

Austin

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Courtesy of:

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Austin, Texas

Austin, Texas See & Do Sightseeing

Many of Austin's most interesting sights are fairly close to the city center, and you could hit a lot of them in a day or two of dedicated touring. Begin at the Texas State Capitol, downtown. Take a tour of the building, and then spend some time appreciating the pink-granite landmark from the outside. If you don't have time during the day, try after dinner. It's open late and is quite striking all lit up at night.

While downtown, you should head south on Congress Avenue to East Sixth Street (known locally only as Sixth Street). If nothing else, stop at the Driskill Hotel for a look around the historic building, perhaps pausing for a drink in its upscale, western-themed bar.

The University of Texas campus lies north of the Capitol. If you have a big appetite for museums, you could fill a day there. Stop by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum to see how this Texas-sized politician shaped—and was shaped by—the turbulent era during which he served as U.S. president. Try to take one of the tours that ascend to the observation deck of the University of Texas Tower. You'll get a great view of the city. The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, just south of the university, is a good place to get acquainted with the state.

Do keep in mind that numerous museums are closed on Monday and Tuesday. As exhibits, events and other programming often change with some frequency, it is best to check online or call before planning your visit to find out what is available. Many of Austin's museums also participate in the Blue Star Museum program that provides free admission to all active-duty military personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

But much of the city's allure isn't captured in museums or landmarks. Zilker Park is a good place to experience Austin's odd combination of laid-back attitude and frenetic exertion. Do a little exercising of your own by walking along the Barton Creek Greenbelt that leads south, out of the park. It will give you a taste of the scenic Texas Hill Country that stretches to the west of Austin. If you plan to spend a good bit of time visiting and exploring the region's state parks, consider purchasing an annual pass. State park passes are US\$70 and cover unlimited admission for you and your guests to all 90 Texas state parks and entitle you to discounts on other park amenities such as camp sites, merchandise and even equipment rentals.
<http://tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/parkinfo/passes>.

Wine connoisseurs will also want to take at least a day trip to visit some of Texas's finest wineries in Hill Country west of Austin. Beer nuts will be delighted by the numerous breweries right in town, including Austin Beerworks, South Austin Brewing Co. and Draught House Pub and Brewery. Don't miss the chance to visit Black Star Co-Op Pub and Brewery, the first member-owned brewery of its kind in the U.S.

No matter how you spend your days, reserve an hour or so at dusk to see the bats emerge from beneath the Congress Avenue Bridge (mid-March to early November). Seen either from atop the eastern side of the bridge or from the lawn below, it's probably the city's most distinctive sightseeing attraction. Just remember, keep your mouth closed when looking up at the bats.

Casinos

You must be 18 years of age to play the lottery or bet on horse races in Texas, and 21 years to enter a gambling facility. Poker, including Texas Hold 'Em—the game named after the Lone Star State—is especially popular.

Austin Party Cruises

There are no casinos in Austin, but riverboat gambling has become quite popular. Austin Party Cruises has a fleet of three large boats available for both public and private outings. Many local businesses and nonprofit organizations host casino party fundraisers on the boats for a reasonable entry fee. Contact the company for a complete list of cruises and boat availability.

Daily 8 am-8 pm.

Historic Sites

French Legation Museum

Built in the 1840s, the French Legation is a beautifully preserved French-colonial home from the era when Texas was an independent country. A diplomat from France had the building constructed to fit his lavish tastes.

Tuesday-Sunday 1-5 pm. US\$5 adults.

2215 Westlake Drive
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-328-9887

<http://austinpartycruises.com>

802 San Marcos St., East Austin
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-472-8180

<http://www.frenchlegationmuseum.org>

Stevie Ray Vaughan Statue

It's not a large or lavish landmark—or even particularly attractive—but the monument to Austin's blues-guitar hero is a popular pilgrimage site. Vaughan got his start in Austin's clubs, and he became something of a saint in the city after dying in a helicopter crash in 1990. Fans often leave keepsakes at the monument: bottles of booze, guitar picks or joints pressed between the metal fingers of the statue.

Auditorium Shores (on the south bank of the Colorado River across from downtown, near the intersection of First Street and Riverside Drive)
Austin, TX

Texas State Capitol

You might expect Texas' Capitol to be large, and it is. But it's the beauty of the pink-granite structure that is memorable. Inside are literally miles/kilometers of gleaming wood wainscoting, hundreds of doors and window shutters, and carefully restored painted surfaces. The rotunda is impressive. Tours of the building will take you into the plush legislative chambers, although you can sometimes poke your head in on your own. The lush, shaded grounds surrounding the building are a nice place for a picnic. Visitors center located at 12 E. 11th St. (southeast corner of the Capitol grounds); open Monday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm.

1100 Congress Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-463-5495

<http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/spb/capitol/texcap.htm>

Weekdays 7 am-10 pm and Saturday and Sunday 9 am-8 pm. Free.

