



A GUIDE FROM DANNY BAISLEY, SELLING TEXAS TEAM · LAST UPDATED OCTOBER 2026

Things to Do in Austin

Things to do in Austin, from the Capitol and the bats to live music and Lady Bird Lake, with what each costs and the free museum days.

▶ **Watch:** What to do in Austin, from 50 years of living here. [youtube.com/watch?v=hzfAaDBePoQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzfAaDBePoQ)

The short answer

1. **Pick the day.** Many paid museums have a day that costs nothing: the Blanton on Tuesdays, the Contemporary on Thursdays, Mexic-Arte on Sundays, the Bullock on the first Sunday of the month and the science museum on the fourth. The Ransom Center and the City's museums cost nothing whenever they're open.
2. **Pick the time.** The last Capitol tour starts at 4:15 p.m. The bats come out 20 to 50 minutes after sunset, best from March to early May and from late July to mid-September.
3. **Check the age rule.** Five of the music clubs in this guide let in only people 21 and up. Stubb's, Emo's and ACL Live are all ages unless a show says otherwise.

[Jump to the one-page list: free things to do](#) →

Who this guide fits

1. **It fits** anyone in or around Austin, or visiting, who wants something to do today, tonight or this weekend: alone, as a couple, with friends or with children. Each place ends with what it costs and the day it was checked.
2. **Bringing children?** Several museums let children in at no charge every day: under 18 at the Contemporary, under 12 at the LBJ Library, and 5 and under at the Blanton and the Bullock. Places built for children, like Thinkery, are in [the kids guide](#).
3. **Under 21, or a night out without drinking?** Five of the music clubs in this guide are 21 and up. Stubb's, Emo's and ACL Live are all ages unless a show says otherwise, Mohawk and the Broken Spoke welcome all ages, and Antone's labels each show. Some museums stay open late: the Blanton until 8 p.m. on Saturdays, the Jones Center until 9 p.m. on Wednesdays, the Carver Museum until 9 p.m. on Thursdays, and Laguna Gloria until 9 p.m. on Thursdays, when it costs nothing.
4. **Visiting from out of town?** City of Austin places charge non-residents more: an adult pays \$8 at the Zilker Botanical Garden instead of \$6, and \$9 at Barton Springs instead of \$5.

5. **On a budget?** [Section 12](#) lists everything in this guide that costs nothing. Families with an EBT card (the card for SNAP food benefits, once called food stamps) get in at no charge at the Bullock, the Contemporary, the LBJ Library, Umlauf and the Zilker Botanical Garden, and for \$3 at the science museum, through a national program called Museums for All.
6. **Bringing a dog?** Leashed dogs are welcome at the Zilker Botanical Garden. Mayfield Park allows no pets. Texas Rowing Center rents boats to paddlers with dogs under 50 pounds and lends dog life vests at no charge. On Lady Bird Lake, keep dogs away from water with algae mats ([section 4](#)).
7. **It isn't the guide for** swimming holes (see "[Swimming Holes Near Austin](#)"), places built for young children ([the kids guide](#)), or tickets and parking for the big arenas (the venues guide).

SECTION 1

The Texas Capitol

The Capitol: a 40-minute guided tour that costs nothing, until 4:15 p.m.

Walk into the South Foyer and join a guided tour of the Texas Capitol; it costs nothing. Tours leave every 15 to 30 minutes and take about 40 minutes: Monday to Saturday from 9 a.m., Sunday from noon, with the last one at 4:15 p.m. Groups of more than 10 call ahead to book, and a tour in another language can be requested ahead of time.

The building is open Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. It closes on Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. While the Legislature is in session, it can stay open later.

Park in the Capitol Visitors Parking Garage at 1201 San Jacinto Blvd., entered from East 12th or East 13th Street. On weekdays, the first 2 hours cost nothing, then \$1 for each half hour, up to \$12 a day. On weekends, it sometimes costs nothing, but special events can mean a fee of up to \$25.

