

May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011



## It's all about the South

This vacation was about touring the south and exploring its influence on American music and civil rights. Starting in MEMPHIS, we went right to the most famous recording studio in the world. This was the birthplace of Rock and Roll. This was where Soul, Blues and Country music all came together. Great legends recorded some of their first golden hits in a small unassuming room in the Sun Studio Record Shop. Johnny Cash, Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins were instantly recognized as the "Million Dollar Quartet". Today the city of Memphis seems to be stuck in the 50's. Black unemployment is high. Crime is high. Education and advancement are low. The Civil Rights museum displays the horror and inequality of the past. But unfortunately, today much remains unchanged. Still Memphis offers a fascinating look at the Civil Rights Movement and the music that literally changed our country.

Moving along we went to NASHVILLE. These two cities are worlds apart. It takes noticeable pride in its city. This is a honky-tonk town filled with country music and flag waving citizens. This is boot country and the people are proud to be American. Here too, singers have become legends. The Grand Ole Opry is celebrating its eighty-fifth year and still going strong. Music is everywhere and great talent is plentiful. Jam sessions, small cafés, bars, shops....one can hear music almost anywhere. I loved Nashville.

From here we flew to SAVANNAH. Savannah didn't impress me. Well maybe those huge old oak trees did. They alone were worth the trip. Perhaps I expected too much from all the stories I heard about its beauty and charm. But I think....this city is now resting in its past glory. The narrow streets were crowded with traffic, the huge old oak trees canopied most of the parks and kept them eerie looking with hanging moss, the restaurants were touristy and the southern hospitality wasn't really all that noticeable. Yes, there were some great old mansions and wonderful Cajun-Creole architecture but nothing like what I expected. No need to go back there.

We then drove up to South Carolina. HILTON HEAD had wide beaches with flat shore lines and unending distant views. The best thing about it was that we could ride a bike on the sand. We rode for hours! We rode through side streets and saw many big and beautiful homes of the wealthy. But all too many places were gated and inaccessible. CHARLESTON was a wonderful surprise in many ways. Here there was so much to see and do. This is where the Civil War started with the first cannon shot to Fort Sumter. Here the Confederate flag still flies. The ocean waters are warm and coastal plains have all kinds of wildlife....even alligators! Here we found old shack restaurants with really good seafood. Charleston reminds me of the movie, Gone with the Wind. You can see the history of the South, the slave quarters, the cotton gin mills and the plantations. This city is still proud. Many old historic buildings have been restored. The riverfront is lined with beautiful old mansions and the magnolia trees sprinkle the city with the sweet smelling blossoms. Son of a gun, we had such fun....in the bayou. Definitely could have spent longer in Charleston.