



WOW! Auburn/Opelika Spa Named Marriott's Best

The Auburn Marriott Opelika Resort & Spa at Grand National was named Marriott's Best Spa in North America for 2019, according to data recently released by Marriott International. The Spa at Grand National was not the only Alabama spa to receive rave reviews.

While the resort spas in Palm Beach, Las Vegas, Grand Cayman, Hawaii, St. Kitts, Cancun, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami, and Costa Rica certainly are first class, Alabama is home to some of Marriott's best spas throughout various brands.

"All six of our spas across Alabama are known for offering exceptional experiences in spectacular settings," said Tony Davis, president of PCH Hotels and Resorts. "From custom massages and facials, to body and nail treatments, the RTJ Spa Trail features exceptional hospitality and innovative treatments for our guests. They leave our spas relaxed, rested, and rejuvenated." These six spas are part of the hotels/resorts owned by the Retirement Systems of Alabama and associated with the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

The spa rankings are determined by guest surveys

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Alabama State and Local Governments Collect Less Taxes than Any Other State

BY JESSA REID BOLLING, ALABAMA POLITICAL REPORTER

Alabama state and local governments collect less in taxes per resident than any other state in the U.S., according to the latest figures available in the U.S. Census Bureau. That's been true since the early 1990s and partially explains why Alabama struggles to provide the same level of public services as other states.

The Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA), a nonpartisan research group at Samford University, released their 2019 analysis of Alabama's tax system and how it compares with tax systems in other states, based on the latest data available from the U.S. Census Bureau and the

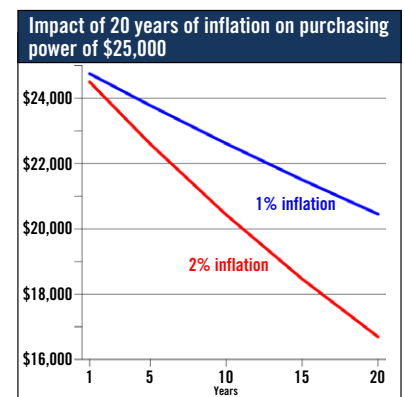
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COLAs

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

National Association of State Retirement Administrators

A COLA is provided to offset or reduce inflation, which erodes the purchasing power of retirement income. As Social Security beneficiaries get an annual COLA as inflation protection, many public pensions provide similar adjustments.



Anyone that is retired on a fixed income clearly understands the serious impact of inflation, as shown above. The Alabama Legislature has responded generously with eighteen retiree Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs), as well as four, one-time retiree bonuses. The RSA or its Boards of Control do not have any authority to give retiree raises. That authority rests with the Legislature.

As I have stated in the past, unfunded retiree COLAs were considered reasonable when a state government pension was funded near 85%, and even more reasonable when the pension was funded at 100%. The RSA did exceed 100% around the year 2000, before the 2008 and 2009 crash that greatly reduced funding levels which resulted in pension funds across America either requiring members to contribute more or have their benefits cut. This decline in funding led to the cut in benefits for RSA members hired after January 1, 2013, and to the infamous PEW Charitable Trusts pushing for additional pension reform in 2016.

The most recent Actuarial Report, as of September 30, 2018, shows the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) at 70.2% funding, the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) at 68.7% funding, and the Judicial Retirement Fund (JRF) at 66.7% funding. Unfunded retiree COLAs would bring these funding levels down and leave the system open for more attacks from outside groups like PEW. Granting a 1% unfunded COLA would increase the RSA's unfunded liability by an estimated \$227.9 million.

Until Alabama gets revenue to solve problems that plague our state, or we find a new revenue source, retiree bonuses may be the only viable option, but only when funding is available. ●

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conducted independently by an outside research firm for Marriott International. Below are the spa rankings for guest satisfaction in North America for 2019:

RANKING OUT OF 71 MARRIOTT PROPERTIES WITH SPAS

1) Spa at Grand National – Opelika

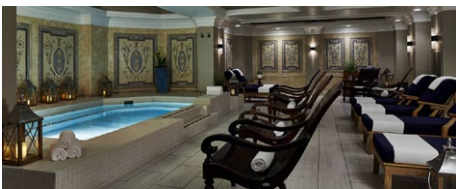


2) Spa at The Shoals – Florence



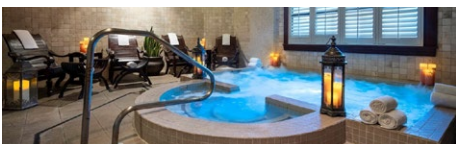
RANKING OUT OF 37 AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION PROPERTIES WITH SPAS

