



[Nashville, TN.]

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Getting Down in Music City USA

[WRITTEN BY LISSA POIROT]

You don't have to be a lover of country music to fall in love with Nashville; you just need to have an appreciation for its roots in all types of music, including gospel, rock-n-roll and even pop. Energy bounces off the streets of this lively and hip city. Maybe it has something to do with the hidden speakers around downtown pumping out music throughout the day. Maybe it's the honky-tonks, doors open wide, featuring live acts night and day. Or maybe it's the street corner songwriter, guitar case open to collect a few bills and coins, singing his heart out and hoping to be discovered. They didn't go wrong in nicknaming Nashville "Music City," and a visit to this intimate neighbor, just under four hours by car and two hours by air, should be a requirement for any true Southerner, or one who wishes to embrace a newfound love for the South.

Don't let its country roots lead you to believe this is a Podunk town. Nashville has also been called "The Athens of the South" because of its focus on education — more than two dozen colleges and universities call it home, including Vanderbilt University. Nashville is on the verge of becoming the next great Southern city. Currently, it's small enough to hold onto its charm, but the rise of in-town condos and rebirth of bungalow-lined neighborhoods is similar to Atlanta before its own population explosion and just an inkling of what's to come in a city shrouded in trees amidst rolling hills.

WHERE TO STAY

With 3,000 rooms and suites providing everything under one roof so you don't have to leave, the **Gaylord Opryland Resort** is conveniently located on the outskirts of the city near the airport, as well as the Grand Ole Opry and Opry Mills shopping. Rooms start as low as \$239 a night, while more than a dozen restaurants make dining out easy. Built in a conservatory fashion, the resort features miles of indoor botanical gardens and its own river and even offers Delta River Flatboat Tours. The resort's pastures give wannabe equestrians a chance to get the lay of the land on the back of a horse, and those in need of physical fitness can find it in the 4,000-square-foot fitness center, in one of a multitude of swimming pools or on the links at the 18-hole Gaylord Springs course, which is a stop on the Senior PGA Tour. Relache Spa provides a host of relaxing treats, from massages to facials to body treatments to hair and nail services.

GETAWAY

However, if you prefer to be close to the action, visit the **Nashville Hilton** or the **Hermitage Hotel**, each located in the heart of downtown. Save a few bucks without sacrificing location at the Hilton, just across the street from the Country Music Hall of Fame and new Schermerhorn Symphony Center, and a block away from Broadway. The 330 all-suite rooms start at \$259, and guests enjoy an indoor pool and fitness center, as well as four restaurants. (The Sportsgrille serves up mean barbeque ribs!)

For luxury at its finest, the Hermitage is a five-diamond, historic hotel featuring 123 elegantly appointed guest rooms and suites with oversized, marble bathrooms. (Rates start at \$279 per night.) Fine dining is located at either the Capitol Grille or Oak Bar, and afternoon tea service is provided in the lobby daily. Pets are not only welcome at the Hermitage, they are pampered with a program that includes dog walking service, grooming and gourmet meals prepared by the hotel's chefs. Babysitting services are offered for children, who can also participate in etiquette classes before afternoon tea. And the intimate Spa at the Hermitage Hotel can detox the body with massage, scrubs and wraps.



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Gaylord Opryland Resort

WHERE TO PLAY

Both a noun and a verb, a visit to Nashville would be remiss without a stop in a honky-tonk, one of many dive bars that line Broadway, where live music is loud and raw, spilling out into the streets. Inside, throes of people, oft dressed in jeans, boots and cowboy hats, enjoy free nightly music. Of all the honky-tonks, **Tootsie's Orchid Lounge** is renowned as the bar of choice for musicians playing at the Ryman Auditorium, home to the original Grand Ole Opry, ducking out through the alley to grab a few drinks. The joke was that the second half of the Opry was much livelier than the first! www.tootsies.net

If ever a reason to get out of the honky-tonks, it's to visit a little strip mall where an unimposing **Bluebird Café** awaits. This famed café has been featured on Turner South for hosting intimate concerts "in the round," where songwriters sing songs and tell jokes, giving audiences an understanding about the songwriting process and the stories behind some of country music's biggest hits. A line gathers early filled with patrons hoping to grab one of just 23 tables in the one-room café, so you'll need to be an early bird, too! www.bluebirdcafe.com

Continue your foray into music history with a stop at **Ernest Tubb Record Shop** and **Hatch Show Print**, back on Broadway. Ernest Tubb's wasn't just a record shop but a place for up-and-coming musicians to get a radio audience. Loretta Lynn often played in the store's makeshift stage before landing on the Opry, and so many musicians wrapped up concerts at the Opry with jam sessions here that the store had a popular radio show called the



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“Midnight Jamboree.” You may just get to witness an impromptu performance by today’s country legends, if not have a chance to browse thousands of titles to take home. And just down the street, the shop that printed all the concert billboards is now the oldest operating letter-press print shop, and still prints out posters of the city’s upcoming events.

www.etrecordshop.com

But when it comes to shopping, leave Broadway to enjoy one of the city’s up-and-coming neighborhood revitalizations, which means boutique shopping is plentiful. Visit **12 South, East Nashville** and **Hillsboro Village** (don’t miss Fire Finch) for Virginia-Highlands-style boutique shopping in quaint bungalow homes. Or head to the outskirts of town to Opry Mills for miles of bargain outlet shopping with name-brand designer chains.

