

Austin getaway offers cool shops, hot night life

By Beth D'Addono
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

AUSTIN, Texas — Joe Willie “Pinetop” Perkins walked slowly across the stage at Antone’s. A hush fell over the crowd at the divey blues joint. Then, the 94-year-old former sideman with Muddy Waters lit into a blistering rendition of “Got My Mojo Workin’,” and the place went wild. Perkins, who earned his first Grammy a few weeks later for his part in “Last of the Great Mississippi Delta Bluesmen: Live in Dallas,” is a living legend, and we got to see him.

That and so many other experiences we had over four days were why my girlfriend and I chose the funkier city in Texas for a reconnecting getaway. We had strict criteria for a destination: great music, good restaurants, eclectic non-mall shopping, pampering and R&R, and ethnic and cultural cachet.

Austin exceeded our expectations. The capital and the only blue dot on a big red state, its unofficial slogan is “Keep Austin Weird.” Enough said.

Dubbed the coolest city in America by Forbes magazine, it is also one of the brainiest, with more than 40 percent of adults holding bachelor’s degrees. And Austin continues to attract educated professionals and California-ex-pats to its hefty concentration of high tech industries. It’s a young town, with some 110,000 students enrolled in seven area colleges and universities. Residents have a penchant for health and fitness. Mornings when we walked around Lady Bird Lake, a reservoir on the Colorado River directly behind our hotel, we had plenty of human and canine company.

The entire city is walkable to the point that we didn’t need to rent a car. A free trolley runs between big attractions and downtown neighborhoods, and public transit makes getting around a breeze.

“It’s all about lifestyle,” said Lisa Wineland, a commercial realtor who relocated from Washington, D.C., four years ago. Wineland, a native of Lubbock, is the first to say that Austin isn’t like other places in Texas. “Everybody’s fit and into organic food here. Austin is also at the forefront of the green movement in Texas, and the weather’s great. People are genuinely nice and happy to see you.”

That lifestyle component is one of the reasons celebrities including Luke Wilson, Sandra Bullock, Matthew McConaughey, Lyle Lovett, Lance Armstrong, and Willie Nelson live here.

Austin is on the national music map for two main reasons: the annual South by Southwest indie fest and the rootsy “Austin City Limits” PBS show. Austin has a soundtrack for every music lover. Into a crazy club scene? Head to Sixth Street, seven blocks of neon-light-



AUSTIN CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

SoCo, a South Congress Avenue neighborhood in Austin, is fun and funky. The Mean Eyed Cat bar is in a former chainsaw factory.



JACK PLUNKETT

ed honkytonks that draw a (mostly) college-age crowd to a wide mix of nightclubs and lounges, including Light Bar, Fuel, and Momo’s, which has an awesome rooftop deck overlooking the city. Our highlight was taking in Esther’s Follies, a comedy revue that pokes hilarious fun at current events and politicians.

A few blocks away is the Warehouse District, an entertainment zone that covers a lot of musical ground. Drawing an older crowd to hot spots along 4th and 5th streets, the area is where we found Antone’s. It’s also home to the eclectic Alamo Draffhouse, a pub/art-movie house that sometimes features live music. Another happening spot is the basement at the Elephant Room on Congress Avenue, a draw for jazz groups.

We took a cab to what became our favorite bar in town, the Mean Eyed Cat. Located in a former chainsaw factory, it is a live music venue and a Johnny Cash tribute bar, complete with velvet paint-

ings and prison photos. And yes, “Ring of Fire” is on the jukebox. We caught a favorite locals band called Reid Wilson & His So-Called Friends.

For a good dose of Austin weirdness, it doesn’t get any better than SoCo, the South Congress Avenue neighborhood south of Lady Bird Lake. Lined with funky

shops, art galleries, cafes, and music venues, SoCo is the city at its hippest. Shops like Lucy in Disguise for costumes to rent or buy, New Bohemia for retro collectibles, and Uncommon Objects for Texas-made artsy accessories, kept us happy for hours.

For lunch, we stopped at the venerable Güero’s Taco Bar, where a band was setting up for an afternoon jam session. Dessert meant crossing the street and lining up at Amy’s Ice Cream, with homemade flavors like Mexican vanilla, sweet cream, and even Shiner Bock, inspired by a local micro brew.

Eats in Austin range from down home Tex Mex, including breakfast at Las Manitas, with its mix of starving artists and local power brokers, to fresh and healthy cafe fare at the gigantic Whole Foods, the brand’s flagship store, or its grass-roots counterpart, Central Market. Barbecue is taken to new heights at Lamberts Downtown BBQ, a magnet for twenty- and thirtysomethings who

like a little extra sauce with their lounge scene. A few other notable spots include Wink, Jeffrey’s, Aquarelle, the Driskill Grill, and The Belmont, with its fun, retro vibe.

Trio, the recently renovated restaurant at Four Seasons, topped our list of swank dining spots, thanks to chef Todd Duplechan’s emphasis on local and seasonal ingredients and a top-shelf wine list, including 60 by the glass. For brunch, gospel music at

Stubb’s, with its \$16.95 buffet laden with red-eye gravy, grits, biscuits, brisket, and barbecue chicken, is a must.

We couldn’t leave Austin without a spa visit. Or two? The new spa at Four Seasons emphasizes treatments incorporating native Texas plants and flowers like Hill Country lavender, yellow rose petals, Hill Country grapeseed, and Colorado River mud, all in a setting of luxe serenity. At Milk + Honey, a day spa in the heart of the downtown Second Street shopping district, we were scrubbed, rinsed, and kneaded.

