Travel Guide

Austin
Mention Austin to just about anyone, and they’ll tell you they’re either planning a trip, or just got back from one. And there are plenty of reasons for that: Austin is the live music capital of the world. It’s a major conference center for events like SXSW, a destination for bachelor/ette parties, a hub for startups, and it’s full of stunning outdoor settings. It’s home to many excellent restaurants, and it’s the center of the known universe for barbecue, breakfast tacos, Tex-Mex, and backyard patios. Here’s how we’d recommend you plan your time in Austin if you want to experience all of it.
If you’re interested in staying in an Airbnb-type situation, here are the neighborhoods we’d recommend, and what you can expect in each:

**East Austin**

The place to stay if you want to feel especially cool, East Austin has a mix of old-school restaurants, buzzy new places, barbecue joints, and bars. This neighborhood puts you in the middle of both daytime and nighttime action, although compared with other neighborhoods (like South Congress/Bouldin Creek), things are a little more spread out over here.

**South Austin: South Congress/Bouldin Creek**

The neighborhood around South Congress Avenue and South 1st Street is one of the best-known areas in Austin. It’s a fusion of the old and new: classic bungalows, boutique hotels, local shops, restaurants, live music, and nightlife. Just be aware that South Congress Avenue itself can get a bit chaotic on the weekends, full of tourists and bachelorette parties.

**Downtown**

Downtown is full of high-rise condos, apartments, and hotels alongside restaurants, live music, museums, and historic theaters. It can further be divided into separate nightlife districts that you’ll want to visit (or avoid): Rainey Street (1930s bungalows converted into rowdy bars and restaurants), Dirty 6th Street (raucous dive bars), the Warehouse District (nightclubs), and Red River (music venues).

**Clarksville**

Clarksville is just west of downtown, and it’s more of a low-key residential neighborhood, with easy-going restaurants, cafes, galleries, and shops.
Hotel San José

Hotel San José is an escape from the hustle on South Congress Avenue. Originally a 1930s motor lodge, this boutique hotel has been stylishly renovated, with a pool and a very nice courtyard to enjoy a michelada or a frose.

Hotel Saint Cecilia

A sister property to Hotel San José, The Hotel Saint Cecilia is more luxe, with 14 suites and poolside bungalows. It’s also steps away from everything on South Congress Avenue, and in addition to the bar and heated pool, there are plenty of other nice small touches, like a turntable in every room.

South Congress Hotel

This is a newish boutique hotel on (no surprise) South Congress Avenue. It has everything you might need: a rooftop pool, a good coffee shop, and three restaurants, including Café No Sé, an all-day café with a very good burger, and Otoko, a pricey omakase spot (do book in advance, it can be hard to get into). There’s also a shop that rents vintage motorcycles if you’re feeling adventurous.

The Driskill

Located on Sixth Street in downtown Austin, The Driskill is a historic and iconic hotel originally built in 1886. The rooms may be on the smaller side, but it’s pretty centrally located, within walking distance of everything downtown. Inside the hotel is the old-school steakhouse The Driskill Grill, but make a point of having a drink at The Driskill Bar, a very Texas-y, opulent bar.

Carpenter Hotel

Right near Zilker Park and Town Lake is the Carpenter Hotel, a new retro-feeling boutique hotel that’s partially built out of a mid-century union hall. There’s a coffee shop you’ll want to spend time in (Hot L), and a restaurant where you’ll actually want to eat (Carpenters Hall).
How To Spend A Day In Austin
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Day 1

Be A Tourist, But Do It Right

Start your day with breakfast tacos at Veracruz All-Natural (the migas tacos are the best in town). There are multiple locations – we like the original spot on the East Side, and the one at Radio Coffee & Beer. Be prepared for lines at both (or get there early).

Lady Bird Lake (a.k.a. Town Lake) is in the middle of downtown Austin. Rent a paddle board or kayak, or walk/run/bike the 10 miles of trails around it. If it’s hot, head to Barton Springs Pool, a giant, beautiful natural pool that maintains a chilly 68ºF year-round.

La Barbecue is where you’ll find some of the best brisket, ribs, and sausage in Austin - with shorter lines than Franklin Barbecue. It has indoor seating, and importantly during the summer, air conditioning.

You can skip the line by pre-ordering three or more days in advance.

Take a break from the hot sun and meat sweats inside Ellsworth Kelly's Austin, a chapel-like building with colorful stained glass at UT's Blanton Museum of Art. Or check out Austin’s New Central Library downtown. The rooftop garden has a great view of Town Lake.

The Driskill Bar, inside the historic Driskill Hotel, is one of the most-Texas-themed bars in Austin. There’s often live music, too.

There are three major food groups in Austin: tacos, barbecue, and Tex-Mex. Matt's El Rancho is a classic Tex-Mex staple where you’ll find their famous Bob Armstrong Dip. There’s often a short wait, but that can be alleviated by a very good margarita.

Down the street from Matt’s El Rancho is the Broken Spoke, a legendary Texas honky tonk with live music, chicken fried steak, beer, and of course, dancing. (If you really want to learn to two-step, you can even take classes.)
How To Spend A Day In Austin

Day 2
South Austin Edition

Start your day with coffee and an everything kolache at Mañana, one of the cafes in the South Congress Hotel.

Hit up the shops along South Congress Avenue, like Tesoros Trading Company, Big Top Candy Shop, or Allens Boots - because you can't visit Austin and not come back with a pair of cowboy boots.

Weekends on South Congress can be a zoo, so try to get your shopping in early.

Stick around on South Congress for lunch at June’s All Day, a casual cafe and wine bar, or head out to Cosmic Coffee + Beer Garden, where you can get exceptional tacos from Pueblo Viejo and/or some of the best barbecue in town from Leroy & Lewis.

