

# The New York Times

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By Evan Rail

## 36 Hours in Austin, Texas



Downtown, seen from South Congress Avenue. Credit Stacy Sodolak for The New York Times

The sprawling capital of Texas has welcomed over 100,000 new residents since 2010. Along with all the new Austinites, dozens of new shops, restaurants, bars and hotels have appeared, turning the formerly sleepy city into a thriving metropolis quickly approaching a million inhabitants. This month, the [South by Southwest Festivals](#) will only add to the bustle. To catch up on the cool arrivals, you'll need a rental car or a service like Uber or Lyft, as well as the patience to brave the city's traffic. If you're a first-time visitor, take time for the city's must-sees, like Lady Bird Lake, the State Capitol and the enormous bat colony that lives under the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge. With all the excitement in Austin, you might also find yourself considering moving here for good.

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### Friday

#### 1. The New South, 4 p.m.

While South Congress Avenue, a.k.a. SoCo, has been a countercultural favorite for generations, new arrivals are refreshing this colorful strip south of the Colorado River. Joining established shops like [Service Menswear](#), the recently opened [Revival Cycles](#) stocks cool jeans from Austin's own Traveller

Denim, next to the sleek [South Congress Hotel](#), whose lobby bar has become a destination in and of itself. Across the street, [Cove](#) offers casual women's clothing from Mara Hoffman and other indie designers. Down the street, the well-established [Stag Provisions](#) gives its old fans a new reason to shop through its collection of heritage men's clothing: an exclusive collaboration with boot maker Red Wing, finished in the same rough-out Mohave leather used by the United States Marine Corps (\$260).

## **2. French Fare, 8 p.m.**

With a name like [Hopfields](#), it might sound like this place is all about the suds, but locals love this central Austin gastropub for such French-inspired fare as steak frites with Dijon mustard, house-made pâtés, and the Pascal burger (with Camembert, cornichons, whole grain mustard and caramelized onions), which many call the city's best. At just over four years old, Hopfields is nearly a veteran now, but keep an ear out: Rumors of a coming second location abound.

## **3. Fowl Play, 9:30 p.m.**

Betting on its hometown's claim as the Live Music Capital of the World, [Geraldine's](#) — the stunning fourth-floor bar and restaurant inside the new [Hotel Van Zandt](#) — offers live concerts 365 days a year. (Geraldine's is named after a neighborhood guinea fowl, who moved on to the great farmyard in the sky after being hit by a car in 2014.) Geraldine's offers killer views of the downtown skyline, as well as up-close views of musicians performing everything from modern indie-rock to traditional blues and country.

## **4. Historic Homes, 11 p.m.**

Check out the numerous watering holes on nearby Rainey Street, like 2014's [Container Bar](#), built out of shipping containers. Many popular Austin destinations were constructed inside Rainey's historic bungalows, like [Javelina](#), a friendly roadhouse with communal tables and outdoor seats that face the evening parade.



South Austin Music. Credit Stacy Sodolak for The New York Times

# Saturday

## 5. Java Upgrade, 10 a.m.

Austin's burgeoning barista scene offers plenty of options for a morning pick-me-up, from old favorites like the original location of Caffé Medici on West Lynn Street to newer spots like Radio. Before you explore the shops and restaurants in the South Lamar neighborhood, start at Picnik, a coffee trailer that serves high-grade java, including upgraded options with grass-fed butter and medium-chain triglyceride oil. The pastry case includes Paleo-inspired treats — that morning poppy seed muffin might be delicious, but it's also gluten-free, grain-free and free of refined sugar.

## 6. Punk Ramen , Noon

The city's mainstream prefers noodles in their Italian form, but the hottest new arrival on South Lamar is the second location of Ramen Tatsu-Ya, a Japanese noodle bar. With its plywood furniture and Rancid soundtrack, Tatsu-Ya feels like a punk club, albeit one with a popular weekend lunch that brings in a crowd ranging from university students to Japanese families and grandparents. Stick with the Ol' Skool (\$9.50), the house take on Tokyo-style clear broth, served with thick ramen noodles, or dig into the richer, almost creamy tonkotsu (\$9.50), dressed up with toppings like brussels sprouts, garlic or chile "bombs."

## 7. Instruments to Go, 2 p.m.

Take inspiration from local musical talent and shop for instruments as souvenirs. From South Lamar, start out at South Austin Music, a favorite for electric guitars and effects, then head north across the river to Hill Country Guitars, where a gorgeous, Sitka-topped acoustic from the local luthier Collings Guitars will set you back a cool \$4,568. A bit farther north, Austin Vintage Guitars offers collectible models from brands like Fender, Gibson, Rickenbacker and Danelectro, as well as guitar picks, slides and T-shirts in a spacious new shop.



