

Tank Trip



Visitors will discover beautiful scenery as they paddle the Pearl River swamps and wetlands around Barnett Reservoir.

Weekend Respite

Sample the outdoors and culinary offerings in a getaway to Ridgeland.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MELISSA CORBIN

There's a good chance many of you reading this article have recently vowed, "This year, I'm going to take better care of myself." Who among us doesn't annually visit the quest to lose weight, exercise more, or stop smoking?

The folks in Ridgeland, Mississippi, seem to realize good health isn't just a New Year's resolution that lasts until the end of February. Twice named the "Healthiest Hometown of Mississippi" by the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, as well as being tagged last year by Niche.com as one of the healthiest places to live in the state, Ridgeland has an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities. Add in shopping and dining options and Ridgeland becomes a delightful weekend getaway that might actually be good for you.

HAPPY TRAILS FOR YOU

Ridgeland gets its reputation for being a healthy place to live for good reasons. You're likely to spot Mayor Gene McGee



biking alongside the Barnett Reservoir, or as the locals say, The Rez. The city boasts numerous trails, including a multi-use trail that runs through national park land (Natchez Trace Parkway). An almost 10-mile portion of the city's multi-use trail recently was renamed Chisha Foka (Choctaw for among the post oaks) and is popular with bikers, hikers, and joggers. Rent a bike from Bicycle Revolution that offers to deliver and pick up the bike at agreed-upon locations, making it easy for customers to make tracks along the trail.

DROP A LINE

The 50-square-mile reservoir has plenty of fishing and boating opportunities, and a number of outfitters will make it easy to get out on the water. As the temps cool, the bass and crappie become more active. With an average 12-foot depth on The Rez, the fish literally jump into your boat. At least that's the sort of big fish tales you're liable to hear.

However, no Ridgeland native tells a better story than Angi

Webb, owner of Pearl River Kayaks. Webb, an experienced guide, will take you on an excursion exploring ancient Pearl River swamps and wetlands surrounding The Rez. Because the climate is most always conducive to year-round water activities, you'll learn to forage flora, fauna, and fungi as the Choctaw people once did. Explore Pelahatchie Bay near Ridgeland and stop at Goat Island where Billy the goat and his family will greet you.

The Rez also is popular with birding enthusiasts, and this time of year, several hundred American White Pelicans find the lake a perfect pit stop along their migratory route to and from the Gulf of Mexico.

SPOTTING A BARGAIN

If your sport is shopping, don't miss the Bill Waller Craft Center, which is home to the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi. Here you can take classes in glass blowing, weaving, and metal arts, to name a few. The state-of-the-art facility showcases more than 400 juried artisans from across the state in its gallery that's open daily, making it easy for you to shop for those one-of-a-kind treasures to take home.

The upscale outdoor mall, Renaissance at Colony Park, is the place for the latest fashions. If you're into vintage, head to the Antique Mall of the South in Ridgeland, one of central Mississippi's largest collections of antique vendors.

WHERE TO EAT AND SLEEP

Start your day off with classic American fare at Primos Café & Bake Shop that has been in the same family for more than 90 years. For lunch, try organic salads, wraps, and smoothies at Crossroads Café, a great refueling stop before an afternoon of power shopping and trail hopping.

Close the day by catching a gorgeous sunset over The Rez. A perfect vantage point is on the patio deck of Pelican Cove Grill on Harbor Walk Drive. Sip the signature frozen cocktail, Pink Pelican, while catching those intense pink hues of the day's end.

When it's time for dinner, treat yourself at Ely's Restaurant and Bar overlooking Jackson Street. It was one of the best steak house experiences I've had. The 22-ounce Cowboy Ribeye wins for best splurge of the trip hands down.

If seafood is more what you crave, CAET at Renaissance at Colony Park will do the trick. Get the Redfish Anna topped with jumbo lump crab meat. The restaurant also offers a diverse selection of oysters.

After topping off the tank, enjoy a peaceful night's sleep at Ridgeland's newest hotel, Hampton Inn and Suites on Steed Road. After you take advantage of the free hot breakfast, fitness center, and indoor pool, you'll be ready to hit the road for your next adventure wherever the road takes you.

Melissa Corbin is a contributor from Nashville, Tennessee.



Above: Visitors can take classes and shop for crafts at the Bill Waller Craft Center, home of the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi.

Right: Numerous trails can be found around Ridgeland.



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Fascinating exhibits at the museum examine the Civil Rights Movement.

MAKE A SIDE TRIP

Because Ridgeland is just 12 miles north of Jackson, make a stop at the interactive Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson before you head home. You'll discover stories of Mississippians such as Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Vernon Dahmer who were Civil Rights advocates. Each visit proves inspiring, but as we celebrate African American History Month in February, the museum is especially poignant. Located next to the Museum of Mississippi History, the museum features eight interactive galleries that focus on the years 1945-1976 when Mississippi was ground zero for the national Civil Rights Movement.



FOR MORE INFO

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