Time to choose your own Austin adventure:

The Umlauf Sculpture Garden: Check out the bronze sculptures by Charles Umlauf in a serene outdoor garden with walking trails.

Cathedral of Junk: A sculpture made out of 60 tons of junk in a backyard. Call ahead to make an appointment.

Zilker Botanical Garden: Located on 26 acres, this is an escape from the city, with waterfalls, a rose garden, and Koi ponds.

Head to the garden courtyard at the Hotel San José for micheladas and margaritas.

Odd Duck serves a constantly-changing menu of riffs on Texas cuisine. Reservations recommended.

A legendary live music venue since the 1950s, the Continental Club is a dive bar with a mix of recurring bands and touring acts. The earlier shows tend to have no cover charge.
2 Other Things You Should Really Do
When ordering tacos anywhere in Austin, you’ll be asked a couple of questions. Choose wisely.

**Flour or corn?** Flour tortillas are generally for breakfast tacos and heavier saucy dishes like carne guisada, corn tortillas are for everything else, and...

**Red or green?** Taco spots often have two kinds of sauces: Red is typically a spicy red pepper sauce, and green is either a creamy jalapeno or tomatillo sauce. Yes, you can ask for both.

**Valentina's Tex Mex BBQ**

It’s a longish drive to the extreme southern reaches of Austin, but Valentina’s is worth the trip just for the breakfast tacos with brisket or pulled pork (something that’s pretty unique to this place). Breakfast is only served until 11am, and get there early – there’s often a line.

**Pueblo Viejo**

There are three locations of Pueblo Viejo, and the best one is at Cosmic Coffee on Pickle Road. All of the tacos here are great – but the breakfast tacos are the standouts. Cosmic Coffee also has a full bar, good coffee, and a sun-dappled beer garden.
Veracruz All-Natural

While there are many locations of Veracruz All-Natural, our favorite is the one on the East Side. They’re deservedly famous for their excellent migas tacos. Yes it’s technically a breakfast taco, and yes you can have it any time. If you need a moment of health, get a juice or a smoothie, too. Be prepared to wait in line, especially on weekends.

Vaquero Taquero

Vaquero Taquero is an Austin up-and-comer that recently opened a brick-and-mortar location. Here you’ll find ridiculously good al pastor tacos topped with pineapple and their spicy salsa, all on handmade corn tortillas.

Nixta Taqueria

While Nixta Taqueria may be a newish spot, it’s quickly become one of our favorite places to eat tacos in Austin. They make their own corn tortillas and use unexpected ingredients, like duck confit. There’s even a short, affordable natural wine list.
The drink of choice in Austin is generally Topo Chico, a sparkling mineral water from Mexico. A close second, however, is beer. Here are a few of our favorite breweries:

**St Elmo Brewing Co.**

Located in South Austin, St Elmo Brewing Co. makes a variety of beer styles from Juicy IPAs to raspberry sours. Out back there’s a relaxed beer garden often with live music, and Soursop, a trailer serving riffs on Thai food.

**North Austin's Brewery District**

There are a bunch of breweries all in the same neighborhood of North Austin, and a lot of them have rotating food trucks in their parking lots. Some of our favorites include *Austin Beerworks* (pilsners and IPAs, plus beers only available there), *Adelbert's* (Belgian-style farmhouse beers), and *Circle Brewing Company* (known for their Circle Blur hefeweizen).

**Live Oak Brewing Company**

Out by the airport, Live Oak is probably best known for their hefeweizen and their smoked beers. There’s a tree-covered beer garden, a 9-hole disc golf course, and the Black Forest, a food truck with pretzels and sausages.

**Jester King Brewery**

You’ll need a car, but it’s worth it to make your way out to far west Austin to visit Jester King, a world-renowned brewery that specializes in wild-fermented beer. Located on the grounds of a giant farmhouse, you could easily spend an entire afternoon hanging out in the outdoor space with picnic tables. When hunger strikes, they make absurdly good pizzas.
When You Need Proof That Austin Is Still A Little Weird
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Austin has changed and grown an incredible amount over the last couple of decades, but it’s still holding on strong to its weird - you just have to know where to find it.

Enchiladas At A Bowling Alley
Bowling alley food usually means frozen pizza and hot dogs. But inside the bowling alley Dart Bowl is the Dart Bowl Cafe, a tiny restaurant with some of the best enchiladas in town, covered in cheese and homemade chili (it’s Texas, so no beans). There’s also a full bar with prices that haven’t been changed in at least a decade (well drinks are $2.75).

Chicken Shit Bingo
Normally the Little Longhorn Saloon is a honky-tonk with live country music and cheap beer, but on Sundays they also do Chicken Shit Bingo. Which is exactly what it sounds like: If a chicken shits on your number, you win a cash prize, which you can immediately use to buy more beer.

It’s Always Christmas At Lala’s
Lala’s Little Nugget might just be the most festive dive bar in town, as it’s been continually decorated for Christmas since the 1970s.

A Life-Size Animatronic Lyndon B. Johnson
Inside the LBJ Presidential Library and Museum on the University of Texas campus is an animatronic robot of Lyndon B. Johnson that gestures and tells stories and jokes. He used to be dressed in casual ranch wear and a cowboy hat, but after a redesign, he wears a suit now. And still tells the same jokes.

Party World Rasslin’
Held quarterly in 4th Tap Brewing’s space up in north Austin, Party World Rasslin’ is an underground wrestling league. Yes, it’s a melodramatic and campy spectacle, but they take it incredibly seriously, with expert choreography and an elaborate and apocalyptic mythology. If that’s not enough to sell you, as a bonus you get to drink good beer.
Have a great trip.
Take us with you?