

Explore Georgia's unique museums off the beaten path

Nestled throughout Georgia's charming cities and small towns are museums that highlight the state's rich history, industry and culture. Visitors will find unique items, each with its own story to tell.

Museums are immersive educational experiences waiting to be explored. Join us on a journey off the beaten path through Georgia's museum landscape.

Cedartown Museum of Coca-Cola Memorabilia, Cedartown; (678) 901-0245; cedartowncokemuseum.org

Dan Morris, collector in chief at the Cedartown Museum of Coca-Cola Memorabilia, started collecting at 12 years old, inspired by trips with his grandmother to Moores Soda Fountain, a Cedartown diner that sold Coca-Cola memorabilia.

In 2013, an old Coca-Cola bottling facility that had stopped operating in the 1970s went up for sale.

"We bought the building and then over the next couple of years renovated it and turned it into what it is today," he says.

When visitors walk through the door, they see a 1920s mahogany soda fountain, which came from a pub in

London, as well as Coca-Cola leaded-glass globes on top of syrup dispensers.

"You can get a glass-bottle Coke out of a 1957 vending machine that works," Morris says.

Most visitors can expect to spend one to two hours at the museum, but Coca-Cola enthusiasts can spend a whole day exploring "the biggest publicly displayed collection of Coca-Cola memorabilia in the country," Morris says.

The museum is laid out chronologically from the 1880s to the 1960s, showing the "evolution of Coca-Cola marketing," he says. Coca-Cola corporate teams and the Coca-Cola Collectors Club have visited the museum.

Morris, who describes his career as "antique advertising specialist," purchases new items each week. The rarest item in the museum is also one that many visitors overlook: a leaded-glass Coca-Cola bottle. Morris says there are no more than 10 of these bottles known to exist.

"They were made in the 1920s, and they were expensive to produce," he says.

More information about the museum, including how to support it through donations, is on the website.



Miles Through Time, Clarkesville; (470) 239-0199; milesthroughtime.com

"I've always been into cars," says Sean Mathis, Miles Through Time automotive museum founder.

Mathis' grandfather owned a 1959 Cadillac Coupe DeVille. This iconic car now belongs to Mathis, who spent 10 years trying to buy it from his grandmother.

After taking the Cadillac to car shows, Mathis says he wanted to keep the car in a facility the public could visit. In 2017 a real estate agent showed Mathis an old car dealership in Toccoa. The former dealership became Miles Through Time's first home before the museum relocated to the Old Clarkesville Mill.

The museum's three galleries house Model T Fords, Franklin Mint and Danbury Mint model cars, and a replica of the first Phillips 66 filling station. There are muscle cars, Studebakers and a DeLorean that Mathis restored.



Above and inset: The Cedartown Museum of Coca-Cola Memorabilia has the nation's largest public display of Coca-Cola memorabilia, according to founder Dan Morris.

CEDARTOWN MUSEUM OF COCA-COLA MEMORABILIA

COURTESY SEAN MATHIS



Sean Mathis, founder of Miles Through Time automobile museum in Clarkesville, started his museum in 2017 in a former car dealership.



This life-size wooden sculpture of a 1910 Studebaker electric motor car, created by Gary Russeth, is at Miles Through Time.

“The DeLorean is a car that I spent three years trying to get out of a guy’s barn,” he says. “It was covered in vulture poop and sunk into the ground, and the door handles were broken.”

More than 80 of the vehicles are on loan from owners who’ve become cooperative co-curators. Visitors can expect to see new vehicles with each visit.

Inspired by the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in Dearborn, Mich., Mathis wanted to create a space where anyone could find something interesting.

“There’s an entire telephone exhibit [and] a camera exhibit. There’s an entire cabinet full of first-responder badges, some of them over 100 years old [and] some of them from 9/11,” he says.

Visitors also can spend time shopping at Vintage Garage Antiques, which is the gateway to the museum.

The Miles Through Time website includes information about events and what vehicles currently are on display as well as ways that the public can get involved and support the museum.

Music Memories Museum, Swainsboro; (478) 237-0936; musicmemoriesmuseum.com

Music Memories Museum owner Michael Bright started collecting music memorabilia in the 1980s.

“I have authentic items and personal clothing once owned by over 200 famous singers from the 1950s right up to present day,” he says.

As a Southern gospel singer, Bright says he performed 250 concerts a year from 1997 to 2013.

“I felt like it was time to get off the road,” he says, so in 2013 he took over Main Street Market Antique Mall in Swainsboro.

Bright started curating the museum, which is inside the antique mall, in 2020. There are items from famous musicians spanning multiple genres, including a suit from Hank Williams Jr., a dress from Patsy Cline, a scarf from James Brown and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle that belonged to Gregg Allman. The museum also boasts 40 original costume pieces by tailor Nudie Cohn, who designed elaborate suits for celebrities.

One of the special things about the Music Memories Museum is its location.

