



**nileGUIDE**

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



BruceTurner

# The Top 10 Things to Do in Austin

## **Austin, 1 Day**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** Visiting a new city can be overwhelming, particularly under time constraints. To help ease the planning pain, I've pulled together a list of the must-see spots throughout the Austin area. Want some fun in the sun? Need a good laugh? Interested in the local art scene? We've got them all. From visiting natural caverns or a popular spring-fed pool to tracking ghosts and taking in a panoramic view of the city, temporary Austinites will leave with a good dose of what makes this city so unforgettable.

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Austin



### Barton Springs Pool

Spring-fed pool and first-rate people watching.



### Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art

Modern and contemporary art housed on the UT campus



### Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

Family fun coupled with interactive Texas history lesson



### Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Elegant grounds celebrate the beauty of native plants.



### Hill Country Flyer (The)

Enjoy the Hill Country scenery from the comfort of a renovated steam train



### Esther's Follies

Downtown musical comedy revue



### University of Texas Tower

Overlook the UT campus and downtown skyline from this iconic tower.



### Inner Space Cavern

72 degree cave



### Austin Zoo

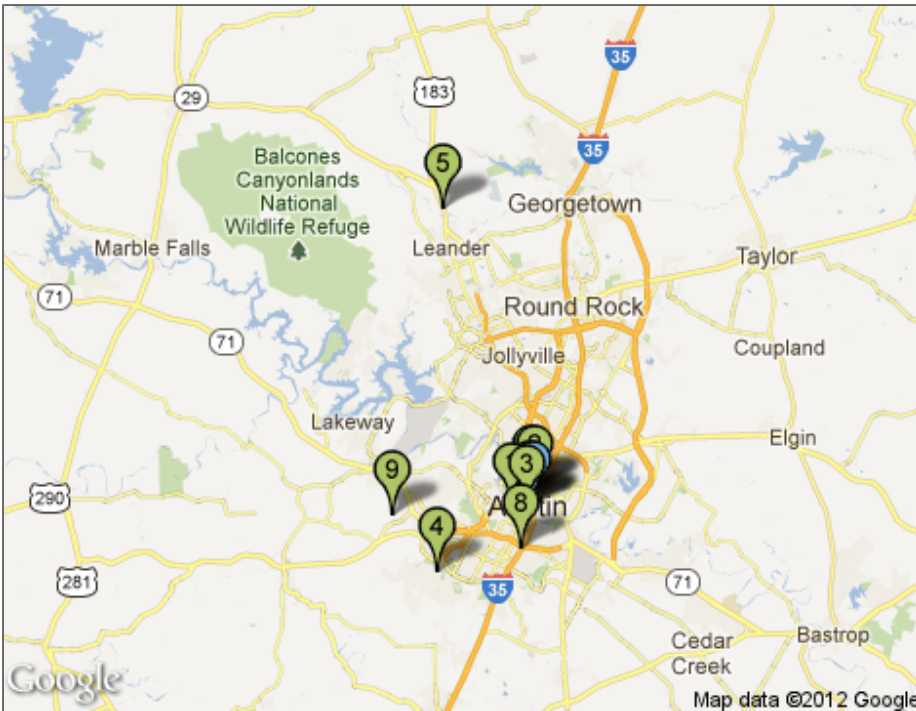
Fun for all ages



### Austin Ghost Tours

Haunted Austin stories

# Day 1 - Austin



QUICK NOTE

**contact:**

tel: 512-867-3080

<http://austincityconnection.net/parks/bartonsprings.htm>

**location:**

2101 Barton Springs Road  
Austin TX 78704

**hours:**

Daily 5am-10pm except during pool maintenance (Thurs 9am-7pm). Splash! Tues-Fri noon-6pm; Sat-Sun 10am-6pm

## 1 Barton Springs Pool

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

On busy summer days, it's easier to park at the back parking lot, near Umlauf Sculpture Garden along Robert E. Lee Road.

