



Inside Sun Studio, Memphis, where Elvis's career was launched.

LISTEN UP:

THE AMERICAN ROAD TRIP EVERY MAN NEEDS TO DO

UNPLUG YOUR HEADPHONES AND DISCOVER MUSIC LIKE COUNTRY, ROCK'N'ROLL AND BLUES IN THEIR ORIGINAL SETTING — AMERICA'S DEEP SOUTH.

Of all the great highway journeys, one has been elevated to pilgrimage status by music fans. It starts in the jazz halls of New Orleans, sweeps through the cotton-rich blues joints of the Mississippi Delta and finishes in the honky-tonks of Nashville.

It's a 1000km slice of musical history; an opportunity to hear these influential genres in their birthplaces and experience the society that led to their creation.

You'll encounter residents of one of the most maligned parts of the US — the Deep South — discovering them to be some of the friendliest, most polite people you'll meet. You'll also eat an artery-clogging array of deep-fried food that'll slice 15 years off your lifespan. So, here are three cities you shouldn't miss.

NEW ORLEANS

The cradle of jazz is surprisingly coy about its most celebrated export, which emerged in the early 20th century from a musical melting pot of Creole culture, gospel, blues and ragtime. There's no permanent jazz museum and the city's main entertainment strip, The French Quarter's Bourbon Street, is a neon-lit tunnel of uninspiring bars full of college kids and cover bands. Don't be deterred. Venture onto nearby Saint Peter Street and you'll find people queuing outside the weather-beaten exterior of Preservation Hall. Since 1961, this venue has been a monument to traditional New Orleans jazz. Inside there are no seats, just a couple of benches and cushions on the floor.

There's no bar (you can BYO) and no dance floor. Sitting at the feet of the band, soaking in the sounds, is a joyous experience.

For a look at the contemporary jazz scene, head to Frenchmen Street. Dubbed "the locals' Bourbon Street", it's home to music venues with names such as Snug Harbor, The Spotted Cat and Blue Nile. There's a more bohemian feel, as bands busk on street corners, local artists peddle wares and every so often an intoxicating waft of jazz escapes from an open door.

New Orleans loves a good party. Wander through the French Quarter and you'll find impromptu jam sessions and people drinking and dancing in the street. As one local put it, "What happens in Vegas

stays in Vegas. What happens in New Orleans, no-one can remember."

WHERE TO STAY The Maison Dupuy Hotel is charming and well located in the French Quarter.

maisondupuy.com

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK Brennan's for its Bananas Foster — bananas flambéed in rum with ice-cream; the café brûlot (a brandy-infused Creole coffee) at Arnaud's; and a sobering 3am serve of *beignets* (doughnuts) at Café Du Monde. brennansneworleans.com; arnaudsrestaurant.com; cafedumonde.com

MEMPHIS

You can't walk three blocks in Memphis without stumbling across a museum. For an excellent overview, start at the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum. Created by the Smithsonian Institution, it describes how blues, country and gospel moved to Memphis and morphed into rock'n'roll.

The man credited with pioneering this revolution is Sam Phillips, a DJ turned record-producer whose tiny Sun Studio launched the careers of Elvis, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis. Entertaining daily tours take you inside to absorb rarely heard clips of Elvis's early recording sessions.

And then, of course, there's the King's former home, Graceland. Yes, it's kitschy, yes, it's over-the-top, but it's also a moving reminder of what an extraordinary impact this one man had on pop music. And if you manage to leave without a tacky

At a Beale St music festival, Memphis.



Boots for sale in Nashville.





Meschiya Lake and her band at The Spotted Cat, New Orleans.

souvenir then you're a better man than me (I chose a snow globe).

Guitar fans should tour the Gibson factory, where these iconic instruments are still handmade. A visit to the National Civil Rights Museum, on the site of Martin Luther King Jr's 1968 assassination, is pretty much compulsory.

Memphis's answer to Bourbon Street is Beale Street — another gaudy parade of restaurants and bars, most of which have live music. B.B. King's Blues Club and Rum Boogie Cafe are worth a look but they're a far cry from the music's roots.

For an authentic blues experience, visit a juke joint. These are shacks where African Americans would gather in the early 1900s to drink, dance and play music. You'll still find them in towns such as Clarksdale and Jackson and I highly recommend stopping there en route to Memphis (msbluestrail.org). Driving through the Delta, with its unrelenting heat and endless cotton fields, it's easy to see the hardship and oppression that made folk from these parts sing the blues.

WHERE TO STAY The Peabody Memphis, a city institution with a daily parade of marching ducks and opulent Southern charm. peabodymemphis.com

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK The Midtown district for mouth-watering pulled pork at Central BBQ, upscale tapas at Alchemy and live music at Young Avenue Deli. cbqmemphis.com; alchemyneworleans.com; youngavenuedeli.com



THE SOUNDTRACK WHAT TO LISTEN TO ON YOUR IPOD BEFORE YOU GO.