2) Spa at the Grand – Point Clear

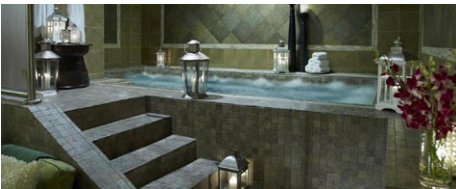


RANKING OUT OF 22 RENAISSANCE HOTELS WITH SPAS

9) Spa at Ross Bridge – Hoover



10) Spa at Montgomery – Montgomery



11) Spa at The Battle House – Mobile



Alabama State and Local Governments Collect Less Taxes than Any Other State

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Bureau of Economic Analysis. Alabama state and local governments collected \$3,370 per resident through property, income, and an array of other taxes, an increase from \$3,203 in 2016, showing a gain of \$167 per capita. Still, Alabama ranked last in the U.S. and last among Southeastern states in state and local tax collections per resident. Among Southeastern states, the average per capita rate was \$3,755, \$385 per resident higher than Alabama. The median value for U.S. states was \$4,682 per capita, \$1,312 more per resident than Alabama.

PARCA's analysis found that IF Alabama's per capita property tax collections matched the average of other Southeastern states:

- State and local governments would have an additional \$2 billion to fund

providing services.

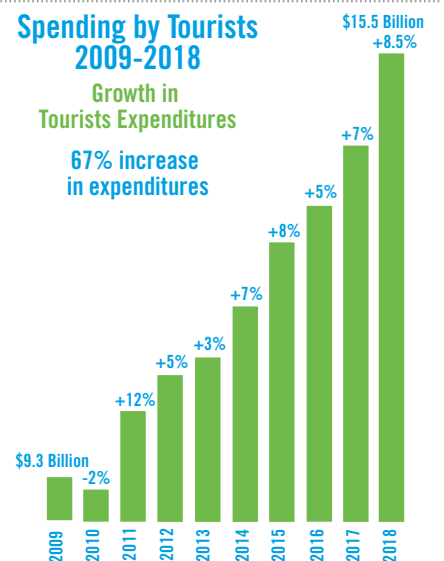
- Alabama's overall tax revenue per capita would rank in the middle of Southeastern states, putting Alabama in front of Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee in per capita collections. Alabama would still fall behind Arkansas, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Kentucky.

As it stands, Alabama's traditional preferences for low property taxes leaves state and local governments more reliant on other taxes for revenue. Alabama has among the highest sales tax rates in the U.S. Alabama also has some of the highest taxes per capita on alcohol and public utilities. Despite those higher rates, Alabama doesn't make up the difference created by its low property tax collections. ●

Tourism Economic Impact 2018 Alabama Tourism Department Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Travelers are estimated to have spent more than \$15.5 billion in 2018, an increase of \$1.2 billion or 8.5 percent, a record total and percentage of growth. It was the second year in a row for growth in excess of one billion dollars in a single year.
- Based on the primary and secondary data, it is estimated that more than 27.7 million people visited the state of Alabama during 2018.
- Visitor expenditures in Alabama have increased by 67 percent in the past decade.
- In 2018, more than \$954 million of state and local tax revenues were generated by travel and tourism activities. Without those taxes, each household in Alabama would have had to pay \$507 in additional taxes to maintain current service levels.
- Travel industry expenditures represent 7.3 percent of Alabama's Gross Domestic Product – overall production – in 2018.
- An estimated 198,891 jobs – 9.7 percent of non-agricultural employment in Alabama – were directly or indirectly attributable to the travel and tourism industry.
- The total impact of the travel and tourism industry on Alabama's earnings in 2018 is estimated to be \$5.4 billion.
- Every \$116,120 of travel-related expenditures creates one direct job in Alabama.
- For every \$1 in Alabama's travel-related expenditures, the state retains a total of \$0.34.