Texas State Cemetery

A veritable who's who of Texans are buried just a few blocks from the state capitol: from Stephen Austin, the Father of Texas, and Albert Sidney Johnston, a Confederate general, to Alamo survivor Susanna Dickinson, author James Michener and celebrated coach of the Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry. A free, self-guided tour is available at the visitors center.

909 Navasota St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-463-0605

<http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/general.asp>

Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm. Cemetery hours daily 8 am-5 pm.

University of Texas Tower

This 27-story tower is one of the most recognizable sites in Austin. It's perhaps best known as the location of a sniper attack in 1966, but these days, with improved security and safety devices in place, it's a good vantage point for viewing the campus and the rest of the city. Whenever a university team wins an important game and during graduation, the spotlights shining on the tower glow orange.

UT Union Building (near Guadalupe and 24th streets), University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-475-6633. Toll-free 877-475-6633

<http://www.utexas.edu/tower>

Tours generally operate during the school year Thursday-Sunday 2-8 pm; during summer, sunset tours are offered, although you should check in advance. Reservations required. US\$6.

Museums

Austin History Center

This building, constructed in 1933 in the Italian Renaissance style, used to be Austin's main public library. Now you can view changing exhibits on a diversity of subjects, such as 19th-century Austin cuisine, Asian-American heritage in the city and the history of the building itself. You can also make an appointment to browse through the collection's documents and personal histories.

810 Guadalupe St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-974-7480

<http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc>

Daily 10 am-6 pm.

Blanton Museum of Art

Renovated and relocated, the Blanton Museum has more exhibition space than ever. The permanent collection includes 19th- and 20th-century American art, contemporary Latin American art, Renaissance and baroque paintings, and plaster casts of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. The Michener Collection, donated by best-selling author James Michener, contains an impressive array of modern and contemporary American works.

200 E. Martin Luther King Jr Blvd. (at Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard),
University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-471-5482

<http://www.blantonmuseum.org>

Open Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm (third Thursday until 9 pm), Saturday 11 am-5 pm, Sunday 1-5 pm. US\$9 adults, US\$7 seniors, US\$5 students and children age 13-21. Free on Thursday.

Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

This museum (named for the Texas politician who championed it) puts Texas history front and center. The changing exhibits examine the region from the time of its earliest inhabitants to the 20th century and include a reconstruction of the Alamo and artifacts such as Neil Armstrong's space suit and instruments owned by some of the state's country-music legends. An IMAX theater and a special-effects Texas Spirit theater require an additional admission fee.

Monday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm. US\$12 adults for exhibits. The IMAX theater charges US\$9 adult. The Texas Spirit theater charges US\$5 adults. Combination tickets available at discounted rates. Parking US\$8 (US\$2 rebate with museum admission).

Elisabet Ney Museum

One of Texas' oldest museums is located in the former studio of 19th-century sculptor Elisabet Ney. The neoclassical building in the historic Hyde Park neighborhood is something to see, and Ney's sculptures—of the so-called "great men" of Texas, including Sam Houston and European personalities—reflect her larger-than-life role as a pioneering female artist. Run by the city of Austin.

Wednesday-Sunday noon-5 pm. Free.

Harry Ransom Center

The University of Texas facility has massive archives, including early manuscripts by Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and Tennessee Williams. There are rotating exhibitions in the gallery space, as well as a Gutenberg Bible on permanent display. Emphasis extends beyond the printed word to sculpture and photography. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's 1826 heliograph, considered by some to be the world's first photograph, is on permanent display. Guided tours are available Tuesday at 6 pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 2 pm.

Monday-Wednesday and Friday 10 am-5 pm, Thursday 10 am-7 pm, Saturday and Sunday noon-5 pm. Free.

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum

The 36th president of the U.S. hailed from the Texas Hill Country west of Austin and began his political career as a state legislator. His library and museum claim to attract more visitors than that of any other U.S. president. The museum offers historical and cultural exhibits on the volatile era of the Johnson administration—1963-69. A permanent exhibition, *The Humor of LBJ*, highlights the former president's prowess as raconteur: An audio-animatronic model of LBJ dressed in ranch duds spins five humorous yarns—actual voice recordings of the president. The gift shop sells vintage campaign paraphernalia and reproductions of White House dessert plates. (Those interested in LBJ should also plan a visit to his home and other sites in Johnson City: It's a good day trip from Austin.)

Library and museum open daily 9 am-5 pm. Free.

Mexic-Arte Museum

This colorful gallery showcases paintings, prints, video installations and found object art from Latino artists from Mexico, Central and South America. Recent exhibitions included ceramics inspired by the imagery of Mexico and South Texas, and painted interpretations of the Mexican Revolution.

Open Monday-Thursday 10 am-6 pm, Friday and Saturday 10 am-5 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm. US\$5 adults, US\$4 seniors, US\$1 children age 12 and younger.

O. Henry Museum

William Sidney Porter lived in this house with his wife and child before he was sent to prison in 1898 for embezzlement. While in prison, he took up the pen name O. Henry and transformed himself into one of the country's best-loved short story writers. The home contains his original writing desk and the wicker rocking chairs said to have inspired his most famous story, "The Gift of the Magi."

