



# DISCOVER AUSTIN CITY... NO LIMITS!

**Downtown Austin** looking across Lady Bird Lake.  
(Lower Colorado River Authority)



Austin sustains many vibrant cultures and subcultures flourishing in a community that allows room for new ideas. The beauty of our green spaces, the luxury of a recreational lake in the middle of the city, historic downtown architecture blending with soaring new mixed-use high rises, and a warm climate provide inspiration and endless activities for citizens and visitors.

If you haven't heard the city's unofficial motto yet, chances are you will soon after arriving – “Keep Austin Weird” – a grassroots, underground mantra that's filtered upward, encouraging individuality and originality in every form. It's an apt phrase, since from its beginnings Austin has embodied an independent, unconventional spirit.

## EARLY AUSTIN

Austin began as the small, isolated frontier town of Waterloo, settled on the banks of the Colorado River. In 1839, Mirabeau Lamar, later the second president of the Republic of Texas, proposed that the capital of the newly independent republic be moved to Waterloo, preferring its more centralized position in the republic's territory. Sam Houston, elected as the first president of the republic, wanted the capital to remain in the city on the Gulf of Mexico that was named for him. Lamar prevailed, and Waterloo was renamed Austin, in honor of early Texas colonizer Stephen F. Austin. Three years later, Houston's attempt to relocate the capital by taking possession of the official papers of the republic under cover of darkness was thwarted by Austin citizens, in what has become known as the Archives War of 1842. The scene is now immortalized by a bronze statue on Congress Avenue, the main downtown thoroughfare, showing townswoman Angelina Eberly lighting a cannon to startle Houston's men. Waterloo has not been forgotten, either. Several local businesses and a city park proudly bear its name.

## BUILDINGS AND LANDMARKS

In 1845, Austin became a state capital when the United States annexed the Republic of Texas. The current capitol building was completed in 1888 on an area of high ground, replacing the previous one that had burned with an imposing Renaissance Revival native pink granite and limestone structure, the largest state capitol building in the nation. The dome is topped by the Goddess of Liberty, a zinc statue of a woman holding aloft a gilded Lone Star. From many vantage points downtown there are unobstructed views of the Capitol, planned for and protected by state law. Visitors are free to explore the beautifully maintained Capitol grounds and the building itself, where tour guides are available. The soaring interior of the Rotunda is a magnificent space and an excellent place to cool down during a summer walk.

Equally a part of Austin's identity, beyond its role as state capital, is the fact that it is home to the state's (and at times the nation's) largest by enrollment public institution of higher learning, The University of Texas at Austin. Established in 1883, UT Austin features beautiful and iconic buildings, including the Main Building and Tower, situated on a hill due north of the State Capitol, the two structures standing guard over the city's political and academic spheres. One of many campus buildings worth visiting, adjacent to the tower, is ornate Battle Hall, on the National Register of Historic Places. Littlefield Fountain with its tiered pools and bronze statues is a popular snapshot background and provides a focal point for the central area of the university built to architect Paul Cret's campus master plan, in a Spanish Mediterranean style. The entire campus is lined with wonderful examples of the city's live oak trees, which provide shady respite from the summer sun, and flowering bushes. Shops and eateries catering to the college crowd line Guadalupe Street, also known as the Drag, on the western edge of campus, and are worth a look for university-themed souvenirs.



Downtown Austin covers an area about thirteen blocks square, friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists. A stroll along these streets will lead you past historic structures like the restored Paramount Theatre and the grand Driskill Hotel, which sit amidst an evolving cityscape of old and newer buildings. City Hall, at the south end of downtown looking out onto Lady Bird Lake, was built using a large percentage of recycled materials and features striking, irregular copper-clad roof angles. A limestone plaza on the southern façade provides a large public gathering space where music is often performed. The recently built, massive Frost Tower has become a downtown icon with its faceted crest. It was briefly the tallest downtown structure until the mixed-use skyscraper boom began a few years ago. This year a locally produced calendar features the many construction cranes rising alongside residential-office-retail towers and other buildings in process, visible in several directions from the city's center. Back at ground level, refreshment is always near while exploring downtown, at coffeehouses, gelato shops, sushi bars, delis, and at restaurants offering a full gamut of cuisines.