**DESCRIPTION:** The water in Barton Springs swimming pool hovers around 68 degrees year-round, which means that it feels cool -- even cold -- in the heat of summer. It feels relatively warm in winter, though, and a few rugged souls swim there every morning, regardless of the weather. If you're more into lounging than exercise, there's a part of the massive pool dedicated to floats and floaters. On the hillsides surrounding the pool, you will see a snapshot of Austin culture. There's usually a group of twentysomethings kicking around a hacky-sack ball, a sixtyish man doing yoga, and (kid warning) a woman of indeterminate age without her top. Occasionally, a drum circle forms at the top of the hill. Guitars are almost as common as smart phones. On summer days when the temperature can soar above 100 degrees, this is the only reasonable place to be. © NileGuide



**contact:**

tel: 512-471-7324

fax: +1 512 471 7023

<http://www.blantonmuseum.org/>

**location:**

23rd and San Jacinto  
Austin TX 78712

## 2 Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art

**DESCRIPTION:** As the principal art museum in the Austin metropolitan area, the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art has a massive collection featuring more than 17,000 works, including modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, as well as 15th century to contemporary prints and drawings. Situated on the southeastern corner of the University of Texas campus, adjacent to the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum and within walking distance of the Texas State Capitol, the Blanton building itself embodies the clean lines of modern art with its simple granite and limestone facade, white walls and crisp interior angles. Plan a multi-day visit, if possible. With 124,000 square feet of space, the museum can't be fully explored in one day. Along with the established collections and touring exhibits, the museum also organizes lectures, gallery talks, concerts, workshops and the ever popular B Scene, a monthly evening of mingling, cocktails and musical entertainment among the art. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of cloverity

**contact:**

tel: 512-936-8746

<http://www.thestoryoftexas.com/>

**location:**

1800 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin TX 78705

**hours:**

Mon-Sat 9am-6pm; Sun  
noon-6pm. Phone or check  
website for additional IMAX  
evening hours

## 3 Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

**DESCRIPTION:** With a grand facade that includes a 35-foot-tall bronze star, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum is hard to miss. The three-story museum, open since 2001, turns the fascinating and sometimes sordid history of the state into imaginative interactive exhibits for the enjoyment of all ages. Meet the state's first occupants on the first floor, hear Stephen F. Austin announce the Texas Revolution on the second and peruse the third level for an understanding of how big business -- mostly cotton, cattle, and oil -- has played a part in the making of the Lone Star State. Located just south of the University of Texas campus, a stone's throw from the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art and a short walk from the Texas State Capitol, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum also features Austin's only IMAX theater as well as the Spirit Theater, a 200-seat multimedia special effects theater with history-based shows. © NileGuide

**contact:**

tel: 512-232-0100

fax: +1 512 232 0156

<http://www.wildflower.org/>

**location:**

4801 LaCrosse Ave  
Austin TX 78620

**hours:**

Open 9am-5:30pm mid-Mar  
through end of May

## 4 Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

**DESCRIPTION:** While many may remember that Lady Bird Johnson was the First Lady who championed the planting of wildflowers along highways, Texans know her as an all-around environmental advocate. Her passion was not only for wildflowers but native plants of all kinds. So it's fitting that the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is both a showplace for beautiful plants and a botanical research center. The public botanical garden introduces visitors to the beauty of wildflowers and other native plants and natural landscapes through experience and education. Stroll through the 16 distinct gardens, the Ann and O.J. Weber Butterfly Garden, the sprawling South Meadow, or relax along the Erma Lowe Hill Country Stream. Knowledgeable docents explain the many roles of indigenous plants, as well as conservation techniques such as controlled burning and invasive species removal. For a more in-depth look at the former First Lady and her husband,



visit the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum on the University of Texas at Austin campus. © NileGuide

**contact:**

tel: +1 512 477 8468  
fax: +1 512 477 8633  
<http://www.austinsteamtrain.org/>

**location:**

Hwy 183 and FM 1431  
Cedar Park TX 78613

## 5 Hill Country Flyer (The)

**DESCRIPTION:** For an enjoyable afternoon, take a scenic journey on this Central Texas vintage steam train. Traveling deep through the Hill Country, this excursion is a must-see for any train buff. Wander through small Texas towns and view the beauty of an era gone by, all while enjoying a relaxing trip in an old-time rail car. © wcities.com