A meal from Micklethwait Craft Meats. Credit Stacy Sodolak for The New York Times



## 8. New 'Cue, 3 p.m.

In the old days, lovers of great barbecue knew to leave Austin for smoke pits in nearby towns like Lockhart and Driftwood. Then came East Austin's [Franklin Barbecue](#) in 2009, frequently called the best in the country. With the line often stretching for hours, you can get a quicker snack at [Micklethwait Craft Meats](#), which serves fall-apart smoked brisket, massive beef ribs and flavorful specialty sausages. (The backyard party vibe is another draw.) Afterward, clear the smoke from your palate with a tasting tour at [Blue Owl](#), a brewery specializing in sour ales.

## 9. Art Hungry, 4 p.m.

Last November's [East Austin Studio Tour](#) included more than 280 artists' studios — and that was just in rapidly gentrifying East Austin. Catch up on the area's colorful new venues like [Wade ArtRoom](#), an intimate gallery run by the painter Angela Mathias, or stop by East Austin's long-running [Pump Project](#), a warehouse studio space featuring some 35 artists, which was joined by the new [Icosa Collective](#), a group of 20 visual artists, last year. Then cross Interstate 35 into downtown Austin, home to the Jones Center, which merged with the beautiful villa and sculpture park out at Laguna Gloria to form a museum called [the Contemporary Austin](#) in 2013. The current exhibition, "Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia," a solo show from the co-founder of the band Devo, runs through April 17.



Launderette. Credit Stacy Sodolak for The New York Times

## 10. My Beautiful Laundromat, 7 p.m.

Many of the city's coolest restaurants — places like [Wu Chow](#), [Bullfight](#) and [Geraldine's](#) — are less than a year old. Among the best new arrivals is [Launderette](#), where Rene Ortiz extends contemporary Mediterranean cuisine to include influences from regions like North Africa and the Levant: rich beet hummus and crisp flatbreads accompany a creamy labneh appetizer, spicy Aleppo prawns get an aromatic dose of mint, and the juicy house burger arrives on a fluffy challah bun from the acclaimed pastry chef Laura Sawicki. Launderette's front of the house can't always keep up with the kitchen, but the excellent cooking and fun-loving crowd in this former laundromat make up for the kitsch soundtrack and hit-or-miss service.

### **11. Craft Cocktails, 10 p.m.**

Check out the expanding bar scene in downtown's Warehouse District, surrounding Republic Square, with a sampling of craft cocktails at the new [Roosevelt Room](#), which lists its mixed drinks by era of origin, from classic "early years" concoctions like the Brandy Crusta (Cognac, orange liqueur, fresh lemon juice, bitters) through Prohibition-era favorites like the Blood & Sand (Scotch, orange juice, sweet vermouth, Cherry Heering). Intimate booths and videos projected on the wall give an underground character to the long, dark space. Afterward, see how the newcomer compares with an old favorite like [Péché](#), just two blocks away, where the focus is on high-grade absinthes like Switzerland's exceptional Clandestine.

## **Sunday**

### **12. Taco BBQ, 11 a.m.**

There's no better morning-after restorative than [Valentina's](#), which combines classic Texas barbecue with authentic Mexican fare. Fans followed this food trailer's move from downtown to a parking lot in South Austin, lining up for potato-egg-and-cheese breakfast tacos with house-made chorizo (\$3), as well as lunch tacos like the smoked-brisket taco, topped with guacamole and a mild tomato-serrano salsa (\$5), and the pulled "pollo" chicken taco, dressed with spicy tomatillo-habanero sauce (\$4).

### **13. To the Hills, Noon**

There are many reasons to head to Hill Country, the undulating landscape that starts just outside Austin, but for beer fans, ground zero is [Jester King](#): Set on a working ranch, this brewery and beer garden is the No. 1 Austin destination for users of Ratebeer.com. After sampling rare drafts like El Cedro, a cedar-aged farmhouse ale, direct your designated driver to [Revolution Spirits](#), a distillery that makes raspberry, apricot and cherry liqueurs with fruit pulp left over from Jester King's brews, as well as Austin Reserve, a richly aromatic gin. Then walk across the parking lot to [Last Stand](#), a new microbrewery, where you can sip a pint of bittersweet coffee porter while enjoying a classic Texas pastime: a game of chicken-poop bingo.

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## **Lodging**

The new [South Congress Hotel](#) (1603 South Congress Avenue; southcongresshotel.com) has an enviable location on one of the city's coolest shopping strips, as well as a rooftop pool and popular lobby bar. A web search for April found double rooms starting around \$255. Just off the trendy Rainey night-life scene, [Hotel Van Zandt](#) (605 Davis Street; hotelvanzandt.com) has 319 well-appointed rooms and an enviable bar, restaurant and live-music venue in downtown Austin. A web search for February found double rooms starting at \$249.