Must-Visit Spots in Austin, TX

Known globally as the "Live Music Capital of the World," Austin, Texas, is a vibrant city where rugged outdoor adventures meet eclectic urban culture. Whether you are visiting for a weekend or planning an extended stay, the Texas capital offers an unforgettable mix of natural springs, historic landmarks, world-class food, and quirky local hangouts.

Here is a curated guide to the absolute must-visit spots in Austin, TX.

1. Barton Springs Pool & Zilker Metropolitan Park

Located right in the heart of the city, **Zilker Park** is Austin's premier green space, spanning over 350 acres. Its crown jewel is **Barton Springs Pool**, a massive, three-acre swimming hole fed entirely by natural underground springs. Because the water stays at a refreshing 68 to 70 degrees year-round, it is the ultimate spot to cool off during hot Texas summers—or take a brisk dip in the middle of winter.

2. The Texas State Capitol

Standing taller than the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., the **Texas State Capitol** is a stunning example of 19th-century Renaissance Revival architecture built from sunset-red granite. Go here Visitors can take free guided tours to learn about Texas history, admire the intricate rotunda, and stroll through the surrounding 22 acres of shaded, monument-lined grounds.

3. South Congress Avenue (SoCo)

If you want to experience the classic "Keep Austin Weird" vibe, head straight to **South Congress Avenue**. Just south of Lady Bird Lake, this bustling strip is packed with colorful street murals (including the famous "*I Love You So Much*" wall), vintage clothing boutiques, boot shops, eclectic galleries, and iconic eateries. It also offers one of the best unobstructed views of the Texas State Capitol at the north end of the street.



4. Lady Bird Lake & the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail

Winding right through downtown, **Lady Bird Lake** is a reservoir on the Colorado River reserved strictly for non-motorized watercraft. Rent a kayak, canoe, or stand-up paddleboard to see the Austin skyline from the water. If you prefer staying on dry land, walk or cycle along the **Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail**, a scenic 10-mile loop hugging the shoreline.

5. Congress Avenue Bridge Bats

From roughly March through October, dusk draws massive crowds to the **Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge**. Beneath the bridge lives the largest urban bat colony in North America—up to 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats. At sunset, the bats emerge in dramatic, swirling clouds to hunt for insects, creating one of Austin's most unique natural spectacles. You can watch from the bridge itself, the grassy banks below, or from a sunset river cruise.

6. Mount Bonnell

For the best panoramic views of Austin, climb the 102 limestone steps to the top of **Mount Bonnell**. Rising 775 feet above sea level inside Covert Park, this historic lookout point overlooks Lake Austin, the rolling hills of Westlake, and the downtown skyline in the distance. It is an especially popular spot at sunrise and sunset.

7. Sixth Street & the Red River Cultural District

No trip to Austin is complete without experiencing its legendary nightlife and live music scene. **Historic Sixth Street** ("Dirty Sixth") is famous for its high-energy bars, historic architecture, and wall-to-wall live bands. For a more laid-back or indie music vibe, head a few blocks north to the **Red River Cultural District**, home to iconic venues like Mohawk and Cheer Up Charlies, or explore the trendy cocktail lounges of **East Sixth Street**.

8. Bullock Texas State History Museum

Located just north of the Capitol complex, the **Bullock Museum** tells the "Story of Texas" across three floors of interactive exhibits, rare artifacts, and multimedia displays. From the recovered remains of a 17th-century French shipwreck to exhibits on Texas music, space exploration, and ranching, it is a must-visit for history buffs and families alike.

9. Blanton Museum of Art

Situated on the University of Texas at Austin campus, the **Blanton Museum of Art** is one of the largest university art museums in the country. Its permanent collection spans everything from European paintings to modern Latin American art. Be sure to step inside *Austin*, a standalone stone building with luminous colored glass windows designed by renowned artist Ellsworth Kelly.

10. Mayfield Park and Nature Preserve

Tucked away near Lake Austin, **Mayfield Park** feels like a secret oasis. Built around a historic 19th-century cottage, the grounds feature serene lily-pad ponds, blooming gardens, shaded walking trails, and dozens of vibrant peacocks that freely roam the property.

Tips for Your Visit

- **Pace Yourself on Food:** Make time for authentic Central Texas barbecue (like Franklin Barbecue or Terry Black's) and Austin-style breakfast tacos—both are local institutions.
- **Plan Around the Heat:** If visiting between May and September, tackle outdoor hikes and sightseeing early in the morning and save museums or Barton Springs for the afternoon.
- **Go Beyond Downtown:** Neighborhoods like East Austin, Hyde Park, and South Lamar offer incredible local coffee shops, food truck parks, and murals away from the main tourist crowds.