The only complaint we had about our long weekend? Way too short.

Beth D’Addono, a freelance writer in Belmont Hills, Pa., can be reached at bethdaddono@cast.net.

99 CALIFORNIA	124 LONDON	170 PARIS	457 JOHNSBURG/CAPE	565 AUSTRALIA
Florida 99 Frankfurt 170 Prague 230 Lima 288 Casablanca 347 Lagos 405	Portland 100 Costa Ri 175 Tokyo 230 Athens 282 Manila 402 Accra 407	Vegas 108 Amster 185 Italy 240 India 295 Bra Aires 406 Auckland 510	Seattle 118 Dublin 205 Istanbul 262 Bangkok 300 Tel Aviv 407 Dakar 500	Manchester 155 Zurich 210 Madrid 270 Beijing 320 Santiago 438 Conakry 640
Denver 158 Brussels 222 Moscow 275 Brazil 320 Nairobi 455 Monrovia 727	*Prices include taxes and fees. **From Boston. ***Per hour. ****Per person. *****Per credit card fees. **Bank at 170hours.com			

R A TRAVEL Since 1976	
RIO/SAPALL.....280	WEST AFRICA.....370
LONDON/DUBLIN.....140-180	MARROCCO.....350
PARIS/GERMANY.....175	TOKYO.....250
SOUTH AMERICA.....290	CALIFORNIA.....99
TELAVIV.....339	FLORIDA.....79
CAIRO/CAS.....310	MEXICO.....149
AUSTRALIA.....498	ITALY/SPAIN.....189
SOUTH AFRICA.....375	DELHI/BOMBAY.....385
1(800)788-0777 1(212)633-9300 www.ratravel.com	

EUROPE'S BEST BUYS - ALL/MOSTLY INCLUSIVE!
Spring-Dec. '08: Italy (Rome/Flo/Vce, Sicily, Sorrento, Tuscany, Lakes, Riviera) IRL, Greece, Spain, France, Portugal Plus China, Branson, US Nat'l Parks w/Vegas, all escorted
DURGAN TRAVEL SERVICE - STONEHAM, MA
781-433-2224 1-800-224-6953
Sign up for email specials at www.durgantravel.com

DON'T GET SOAKED ON YOUR CRUISE!
Cruise Brothers
CruiseBrothers.com
PRINCESS CRUISES SALE
Reduced deposits \$100 per person
\$120 value onboard coupon booklet
Shipboard credit on selected sailings!
1.800.235.4611
Website is open 24 hours for online bookings!

If you go . . .

Where to stay
The Driskill Hotel
604 Brazos St.
800-252-9367
driskillhotel.com
Austin’s historic “grande dame” was built in 1886 as a showplace by a cattle baron and remains one of the most elegant hotels west of the Mississippi. From \$192.60.
Four Seasons Austin
98 San Jacinto Blvd.
512-685-8100
fourseasons.com/Austin
On Lady Bird Lake, steps away from night life and dining, and home to a 6 a.m. live music broadcast during South by Southwest. A first-class spa and Trio for fine dining draw a well-heeled crowd. From \$320.
Where to eat
Las Manitas Avenue Cafe
211 Congress Ave.
512-472-9357
Spicy huevos rancheros for breakfast, tacos, fajitas, and enchiladas for lunch, and fresh-squeezed fruit juices. The service is fast and friendly, and the people-watching is the best. \$4-\$8.
Ranch 616
616 Nueces St.
512-479-7616
<http://ranch616.yguides.net>
A favorite among locals, visitors, and celebrities. Serves upscale Southwestern cuisine in a fun, kitschy atmosphere with a South Texas icehouse theme. Chef Kevin Williamson’s fried oysters have been voted

“Best in the South” by Southern Living magazine.
What to do
Central Market
4001 North Lamar
512-458-3068
centralmarket.com
This indie fresh food market is heaven for foodies, and offers evening cooking classes that are great for improving your skills and meeting locals. \$40-\$65, including food and wine.
Esther’s Follies
525 East 6th St.
512-320-0553
esthersfollies.com
Austin’s original political satire and musical parody troupe entertains in the heart of downtown. \$20-\$25
Shop South Congress Avenue
firstthursday.info
Hip strip of junk stores, antique shops, trendy boutiques. Key stops include Uncommon Objects, Lucy in Disguise with Diamonds, Parts & Labour. Head farther south to Heritage Boots (3100 South Congress Ave., across from the St. Edward’s University campus), where custom, handmade boots with true south Austin flavor are the order of the day.
Milk + Honey
204 Colorado St.
512-236-1115
milkandhoneyspa.com
A day spa-retreat with massage, nail treatments, and more in Austin’s upscale, pedestrian shopping district. From \$65 for a 45-minute massage.



a. ▶ FOLD

How close are you to the perfect getaway?

▶ FOLD b.





a. ▶ FOLD

Escape to the waters of Discovery Cove to swim with dolphins and exotic sea life in a relaxed all-inclusive environment. Take advantage of this special, limited time offer. Your reservation includes unlimited admission to either SeaWorld, Aquatica or Busch Gardens during your vacation. To reserve your getaway today at one of Orlando's beautiful Marriott properties, call 866-316-6392.

▶ FOLD b.





DISCOVERY COVE®
DiscoveryCove.com



MARriott
HOTELS & RESORTS
1-866-316-6392