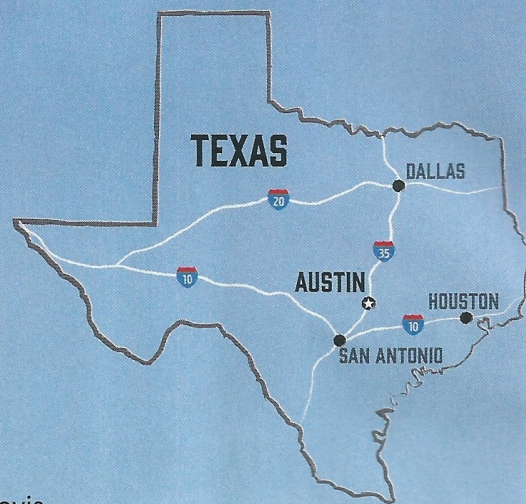


Scaling the Silicon Hills

Why now is a great time to visit ever-evolving Austin

By Cynthia J. Drake ✪ Photographs by Kimberly Davis

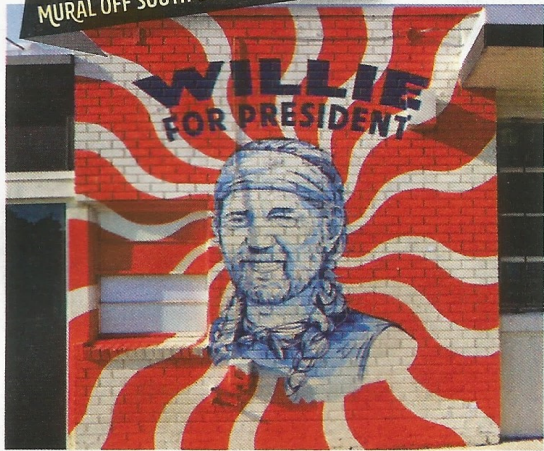


In a state that's always grabbing headlines for its growth, Austin's evolution isn't exactly news, but it's still exciting to watch. New restaurants, hotels, and other businesses are popping up at a dizzying pace. New high-rises are planned for the famed South Congress district, and East Austin has taquerias, barbecue joints, and boutique hotels that are generating buzz. If it's been a while since you've visited, now just might be a great time to return.

FUN FACT: Austin is sometimes called "Silicon Hills" in a nod to the cluster of tech companies that have moved to the area in recent decades, bringing with them some of an estimated 150 net new Austinites every day.



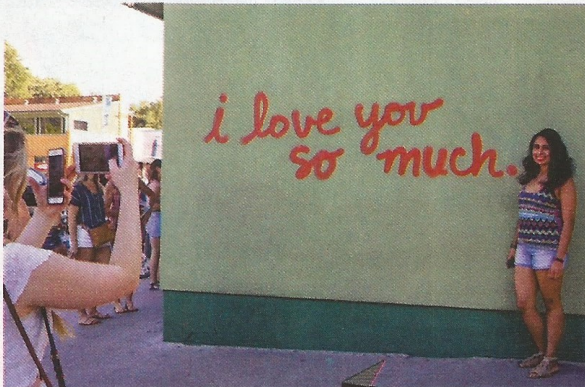
MURAL OFF SOUTH CONGRESS AVENUE



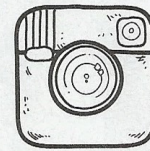
TACODELI



HOTEL ZAZA AUSTIN



MURAL AT JO'S COFFEE



INSTA-WORTHY

Though Austin's most photographed graffiti park (HOPE Outdoor Gallery) closed this year, a new location is expected to open at Carson Creek Ranch. Meanwhile, people still line up to snap a pic in front of **Jo's Coffee's "I love you so much" mural.**

Day 1

TACO 'BOUT A GOOD START: Austin locals are always debating the town's best breakfast taco, and visitors should sample at least a few to find their own favorite. A worthy starting point is **Tacodeli**, founded here by Mexico City native Roberto Espinosa in 1999 and celebrating its first downtown restaurant opening this year on Congress Avenue. Order up Jamón El Suavecito, tender belly smoked ham with a mix of cheeses for a perfectly Austin start to your day. (512) 601-6631; tacodeli.com.

BOOK IT: A library might seem an unlikely must-see spot, but **Austin Central** is no ordinary library. Named one of 100 World's Greatest Places by *Time* magazine in 2018, the six-floor library has earned high marks for green features, including rainwater-powered bathrooms and a seed library. Don't miss the rooftop garden, a technology "petting zoo" with 3D printers, and the **Cookbook Bar and Café**. (512) 974-7400; library.austintexas.gov.

ENJOY THE FARE: Austin has so many dining options that deciding where to eat can be overwhelming. All the more reason to check out **Fareground**, Austin's first food hall, located on Congress

Avenue and home to outposts of several of the city's hottest restaurants, including **Contigo**, **Henbit**, **Ni-Komé**, and **Dai Due Taqueria**. It makes for an easy DIY food crawl at lunch or dinner. faregroundaustin.com.

