stroll. (www.sewanee.edu)