Wednesday-Sunday noon-5 pm. Free.

1800 N. Congress Ave. (at Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard), University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-936-8746

<http://www.thestoryoftexas.com>

304 E. 44th St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-458-2255

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/elisabet-ney-museum>

300 W. 21st St. (on campus)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-471-8944

<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu>

2313 Red River St., University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-721-0200

<http://www.lbjlibrary.org>

419 Congress Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-480-9373

<http://www.mexic-artemuseum.org>

409 E. Fifth St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-472-1903

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/o-henry-museum>

Texas Memorial Museum of Science and History

The multistory museum, located on the University of Texas campus, boasts more than 5 million specimens. It offers interactive, multimedia displays of native fish and a 3-D display that allows visitors to examine such things as a hummingbird's beak from the inside out. Other exhibits focus on items as diverse as gems, minerals, meteorites, firearms, crafts, Native American artifacts and fossils. The museum store sells books, toys, jewelry, T-shirts and educational gifts.

Monday-Friday 9 am-4:50 pm. Free admission.

The Contemporary Austin

Exhibits of painting, sculpture, photography and multimedia works change roughly six times a year. Showcased artists hail from as nearby as Dallas and as far away as South Africa. The museum also operates a second location, the venerable Laguna Gloria, which has reopened following extensive renovations to the Italianate villa and the grounds. There isn't much art to see, but the beautiful landscaping makes for a lovely stroll.

The Jones Center Tuesday-Saturday 11 am-7 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm. Laguna Gloria Villa open Tuesday-Sunday 10 am-4 pm; tours offered Saturday and Sunday at 1 pm. US\$5 adults.

The Thinkery

Formerly known as the Austin Children's Museum, the Thinkery opened at a new location in December 2013. It places heavy focus on interactive exhibits featuring science and technology. Youngsters can build new inventions by hand in the Innovator's Workshop. In the Spark Shop, older children can make their inventions fly. Our Backyard is a maze of woodland fun, magnified several thousand times. There is also a Light Lab with a giant Light Bright, a Kitchen Lab and a Currents exhibit where visitors can get soaking wet discovering the connections between water and sound.

Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday 10 am-6 pm. US\$9 adults and children, US\$1 seniors and military, free for children younger than 2. Free admission Sunday 5-6 pm.

Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum

Located near Zilker Park, this venue presents the works of sculptor Charles Umlauf, a noted artist who taught at the University of Texas for many years. More than 60 sculptures are arranged in xeriscape gardens, on a terrace and in an indoor gallery. The grounds are shady, which makes for a nice stroll on a sunny day. Some small sculptures and watercolors showcase Umlauf's early efforts. The garden also offers yoga classes.

Wednesday-Friday 10 am-4 pm and Saturday and Sunday noon-4 pm. US\$5 adults, US\$3 seniors, US\$1 students; yoga classes US\$15 per person.

Neighborhoods & Districts

Bremond Block

Located west of the downtown high-rises, this block is a showplace of Greek Revival and Victorian homes built in the 1800s. The trees that shade the streets make it a pleasant place to stroll. Because most of the buildings are now offices, they're not open to visitors. A 90-minute guided walking tour of the area takes place March-October Saturday and Sunday at 11 am. The free tour departs from the south entrance of the state Capitol. The Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau also has free, self-guided walking tour maps.

Capitol District

The Capitol building dominates the neighborhood, but there's a good amount of exploring to be done around the grounds and nearby buildings. Old courthouses, occasional statuary, small bits of green space and a few buildings more than a century old alternate with the newer bureaucratic offices just north and south of the Capitol itself. The wide streets don't provide much shade in the sweltering summer, but much of the year it's pleasant to explore the district, especially if you want to visit the Bullock Museum of Texas History as well. Just keep in mind that many buildings run by state and federal agencies are heavily guarded and often closed on the weekends.

2400 Trinity St., University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-471-1604

<http://www.utexas.edu/tmm>

700 Congress Ave., Downtown
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-453-5312

<http://thecontemporaryaustin.org>

1830 Simond Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-469-6200

<http://thinkeryaustin.org>

605 Robert E. Lee Road
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-445-5582

<http://www.umlaufsculpture.org>

Guadalupe and W. Seventh streets,
Downtown
Austin, TX

East Austin

The eastern area of Austin near the University of Texas and beyond is experiencing a growth spurt and is home to many of the city's hottest contemporary art galleries. Its culinary scene has become so popular that the Austin foodie tour company, Austin Eats, has added an East Austin food tour. Specialty boutiques, artist studios and live/work spaces have become the norm, though there has been some fuss by earlier residents who are being priced out of the neighborhood as property values and cost of living continue to increase. Many Austinites compare East Austin to the SoCo of "old Austin." Local artists have also started an annual East Austin studio tour in November.

Hyde Park

This charming residential neighborhood offers a mixture of older Texas Victorian homes and bungalows—including the Elisabet Ney Museum, a former sculpture studio—and a handful of neighborhood businesses, including Austin's oldest grocery. North of the University of Texas, the neighborhood is hemmed between 38th and 48th streets, Guadalupe to the west and Duval to the east. It's hard to believe that the tree-lined streets there were once considered an Austin suburb. It's a little far to walk all the way from campus, but once you reach Hyde Park, the shady sidewalks are inviting.