## FOOD

One of the pleasures of visiting a new city is learning about it through its food. Tex-Mex, a blend of Anglo frontier cooking with Mexican flavors and traditions, is a staple of many restaurants. A basket of warm tortilla chips and a bowl of house-made salsa is a favorite way to start the meal. And once you try an authentic Austin breakfast taco (good at any time of the

day or night, actually), you'll be figuring out how to make them for yourself at home. Barbeque in Austin is all about the smoke, though each pit's sauce has its own twist on spice and heat. A traditional chicken-fried steak meal may hit the spot, and reflects the influence of German immigrants to Central Texas. However, if you're craving French, Cajun, Creole, Middle Eastern, Pacific Rim, or a uniquely Austin hamburger, you'll have plenty of establishments from which to choose. Sixth Street and Congress Avenue offer many dining options, but restaurants are dotted throughout downtown and in all directions. Venture out into the surrounding neighborhoods to discover Craftsman bungalows converted into a New Haven-style pizzeria or into a gourmet café serving food from its own garden. South Congress Avenue, across the lake from downtown, is dense with dining, sipping, shopping, and people-watching opportunities. The eclectic, colorfully decorated storefronts will lure you in to discover clothes, antiques, and gifts. If you're too busy to stop for a meal, two specialty groceries can provide you with substantial snacks and drinks on the run.

## MUSIC AND ART

Once your energy is renewed, avail yourself of Austin's music scene, museums, and art galleries. The Red River Street area downtown has become the axis for live music with local and out-of-town bands, big names and small, playing every night of the week. Having long touted itself as the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin truly sits on the international stage with South



View of downtown Austin from the Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail. Photographer: John Anderson.



by Southwest, an overwhelming week of music, film, and interactive media shows and discussions every March. (Austin's reputation for filmmaking and film culture commands respect across the nation.) You may have witnessed a typically enthusiastic audience of Austinites on a showing of PBS' Austin City Limits, on the air for thirty-five seasons. Now in its eighth year, the Austin City Limits Music Festival brings massive crowds from all over the world to see and hear three days of hot current bands and legendary performers in one of the city's great outdoor spaces, Zilker Park. The city's strong musical life has its roots in early folk traditions that still inspire and contribute to the scene, including African-American blues and jazz and Mexican-American Tejano and Norteño styles.

Art is everywhere you look in Austin, from outdoor murals and sculpture to gallery spaces and a world-class museum. UT Austin's Blanton Museum of Art is the largest university art museum in the United States showcasing European Old Master paintings, modern and contemporary art from the Americas, and an impressive collection of prints and drawings. The Austin Museum of Art and Arthouse at the Jones Center, both downtown, exhibit modern and contemporary art. Galleries and studios are dispersed through the city, supporting an active community of working artists.

## GREEN SPACES

Outdoor recreation is possible year-round in predominantly warm and sunny Austin. Lady Bird Lake, recently renamed in honor of the former First Lady known for her advocacy of nature, flows through the middle of the city and is active with canoes, kayaks, and rowing sculls. An extensive hike and bike trail winds along both sides of the lake and continues through green belt areas into the heart of the city. The great outdoor civic spaces of Zilker Park, Auditorium Shores, and Festival Beach are ideal for running, biking, dog-walking, picnicking, kite-flying, sports, and music events. A favorite way to cool down in summer is to take a plunge into Barton Springs or Deep Eddy, spring-fed pools with refreshingly cool water. Mount Bonnell, a scenic promontory overlooking Lake Austin, is a favorite romantic spot well worth the ninety-nine step climb.

## SEE YOU IN AUSTIN!

Austin is a welcoming city, notably casual and uniquely eclectic in its attitudes and artistic expression. Once you visit, you'll understand why the temptation to stay has been too strong for some to resist. For additional spotlights on a wide spectrum of the city's attractions, visit the host committee's blog at <http://www.archives2009.org/>.

*We'll see you in August!*

*by Rebecca Romanchuk, Texas State Library and Archives Commission*

## COSA AND SAA THANK THE AUSTIN 2009 HOST COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND ENTHUSIASM!

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