

A night-time photograph of the Nashville skyline. The AT&T Building is the central focus, illuminated with blue and white lights, featuring its distinctive two spires. Other skyscrapers are visible in the background, some with glowing windows. In the foreground, a river reflects the city lights, and a boat is docked on the left. The sky is a deep blue, and the overall scene is vibrant and urban.

**GETTING THERE**

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# Welcome to Nash Vegas

*From honky-tonks to GooGoo Clusters,  
Lucy Corne immerses herself in Nashville  
life and emerges with a new-found respect  
for country music*





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**M**ore bachelorette parties are held in Nashville than any other city in the USA. It's a fact I heard at least a dozen times in the Tennessee capital, sometimes shared with pride, sometimes embarrassment and, almost always, with bemusement.

During our week-long stay in Music City, we saw groups of young women pedalling 10-seater beer bikes, boot-clad crews hopping between Broadway bars, and even a bachelorette party on a tractor-pulled trailer, the unlikely voices of the Spice Girls blasting from hidden speakers. You'd think cheesy '90s pop from across the pond would be frowned upon in a city that found fame through country music, but the locals seem to tolerate the revellers well.

Nashville's transformation into a party city has, of course, resulted in much-needed tourism. Construction is rife as new hotels spring up in the compact downtown core and the city takes ownership of its adopted moniker of Nash Vegas.



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blare from the honky-tonks, which are bars offering some form of live music. It's often a duo equipped with little more than a couple of guitars and a tip jar – most musicians don't get paid to play and rely on listeners' generosity. To curry favour, they take regular requests and pepper the country tunes with rock classics from decades past. Between the bars, most of which come with rooftop terraces, there are stores selling the Nashville trinity of records, guitars and boots.

When I arrived in Music City, I thought I'd need to see a show at the legendary Grand Ole Opry or take a backstage tour of the Ryman in order to experience the city's musical culture. But in Nashville, music is everywhere – and I do mean *everywhere*. You know those electrical boxes that hum quietly on average street corners? Well, in Nashville



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Swift's rhinestone-encrusted guitar. The highlight for many, though, is the chance to become a country star for the day. A series of interactive exhibits enables you to record and mix your own record, present a country music award, see your face on an album cover and take a quiz to find out if you're destined to be a lead singer or a roadie.

The Hall of Fame isn't the only place you can try your hand at being the next Tim McGraw or Shania Twain. Head over to Third Man Records, where you can follow a slew of famous faces and record your own tune in a decades-old booth. A vintage sign inside the quirky store invites you to step in and record your voice for a mere

they don't hum – they blast out tunes by Johnny Cash or Garth Brooks. There are music-themed bus tours, there's a pedestrian bridge that warbles a weird melody created by the water running beneath the bridge, and the city's convention centre even has a ballroom designed to make you feel like you're inside a giant acoustic guitar.

Of the city's many musical attractions, the Country Music Hall of Fame is a must, whether you're a die-hard Willie Nelson fan or, like me, someone who can only hum a handful of country tracks. It begins with a history of bluegrass and country music, with a focus on some of the industry's most iconic artists. Here you can see Carl Perkins' actual blue suede shoes, Elvis Presley's "gold" Cadillac and an array of elaborate costume pieces, including Taylor



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- 01 A party bike in downtown Nashville.
- 02 The Johnny Cash Museum.
- 03 Hoping to be discovered.
- 04 Mural on the wall of Carter Vintage Guitars.
- 05 The Country Music Hall of Fame.
- 06 Third Man Records.
- 07 Inside the Country Music Hall of Fame.

**Previous spread:** A view of downtown Nashville with the Cumberland River in the foreground.



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35c, but these days it costs \$20 to take your tune home on freshly pressed vinyl.

I didn't record a remake of any Dolly Parton classics, avoided the call of karaoke and even resisted the urge to buy a new pair of boots, but while in Nashville I did learn more about bluegrass and barbeque than I ever thought I'd need to. And I certainly learnt how to party. When I look back on my time in Nash Vegas, I have to turn to the words of the Everly Brothers in their 1960 tune *Nashville Blues*: "Gotta get back to Nashville, 'cause that's where the good times are. Ever since I left Nashville the kicks ain't been up to par."