Austin, TX

<http://www.austinhydepark.org>

Sixth Street

Officially named East Sixth Street but usually shortened to Sixth Street, this area has long been famous for its nightlife. A collection of buildings from the 1800s lines the street, but they're better known for the bars and restaurants inside them than for their historical authenticity. For many, this is the place to be on a weekend night (be aware it can get overrun with college students when school's in session). The Driskill Hotel, at the corner of Sixth and Brazos streets, is the gem of the area. Built in 1885, it's festooned with balconies and arched doors and windows. Step inside to view its elegant lobby. The street's 200 and 400 blocks are especially rich in 19th-century structures, including the J.W. Hannig Building (built in 1876), the Kriesle Building (1860) and the J.L. Buaas Building (1875). The fun is also starting to spread west of Congress Avenue, where a good number of restaurants and bars have opened.

201 E. Sixth St. (downtown, just east of Congress Avenue)
Austin, TX

<http://www.6street.com>

South Congress (SoCo)

This gem of a neighborhood is a shopper's paradise, packed full of eclectic and boutique retailers, galleries, restaurants and, most recently, Austin's beloved food truck scene. Though once a rural, country road, its direct path to the State Capitol made its transformation inevitable. Travelers will enjoy its proximity to two historic residential Austin neighborhoods, Travis Heights to the east and Bouldin Creek to the west. SoCo officially begins at the Colorado River and Congress Avenue Bridge and ends near the capitol building, but most locals refer to SoCo as being between the Barton Springs Road and Elizabeth Street. This stretch also holds a monthly event known as First Thursdays, where the neighborhood shops all stay open till 10 pm and host a number of special events on the first Thursday of every month. Many of the city's more established artists, musicians and other bohemian types live somewhere in South Austin.

Austin, TX

<http://www.firstthursday.info>

Parks & Gardens

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

The brilliantly colored wildflowers that transform the mostly beige landscape of Central Texas are showcased at this center named for and supported by the former first lady. Stroll through gardens and natural areas filled with native plants. The wildflowers are at their peak mid-March to May, but it's worth a trip almost any time of the year. Children's activities, gift shop and cafe, too.

Tuesday-Sunday 9 am-5 pm. US\$9 adults, US\$7 seniors and students, US\$3 children ages 4-12, free for children younger than 4.

4801 La Crosse Ave. (off MoPac Expressway/Loop 1)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-232-0100

<http://www.wildflower.org>

Mansfield Dam

Constructed between 1937 and 1942, Mansfield is the largest of the dams harnessing the Colorado River, and it creates the largest lake in the Austin area, Lake Travis. A roadway open to pedestrians and bicycles runs across the top of the dam, offering a fantastic view of the lake and surrounding hills.

Markers along the way explain the history of the dam and significant facts about the Highland Lakes system. Make the stroll as the sun sets, and you'll get to see dozens of vultures winging in to roost on an adjacent radio tower. The road is accessible from parking areas on both ends of the dam. The gates are closed at dusk—someone usually drives across the dam in a vehicle to shoo you off. Call ahead: The dam is sometimes closed to pedestrians.

8 am to dusk. Boat ramp is open 24 hours a day.

4370 Mansfield Dam Park Road (off Highway 620, about 19 mi/30 km west of downtown)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-854-7275

<https://parks.traviscountytx.gov/find-a-park/mansfield-dam>

McKinney Falls State Park

This pleasant park is adjacent to the state's Department of Wildlife and Parks and only about 15 minutes (15 mi/24 km) from downtown Austin. Located on the banks of Onion Creek, McKinney Falls is a 745-acre/301-hectare oasis popular with beginning mountain bikers, picnickers and bird-watchers. There's camping, although it's not much in the way of wilderness. The main trail bypasses the foundations of some historic homes.

Daily 8 am-10 pm. US\$6 per person per day; free for children age 12 and younger.

Mount Bonnell Park

At the top of Mount Bonnell's 100 steps is a view as rewarding as any in the city, overlooking the waters of Lake Austin and the lights of downtown. Although the area's reputation as an attraction dates back to the 1850s, it officially became a park in 1938. Be careful of who goes up there with you: Legend has it that couples who climb to the top of Mount Bonnell will soon be married. The observation deck is also a popular spot for photographers. Do pay attention to the "Hide, Lock, Take" signage as well, as the park has intermittent spurts of car burglaries.

Open daily 5 am-10 pm.

Zilker Park

The city's grandest park, Zilker meanders along the Colorado River (or Lady Bird Lake, as it's known inside the city). The park contains the famed Barton Springs Pool, a natural spring-fed swimming area, as well as vast stretches of grass, a hillside theater and lots of outdoor-sports facilities. On weekends it's filled with kite flyers, dog walkers and recreation-crazed locals. The park connects with the Barton Creek Greenbelt, a network of trails that follows the waterway upstream for many miles/kilometers, becoming wilder and more rugged as the trails travel deeper into limestone canyons carved by the creek. While you're there, hop aboard the Zilker Zephyr, a miniature train that takes a leisurely 30-minute tour along Barton Creek and Lady Bird Lake. The train runs every hour on the hour Monday-Friday and every half-hour on the weekends. Departure point is across from the playground.