- + Preservation Hall Jazz Band *Shake That Thing*
- + Trombone Shorty *For True*
- + The Jelly Roll Kings *Off Yonder Wall*
- + George Jones *The Essential George Jones*
- + Keith Urban *Get Closer*
- + VA *Delta Blues*

THE FACTS

Visit in April/May to catch music festivals such as Jazz Fest in New Orleans, Memphis in May and Awesome April in Nashville. Qantas flies to New Orleans, Memphis and Nashville on its new daily service via Dallas/Fort Worth. qantas.com.au For more info, visit neworleanscvb.com; memphistravel.com; visitmusiccity.com

NASHVILLE

One show established Nashville as the "Home of Country Music".

Since 1925 the Grand Ole Opry, the world's longest running radio show, has broadcast live performances from America's leading country music stars. Even if you can't catch a show, it's worth taking a tour to its home since 1974, the custom-built Grand Ole Opry House, to stand on the stage that's launched countless careers.

Visit the Country Music Hall of Fame for information about the music's history. I found it overwhelming and preferred the more focused tour of RCA Studio B. Known as the "Home of 1000 hits", this historic studio hosted legends including Elvis, Roy Orbison and Dolly Parton. Elvis alone recorded more than 250 songs here.

Today, Nashville has a vibrant music scene with more than 80 record labels, 180 recording studios and 100 live music venues. Start at Honky Tonk Highway — a cluster of venues on Broadway that pump out infectious feelgood tunes. For a more intimate experience, visit The Bluebird Cafe, a Nashville establishment that's been showcasing local songwriters for 30 years. And if you prefer your country with a twang of bluegrass, the unassuming Station Inn has hosted stars such as Alison Krauss and Ricky Skaggs.

Midtown hosts a variety of decent bars and restaurants, including speakeasy-style The Patterson House, Zen-like sushi joint Virago and sleek drinking den Whiskey Kitchen. They're a pleasant respite from the honky-tonk mania of downtown. Don't get me wrong, country music is fun but just occasionally you want to hang out with people who aren't dressed like Woody from *Toy Story*.

WHERE TO STAY Union Station Hotel. In a restored downtown railway station — a stylish option. unionstationhotelnashville.com

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK Puckett's Grocery & Restaurant for Southern comfort food, Tavern for upmarket pub tucker and The Catbird Seat for a seven-course culinary journey. puckettsgrocery.com; mstreetnashville.com; thecatbirdseatrestaurant.com



THE STOPOVER

THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS YOU'LL WANT TO SPEND TIME IN.

Like braided and branded Australians in Bali, airport stopovers are annoyingly familiar. Thankfully, many international hubs are upping the ante and offering trapped tourists more than cheap booze and uncomfortable plastic seats with non-collapsible armrests. Here are the best airports in which to play the waiting game.

Hong Kong International Airport, China

Swap the carry-on for a bag of clubs at the airport golf course. The SkyCity Nine Eagles is attached to Terminal 2 and features nine manicured holes built around two lakes. Landing at night? You can still ruin a good walk given the course is fully floodlit. Green fees start from approx. \$40. There's also a Playstation Gateway area and a 4D cinema screening films with extra-sensory surprises (wind, mist, bubbles).

Dubai International Airport, UAE

After trawling the 5400sqm of shops, unwind in the vast open-air garden oasis or slip into the pool, spa, steam room and sauna of the 24-hour G-Force Gym. Best value is the combined wet area and gym pass (approx. \$40 for three hours). Swedish and shiatsu massages can be arranged. Bliss.

Incheon International Airport, Seoul, South Korea

Have a twirl on the airport's ice-skating rink (open daily 10am-8pm, approx. \$4). The surface is made of special 'dry ice', so you won't get soggy

if you take a tumble. A 300m golf driving range and 18-hole course are a five-minute, free shuttle ride away — nine holes from approx. \$25. There's a luxury 24-hour spa (Spa on Air) with massages and 'sleeping chambers', and free cinemas.

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, The Netherlands

Enjoy some fresh air at the airport's in-house oxygen bar, before eyeballing a couple of Dutch Masters at an offshoot of the acclaimed Rijksmuseum. Artistic pursuits can turn to spa treatments or gambling at the airport casino. However, for the ultimate punt, stop by the airport wedding chapel and say "I do."

Changi Airport, Singapore

A much-loved Singapore fling given the abundance of amenities and tranquil settings. Beyond the famed tax-free shopping, and a wealth of spa and fitness options, it's possible to slide into a generous rooftop pool, relax in a butterfly garden or snooze through a few free, new-release films at the in-house cinemas.