CATCH A SHOW: Choose your own musical adventure in Austin. Head to the **Elephant Room** (elephantroom.com) for jazz, **Broken Spoke** (brokenspokeaustintx.net) for country, Antone's (antonesnightclub.com) for blues, and the **Cactus Café** (cactuscafe.org) for acoustic singer-songwriters. The granddaddy of Austin venues is the **Continental Club** (continentalclub.com), while the **Austin City Limits stage at Moody Theater** (acl-live.com) hosts major performers.

SLEEP HERE: The **East Austin Hotel**, which opened in May, embraces a midcentury aesthetic with locally sourced vintage furnishings, and dozens of traditional rooms, as well as "cabins"—budget-friendly private rooms with shared bathrooms. The hotel also has three on-site restaurants and bars. *Rooms start at \$99.* (737) 205-8888; eastaustinhotel.com. Feel like a splurge? Check out the new luxe **Hotel ZaZa Austin**. *Rates start at \$289.* (512) 542-9292; hotelzaza.com/austin.



RING IN THE HOLIDAYS, AUSTIN-STYLE.

If you're in town December 10-23, stroll through the impressive **Trail of Lights** that illuminate **Zilker Park** and be sure to walk underneath the 155-foot Zilker Holiday Tree. The **Armadillo Christmas Bazaar** at Palmer Events Center has art and live music December 13-24.

ANN AND ROY BUTLER HIKE-AND-BIKE TRAIL



OLAMAIE



THE BRUNCH BOAT

Day 2

BIKE THE COLORADO RIVER: Enjoy some Texas sunshine with a bike ride that spans the Colorado River's downtown stretch, which includes Lady Bird Lake and Zilker Park. Rent a bike at one of the many Austin **B-cycle** stations around town. Rates start at \$3. austinbicycle.com. Then explore the 10-mile **Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail**. tinyurl.com/austintrail. Once you get to Zilker Park, you can cool down with a dip at **Barton Springs**, where a spring-fed, 70-degree public pool is open year-round. Closed Thursdays. Nonresident adults, \$9.

'CUE-CRAWL: No Austin visit is complete without indulging in barbecue. A great choice is still **Franklin Barbecue** (franklinbbq.com), where waiting in line is a sacred tradition (think lawn chairs and beverages, tailgate-style). An explosion of worthy competitors has followed in recent years, many of them in East Austin. You can't go wrong at **La Barbecue** (labarbecue.com),

Micklethwait Craft Meats (craftmeatsaustin.com), or **J. Leonardi's Barbecue** (texasbbqaustin.com).

IN LIVING COLOR: See *Austin*, one of the most talked-about art installations of the past two years, by the late artist Ellsworth Kelly. Located at the **Blanton Museum of Art** on the University of Texas at Austin campus, Kelly's sparse chapel-like structure with colorful geometric shapes on three sides always looks different depending on the sun. blantonmuseum.org. While you're on campus, also check out **James Turrell's *The Color Inside***, a skylight art installation best seen at sunrise or sunset. Free, reservation required. turrell.utexas.edu.

ENJOY THE SHOW: For a different kind of cinematic experience, head to **Blue Starlite Drive-In**, which shows classic films that moviegoers watch from the comfort of their car or lawn chair. Tickets start at \$10. bluestarlitdrivein.com.

Day 3

GO BRUNCHING: Partake in the beloved Austin brunching tradition by reserving your spot on a bus or a boat. On the **Brunch Bus** by Twisted Texas Tours, a live band serenades you through three brunch spots. \$69; twistedtexastour.com. In November and December, join Buddy the Elf on an Austin Tour Company-led slow **Brunch Boat** to nowhere on Lady Bird Lake, featuring dancing on the top deck, tacos below, and plenty of giggles. \$49; austintourcompany.com.

TAKE A HIKE: To get a classic Hill Country view of Lake Austin, climb 106 steps up **Mount Bonnell**. After making your way down, check out **Laguna Gloria**, a 14-acre outdoor sculpture and art-installation park located just a mile away. (512) 458-8191. Consider buying picnic fixings at the new French-American café, **Épicerie**. (512) 371-6840; epicerieaustin.com.

BISCUITS, PLEASE: Treat yourself to an elevated Southern-style meal at **Olamaie**, featuring the culinary stylings of James Beard Award finalist Michael Fojtasek. Start with the Ranger Cattle Beef Tartare and off-the-menu biscuits with honey butter. Reservations recommended. (512) 474-2796; olamaieaustin.com.

Austin-based **Cynthia J. Drake** recently volunteered to perform as an extra in a music video drinking Topo Chico, filmed at the Broken Spoke—practically a “cover-all” on an Austin bingo scorecard.