



Austin
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Things to Do in Austin

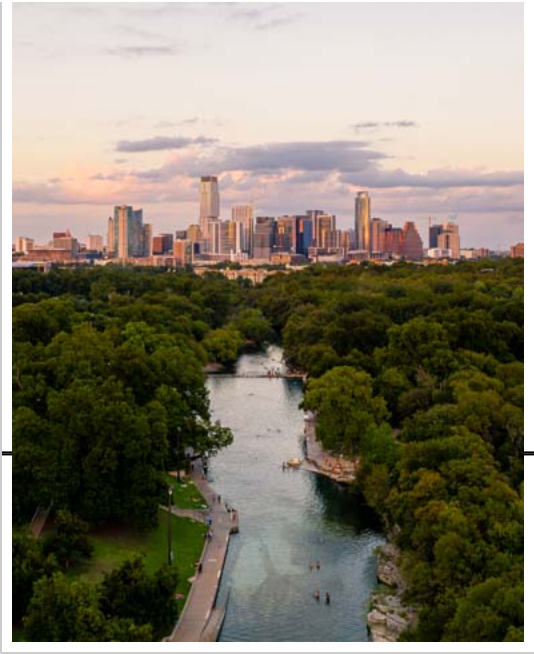
With a world-famous live music scene, beautiful parks and natural areas, and a wealth of bars and restaurants, [Austin](#) truly has something for everyone. There are more things to do in Austin than you can imagine, including a plethora of options that won't impact your pocketbook. Jog along an urban riverside trail, swim in a massive spring-fed pool, take in stunning graffiti art, and enjoy the view from the highest elevation in town. These are just a few of the cheap and free things to do in Austin that you can experience while you're in the capital of the Lone Star State. Plan your trip to Austin by checking out these can't-miss Austin activities.

Hike or Bike the Butler Trail

Spend any time at all in Austin and at some point you'll be drawn to the shimmering waters of Lady Bird Lake. While there are a variety of ways you can enjoy this part of town for free, one of the best is by hiking, jogging, or biking on the [Butler Trail](#). The waterside pathway stretches for 10 miles along the lake, offering scenic views and a safe place to exercise.

Swim in Barton Springs Pool

The Texas Hill Country is home to numerous spring-fed pools, but it's hard to find one as convenient as [Barton Springs](#). Situated within Zilker Park, the three-acre pool is an exceedingly popular place to cool off in the summer. Not only is the water pristine, but it maintains a year-round average temperature of 68-70 degrees. The pool has been a popular Austin hangout for many years, and even the likes of Robert Redford learned how to swim here. With its lush surroundings and refreshingly cool water, a visit to Barton Springs is a must.



Explore Zilker Park

Visit [Zilker Park](#) once and you'll see why it's kind of a big deal in Austin. The beloved 351-acre greenspace has it all. Have a picnic or play on the massive verdant lawn, go for a ride on the Zilker Zephyr miniature train, stop and smell the flowers at the Zilker Botanical Gardens, and catch a concert at the Zilker Hillside Theatre. Along with all of this, the park offers access to Lady Bird Lake and is home to the Austin Nature and Science Center. Yet the best part is that it's just minutes away from downtown Austin, making Zilker Park a convenient urban retreat no matter where you are in town.

Climb Mount Bonnell

With its rocky limestone cliffs and rolling hills covered in live oaks, it's fair to say Austin is a pretty place. Fortunately, the capital of Texas is full of neat vantage points where you can appreciate its scenic charm. One of the best is [Mount Bonnell](#) on the northwest side of town. Take the limestone steps to the summit, perched at 785 feet above sea level, and you'll enjoy a remarkable view of the Austin skyline and the Colorado River.

Visit a True Texas Honky-Tonk

Try two-stepping at an iconic Texas dancehall like the [Broken Spoke](#), an old-fashioned honky-tonk known for its chicken-fried steak and free dinner show. Dance along to live bands Tuesday through Saturday from 6-8 p.m. and arrive early for a free dance lesson (Wednesday through Saturday)! Or, visit the [Little Longhorn Saloon](#), a staple of Austin's honky-tonk country music scene. It never charges a cover and is known for its six-days-a-week happy hour, with \$2.50 Lone Star beers.

Admire the Architecture

Cruise around Austin during your time here and you'll encounter a variety of eye-catching [architecture](#) that goes far beyond the Texas Capitol building. Just a few blocks from said structure is the beautiful 1884 St. Mary's Cathedral. Take a photo of its limestone façade and looming bell tower before checking out The Driskill Hotel, another 19th-century building that is just as opulent inside as its exterior suggests. Traipse through downtown Austin for even more sites, such as the University of Texas Tower, the Governor's Mansion, and the Bremond Block Historic District.

