

Lesson 6

A Tour of the Southeast

What factors have shaped the culture of the Southeast?



Introduction

You are about to visit the Southeast and tour different landmarks of the region. The Southeast has different landforms and bodies of water, and you will get to see many of them. The environment of the Southeast impacts the region's industries. The events that occurred there and the history of the region have influenced its culture.

On this tour, you will get to explore the Everglades in Florida and the critters that live there. You will travel to Virginia and cross the Appalachian Mountains. You will even get to sail down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. At the port, you will see ships load and unload their goods. Your tour will also take you to the Gulf of Mexico. Finally, you will explore two stops in Mississippi and Alabama to learn more about events that shaped our country's history.

As we travel, keep your eyes, ears, and minds wide open. Notice the land and how each place is used in different ways. Think about how the Southeast has changed over time.

How do different landforms and bodies of water impact the Southeast's industries? What factors influence the region's culture?

Airboats are a common type of boat in the Southeast. They allow people to easily travel through swamps.

Vocabulary

bayou
delta
hurricane
mineral
petroleum
plantation
savanna
segregation
strip mine
swamp





Many waterways flow through the flat land of the Everglades. These waterways are home to many different types of plants and animals.

1. Everglades National Park, Florida

The first stop on your tour of the Southeast is the Everglades National Park in Florida. The Everglades is a vast area of swamp, savanna, and forest at the southern tip of Florida. A **swamp** is an area of low land that is covered by water. A **savanna** is a flat grassland. If you look around the Everglades, you can see all the life it supports.

Many different types of animals live in the Everglades. Alligators, crocodiles, turtles, and snakes can all be found here. Deer, bears, panthers, bobcats, otters, and other animals also live in the park. More than 300 kinds of birds live in the Everglades. Scientists and park rangers study the animals that live there.

The Everglades is a tropical area with a hot, humid climate. The area experiences natural disasters, such as wildfires and hurricanes. Wildfires can occur in the winter when it is dry. During the summer, the Everglades get a lot of rain and can experience storms such as hurricanes. A **hurricane** is a dangerous storm with heavy rains and high winds that develops over the ocean and often moves toward land. In 2017, Hurricane Irma hit southern Florida. Its strong winds and heavy rains damaged trees and caused flooding in the Everglades.

Florida is a state with many different environments and cities. As you leave the Everglades, travel up the east coast of Florida to reach your next stop: Cape Canaveral.

2. The John F. Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida

Florida is in a part of the United States called the Sunbelt. The Sunbelt stretches across the country from Florida to California. States in the Sunbelt usually have a warm and sunny climate all year long.

Florida's sunny climate makes it a popular place to visit. People from all over the world travel to Florida for vacation. People who travel for fun are called tourists.

Many tourists visit Florida every year. Some come to enjoy the sunshine and the beaches. In Orlando, Disney World's Magic Kingdom alone has more than 17 million visitors every year.

Many tourists also visit the John F. Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. In 1961, the people at the space center launched Alan Shepard into space in a rocket-propelled ship. He was the first American to travel into space. Today, Cape Canaveral is home to our nation's space shuttles.

Visitors to the Kennedy Space Center learn all about space exploration. They may even see a rocket launch. Launches require so much fuel and energy that you can feel the ground shake as the rocket takes off.



An astronaut greets visitors at the Kennedy Space Center.



Today, you can visit Jamestown. People demonstrate what life was like in the 1600s.

3. Jamestown, Virginia: England's First American Colony

If you travel from Cape Canaveral up the East Coast for about 800 miles, you will reach Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement in America.

In the spring of 1607, settlers from England chose this spot on the James River to build a colony. John Smith, one of their leaders, called it "a very fit place." He was wrong! The land was swampy. Mosquitoes also made life miserable, and they carried a dangerous disease called malaria.

By summer, many people in Jamestown were hungry. The forests around Jamestown were full of food, but the colonists didn't know how to find it. By fall, many of the colonists were dead. For many years, the pattern continued—new colonists arrived during the spring, but by winter, most had died.