**contact:**

tel: 512 320 0553  
<http://www.esthersfollies.com>

**location:**

525 East 6th St  
Austin TX 78701

## 6 Esther's Follies

**DESCRIPTION:** One part vaudeville and one part stinging political/social satire, this place has amused and delighted its guests, as well as the pedestrians who pass by its front-stage windows and observe its goings-on, since the late 1970s. A troupe of multi-talented performers write, act, sing and dance their way across a broad comedic map that pokes fun at our elected officials, celebrity icons, and regular citizens, and the material is constantly being updated. It is not all for laughs, though; a magical act comes on a couple of times per show to startle and captivate your senses. This is a true downtown institution. © wcities.com



wcities

**contact:**

tel: 512-475-6633  
<http://www.utexas.edu/tower/>

**location:**

2400 Inner Campus Drive  
Austin TX 78731

## 7 University of Texas Tower

**DESCRIPTION:** Soaring 28 stories and 307 feet into the sky above the University of Texas campus, the University of Texas Tower is the campus' most easily recognizable landmark. A few miles north of downtown, the tower remains one of the tallest buildings in the campus area, and it's on top of a large hill, so it's viewable from many vantage points around town. Since its debut in 1937, the structure has served as the main building of the UT campus. The observation deck just below the clock tower was closed for several years after a gunman, Charles Whitman, went on a shooting spree from the tower in August 1966. Now, observation deck tours are available by reservation, and visitors can enjoy sweeping views of the cityscape. The Texas State Capitol, Mount Bonnell and other Austin landmarks are easily visible from this height. The tower is normally illuminated with a white light at night, but after athletic victories and other achievements, the tower lights turn burnt-orange, the official school color. © NileGuide



wcities

**contact:**

tel: +1 512 931 2283  
<http://www.myinnerspacecavern.com/>

**location:**

## 8 Inner Space Cavern

**DESCRIPTION:** After being sealed for over 10,000 years, this cave was discovered in 1963 when a group of workers were digging to build a highway overpass. Daily tours are available and last

4200 South I-35, exit 295  
Georgetown TX 78627

just over an hour. The cave stays a comfortable 72 degrees Fahrenheit year-round, and features not only beautiful rock formations but also the remains of prehistoric mastodons, saber-tooth cats and other ice age animals. After your tour, enjoy the shaded picnic area with a playscape for children. Its located 24 miles north of Austin on IH 35, exit 259. © wcities.com

**contact:**

tel: +1 512 288 1490 / +1 800  
291 1490

fax: +1 512 288 3972

<http://www.austinzoo.org>

**location:**

10807 Rawhide Trail  
Austin TX 78709

**hours:**

Daily 10am-6pm

9 **Austin Zoo**

**DESCRIPTION:** Enjoy a hill country setting in a family environment. This privately owned home originally started with a small selection of farm animals and has now grown into a wild animal sanctuary and zoo. See Bengal tigers, lemurs, a butterfly garden and more! The picnic areas are perfect for a birthday party or company event. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Austin Zoo & Animal Sanctuary

**contact:**

tel: +1 512 853 9826

<http://www.austinghosttours.com/>

**location:**

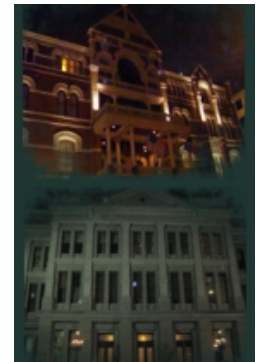
617 Congress Ave.  
Austin TX 78701

**hours:**

Tour schedules vary; call or check the website

A **Austin Ghost Tours**

**DESCRIPTION:** If you favor activities that are likely to keep you from sleeping, these tours are for you. Not only are the various outings held in the evening, but they're all concerned with ghouls. **The Ghosts of Austin Downtown Walking Tour** explores the stories of those that even death couldn't separate from downtown, while the tavern-crawl **Haunted Sixth Street Tour** capitalizes on the spirits that liked their spirits (and visitors who like both the spectral and the alcoholic manifestations). Austin Ghost Tours has also teamed up with the Austin Museum of Art for a special 90-minute **Haunted History Walking Tour**, featuring the museum exhibit "The Disembodied Spirit," the Wooten building, the Old Miller Opera House, and the Capitol. A variety of other tours are available as well, so be sure to check the website, and then call ahead to make the required reservations. © Frommer's



Austin Ghost Tours

# Austin Snapshot

## Local Info

With its perfect proportions of adventurous spirit and laid-back atmosphere, Austin wins visitors over time and time again. Nestled in the southern portion of the Lone Star State, the capital city doubles as the hub of serious government affairs and the supreme getaway for outdoor recreation and cultural escape.

