

BLUES & BREWS

EVERYTHING IS BIGGER IN TEXAS, AND IN AUSTIN, IT'S ALSO BETTER THAN EVER.

By Becca Hensley with contribution from Sarah Perkins

Tumbleweeds? Heck no. Austin is a university town set in the heart of Texas, surrounded by hills, lakes and vineyards galore. A thriving, hip metropolis, it may be best known for its music scene, but most visitors swoon over its eateries, unique bars, galleries and independently owned shops too. On a dammed river Texans call a lake, the city challenges fitness buffs to excel with places to run, kayak, bike and rent stand-up paddleboards. With a bevy of crowd-pleasing music festivals, including South by Southwest and Austin City Limits, Austin has plenty of party. For the North Shore, daily nonstops from O'Hare mean it's a great long weekend destination. Here, an invite.



VINYL BEAUTIES
Playing up Austin's passion for music, the W has a series of tune-themed living-room lobbies. This one is bedecked with albums.

STAY HIP

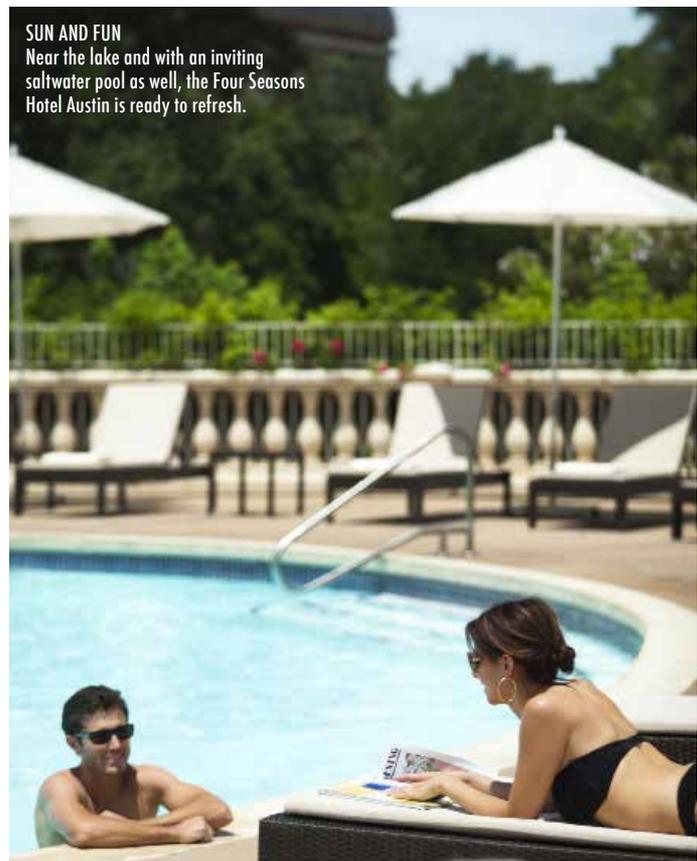
The W Austin in the Second-Street District occupies one of the best locations in town. A colony of cool, it has music-themed, living room-style bars, always thronged with locals. We love the Away Austin Spa for detox massages; the fourth floor's outdoor pool deck; and Trace, a restaurant with a penchant for farm-to-fork flavors—and a brunch scene that cures what ails you. Conveniently, the hotel sits beside Austin City Limits, a favorite concert venue. *Rates from \$340, 200 Lavaca St., 512.542.3600, whotelaustin.com*



PAMPERING PEDI
Unwind at the Away Austin Spa, where massages, facials, pedicures and body treatments are all on deck.

STAY DIVINE

Situated on the banks of picturesque Lady Bird Lake, the Four Seasons Hotel Austin has your lavish getaway covered. While it has close proximity to the happening SoCo neighborhood, you'll feel like you're at a secluded resort. Take a dip in the outdoor saltwater pool and relax afterward in the fitness center's eucalyptus steam rooms. In the evening, take in the lake views on the outdoor terrace at Trio, the hotel's own fine-dining spot known for its Texas grill favorites and choice wine list. Plush rooms and suites offer the best of the city and Austin's natural beauty—without giving up any luxe amenities. *Rates from \$500, 98 San Jacinto Blvd., 512.478.4500, fourseasons.com/austin*



SUN AND FUN
Near the lake and with an inviting saltwater pool as well, the Four Seasons Hotel Austin is ready to refresh.

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GET PRETTY

Even though you're on vacay, travel can cause major stress.

These spas and salons will help you feel your weekend best in no time. An Austin favorite, Milk + Honey (milkandhoneyspa.com) is known for its natural and organic products. Book the couples massage, a customized dual Swedish-style rubdown for you and the "honey" in your life. Is your 'do falling flat? Check out Roar (roar-roar.com), the city's premier hair salon, for a blowout to tame your mane. Treat your paws and claws to the mani-pedi retreat at Hiatus Spa + Retreat (hiatusspa.com)—it's hard not to drift away when you're relaxing with a warm neck wrap in a zero-gravity chair. Lose your glow on the plane ride? The ultimate skin treatment at Face to Face Spa (facetofacespa.com) will surely perk up your complexion.