Tour the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

As the Capital of Texas, what better home for a botanical garden dedicated to the Lone Star State's native plants than Austin? That's exactly what you'll find at the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#). Walk the plant-lined pathways through several gardens, including an arboretum with an array of Texas trees. Fascinating structures and art displays abound in the wildflower center, which is also home to a café that serves lunch every day except Monday.



Rent a Kayak and Paddle Lady Bird Lake

Imagine walking through downtown Austin and, moments later, being on a kayak in the middle of a pristine river. That's what it's like at [Lady Bird Lake](#), the part of the Colorado River that meanders through town. Visit one of the many kayak, stand up paddleboard, and canoe rental sites along the waterway for a nominal fee and you can explore to your heart's content. Keep your eyes open and you may just see fish and turtles swimming in the clear water, as well as dozens of locals jogging on the trails that border the lake. Whether you kick back in the middle of the lake and take in the view or you work up a sweat, you'll experience a truly urban retreat to the great outdoors at Lady Bird Lake.

Watch the World's Largest Urban Bat Colony Emerge

Texas' remarkable natural beauty is always a part of everyday life in Austin, with no example more profound than the [Congress Bridge bat colony](#). From mid-March until the mid-October, about 1.5 million bats take up residence in the crevasses under the bridge. Many emerge to feed at dusk, providing one of the most spectacular sights you'll find anywhere in Texas. To see it for yourself, find a spot on top of the bridge, in the Statesman Bat Observation Center, or from the Butler Trail on the north and south banks of the Colorado River. You can also enjoy the view from the water in a kayak or a special river cruise offered by one of the local operators.



Stroll South Congress

Take a walk along South Congress Avenue, known for its chic boutiques, funky street art and tasty eateries. Grab a cone from Amy's Ice Creams then check out the affordable jewelry and unique souvenirs by local artists at Parts & Labour, beautiful gifts from around the world at Tesoros Trading Company and take a pic in front of iconic murals like the I love you so much mural at Jo's Coffee or Willie for President at STAG.

Snap a Selfie at the Pennybacker Bridge

The iron arch of Austin's [Pennybacker Bridge](#) is a popular landmark for locals, and not just because of how distinct it is. Hike up the trails on either side of Highway 360 on the north side of the Colorado River and you'll be treated to one heck of a view. Make sure to bring sturdy tennis shoes and a camera, as the journey is short but challenging. Once you get to the top, take a selfie with the bridge and the river in the background and pause to gaze out at the surrounding hills and the downtown skyline in the distance.

Take In the Nightlife on Sixth Street

Austin's [Sixth Street](#) is the epicenter of all the action once the sun sets. Throngs of people meander from one bar and club to another as the sounds of performing bands echo off of colorful historic storefronts. Although it's free to soak up the atmosphere, you may need some cash to step inside of a bar to get a drink. Hang out, make some new friends, and when it's closing time, stop by a food truck for something delicious.

Hike in McKinney Falls State Park

Venture about 10 miles south of downtown Austin and you'll reach a natural oasis of cypress-tree lined creeks and waterfalls cascading over limestone ledges. Congratulations, you've found [McKinney Falls State Park](#). Explore the sprawling park's nine miles of hiking and biking trails, go bouldering on limestone outcroppings, and snap a few photos of the famous waterfalls. Fishing, birding, and camping are popular things to do in the park as well, so don't forget your gear.



Cycle Your Heart Out

With its varied topography and abundance of urban trails, Austin is a hotspot for all kinds of [cyclists](#). If you can't resist a good off-road trail, pedal on over to the Barton Creek Greenbelt, Rocky Hill, or Pace Bend. For some road cycling, visit the Veloway, a self-contained 3.1-mile paved track that takes you through the rolling natural terrain of South Austin. Not only is cycling a great way to get some exercise, it's also a convenient means of getting around town. Rent a bike from an [Austin B-Cycle](#) station and cruise around downtown.

Go On a Day Trip

Austin is surrounded by picturesque small towns, stunning countryside, and one-of-a-kind natural wonders that make for a remarkable day trip. Visit the [Hill Country](#) to soak in the cool waters of Hamilton Pool, visit a distillery in Dripping Springs, and explore Lake Travis. Drive on the winding highways farther west and you'll be in Texas Wine Country, where you can visit one of dozens of vineyards to try reds and whites made in the Lone Star State. Make sure to take your time as you pass through each town, as each one (from Fredericksburg and Marble Falls to Georgetown and Bastrop) has one-of-a-kind restaurants, breweries, shops, and picturesque downtowns to enjoy.