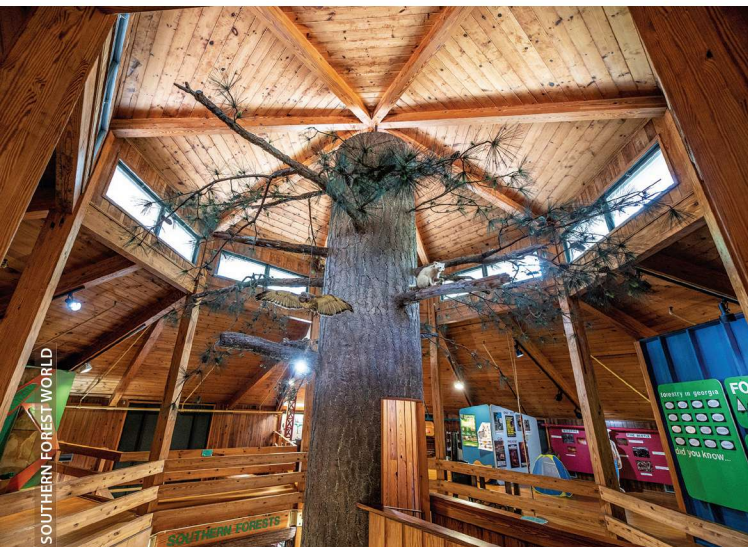
“People don’t realize the history of the music in this town,” Bright says. “Hundreds of country music and

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MICHAEL BRIGHT



This Harley-Davidson motorcycle at the Music Memories Museum in Swainsboro belonged to legendary Southern rock musician Gregg Allman.



A 38-foot fiberglass loblolly pine inside Southern Forest World in Waycross contains a walk-through spiral staircase.

rock 'n' roll singers used to perform right here.”

For example, Hank Williams Jr. gave his first live performance on the Nancy Auditorium stage a mile down the road from the museum.

“I hope that when you come in here you’ll find an item that belonged to maybe one of your favorite singers or brings back a memory in your life,” Bright says.

Visit the museum’s website and follow it on Facebook at fb.com/musicmemoriesmuseum for information about music history as well as items on display.

Southern Forest World, Waycross; (912) 285-4056; southernforestworld.org

Southern Forest World’s director, Bertha Dixon, says that when she asks children where paper products come from, the answer is “Walmart.”

“We want to teach them where they actually come from,” she says. “We use products every day that we don’t realize have wood products in [them].”

For example, wood fibers are used in the manufacturing of plastic products, paper packaging and even cell phone screens.

At Southern Forest World, which opened in 1981, visitors can learn about different types of forests in the United States as well as forestry history and ecology. There’s even a NASA section.

“People don’t realize that [the forestry industry played] a part in going into outer space,” Dixon says, because of pine-wood fibers used in astronauts’ clothing and equipment.

On the grounds outside of the museum are a nature trail, a playground, an amphitheater and a fire tower that once sat at the top of Brasstown Bald, Georgia’s highest point.

Something that brings many visitors to the museum—including filmmakers who have come from England and Japan—is Stuckie the mummified dog.

Stuckie was “a brown-and-white hound dog that had

been trained to run raccoons,” Dixon says. One night the dog got stuck in a hollow chestnut oak. The tannic acid in the tree, combined with the hollow tree’s airflow, mummified Stuckie’s remains over time.

Southern Forest World is celebrating Arbor Day by offering free admission on Feb. 16. Learn more about the exhibits and events and find out how to donate to support the museum at the website. southernforestworld.org

Katie Teems Norris is a New Mexico-based freelance writer and communications professional.

More museums to explore

- **American Prohibition Museum**, Savannah; (912) 551-4054; americanprohibitionmuseum.com
- **Chieftains Museum/Major Ridge Home**, Rome; (762) 327-6124; chieftainsmuseum.org
- **Crawford W. Long Museum**, Jefferson; (706) 367-5307; crawfordlong.org
- **The Dignity Museum**, College Park; info@lovebeyondwalls.org; lovebeyondwalls.org/dignity-museum
- **Eagle Tavern**, Watkinsville; (706) 769-5197; bit.ly/eagletavernwv
- **Elberton Granite Museum**, Elberton; (706) 283-2551; bit.ly/granitemuseum
- **Expedition: Bigfoot! The Sasquatch Museum**, Blue Ridge; (706) 946-2601; expeditionbigfoot.com
- **Fire Museum**, Marietta; (770) 794-5466; bit.ly/mariettafiremuseum
- **Funk Heritage Center**, Waleska; (770) 720-5970; reinhardt.edu/funkheritage
- **Georgia Rural Telephone Museum**, Leslie; (229) 874-4786; grtm.org
- **Georgia State Cotton Museum**, Vienna; (229) 268-2045 or (229) 406-4620; bit.ly/viennacottonmuseum
- **Harlem Museum and Welcome Center**, Harlem; (706) 556-0401; harlemmuseumandwelcomecenter.com
- **Image Doctor’s Camera Museum**, McDonough; (770) 892-0042; camera-museum.org
- **Museum of Design Atlanta (MODA)**, Atlanta; (404) 979-6455; museumofdesign.org
- **Museum of Miniature Chairs**, Stone Mountain; (770) 498-8816; museumofminiaturechairs.com
- **Savannah African Art Museum**, Savannah; (912) 721-7745; savannahafricanartmuseum.org
- **SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion + Film**, Atlanta; (404) 253-3132; scadfash.org
- **Southeastern Quilt and Textile Museum**, Carrollton; (770) 301-2187; sqtmuseum.org
- **Southeastern Railway Museum**, Duluth; (770) 476-2013; train-museum.org
- **St. Simons Lighthouse Museum**, St. Simons Island; (912) 638-4666; bit.ly/stsimonslighthouse
- **Waffle House Museum**, Decatur; (770) 326-7086; wafflehouse.com/museum
- **William Root House**, Marietta; (770) 426-4982; roothousemuseum.com
- **World War II Home Front Museum**, St. Simons Island; (912) 634-7098; bit.ly/homefrontmuseum