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Alamo Title

Austin's 10 Best

If you only have a day or two to explore Austin Texas, you want to know the highlights: the most engaging museums, finest restaurants, trendiest night spots and most fabulous shopping. Sure, it's fun to explore an unfamiliar city at a leisurely pace, but when time is at a premium, we have the answer. Our concise "Overall 10 Best" gathers Austin's top attractions, nightlife, restaurants and shopping on one convenient list. -- Kim Goodin, 10Best Editor

1. Arboretum at Great Hills

ARBORETUM

10000 Research Blvd, Austin, TX 78759 • 512-338-4755

This upscale, open-air retail destination in the northwest part of town enjoys a solid reputation. Named for the preponderance of trees around it, the center boasts two levels of mainstream shopping aimed largely at an established, older demographic. Representative shops include Express, Pottery Barn, The Sharper Image, and Restoration Hardware. Sit-down restaurants, park areas, and signature cow sculptures give the complex added appeal.

2. Austin City Limits Music Festival

BARTON SPRINGS DISTRICT

2100 Barton Springs Rd, Zilker Park, Austin, TX 78746 • 888-512-7469

Austin City Limits, the long-running, much-praised live music program on public television, captures the spirit of the Austin music scene like no other. And while it once primarily hosted country performers, today's lineup includes something from virtually every genre. Even so, there's just too much good music for the regular television season, and that's where the festival comes in. From local singer-songwriters to internationally known artists, the festival features about 130 performances on eight stages, along with tons of food, drink, children's activities, and arts and crafts vendors. Past performers have included everyone from Blues Traveler, Lyle Lovett, and Buddy Guy to The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Roseanne Cash, and Oasis.

3. Blanton Museum of Art

UNIVERSITY AREA

200 E Martin Luther King Blvd, UT, Austin, TX 78701 • 512-471-7324 • 512-471-5482

The Blanton ranks as the nation's largest university art museum, and its outstanding permanent collection – the largest in Central Texas – is comprised of more than 17,000 pieces, from priceless antiquities to more modern works. Strong holdings of American, Latin American, and European art, along with prints and drawings, comprise the backbone of the collection, which is also bolstered by new acquisitions of contemporary works.

4. Broken Spoke

SOUTH AUSTIN

3201 S Lamar Blvd, Austin, TX 78704 • 512-442-6189 • 512-444-5233

Critics have called this club the "best honky-tonk in Texas." Part of its appeal is that the country music dance hall's stage just barely rises off the dance floor, so patrons can get an intimate look at their favorite stars performing. The place also offers a full menu of authentic Texas cuisine. Willie Nelson and other famous country singers make appearances, and the joint has a long, colorful past spanning more than 40 years – too many tales to tell in such a small space. You'll have to visit and experience it for yourself.

5. Driskill Hotel

6TH STREET

604 Brazos St, Austin, TX 78701 • 512-474-5911 • 800-252-9367

A Texas standard in hospitality since 1886, the Driskill is listed as one of the "Historic Hotels of America" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Its elegant lobby boasts marble floors, and its luxurious rooms include the Cattle Baron suite. The Driskill is Austin's only hotel that enjoys a "Leading Hotels of the World" membership. 188 rooms and suites. Event space for 400. Valet parking only, \$25/day.

Servicing Travis, Williamson, Bastrop and Hays Counties

6. **Hudson's-on-the-Bend**

3509 Ranch Rd 620 N, Austin, TX 78734-2112 • 512-266-1369

WEST AUSTIN

Esteemed Hudson's is located within a small Hill Country cottage, and a smokehouse and herb garden are housed just outside. Chef/owner Jeff Blank and chef Jay Moore are famous for their use of wild game and exotic ingredients. If you're adventurous, sample Omar's rattlesnake cakes with chipotle cream sauce or the Axis antelope. Fine cuts of steak cater to those feeling less bold. Hudson's offers charming atmosphere with small, intimate dining rooms. If you have to wait for a table, which is not at all unusual, have a seat in the garden, where hundreds of twinkling lights shine from the trees.

7. **Vespaio**

1610 S Congress Ave, Austin, TX 78704 • 512-441-6100

SOUTH CONGRESS AVENUE

Austin has several very good, upscale Italian restaurants, and Vespaio is right at the top of the list. The garden out back provides a bounty of heirloom tomatoes that are showcased in dishes like a lovely salad caprese – a simple combination of fresh mozzarella, homegrown tomatoes, and just-picked basil with a drizzle of olive oil. The roasted portobello served on a toasty polenta round is a revelation, and seafood lovers should opt for saffron risotto, studded with scallops, crab, shrimp, and mascarpone. About 40 wines are available by the glass. Next door is the more casual wine bar and cafe, Enoteca. Reservations not accepted Friday or Saturday nights.

8. **The Elephant Room**

315 Congress Ave, Austin, TX 78701 • 512-473-2279

SOUTH CONGRESS AVENUE

The Elephant Room has been voted Austin's "Best Jazz Bar" numerous times for its intimate setting and great nightly acts. Located below street level and known as one of the best spots for live music in Austin, Elephant Room attracts a very loyal crowd, which comes to hear both local and national performers and enjoy a long happy hour.

9. **Wink**

1014 N Lamar Blvd, Ste E, Austin, TX 78703 • 512-482-8868

WEST END

Fashionable and casually upscale, Wink has garnered rave reviews and a loyal bastion of regulars. Although it's possible to order a traditional appetizer and main course, the best way to appreciate the culinary skills at work is to order a series of small plates. The menu changes often to take advantage of the freshest seasonal produce, but past winners have included scallops with baby sweet potatoes, grilled lamb loin on Stilton polenta, duck breast with wild mushroom risotto, and sautéed sweetbreads on Yukon Gold potatoes. Fabulous selection of by-the-glass wines.

10. **Zilker Metropolitan Park**

2100 Barton Springs Rd, Austin, TX 78746 • 512-974-6700

BARTON SPRINGS DISTRICT

This 351-acre park is arguably the most popular in town. Train rides, a playscape for kids, a swimming pool, and jogging trails are available. Other attractions include Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin Nature and Science Center, Umlauf Sculpture Garden, and Zilker Hillside Theater.

List created by 10Best.com Travel Guides.