However, in 1612, things started to get better. The colonists found a crop that grew well in this area. It was tobacco. Virginia tobacco sold well in England, and the colony began to make money.

In 1619, an English ship arrived in the Virginia colony. The ship held 20 African people who had been enslaved. They had been taken from Africa by force and were sold as workers. They were forced to work the land against their will and treated harshly. By the mid-1600s, many more Africans were enslaved and sold in the American colonies.



4. A Coal Mine in Appalachia

Welcome to Appalachia, your next tour stop. This mountain area is located in the southern part of the Appalachian mountain range. Appalachia has no exact borders. It covers most of West Virginia and parts of several other states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Appalachia is too hilly for large-scale farming, but it is rich in **minerals**. Minerals are natural substances found in rocks. One important mineral is coal. Coal is used to heat homes and produce electricity.

There are underground coal mines in Appalachia. Miners have dug tunnels into the mountains to get at the coal hidden inside. Some coal also comes from **strip mines** like the one you see here. Strip mines are mines that are found on the surface. Miners use heavy machinery to strip away the dirt and rocks covering the coal. Then they use giant shovels to dig the coal out of the mountain.

Appalachia is home to many bluegrass festivals. Bluegrass is the traditional music of Appalachia. It is played on banjos, guitars, and fiddles. The music has a fast beat and often tells stories about life in Appalachia.

Miners dig coal out of strip mines such as this one. Coal is often used to produce electricity for homes and businesses around the United States.

Bluegrass music comes from Appalachia. Banjos, guitars, and fiddles are often used to play bluegrass.



5. Musical Memphis, Tennessee

Your next tour stop is Memphis, Tennessee. Memphis is at the northern end of the Mississippi Delta region. The Mississippi River's delta is in Louisiana, and it juts out into the Gulf of Mexico.

However, it is not a true delta. A true **delta** is a triangle-shaped area at the end of a river. Soil carried downstream by the river slowly builds up, creating a delta. What geographers call the "Mississippi Delta" is really a basin of land mostly in Mississippi that lies between the Mississippi and the Yazoo rivers. The area is laced with rivers, and the land here is fertile and good for farming.

In the early 1800s, the Delta's rich soil attracted cotton planters to this region. At that time, cotton was a valuable crop. Many planters brought with them African people they had enslaved. The enslaved Africans did most of the work of planting and picking cotton.

Enslaved Africans led difficult lives. They worked from sunrise until sundown most days of the year, and they were given no right to choose what they wanted to do. The enslavers thought of African people they enslaved as property and would buy and sell them.

Enslaved Africans would sometimes sing about their sorrows. These sad songs contributed to a musical style that became known as the blues. In 1912, W.C. Handy, an African American songwriter in Memphis, wrote the first popular blues song, which he called "Memphis Blues." Today, Memphis is famous around the world as one of the birthplaces of the blues. Many blues clubs and music festivals are found at Beale Street.

Beale Street is known for its blues clubs and music venues. Blues music originated from the songs Africans who had been enslaved would sing about their sorrows.



6. The French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana

Welcome to New Orleans, the largest city in Louisiana. French colonists built the city near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Here, in the French Quarter, you can still see homes similar to those the original colonists built.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina did serious damage to many parts of New Orleans when it caused the Mississippi River to overflow. Today, the people of New Orleans continue to work hard to restore the city.

Ships from all over the world come to New Orleans. It is an important port in the United States.

New Orleans is also the birthplace of jazz. African American musicians living in the area created this style of music. One of the most famous jazz musicians of all time was Louis Armstrong, known for his great trumpet playing. There are many kinds of jazz. One of the oldest is called Dixieland. You can hear great Dixieland jazz right here in the French Quarter.

Louisiana's nickname is the Bayou State. A **bayou** is a stream flowing through swampy land. In the 1700s, French colonists from Canada settled along Louisiana's bayous. They called themselves Acadians. Over time, the name was shortened to Cajuns.

Cajuns and their way of life used to be hidden away in the bayous. Not anymore! Cajun food is all the rage in New Orleans. It has a lot of seasonings, and it is delicious. Cajun music is even more popular. It's as great as Cajun food—and it makes your toes tap!



