

WALKING IN MEMPHIS

Tennessee's second-largest city surprises with music, history and culinary creativity

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES



Elvis, Beale Street and barbecue tend to dominate popular perceptions of Tennessee's second-largest city, but the Home of the Blues is also one of the coolest destinations in the South. Often overlooked by first-time travelers to the region, Memphis is a vibrant city with a rich musical heritage, an illustrious African American history and a burgeoning culinary scene.

Civil Rights on View

For many people, Memphis is synonymous with one of the most significant events in the American Civil Rights Movement: the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The activist was shot while standing on his balcony at the Lorraine Motel, an unassuming two-story property that catered to Black travelers during the segregation era. Located about a 15-minute walk from the Beale Street Entertainment District, the motel is now home to one of the city's main attractions: the National Civil Rights Museum.

Through film, audio, interactive media and hundreds of artifacts, guests are taken on a journey from slavery through the Civil War to the seminal events of the late 20th century that inspired equality for all. The story begins in the state-of-the-art circular gallery and finishes in King's room on the second floor.

Remembering Elvis

Each year, more than 500,000 visitors tour Graceland, the final home and resting place of the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Tours of Graceland depart from the visitor's center, a massive complex filled with museums, entertainment venues, exhibition halls, restaurants, gift shops and Elvis' personal aircraft. Shuttles take guests across the highway and up the hill to the gated home. The mansion is smaller than expected, but fans will delight in viewing the King's eclectic design choices and seeing the famous Jungle Room. Finish the tour at the Meditation Garden, a tranquil space where Elvis, his parents and his daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, are all buried.

A Rich Musical Legacy

While Beale Street may be considered the "Official Home of the Blues," plenty of fantastic music was created farther afield. Sun Studio is where rock 'n' roll took shape in the 1950s. It was here that local DJ Sam Phillips helped popularize the likes of Ike Turner, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and Elvis. The tour takes guests through a small museum filled with memorabilia from the studio's early recording days and finishes in the actual studio, which houses the piano that Lewis played and a microphone used by the King.

In the 1960s and '70s, Memphis played an important role in developing American soul music, thanks in large part to the

musicians behind Stax Records. The tiny recording studio in South Memphis produced a string of hits that catapulted artists like Otis Redding, Al Green, Aretha Franklin, Booker T. & the M.G.'s and Isaac Hayes to stardom. The Stax Museum of American Soul Music tells the studio's story through more than 2,000 interactive exhibits, films and artifacts. Don't miss Hayes' gold-plated 1972 Superfly Cadillac El Dorado.

Beyond Barbecue

Memphis cooks up some of the country's best 'cue, with places such as Corky's, The Rendevous and The Bar-B-Q Shop attracting die-hard carnivores and foodies.

If you're searching for even more of the King, try out one of his favorite dishes: a fried peanut butter and banana sandwich. Order one at the Arcade Restaurant, a cafe that was founded in 1919. Elvis was a regular here. For lunch, visit the historic Four Way restaurant. Founded in 1946, this Memphis institution has been a favorite of civil rights leaders, musicians, politicians and locals craving soul food. Elvis was a fan of the eatery's fried catfish, fried chicken and peach cobbler.

But Memphis also serves up plenty of dynamic cuisine. Kinfolk is one of the city's newest additions. Chef and owner Cole Jeanes opened the farm-fresh Southern breakfast joint in Harbor Town Square in August. Showcasing locally sourced products, Kinfolk serves creative classics. Griddle cakes are topped with pecan pie butter and rosemary-maple syrup.

Amelia Gene's dazzles in the renovated former Wm C. Ellis & Sons Ironworks shop. The brick and concrete building has been given a glam update with a gleaming crystalline art piece/light fixture that spans the dining room. From charred octopus salad or Wagyu steak tartar to Georges Banks scallops or a half Rohan duck, Chef Nate Henssler's globally inspired menu is seasonal and refined.

Chez Philippe in the historic Peabody Memphis Hotel is Tennessee's only Forbes Four-Star and AAA Four-Diamond rated restaurant. Come for the Peabody's world-famous duck march, when the hotel's ducks (yes!) are paraded into and out of the lobby fountain, and stay for chef de cuisine Keith Clinton's delectable four- or seven-course tasting menu. For lighter fare, enjoy a traditional afternoon tea.

Where to Stay

More than a dozen hotels from some of the nation's trendiest brands have opened recently. Hyatt debuted its newest chain in Memphis. Caption by Hyatt Beale Street is the second of three planned Hyatt hotels being developed downtown. It repurposes the Wm. C Ellis & Sons building, adding a modern 136-guestroom tower above. Caption is situated next door to Hyatt Centric, and the two hotels are connected by a walkway. Across town is the Memphian Hotel, a Marriott Tribute Portfolio property, which is a fun, funky tribute to the local arts scene. The decor is bold and playful, with bright colors, splashy patterns and animal prints. The Guest House at Graceland is a luxe resort located just steps from its namesake mansion. For more, visit www.memphistravel.com.