## WHAT TO SEE

### **Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum**

Allow at least two hours to explore this vast museum of music history and try your hand at singing a country song. [countrymusichalloffame.org](http://countrymusichalloffame.org)

### **Johnny Cash Museum**

Conveniently located just off Broadway, the small but excellent Johnny Cash Museum houses a comprehensive collection of personal memorabilia, including the poem he wrote after June Carter's funeral. [johnnycashmuseum.com](http://johnnycashmuseum.com)

### **The Grand Ole Opry**

Founded in the 1920s as a country music radio show, the Opry has operated as a stage show since the '40s. Grand Ole Opry House was opened in 1974 by then President Richard Nixon, who performed live at the launch. Book ahead for live shows or backstage tours. [opry.com](http://opry.com)

### **Ryman Auditorium**

Built as a tabernacle in 1892, the Ryman has become a place where people come to worship their country music heroes and it's known as the "Mother Church of Country Music". The Grand Ole Opry was hosted here from 1943 to 1974 and today there are regular concerts within its hallowed walls. If you're pushed for time, simply take a self-guided tour, although the entertaining guided backstage tour is highly recommended. [ryman.com](http://ryman.com)

### **Music Row and RCA Studio B**

West of downtown you'll find the streets lined with recording studios where many a country music career has been launched. Among them is the historic RCA Studio B, where major stars like Elvis recorded many of their hits. Tours are arranged through the Country Music Hall of Fame. [studiob.org](http://studiob.org)

**WHERE TO EAT**

If there's one thing that epitomises Nashville almost as much as music, it's food. Whether it's biscuits for breakfast, hot chicken for lunch or a big ol' plate of barbeque for dinner, Nashville abounds in home-grown dishes – and iconic restaurants that serve them.

A word of warning – the city's most famous eateries are very popular and you'll often face hour-long queues to get inside. Here are five of Music City's favourite places to fill up.

**Biscuit Love**

Having begun as a food truck, Biscuit Love specialises in breakfast and brunch. Fluffy biscuits (a lighter version of a buttermilk scone) come smothered with fried chicken and gravy and accompanied by creamy stone-ground grits. The flagship branch in The Gulch is enormously popular, but you'll find shorter queues in nearby Hillsboro Village. [biscuitlove.com](http://biscuitlove.com)

**Goo Goo Cluster**

Nashville's own candy has a store opposite the Johnny Cash Museum. Invented in 1912, the GooGoo Cluster features peanuts, caramel and marshmallows covered in milk chocolate. The store offers tastings and chocolate-making classes, as well as the chance to stock up on gooey treats. [googoo.com](http://googoo.com)

**Hattie B's**

While not the original place to buy Nashville's famous hot chicken, Hattie B's is wildly popular, not least for its proximity to downtown. Chicken comes in six levels of heat. While most report that "Medium" is hot enough, only the brave opt for "Shut the Cluck Up". [hattieb.com](http://hattieb.com)

**Martin's Bar-B-Que Joint**

Close to the Country Music Hall of Fame, Martin's is a vast place with good barbeque, decent beer and regular live music on the huge terrace. The ribs are highly recommended. [martinsbbqjoint.com](http://martinsbbqjoint.com)

**Monell's**

The menu changes daily, but you always get skillet-fried chicken on the side at this family-style institution in Germantown. It's the perfect place to try out southern specialities like fried catfish, meatloaf and collard greens. [monellstn.com](http://monellstn.com)

- 08 The bright lights of Broadway.
- 09 Queuing for a meal at Biscuit Love.
- 10 The 21c Museum Hotel.



**WHERE TO SLEEP**

**Nashville Downtown Hostel**

Just a block from Broadway, this is the perfect spot to slumber if you've come to Nashville to party. Dorms are clean and there are great communal spaces, including a shared kitchen and a games area. Dorm bed costs \$35. [nashvilledowntownhostel.com](http://nashvilledowntownhostel.com)

**Omni Nashville Hotel**

Adjoining the Country Music Hall of Fame, this 21-floor hotel is right in the thick of the Nashville action. There's a huge heated pool and sundeck, smart rooms, several good bars and restaurants and in the lobby, an exhibition of country stars' lavish costumes. Double rooms from \$259. [omnihotels.com/hotels/nashville](http://omnihotels.com/hotels/nashville)

**21c Museum Hotel**

If you like your music with a side of art, check out the exhibitions at this museum-meets-boutique-hotel-meets-elegant-restaurant. The building may be turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century-style, but the decor is contemporary all the way. Double room from \$369. [21cmuseumhotels.com/nashville](http://21cmuseumhotels.com/nashville)