Open daily dawn till dark. Free admission; parking US\$5 mid-March to Labor Day; train US\$3 adults, US\$2 seniors and children younger than age 11.

Zilker Park Botanical Gardens

The Zilker Botanical Gardens offer cool and shady places that are especially nice during the furnace-blast heat of a Central Texas summer. Stroll through the cactus and succulent garden, the herb and fragrance garden, the Tanaguchi garden and the rose displays. Explore the butterfly trail and learn about water conservation in the green garden.

Daily 9 am-5:30 pm. Admission US\$3 adults, US\$1 seniors and children. Parking US\$3 Saturday and Sunday, free Monday-Friday. The lot is locked up promptly after the gardens close, so don't leave your car there if you intend to stay and explore the park.

Amusement Parks

Austin's Park

Austin's Park is a local family favorite with more than 23 acres/9 hectares of go-karts, rides, bumper boats, rock-climbing walls, water walls, laser tag, games and more. Park admission includes most activities and all-you-can-eat pizza, salad buffet and fountain drinks.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-10 pm, Sunday 11 am-10 pm. US\$22 adults. US\$12 for unlimited minigolf.

5808 McKinney Falls Parkway (off Highway 183 South)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-243-1643

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/mckinney-falls>

3800 Mount Bonnell Road (off West 35th Street)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-974-6700

<http://www.austinparks.org/our-parks.html?parkid=287>

2220 Barton Springs Road, South Austin
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-477-8672

<http://austintexas.gov/department/zilker-metropolitan-park>

2220 Barton Springs Road, South Austin
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-477-8672

<http://www.zilkerpark.org>

16231 Interstate 35
Pflugerville, TX

Phone: 512-670-9600

<http://austinspark.com>

Wineries, Breweries & Distilleries

Black Star Brewery

The first worker-owned and managed cooperative brewpub in Texas. More than 3,000 people have a stake in the brewery, and, since members are looking for a return on their investments, their handcrafted ales are of consistently high quality. Bonus points for the no-tipping policy: It's unnecessary to tip there because management pays its workers a living wage.

Monday-Thursday 4 pm-midnight, Friday and Saturday 11-1 am and Sunday 11 am-midnight.

7020 Easy Wind Drive, Suite 100
(Crestview)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-452-2337

<http://www.blackstar.coop>

Paula's Texas Spirits

While Austin's craft whiskey and vodka distilleries may be better known (think Tito's Vodka, Garrison Brothers' Bourbon and Deep Eddy Vodka), Paula's Texas Spirits is one of the only local distilleries still offering tours. Visitors are often amazed at the tedious and remarkable crafting that goes into Paula's Lemon and Paula's Orange, as they still zest each and every fruit by hand. We recommend at least buying a bottle of Paula's Orange to keep on hand at home, as it is the freshest and most flavorful orange liqueur we've ever tasted

Tours and schedules vary; call ahead to book a reservation.

5214 Burleson Road
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-636-6398

<http://www.paulatexaspirits.com>

Texas Wine Trail

This organization of Texas Hill Country wineries offers five unique self-guided trails that take visitors to all of the Hill County wineries. Visitors can select any trail they wish to follow, though it is advisable to take a trail at the time of year recommended, as routes were carefully compiled to take advantage of local scenery, festivals and other events along the way. Becker Vineyards, Fall Creek Vineyards and Woodrose Wineries are among the highlights, though every year there are new and notable vintages produced by any number of the wineries. Tasting and bottle prices vary by vineyard, but if you plan to follow one of the trails, you can buy discounted packages that include tastings at all the wineries and other complimentary goodies.

Austin, TX

<http://www.texaswinetrail.com>

The Austin Brew Bus

The Austin Brew Bus is perhaps the best introduction to Austin's burgeoning craft beer scene. The Brew Bus takes visitors behind the scenes at many area breweries and for tastings at local brew pubs. Tours are popular with tourists and Austinites alike, and most tours book up a month or so in advance, so it's advisable to reserve your spot early. Some highlights include The Draught House Pub and Brewery, Black Star Co-Op Pub and Brewery, South Austin Brewing Co. and Austin Beerworks, though it seems there's a new addition to Austin's craft beer scene every month.

Rates vary by tour size and stops, but most range US\$65-\$75 per person, including all tastings.

701 Trinity St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 281-912-3041

<http://www.austinbrewbus.com>

Zoos & Wildlife

Austin Zoo

This private, nonprofit facility specializes in captive-animal rehabilitation and is a wonderful place to take the kids. The zoo has a range of birds, mammals (including some big cats) and reptiles from around the world in a very pleasant Hill Country setting about a half-hour outside of Austin.