### Downtown

The heart of Austin lays downtown, among the busy streets and inner workings of the state government. The Texas State Capitol--built of pink granite and native limestone and standing 14 feet taller than the nation's Capitol in Washington, D.C.--anchors the area's main thoroughfare, Congress Avenue. The street that once paved the way for horses and carriages now houses some of Austin's tallest buildings, including the futuristic-looking Frost Bank Tower--the first high-rise to be constructed in the U.S. following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The downtown area juggles work and play with a handful of areas organized especially for after-hours fun. Comparable to New Orleans' famous Bourbon Street, Austin's East Sixth Street is often the first place rowdy tourists visit for a memorable night out. Within an eight-block stretch, more than 100 shot bars, live music venues, dance clubs, restaurants and souvenir shops line the street, which is cordoned off from vehicular traffic most nights of the week.

The post-collegiate crowd heads a few blocks west to one of three nearby areas: the Warehouse District, West Sixth Street or the Second Street District. Each neighborhood offers an array of trendy eateries alongside classy pubs, bars and clubs and is only a pedicab ride away from one another.

As the self-described "Live Music Capital of the World," Austin touts a constant schedule of bands and musicians throughout the city, though most

performances are concentrated in the downtown area. The Red River District, located one block west of IH-35 between Sixth and 10th Streets, attracts a mixture of punk, heavy metal and indie rock acts at venues like Emo's, Mohawk and Red-Eyed Fly, while Stubb's regularly schedules big-time touring acts of all genres at the barbecue joint's outdoor amphitheater.

Other popular downtown music venues include Antone's, Austin Music Hall, La Zona Rosa, the Elephant Room and Cedar Street Courtyard, among others. All of these locations and hundreds of other venues host musicians, film premieres and interactive parties during the South by Southwest Music, Film and Interactive Conference held each March.

### University of Texas/ The Drag

Part of Austin's draw is the highly ranked and centrally located University of Texas at Austin. The 40-acre campus sits right in the midst of the city's action, with more than 50,000 students enrolled each semester. The grounds also holds some of Austin's finest museums, including the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center and the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art. The campus' western border--Guadalupe Street--is known as the Drag, a mile-long section of coffee shops, cafes and Longhorn-centric stores like the University Co-Op. The open-air Renaissance Market houses local artisans peddling their wares under shady tents, while the nearby Toy Joy stocks the largest array of random baubles fit for all ages.

### South Austin

Lady Bird Lake, formerly known as Town Lake, intersects the city just south of downtown, creating the unofficial divide between Central and South Austin. The Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail keeps Austinites and travelers alike in shape with nearly 10 miles of landscaped trails amid the hustle and bustle of downtown. Zilker Park, a 400-acre park along the southern shores of the lake, provides wide

open space for kite-flying, Frisbee and other outdoor activities, including dancing at the Austin City Limits Music Festival each October. Kayak and canoe rentals let people enjoy a view of the skyline from the water, while Barton Springs Pool, a natural spring-fed swimming hole, offers up a cool and refreshing respite from the infamous Texas heat. A handful of quirky restaurants--namely Chuy's, Shady Grove, Romeo's, Austin Java Co. and Uncle Billy's Brew & Que--line Barton Springs Road, offering quick and easy meal options for those enjoying the beautiful weather year-round.

Along with university students, musicians and outdoorsy-types, Austin also hosts the largest urban colony of Mexican free-tail bats in North America, which take up residence under the Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge from March to November. Their nightly flight for food occurs around dusk and attracts hundreds of visitors eager to see the throngs of insect-eating bats take to the skies.

Just a couple blocks south of the bat haven sits the hip and trendy South Congress Avenue, referred to locally as SoCo. This strip, only a mile or so away from St. Edward's University, houses some of the city's most unique shops (Uncommon Objects, Parts & Labour, Lucy in Disguise) alongside hip hotels (Hotel San Jose, Austin Motel, Hotel Saint Cecilia) and locally owned eateries (Zen Japanese Food Fast, Home Slice Pizza, Guero's Taco Bar). On the first Thursday of each month, area businesses keep late hours while hundreds mingle along the street, shopping and enjoying live music during the free event appropriately dubbed First Thursday. Another SoCo highlight: Airstream trailers-turned-food vendors, and not just of the sno-cone variety. From cupcakes to chicken cones (you have to try one to understand), the block of food trailers draws quite a crowd every night of the week.

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