

Tennessee River Freshwater Pearl Museum • Farm • Tour

Tours • Museum • Pearl Jewelry Showroom & Gift Shop Open Year Around

G·R·O·U·P T·O·U·R·S

Groups Require Reservations

Host Location:

Birdsong Resort • Marina • Campground
Exit 133 off I-40
Camden, (West) Tennessee

Variety of Tour Packages

Witness

a remarkable iridescent product of nature as it emerges from the indigenous Washboard mussel. Tennessee's Official State Gem – the freshwater pearl – is rarely found naturally from these living animals, but grown at the only freshwater pearl-culturing farm operation in the North American continent. The organic gem stone-culturing operation is nestled in the pristine embayment of Birdsong Creek – just off the scenic Tennessee River's beautiful Kentucky Lake – in Camden, West Tennessee, 9 miles north of Interstate 40 at Exit 133/Birdsong Exit. The Tennessee River Freshwater Pearl Museum, Farm, Tour and Jewelry Showroom is located at Birdsong Resort and Marina.

Explore

one of eight pilot farm locations originally founded by John R. Latendresse (1925–2000) in 1979. All productivity measures eventually narrowed to this one location in Birdsong Creek. John and his wife Chessie, had attempted for many years to adapt the Japanese technique to our native waters and species of mussels. 1984 was the first year a productive harvest was turned.

Discover

North America's only freshwater pearl-culturing facility – the official historical site of pearl culturing for the State of Tennessee (enacted 2004), growing the official State of Tennessee gem (enacted 1979) – the freshwater pearl.



Experience!

The Tennessee River Freshwater Pearl Museum • Farm • Tour

Choose from a variety of tour packages including "walk-in's," tour bus "tweeners," our 3-5 hour guided "full" tour, a 1-2 hour "mini" tour, a range of school-age children's tours, even a bus driver's special "Drop n' Shop."

Guided tours require advance reservations and a group of fifteen or more to book dates. Individuals or small groups may join pre-existing bookings.



PEARLS
Tennessee River
Freshwater

The "Full" Tour

Call for price
Duration: 3-5 hours

Orientation - addresses the history of freshwater pearls of the world; the history of the only freshwater pearl-culturing operation in the North American continent's founder - John Latendresse (1925-2000); an overview of the pearl-culturing process explains incidents participants will see throughout the tour.

Visit with a local diver - a local diver emerges from beneath the water in full wet suit hoisting his "catch of the day" onto the docks. Participants see the different species of mussels found in the Tennessee River, and enjoy a brief biology lesson on how the mussel fits into the aquaculture system of the area waters.

Meet the farm manager - from a lakeside covered pavilion, participants watch as the farm manager retrieves a nucleated basket of mussels via his work boat. Returning the basket for closer inspection, tourists witness the "shucking" of a mussel to reveal the State of Tennessee's Official Gem: the freshwater pearl. Learn in detail about technicians, the nucleation process, quality grading and more.

Tennessee's Official Gem

The Freshwater

Pearl

The pearl, taken from mussels in the fresh water rivers of the state, is the official state gem, according to Public Chapter 192, enacted during the 91st General Assembly (1979).

Southern-Style Catered BBQ Luncheon - Enjoy the catered luncheon at the lake-view community center with a "Southern-style" catered luncheon. Featured on the standard menu are: barbecue ribs, pulled pork barbecue, grilled chicken, potato salad, baked beans, slaw, corn fritters, dessert and drink. (Other menu selections available upon request).

Souvenir Shopping - Shop from our extensive freshwater Pearl jewelry showroom with items from all over the world. Choose one of our freshwater pearls, or enjoy the variety of color and other shapes available from other countries. The Tennessee River - Mississippi Basin area hosts a unique species of mussel that over 90% of the pearl growers of the world want. This species features an unusually thick shell that allows for the three-dimensional shaping of implants to culture pearls. Tennessee exports millions of dollars in mussel shells to foreign countries annually.

Even the renowned black Tahitian pearl - begins with a Tennessee River mussel shell. So whether the pearls were grown in our farm - or not - rest assured that it most likely

During the years between 1882 and 1914, beautiful pearls were taken from many of the state's streams from the Pigeon and Holston in the east to the Forked Deer and Obion in the west. The Caney Fork in Middle Tennessee was noted for its pearl-bearing mussels, and "pearling" was a favorite sport for young people on Sunday afternoons at the turn of the century.

Tennessee River pearls are of all colors and they are "natural" as the mussel made them, all pearl all the way through. They have been found in various shapes: spherical, pear-shaped and baroque, or irregular.

Knob.

The museum houses an antique brail boat (used for musseling prior to the invention of the electric motor), artifacts from the pearl button factories that once lined the river banks, pearling and diving industry exhibits, and many Civil War items of interest.

"Full" Tour ADDED VALUE

- At the beginning of the tour, each participant receives a disposable camera to capture the notable events throughout the day.
- Tourists receive a "surprise" personalized 8"x10" group photo of the day's activities.
- Staff Photographers make photos throughout the day so that tourists may recap their visit on the website a couple of days later.