Daily 9:30 am-6 pm. US\$11 adults.

10808 Rawhide Trail (Highway 290 west
out of town; take a right onto Circle Drive
and follow the signs for the zoo)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-288-1490

<http://www.austinzoo.org>

Bats

As swallows are to San Juan Capistrano, bats are to Austin. In warmer months, the city is home to North America's largest urban bat colony. The best place to view them is the Congress Avenue Bridge over the Colorado River downtown. An estimated 1.5 million Mexican freetail bats live in the narrow crevices beneath the bridge, and when they emerge at dusk, it's a sight not to be missed. A Bat Observation Center has been established next to the south end of the bridge: You'll find information kiosks and a lawn where you can spread a blanket for the show. Viewers also line the walkway on the bridge, observe from one of the nearby bars and restaurants that overlook the water or opt for a bat-viewing boat tour along the river. (Contrary to popular myth, the bats pose no great danger to humans.) The peak time to view the bats is late summer, but a sizable population is present mid-March to early November.

Limited parking available at 305 S.
Congress Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-327-9721. Toll-free 800-
538-2287

<http://www.batcon.org>

Dining

Dining Overview

Eating out in Austin can be a wonderful experience. The city's steady growth over the past few decades spurred similar expansion in the number and variety of excellent restaurants. Upscale Italian, French and Asian food—and the inevitable fusion of these cuisines—can be found throughout the city. Austin's longtime standard-bearers of fine dining (Jeffrey's, Hudson's on the Bend) now have competition.

Although the surge in fancy food places has broadened the city's tastes (and raised prices), it hasn't stolen Austin's heart. Austin's culinary roots are decidedly Mexican, Tex-Mex and barbecue. Many establishments are in their second generation of family ownership, and they still rule the city. Nearly everyone in town has a different favorite place for these "cuisines" (never use that word in a barbecue joint), and you'll rarely go wrong following the advice of locals on this subject.

A few things to know: In Texas, barbecue is beef (although pork ribs are widely available, and you'll sometimes find pulled pork), and the favored cut is brisket. As with other southern barbecue, the meat is smoked, not grilled. You should also be aware of the difference between Tex-Mex and interior Mexican food, both of which can be found in Austin. Tex-Mex is a borderland creation and includes nachos, burritos and other dishes familiar throughout the U.S. If you want to delve deeper into Mexican cuisine, order interior specialties such as Yucatan pork (*cochinita pibil*) at Curra's, anything topped with mole at Fonda San Miguel or the *cabrito* (grilled goat) available at many Mexican restaurants.

Breakfast in Austin is likely to mean breakfast tacos. You can find them everywhere, served from the windows at food trailers, at a small chain called Taco Shack or at any number of Mexican restaurants that are open for breakfast. Popular alternatives to breakfast tacos include *migas* (scrambled eggs with tortilla chips, cheese, jalapenos, onion and tomatoes) and *chilaquitas* (tortilla strips with cheese), and either *rojos* (spicy red salsa) or *verdes* (green tomatillo sauce).

Chicken-fried steak remains a Texas tradition. Although it doesn't receive top billing on the menus at Austin's trendier restaurants, it's still served—sometimes with a twist. At Shady Grove Cafe, you can clog your arteries with the typical country gravy or you can smother your steak in Hatch green chili sauce and Monterey Jack cheese.

If you're on a budget and still want to eat some seriously good food, plan some of your meals at Austin's numerous food trucks. There are many throughout SoCo and East Austin, and many bars, clubs and even shops are beginning to have permanently parked locations of such favorite eateries as The East Side King right on their premises (most common in East Austin, where large backyard patios are more of the norm). The trucks have become so popular, in fact, that sampling tours are now available.

The farm-to-table movement has become deeply ingrained in the Austin culinary scene, in a large part because of its mild climate and ability to have a fair selection of seasonal growing year round. We predict you'll discover within a meal or two the amazing difference in flavor and overall yumminess that results from the high quality of the food used in many of Austin's eateries, from cheap eats to fine dining.

Expect to pay within these general guidelines, based on the cost of a dinner for one, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than US\$12; \$\$ = US\$12-\$25; \$\$\$ = US\$26-\$50; \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$50.

Local & Regional

Franklin BBQ

Initially a food truck operation, Franklin built up a quick and loyal following, as many locals consider its fare the best barbecue in town (though no two locals will ever agree on who should be awarded the illustrious distinction). You can buy your barbecue by the pound, and the sandwiches are a sight to behold—towering heaps of barbecue on a comparatively small bun. We recommend using a fork to eat it. The US\$4 4-in/10-cm pies (bourbon banana and pecan are highlights) make the perfect end to a meal.

Tuesday-Sunday 11 am-midnight. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

900 E. 11th St.
Austin, TX
Phone: 512-653-1187
<http://www.franklinbarbecue.com>

The Salt Lick

The Salt Lick, located on a stretch of sloping rural road 40 minutes south of downtown Austin, is famous for its family-style, all-you-can-eat barbecue platters. Servings of savory beef brisket, pork ribs and sausage are enormous. On weekends the place fills up early, with waits during peak time often topping an hour. No alcohol is served, but patrons are free to take their own. (You'll see plenty of people toting coolers full of beer.) A second location has opened west of downtown. Although it may be more convenient, the atmosphere is modern shopping center—not old Texas.