OUT EXPLORING

Country Music Hall of Fame: A new face to Downtown Nashville is this \$37-million, 40,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility housing country music artifacts, archives and theater space. Watch the progression of country music from its folk-telling roots to its early radio days to the crossover artists currently topping radio charts. www.countrymusichalloffame.com

Music Row: Today’s biggest country artists still record their CDs on this block (Music Square) that also houses headquarters for stars like Reba McEntire and Wynonna Judd. Visit RCA’s Studio B, where more than 1,000 chart toppers, including 250 Elvis hits such as “Are Your Lonesome Tonight?” were recorded.

Ryman Auditorium: The original home of the Grand Ole Opry and the “Mother Church of Country Music,” today the Ryman stage still welcomes acts, where it is rumored the acoustics are second only to the Salt Lake Tabernacle (home to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir). Guided and self-guided tours of the national historic landmark are welcome daily. www.ryman.com

Grand Ole Opry: Although larger than the Ryman, the new Opry is still intimate enough to feel up-close and personal with the world’s longest running radio show, where Minnie Pearl presided in her many hats and Dolly Parton rose to stardom. www.opry.com



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HUNGRY YET?

Nashville’s trendy new restaurants are growing plentiful, but there are two stops that mustn’t be missed when visiting.

Swett’s: Oprah grew up just across the street from this historic soul food restaurant, and still makes an appearance every time she comes to town, simply walking across Clifton Avenue. Three generations of Swett’s have provided continuous service since 1954, serving up comfort food cafeteria style in what is crowded with businessmen during the lunch hour, and everyone in between at night and on weekends. Fried or baked cornbread melts in the mouth and daily servings of barbeque beef, pork and chicken are served beside rotisserie chicken, country fried steak, meat loaf and side dishes grandma only wished she could make so good — turnip greens, macaroni and cheese, okra, squash casserole, candied yams and fried apples. Save room for homemade peach or blackberry cobbler or pecan, fudge or sweet potato pie. www.swettsrestaurant.com

Loveless Café: It's a hike to get to the Loveless Motel & Café, still considered within Nashville's city limits, but this famed restaurant/motel serves up a mean country breakfast, and is world-renowned for its biscuits. More than 50 years young, the quaint, country restaurant serves up award-winning country ham and red eye gravy, Southern fried chicken and homemade preserves that melt away on the fresh biscuits — be careful not to devour too many before the meal, as they are easy to overload on! Beloved by residents, you may just stumble across a celeb or two during your meal. www.lovelesscafe.com



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HOW TO GET THERE

Nashville is just under four hours from Atlanta by car. Take I-75 crossing into Tennessee, then merge with I-24 West via Exit 2 toward Chattanooga/Nashville, which will bring you back into Georgia before crossing back again into Tennessee. Connect to I-40 West via Exit 211A, which will take you directly into Nashville's city limits. Direct flights to Nashville International Airport are just more than an hour and are available through Delta Airlines. For more information, visit www.nashvillecvb.com.



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Picture-Perfect Moment: Grand Ole Opry

Sure, there may be a photo more picturesque than this one, but when you think of Nashville, you can't help but think of the Grand Ole Opry and the throes of country legends that have performed on its sacred stage. Starting with its humble beginnings as a Tabernacle church,

performing at the original Ryman Auditorium became every country and western singer's dream come true. The Opry became the place for singers and songwriters, who knew they finally "made it" when they were invited to perform. Today, the Grand Ole Opry has a new and bigger home at Opry Mills, designed to resemble the original, and each seat still provides a fantastic and up-close view. When the curtain comes up and the red lights of the "barn" appear, you can almost hear Minnie Pearl saying "Howdy!" The Grand Ole Opry is still a live radio show, so audiences sit through commercial announcements and set changes, with banter from Opry members on hand to entertain that evening. You never know who will be performing, and this particular visit was a lucky break. Cole Porter was celebrating 25 years as a member of the Grand Ole Opry and his friend Marty Stewart joined him for old and new songs before a special guest arrived with her well wishes — the legendary Dolly Parton. As Cole's one-time partner, Parton wrote "I Will Always Love You" as her teary goodbye to Cole when she decided to go solo. The evening came alive when Parton performed "Jolene," "Coat of Many Colors," "9 to 5," as well as her beloved hit "I Will Always Love You." However, no matter who performs on stage, an evening at the Grand Ole Opry puts the magic into Music City!