After World War I, dams were built on many of the rivers, and the mussels lost their swift and shallow shoals. Today, pearling exists as a byproduct of shell harvests which supply the cultivated pearl industry of Japan.

Tennessee River pearls are among the most beautiful and durable in the world. At Camden (Benton County), in West Tennessee, these freshwater pearls are collected and crafted into rings, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and gem-quality jewelry. America's only freshwater pearl farm is located on Kentucky Lake in the Birdsong Creek embayment.

TOURS

Member:

ABA - American Bus Association · TMCA - Tennessee Motor Coach Association
Jackson-Madison County Chamber of Commerce / Convention & Visitors Bureau
Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau · Paris - Henry County Chamber of Commerce



began... with a Tennessee River mussel shell.

Tennessee River Folk Life Museum (optional add on based on itinerary time allowance) - Trek to Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park's Tennessee Folk Life Museum - home of the historical Pilot



Museum

Items on display depict the freshwater pearls and mussel industry in general educational/ informational terms. Follow the story board on techniques of pearl culturing, exhibits from local contributors, and other items of interest related to our Tennessee heritage. A brief, entertaining video is also presented for walk-in visitors. Open year around, Monday through Saturday from 8am-5pm and on Sunday from 9am - 4pm.



Showroom

Choose from freshwater pearl bracelets, necklaces, earrings, pendants, rings, and more in an array of colors. Shop from a variety of international pearl designs or make your selection from our own

Tennessee River pearl jewelry collection. Visit the showroom any time during museum open hours.



Gift Shop

An emporium of souvenir items from Birdsong Resort, Kentucky Lake, the Tennessee River Freshwater Pearl Farm and related gift items. Also choose from a



collection of "Pick Tennessee Products."

Owner and Tour Guide Bob Keast with Pearl and Judy



Hosted by

Birdsong Resort, Marina and Lakeside RV Campground is a 58-acre recreational complex that has been operated by Bob Keast and family in the true sense of southern hospitality as a second-generation owner since 1961.



RESORT • MARINA

Lakeside RV & Tent
CAMPGROUND

Located in the central part of the scenic Tennessee River's beautiful Kentucky Lake - one of the largest man-made lakes in America. Over 2,300 miles of shoreline flow through the heart of Western Tennessee. Ninety percent of Kentucky Lake is in the Great State of Tennessee. Quiet, yet conveniently located 9 miles north of I-40 at Exit 133, halfway between Jackson and Nashville, Tennessee. It is an ideal stop for an overnight, weekend or week stay.

Scattered lazily throughout the resort, you'll find twenty-five (25) rental accommodation units to choose from. Cottages and manufactured homes - each unique with its amenities and accommodations - ranging from efficiencies to group lodges.

All units are completely furnished like a home-away-from-home atmosphere. Each one is air conditioned, has television, VCR and/or DVD players, pots, pans, linens, a grill, and a picnic table. They feature a variety of screened-in porches and decks. Select units also feature fireplaces, Jacuzzi tubs, and satellite television. Pack your clothes and food - that's all you'll need.



Come and SEE Us!

Located in the Western Grand Division of Tennessee, just off I-40 at Exit 133. Positioned conveniently 1 hour west of Nashville and 2 hours east of Memphis, The Tennessee Freshwater Pearl Museum, Farm and Tour will fit perfectly into your "hub and spoke" itinerary. Flexible scheduling and a variety of tour packages make it the perfect "tweener" for your group!

MILEAGE CHART

From I-40 Exit #133 get onto Birdsong Road/State Hwy. 191 headed north. Travel 9.2 miles following the Birdsong Resort / Pearl Museum signs along the rural, scenic route. This road has mile markers identical to those on I-40, but they start at zero when you leave the interstate. Just past marker number "9," Turn RIGHT onto Marina Road. There's a large sign pointing the way. The road is only 1/2 mile long and our offices are located in a big blue building on the LEFT. There is plenty of parking right in front on the concrete ramp. The marina, dock, and lake are at the far end of this road.

From	Distance
Asheville, NC	379
Atlanta, GA	332
Baltimore, MD	785
Birmingham, AL	275
Charleston, WV	471
Chattanooga, TN	217
Chicago, IL	472
Cincinnati, OH	361
Columbus, OH	461
Detroit, MI	617
Harrisburg, PA	914
Indianapolis, IN	371
Jackson, MS	343
Jacksonville, FL	678
Lexington, KY	296
Little Rock, AR	277
Louisville, KY	258
Memphis, TN	140
Mobile, AL	530
Nashville, TN	85
New York, NY	970
Philadelphia, PA	909
Pittsburgh, PA	643
Raleigh, NC	628
Roanoke, VA	523
Savannah, GA	580
St. Louis, MO	272
St. Petersburg, FL	811
Toronto, Ontario	845
Winston-Salem, NC	522

Bob Keast, Owner/Tour Guide

bob@BirdsongResort.com

Located at/hosted by:

Birdsong Resort, Marina & Campground

255 Marina Road @ Exit 133 off I-40

Camden (on Kentucky Lake) West Tennessee 38320

Only 1 Hour West of Nashville · 2 Hours East of Memphis

731-584-7880 (Phone) · 731-584-3625 (Fax)



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www.Birdsong.com