Daily 11 am-10 pm. \$-\$\$\$. No credit cards.

Guero's Taco Bar

Offers a range of Tex-Mex specialties, including excellent fajitas, combination platters—keep your eye out for the gut-busting El Presidente, rumored to have been consumed by former U.S. President Bill Clinton during one visit—and a variety of tasty tacos a la carte (the fish tacos get good reviews). Good margaritas, friendly service and frequent live music in the courtyard round out the experience.

Monday-Wednesday 11 am-10 pm, Thursday and Friday 11 am-11 pm, Saturday 8 am-11 pm, Sunday 8 am-10 pm. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Iron Works

This barbecue joint in the shadow of the Austin Convention Center serves hearty portions of brisket, ribs and sausage. If the weather is nice, take your plate outside on the patio, where you can watch turtles play below in Waller Creek. Be sure to purchase some of its signature spice rubs or a jar or two of the sauces to take home to perfect your own barbecue skills.

Monday-Saturday 11 am-9 pm. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Sam's BBQ

This tiny East Austin barbecue joint was a favorite of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Austin's legendary blues guitarist. Rumor has it that Vaughan would occasionally have a package of Sam's smoky meats shipped to him when he was performing or recording in other cities. True or not, the goods at Sam's—especially the ribs and the beans—are down-home, greasy and worth a visit. Plus, it's open late to accommodate musicians and music lovers after the clubs close.

Daily 10 am-10 pm. \$. Most major credit cards. No American Express.

Wink

It's easy to miss Wink—tucked into a nondescript strip mall on North Lamar Street—but those in the know have fostered an almost cultish following for the place. The menu changes daily, but a sure bet is the five-course tasting menu. We had *hamachi* sashimi with poached pears, seared scallops on squash puree, duck breast with sherry *gastrique* and NY strip steak with a mixed berry jus. The restaurant supports the organic farms of Texas Hill Country, and the tastiness of its dishes is only surpassed by the creativity and elegance of the presentation. There are only a dozen tables, so reservations are a must.

Monday-Wednesday from 6 pm, Thursday-Saturday from 5:30 pm. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Cuisines**American****Hudson's on the Bend**

Ernest Hemingway would have loved this place, as will anyone on the Atkins diet. The changing menu revolves around an assortment of game, all of it rendered with creativity and fine ingredients. If you've ever wanted to try antelope, elk, kangaroo, rattlesnake, boar or water buffalo, this is the place. Less adventurous diners will find salmon, trout, quail, rabbit and venison dishes that are equally satisfying.

Sunday and Monday 6-9 pm, Tuesday-Thursday 6-10 pm, Friday and Saturday 5:30-10 pm. Reservations recommended. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

18300 Highway 1826
Driftwood, TX

Phone: 512-858-4959. Toll-free 888-725-8542

<http://www.saltlickbbq.com>

1412 S. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-447-7688

<http://www.guerostacobar.com>

100 Red River St., Downtown
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-478-4855

<http://www.ironworksbbq.com>

2000 E. 12th St., East Austin
Austin, TX

1014 N. Lamar Blvd., Suite E
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-482-8868

<http://winkrestaurant.com>

3509 Ranch Road 620 N. (about a 25-minute drive west of downtown toward Lake Travis)
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-266-1369

<http://www.hudsonsonthebend.com>

Italian

Home Slice Pizza

East Coast transplant and former food writer Jen Strickland Scoville is living her dream as "Queen of the Pies," offering as close as you get to a New York slice at this happening joint. Whole pies, generous antipasto plates, calzones and subs. Open late on the weekend, partially to accommodate the rockers playing down the block at the Continental Club. Local beers on draft and coffee drinks are served by friendly staff.

Open Monday and Wednesday-Sunday for lunch and dinner (slices available at the window Tuesday for lunch and dinner, and Friday and Saturday until 3 am). \$-\$\$.

1415 S. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-444-7437

<http://www.homeslicepizza.com>

Vespaio

Often crowded, this restaurant has a friendly yet sophisticated feel. Many of the dishes have Italian roots, but this is far more than a pasta house. New entrees are featured each night, but we like the mussels, any risotto dish and everything in the antipasto case. It's also a winner for those with food allergies, as it offers gluten-free pasta. If there is a long line, try Vespaio's more casual spin-off, Enoteca, a few doors down (which is also open for lunch and Sunday brunch).

Daily 5-10 pm. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

1610 S. Congress Ave., South Austin
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-441-6100

<http://www.austinvespaio.com>

Mexican

Fonda San Miguel

The ornate tile and museum-quality Mexican paintings in this restaurant will make you think you've stepped into a gorgeous hacienda in Mexico. The food matches the surroundings: fine cuisine from the interior of Mexico. Try anything made with pork. The Sunday brunch is especially popular, if expensive, and the food tastes—and looks—spectacular. Be sure to try the corn soup and the *tres leches* cake.