HIGHLIGHTS

This chic hair haven, Roar, is near downtown Austin in the hip Rainey Street Historic District.



URBAN OASIS

Lady Bird Lake is the heartbeat of Austin, with a trail that rings the river. You'll see birds, turtles and Austin's own bat colony.

DO

Pedal Pushing

Cycling buffs get their fix at bike-nerd heaven Mellow Johnny's Bike Shop (mellowjohnnys.com). This state-of-the-art shop, located downtown, lies just a spin away from Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Path. The store leads group bike rides, offers free bike-route maps aplenty and provides a shower for post-ride cleanup.

Barton Springs

It's cold. But that's OK because you will probably be sweating. Cool off like the locals do at this 900-foot-long historic swimming hole, found smack-dab in the middle of Zilker Park. Spring-fed, its crystalline waters remain 68 degrees year-round. Hilly banks hold sunbathers aplenty, and it's a great spot to bring a picnic lunch. Want to go wild? Keep your eyes peeled for the spring's inhabitant, an endangered albino salamander.

Lady Bird Lake

This fit city never tires. The lake here, although much smaller than Lake Michigan, fills the same function as an outdoor sporting arena. Start by running on the loop that courses for miles around the downtown portion of the Colorado River. Don't like to hoof it? Then, balance on a stand-up paddleboard or cruise the duck-filled waters in a kayak.

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EAT

Mexican Food and Barbecue

You'll beg for mercy when you order your barbecue family style at ranch-like The Salt Lick (saltlickbbq.com). Platters filled with three meats, slaws, potato salad, homemade bread and pickles just keep coming until you can't take it anymore. All-the-rage Franklin Barbecue (franklinbarbecue.com) gets accolades for its tender brisket, but you'll have to wait in line. El Naranjo (elnaranjo-restaurant.com) serves scratch-made interior Mexican cuisine at its elegant digs in the Rainey Street party 'hood. A departure from Tex-Mex, it specializes in Oaxacan specialties. Taco lovers, dig in at Changos Taqueria (changos.com), near the university, where rotisserie-tender pork pairs with pineapple inside house-pressed corn tortillas.

Big Food and Beer Joints

Start with Munich; sprinkle in some Paris; stir it together in Texas—and you have Easy Tiger (easytigeraustin.com), a bakery-meets-beer haus on East Sixth Street. Upstairs, expert bakers turn out crunchy baguettes, splintering croissants and chewy pretzels. Go subterranean to the beer garden; a pub serving more than 30 artisan beers and platters of housemade charcuterie, cheese and homemade mustards. At Banger's Sausage House & Beer Garden (bangersaustin.com), in the trendy Rainey Street entertainment zone, choose from 104 brews to complement 30 varieties of handcrafted sausages (smoky wild boar and more). Not a beer person? Go for the Manmosa, a liter of bubbly just sprinkled with juice—all for \$10.



SPECIAL ORDERS
Munich in Austin? Kinda. Enjoy Banger's outdoor beer garden with housemade German and French specialties.

ROAD TRIP

Hire a driver and explore the Texas Wine Trail, which unfurls just a short drive from downtown. Undulating past scrub oaks, wildflower-dotted fields, antique store-filled hamlets and picturesque diners, the trail leads to 42 Texas-style vineyards. Some to try: Becker Vineyards (beckervineyards.com), Grape Creek Vineyards (grapecreek.com), Hye Meadow Winery (hyemeadow.com) and William Chris Vineyards (williamchrisswines.com).

NIGHTLIFE

Whisler's (whislertx.com), ensconced in an historic building in atmospheric East Austin, has the town talking. Two bars in one, the bottom section serves up bespoke cocktails with a flourish. While upstairs, it welcomes an exclusive crowd to Mezcalería Tobalá, an Oaxacan-intoned mezcal bar awash with the agave goods. Candlelit and moody, it proves the perfect spot to learn everything you wanted to know about tequila's lesser-known cousin. At Pêche (pecheaustin.com), an absinthe bar that borrows its atmosphere from Provence, tipple artfully concocted potations which star La Fée Verte. Swing your partner on the dance floor at the Broken Spoke (brokenspokeaustintx.com), a south Austin institution, where Texas bands blare nightly. At East Side Showroom (eastsideshowroom.com), a supreme people-watching spot, the barkeeps shake it up with imaginative combinations sure to quench your thirst. The Rattle Inn (rattleinnaustin.com), the rooftop Hangar Lounge (thehangarlounge.com) and Donn's Depot (donsdepot.com) are also worthy of stops.

SHOP & BOP

All the cool kids roam SoCo, the neighborhood just south of the river. Loaded with places to imbibe and nosh, it's best known for its unique shops. Get your cowpoke on at Allens Boots (allensboots.com) and then find your little black dress at Blackmail (blackmailboutique.com). All that shopping made you thirsty? Take a margarita break at Guero's Taco Bar (guerostacobar.com), and when darkness falls, groove to some tunes at The Continental Club (continentalclub.com), Austin's archetypical speak-easy.



ON THE ROCKS
In the heart of SoCo, Guero has an outdoor music garden, ideal for margarita sipping.



BLUES BREAK
If you only have one night, be sure to spend it at The Continental Club—Austin's most iconic music venue.