



Top Ten Free Things To Do In Austin

From Jacqui Howard Bear, Your Guide to Austin, TX.

If you're coming to Austin there are a few must-see stops and mostly free things to do in Austin Texas that should be part of your itinerary. Every Texan should see the State Capitol and State History Museum — and non-Texans will find it enjoyable it as well. Plus there some great historical, educational, architecturally significant, and just plain 'gotta see' downtown attractions as well. Plus, most of these are free things to do in downtown Austin.

1) Texas State Capitol Complex

Every Texan should try to visit the State Capitol at least once in their lifetime which puts it at the top of our mostly free things to do list. And if you haven't visited since the restoration of the 1980s, visit again. Taller than the US Capitol, the Texas State Capitol and Capitol Grounds are one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city and a favorite spot for the locals as well. Inside and out, it's simply impressive, beautiful, and one of our state treasures. Free.

2) Barton Springs Pool

Over the years, people have come to this 1,000 foot long natural limestone pool, fed by several underground springs, for everything from fishing and swimming to baptisms and beauty pageants.

3) University of Texas Campus / UT Tower

UT is almost its own city. You don't have to be planning to attend to enjoy its sculptures, fountains, the Tower, and the many museums including the Ransom Center, home of an original Gutenberg Bible among other treasures, the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, and the Texas Memorial Museum. The LBJ Presidential Library and Museum is also on the UT campus. Free (to visit).

4) Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum

The nation's largest, most-visited Presidential library is filled with memorabilia and important papers from LBJ's term in office and those turbulent times that included the Vietnam War. There are exhibits for young and young-at-heart throughout the museum. Free.

5) 6th Street

Perhaps the city's best known street outside of Texas, a few blocks south of the Capitol you'll find the E. 6th Street and Red River Entertainment District. Even if the restaurants, bars, and live music don't appeal to you, a stroll down 6th Street can be a visually stimulating experience. From the beautiful architecture and historic facades to the eccentric appearance of some 6th Street regulars, a visit to 6th Street is sure to intrigue. Free (to stroll).

6) Congress Avenue Bats

Depending on the time of year, a visit to the Congress Avenue bridge provides an awesome sight. Each evening, especially in the late summer and early fall, up to 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats emerge like a black cloud from the crevices of the bridge that they call home for around 8 months of the year. Free.

7) Ladybird Lake

In the shadow of downtown is one of Austin's treasures - Ladybird Lake. This spot along the Colorado River is a popular site for walking, biking, picnics, concerts, bat-watching, and peddle boats, canoes, riverboat rides, and much more. When you need to unwind from a day of sightseeing or business meetings, take a break on Ladybird Lake. Mostly free although some activities have fees (boats, some concerts on the lake, for example).

8) Governor's Mansion

Home to every Texas Governor since Governor Pease in 1856, the Governor's Mansion is a lovely Greek Revival style building just southwest of the Capitol. You just might catch a glimpse of the Governor when you stop by (I have). Free. Advance tour reservations required or just stroll by for a look.

9) Driskill Hotel

A popular location for fairy tale weddings, the Driskill Hotel at 6th and Brazos is also a luxurious place to relax in the splendor of a bygone era. In 1934, Lyndon Baines Johnson and his future wife, Lady Bird, had their first date in the Driskill Hotel dining room. Even if you're staying in a motel on the highway, a walk past and through the Driskill is an eye-pleasing stop while visiting 6th Street. Free (to look).

10) Mount Bonnell

Ascend all 99 steps to the top of Mount Bonnell to enjoy a breathtaking panoramic view of the city skyline, Lake Austin and the surrounding Hill Country. Free admission.