Monday-Thursday 5:30 pm-9:30 pm, Friday and Saturday 5:30 pm-10:30 pm, Sunday 11 am-2 pm.
Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

2330 W. North Loop Blvd.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-459-4121

<http://www.fondasanmiguel.com>

Breakfast & Brunch

Blue Dahlia Bistro

The French-inspired blintzes are to die for, and you'll be delighted by the understated charm and emphasis on fresh, high-quality organic ingredients. Low key live music is usually part of its evening charm. Breakfast is served all day, although the full menu stands well on its own. Blue Dahlia used to be East Austin's best-kept secret, but rave reviews have led to a second location in West Lake Hills.

Monday-Thursday 8 am-10 pm, Friday 8 am-11 pm, Saturday 9 am-11 pm, Sunday 9 am-10 pm. \$-\$\$\$.
Most major credit cards.

1115 E. Eleventh St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-542-9542

<http://www.bluedahliabistro.com>

Late Night

Kerbey Lane

People flock there for the pancakes—made from scratch and served, along with the rest of the breakfast menu, around the clock. Try the gingerbread or blueberry short stack. Kerbey's *migas* also are popular, and the enchiladas and pasta dishes are perfect for lunch or dinner. Four other locations. We like the charm of the original on Kerbey Lane, but the University of Texas location is most central.

24 hours daily. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

2606 Guadalupe St., University Area
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-477-5717

<http://www.kerbeylanecafe.com>

Other Options

Amy's Ice Cream

The inmates are clearly running the asylum at Austin's zaniest—and best—ice-cream shops. Gregarious and goofy almost to a fault, the staff serves heaping dollops of Amy's rich and curious flavors, which range from Guinness (made with the strong Irish stout) to Mexican vanilla to Kindergarten Cop (a blend of chocolate ice cream and sour cream doughnuts). Amy's, an Austin-based chain with 13 local shops, also periodically unveils some really over-the-top experimental flavors (witness sweet cream with Ancho peppers) and dishes up seasonal creations. Some conventional flavors are available for the less adventurous, as are an array of mix-ins such as nuts, strawberries and various candies.

Sunday-Thursday 11:30 am-midnight, Friday and Saturday 11:30 am-1 am. \$. Visa and MasterCard only.

Sugar Mama's Bake Shop

If you have a sweet tooth, a trip to Sugar Mama's is non-negotiable. Everything there is made from scratch, and the fact that it uses only the finest ingredients, many of which are locally sourced, shows through in every bite. The cupcakes and daily specials are among Sugar Mama's menu highlights. Healthy and not-so-healthy treats available, and we love that it also offers dog treats. The longer than normal bakery hours and lovely Barton Springs location make this a perfect indulgence to top off a day of swimming at the pool.

Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-8 pm, Sunday 10 am-4 pm. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

The Highball

It's a bowling alley with vintage lanes and convenient hourly fees. It's a restaurant and a cocktail lounge. And it just so happens to serve the best fried chicken around—according to some, it's the best fried chicken in the U.S. It also has seven themed karaoke rooms and is adjacent to the Draffhouse Cinema.

Open Monday-Friday 4:30 pm-2 am, Saturday 1 pm-2 am, Sunday 10 am-2 am. \$\$\$. Bowling US\$20 per lane per hour. Most major credit cards.

The Trailers of Congress Ave

Other cities boast mobile food vendors—think Portland, Oregon, or Fort Lauderdale, Florida—but we'd venture to say that none are as upscale as Austin's. The Mighty Cone, for instance, is the mobile version of the venerable Hudson's on the Bend restaurant: Stop there and you can get grass-fed venison in a tortilla cone. Franklin BBQ (you may also find it parked on 11th Street) rivals the Salt Lick, and Hey Cupcake satisfies even the mightiest sweet tooth with its "Michael Jackson" cupcake: cream cheese frosting atop a moist fudge cake. The trailers are located on the 1600 block of South Congress Avenue; most are open Tuesday-Saturday from noon, Sunday from 1 pm. (Go early, as they close when their limited supplies run out.)

\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

The Trailers of East Austin

The food truck trend has spread into hip East Austin, so be sure you don't limit yourself to the tasty trailer treats of SoCo. East Austin King is a favorite with multiple permanent locations on the back patios of local bars, such as The Liberty. Regal Ravioli's made-from-scratch pasta creations are delectable, and Schmaltz is known for its vegetarian Reuben. The purveyors of many trucks have gone nonprofit and are using proceeds from their booming businesses to give back to the community. Many trucks are located near the shops on E. Cesar Chavez.

Tuesday-Saturday from noon, Sunday from 1 pm. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

1012 W. Sixth St., West End
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-480-0673

<http://www.amysicecreams.com>

1905 S. First St.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-448-3727

<http://www.sugarmamasbakeshop.com>

1120 S. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, TX

Phone: 512-383-8309

<http://www.thehighball.com>

South Congress Avenue
Austin, TX