TAXES PAID BY TOURISTS IN 2018 SAVED THE AVERAGE ALABAMA FAMILY \$507

Alabama Success Stories

The Alabama Department of Youth Services

As part of Alabama's public safety continuum for juveniles, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) is the state agency responsible for custody and rehabilitative services to youth committed by the state's juvenile courts. The mission of the Alabama Department of Youth Services is to enhance public safety by holding juvenile offenders accountable through the use of institutional, educational, and community services that balance the rights and needs of victims, communities, courts, and offenders. *DYS believes in and strives to treat all youth in custody as 'one of their own.'*

While *DYS* has seen fewer youth coming into state custody in recent years, these youth are usually more delinquent and have greater needs. In response, and consistent with research in the field, the agency has moved towards a more comprehensive rehabilitative model with the goal of providing the necessary programming and supports needed for youth to successfully integrate back into their communities.

The development and support of facility staff is critical as *DYS* transforms from custody-control models to developmental/relational models to effectuate programming with youth. *DYS* strives to develop and support a responsive employee network that is equipped to provide a safe environment and foster positive relationships with youth, encourage healthy coping and living skills, and provide support and modeling to both youth and fellow staff members.

To help accomplish this, *DYS* recently

enhanced career opportunities for front-line staff by collaborating with the State Personnel Department to restructure and reclassify the *DYS* Youth Service Aid position. The position is now classified into four levels, each with increased responsibility and pay range. Levels are now based on minimum years of experience plus demonstration of leadership and initiative. This restructuring and reclassifying addressed the previous inability for staff who are non-degreed to advance, despite having years of experience and solid work histories with *DYS*. *DYS* has also enhanced training and staff development approaches to support these needed skills.

Also, thanks to the support from our state Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey, the agency received a \$1 million dollar appropriation to expand community-based diversion services. This appropriation was provided to *DYS* to pilot projects that were either evidence-based or identified as a promising practice. The new grant awards prioritized counties that did not have local diversion grants already in place with *DYS*. Ultimately, 11 new programs in 23 counties were awarded funding to provide services in FY 2019. *DYS* currently supports 48 programs in 53 counties across the state.

Over the last three years, *DYS* has utilized a continuous quality improvement program as part of quality assurance at its facilities. The agency established an internal Data Committee to review information currently available through databases to determine areas of strength and gaps in data. The

committee has been engaged in efforts to convert this data into useful informational reports to assist with the planning, evaluation, and management of resources within the agency's divisions, offices, and contracts.



DYS will continue to work toward developing and implementing new initiatives that complement the agency's commitment to systems change, which focuses on accountability and effective practices. *DYS* welcomes the opportunity to hear your suggestions as this agency strives to provide the public with quality services that engage youth and provide an environment and opportunities for educational gains, rehabilitation, and getting youth back on track. To learn more about *DYS*, please visit dys.alabama.gov/.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov. ●

Retirement: Will Your Money Last?

SOURCE: SAMUEL STEBBINS AND MICHAEL B. SAUTER

One of the reasons that many Americans get up and go to work every day is to put some money away for retirement. While Social Security payments can be a helpful financial pillar in retirement, it is hardly enough to cover any but the most basic expenditures.

Based on average annual spending for American seniors and the national average life expectancy at age 65 of 19.4 years, the average American will spend about \$987,000 from retirement age on. And those planning for a more comfortable and financially secure retirement should plan on saving a little more.

Of course, both cost of living and life expectancy vary considerably by state – and

so, too, does the cost of retirement. Using the average annual spending of Americans 65 and older – adjusted at the state level for cost of living and life expectancy – 24/7 Wall St. calculated what it will cost to retire comfortably in each state. All data used in the ranking came from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

ALABAMA

- Est. total retirement spending: \$897,566 (3rd least)
- Avg. cost of living: 13.3% less than avg.
- Avg. monthly homeownership cost for senior citizens: \$357 (5th lowest)

- Pop. 65 and older: 17% (18th highest)

In Alabama, residents need an average of about \$898,000 to live out their retirement years in relative comfort – below the national average of about \$1.1 million. Retirees in Alabama need less retirement savings because of both lower average life expectancy and lower cost of living.