These jazz musicians play for tourists in the French Quarter. The French Quarter is the oldest neighborhood in New Orleans.



From shore, you may see oil rigs like this one all along the Gulf of Mexico. They drill for oil that can be used around the United States.

7. An Oil Rig in the Gulf of Mexico

New Orleans is close to the Gulf Coast, or the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico. Many people who live near the Gulf Coast are oil workers. Another name for oil is **petroleum**. The state of Louisiana has more than 58,000 wells that pump petroleum out of the ground.

Petroleum is a thick, black liquid that is found deep in the soil and under the ocean floor. Drilling for oil under the ocean is not easy. Oil workers build huge platforms, called rigs, to hold their machinery. Then they drill down under the sea until they find oil.

Once the oil is pumped out of the earth, it is sent to a factory. This factory is called a refinery, and it turns petroleum into useful products. The product you probably know best is gasoline for cars.

Oil is also used to make petrochemicals, a big word that means “chemicals made from oil.” Petrochemicals are used in all kinds of products, from medicines to plastics. You may be wearing a petrochemical product right now. It might be a button, a zipper, or the soles of your running shoes.

While many cars and products rely on petroleum, oil drilling impacts the environment negatively. In 2010, 4.9 million barrels of oil leaked into the Gulf of Mexico, causing the largest oil spill in history and devastating marine life.

8. A Cotton Plantation in Natchez, Mississippi

The next tour stop is Natchez, Mississippi. In the early 1800s, cotton planters settled this area and built many **plantations**. A plantation is a large farm.

Plantation owners relied on African people they enslaved to grow crops. Many plantation owners became very rich, and they spent their wealth building big plantation homes. In comparison, enslaved people lived in small, basic cabins on the plantation.

In the mid-1800s, many plantation owners wanted to start new plantations on western lands that belonged to the United States. They still wanted to use African people who had been enslaved for labor, but others felt that slavery should not spread into new areas. Who had the right to decide—the federal government or the Southern enslavers?

It took a war to settle this argument. Divided into North and South, Americans fought the American Civil War for four long years. Much of the Southeast was damaged in the fighting, and more than 600,000 people died.

One good thing came out of this terrible war. The North won the Civil War, ending slavery in the United States. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were added to the Bill of Rights to abolish slavery and protect the rights of African Americans.

Natchez was not near most of the fighting, so many of the homes here were not damaged in the war. Today, many tourists visit the plantation homes.

This plantation home is in Natchez, Mississippi. Plantation homes are often very large.



9. Montgomery, Alabama: Birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement

You are looking at the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. This memorial honors 40 Americans who were killed during the civil rights movement.

After the American Civil War, African Americans in the South were free, but many still did not treat them as equal. They were denied many of the rights White citizens had. At the same time, segregation became a way of life. **Segregation** is the separation of people because of race, religion, or gender. Black Americans were often segregated from White Americans. They could not go to school with White people. They could not eat at White lunch counters. Black people couldn't even sit beside White people on a bus.

African Americans were unhappy that they were not being treated equally. For several years, African Americans fought against this unfair treatment. Montgomery was home to one of the important milestones in the struggle to achieve racial equality.

The Civil Rights Memorial shows the names of 40 men and women who were killed during the civil rights movement.





In the 1950s, Black Americans could not sit with White people on buses. The civil rights movement helped end segregation.

In 1955, a minister named Martin Luther King Jr. led a protest against segregation on buses. Before 1955, African Americans could not sit at the front of the bus and had to stand if a White person wanted their seat. African Americans in Montgomery refused to ride the buses until they were treated the same as Whites.

Most African Americans back then did not have cars. They needed the bus to get to their jobs. However, the people of Montgomery chose to walk to work every day for a year rather than ride on a segregated bus. Thanks to all the people who protested using the buses of Montgomery, bus segregation finally ended there. Mother Pollard, one of the people who protested, said, “My feet were tired, but my soul was rested.”