



4 HOURS IN...

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AUSTIN



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Try the best of Tex Mex cuisine, shop 'til you drop, swim in a natural lake, watch bats and enjoy Austin's ever-vibrant music scene

1 BREAKFAST TACOS

Austin has a fantastic food scene; its proximity to Mexico explains the creation of Tex Mex cuisine. Make the most of your visit by starting the day with the city's famous breakfast tacos. Veracruz All Natural, run by Veracruz-born sisters Reyna and Maritza Vazquez, has five outposts in Austin and draws in queues with its homemade corn tortillas, smoothies and wide selection of tacos featuring organic ingredients (hence the name). Opt for the meaty El Breakfast Taco or the veggie Migas Poblanas, filled with egg, tortilla chips (a genius addition), poblano pepper, red onion, black beans, queso fresco and avocado. Its site at Line Hotel on East Cesar Chavez offers both indoor and

outdoor space, as well as a collection window masquerading as a taco truck.

2 SOUTHSIDE SHOPPING

Shopping is at its best south of the Colorado River on the trendy South Congress Avenue, otherwise known as SoCo. The stretch of road is packed with boutiques, trendy bars and music venues, while murals on their façades make it known that it's the arty district. Get into the Western spirit by visiting the flagship Allens Boots store at number 1522, recognisable by the large red boot outside. Open since 1977, the family-owned business is filled with thousands of cowboy boots, hats and leather accessories for hefty prices. For second-hand colourful apparel, head to Prototype Vintage Design at number 1700. If

fashion isn't your thing, while away some time at South Congress Books at number 1608, home to second-hand and collectible books, then cool off at the psychedelic-fronted Amy's Ice Creams at number 1301.

3 NATURE'S CALLING

Austin is particularly striking thanks to its blend of city skyscrapers and lush country scenery. Shady walks along the river offer respite from the 40°C heat in the summer months, with the breeze an added bonus. Begin the ten-mile Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail on the north side of Colorado River, crossing over the Pfluger Pedestrian Bridge to get views of the Downtown skyscrapers, watersports on Lady Bird Lake and the graffitied railway bridge

opposite. Once over the bridge, take a left and continue the leafy trail along Auditorium Shores, stopping at the Stevie Ray Vaughan statue which pays tribute to the local guitarist. Alternatively, turn right after the bridge and head to the year-round Barton Springs Pool within Zilker Park for a swim. Get there early on weekends to gain access for US\$9.

4 BAT CITY

Sunset is best enjoyed at Congress Avenue Bridge, which doubles as a bat cave, housing the largest urban bat colony in North America. Since its renovation in 1980, the bridge has attracted Mexican free-tailed bats in their thousands. Arrive early for a prime bat-watching spot, with locals and visitors alike amassing

on the bridge, the Statesman Bat Observation Center (a circular viewing platform adjacent to the structure) or on the river itself aboard kayaks and paddleboards. The nightly show begins with bats circling under the bridge before they fly east over Lady Bird Lake, forming a hazy dark cloud in the distance. The natural phenomenon starts in late March and runs into early autumn. By the end of the summer season you can see roughly 1.5 million bats take flight.

5 MAKE MUSIC MEMORIES

It's sacrilege to visit Austin without experiencing the electrifying music scene, particularly its jazz and country talent. Recommended is the Elephant Room, a speakeasy-style underground bar which has been hosting jazz

sessions since 1991. The venue, located in the basement of the historic Swift Building on Congress Avenue in Downtown, takes its name from an on-site discovery of mastodon bones in 1985. There's no longer an elephant in the room, with the venue instead open nightly with an early show at 6pm followed by a 9pm headliner. Arrive early to nab a table close to the stage, otherwise you'll be queuing up the stairs with fellow latecomers, waiting for people to leave between sets, which is unlikely given the talent on show. It's free entry from Sunday to Wednesday, with a very reasonable US\$5-7 charge on the rest of the days which is added to your tab at the bar. The drinks menu doubles as a show schedule – handy for those planning a return. Recommended is the Ephraim Owens Quintet.

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