Life expectancy at age 65 in the state is slightly less than 17.7 years, nearly two years below the national average. Additionally, goods and services are about 13% less expensive on average in Alabama than they are nationwide. ●

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ENJOY YOUR WINTER/SPRING A Special Deal FOR RSA MEMBERS

The Battle House,

A Renaissance Hotel—Mobile—\$119

- February 2-5, 9-12, 16-18, 26-29
- March 1-2, 6-9, 22, 26-31
- April 1-3, 9, 12-16, 21-22, 26-30

The Battle House—RSA Spa Package—\$207

- February 3-5, 10-12, 17-18, 26 • March 2, 9, 30-31
- April 1, 13-15, 21-22, 27-29

The Renaissance Riverview Plaza—Mobile—\$109

- February 1, 9-11, 16-18, 26-27
- March 1-5, 8, 22-24, 29 • April 8-9, 12-13, 23, 29

Grand Hotel—\$127 plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-9, 12-13, 16-20, 23-29
- March 1-3, 11-12, 15-18, 22-23, 29
- April 1, 12-13, 19-20, 26-29

Grand Hotel—RSA Golf Package—\$199

plus a 15% resort fee —Promotional code—R2A

Includes: Deluxe Room, One Round of Golf for Two People.
Call for Tee Times after booking package

- February 1-9, 12-13, 16-20, 23-29
- March 1-3, 11-12, 15-18, 22-23, 29
- April 1, 12-13, 19-20, 26-29

Grand Hotel—RSA Spa Package—\$259

plus a 15% resort fee

- February 1-9, 12-13, 16-20, 23-29
- March 1-3, 11-12, 15-18, 22-23, 29
- April 1, 12-13, 19-20, 26-29

Marriott Shoals—Florence—\$109

- February 2-3, 9, 16-18, 20, 23, 27
- March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 • April 5, 12, 19, 26

Marriott Shoals—RSA Spa Package—\$210

- February 2, 9, 16, 23 • March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
- April 5, 12, 19, 26

Renaissance Ross Bridge—Hoover—\$119

- February 1-10, 16-17, 20-23, 28-29
- March 1-3, 8-15, 17-31 • April 1, 5-12, 15-22, 26-29

Ross Bridge—RSA Spa Package—\$223

- February 2-5, 9-10, 16-17, 23
- March 1-3, 8-11, 15, 17-18, 22-25, 29-31
- April 1, 5-8, 12, 15, 19-22, 26-28

Auburn/Opelika Marriott—\$109

- February 1-3, 6-13, 16, 23-29
- March 4-5, 12-19, 22-26, 29-30
- April 5-9, 12-16, 19-23

Auburn/Opelika Marriott—RSA Spa Package—\$201

- February 2-3, 6, 9-13, 16, 23-27
- March 4-5, 12, 15-19, 22-26, 29-30
- April 5-9, 12-16, 19-23

Prattville Marriott—\$89

- February 2, 9, 23 • March 8, 22, 29
- April 5, 10-12, 19, 26

Renaissance Montgomery—\$119

- February 2 • March 1, 22-23, 29-31 • April 9-12

Renaissance Montgomery—RSA Spa Package—\$209

- February N/A • March 31 • April 9-11

Specific room requests may require additional charge.

Rates available the 1st of the month and are not applicable to groups.

800-228-9290 Ask for RSA rate. **Promotional Code: R2A** on www.rsa-al.gov
Book Online and Save RSA \$4.

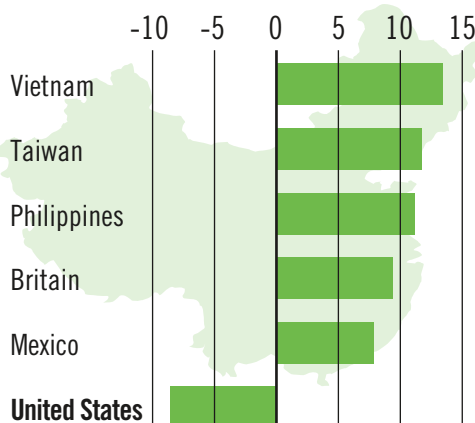
Member Hotel
Discounts Webpage



Vice Chair James Fibbe delivers the Oath of Office to new ERS Board Members, Lindsey Ward – Active State Employee, and Lisa Statum – Active Local Employee.

China Exports

Chinese exports to selected countries, % change 12 months to Oct 2019, compared same period a year earlier



Census Bureau; ITC Tradeweb



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