On the southeast corner of the grounds, the Capitol Visitors Center sits in the General Land Office building, built in 1856 and 1857. The state calls it the oldest state office building in Texas.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** guided tours cost nothing.
2. **Tours:** Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 4:15 p.m.; every 15 to 30 minutes; about 40 minutes; from the South Foyer, outside the tour guides' office.
3. **Groups and languages:** more than 10 people, call 512-305-8402 to book; more than 40 need more than one tour time. Call ahead for a tour in another language.
4. **Building hours:** Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Grounds: every day, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Closed Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Every visitor goes through security screening on entering; the accessible entrance is the North Entrance.
5. **Parking:** Capitol Visitors Parking Garage, 1201 San Jacinto Blvd. (entrances on East 12th and East 13th Streets). Weekdays, 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.: the first 2 hours cost nothing (one visit a day per vehicle), then \$1 each half hour, \$12 a day at most; a lost ticket is \$12. Weekends: sometimes no charge; event fees up to \$25. Cash, checks and major cards.
6. **Capitol Visitors Center:** 112 E. 11th St.; Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.; closed the same five days. Its undated rack card says admission costs nothing.
7. **Phone:** 512-463-0063 (general); Visitors Center, 512-305-8400.
8. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

The Congress Avenue bats

The bats: arrive before sunset, between March and mid-September.

Get to the Congress Avenue bridge before sunset: the bats come out between sunset and full dark, usually 20 to 50 minutes after sunset, and the best months are March to early May and late July to mid-September. The colony of Mexican free-tailed bats numbers between 750,000 and 1.5 million, by The Trail Conservancy's count. From late May to mid-July there's a lull while the young learn to fly, and most of the colony leaves for Mexico around October or November.

The bat season

- **March to early May:** one of the two best times to see them.
- **Late May to mid-July:** a lull while the young learn to fly.
- **Late July to mid-September:** the other best time.
- **October or November:** most of the colony leaves for Mexico.

Two best stretches a year. In either one, get there before sunset.

Watching costs nothing. There are four places to stand: on top of the bridge, best before dark; on the trail along the south shore below the bridge, best near dark; on the trail along the north shore; or on the water, from a kayak or a tour boat. The viewing area at the southeast end of the bridge has signs with QR codes (square barcodes you read with a phone camera) for videos and facts in English and Spanish.

If you find a bat on the ground, leave it there and never touch it with bare hands. Call Austin Bat Refuge, 512-695-4116 or 512-799-8847. If a bat may have bitten or scratched a person or a pet, call 3-1-1.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** watching from the bridge or the shore costs nothing. Bat boat tours last about an hour: Capital Cruises, \$14 for adults, \$11 for seniors and \$9 for ages 3 to 12, plus tax; Lone Star Riverboat, \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors 60 and up and military, \$10 for ages 12 and under, and no charge for ages 2 and under. Live Love Paddle's bat kayak tour, 2 to 2.5 hours, is \$49 a person plus tax.
2. **Season:** about March to October or November; best March to early May and late July to mid-September; a lull from late May to mid-July. Up to 100,000 bats stay all year.
3. **Time:** usually 20 to 50 minutes after sunset; arrive before sunset.
4. **Where to watch:** on top of the bridge (best before dark); the south shore of the Butler Trail below the bridge (best near dark); the north shore; from the water.
5. **Boat tours:** Capital Cruises, from the dock behind the Hyatt Regency, 208 Barton Springs Rd., March to mid-November, 512-480-9264. Lone Star Riverboat, also at 208 Barton Springs Rd., nightly bat tours, 512-327-1388. **Kayak tour:** Live Love Paddle, 1610 E. Riverside Dr.
6. **Parking:** the Statesman lot, 305 S. Congress Ave., at the southeast end of the bridge; 2 hours at no charge at Auditorium Shores. The Trail Conservancy says rates change, so read the signs.
7. **A grounded bat:** don't touch it; call Austin Bat Refuge, 512-695-4116 or 512-799-8847; for a bite or scratch, call 3-1-1.
8. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

● **Watch:** The bats flying out from under the Congress Avenue bridge, and when to be there. [youtube.com/shorts/1Lhr2vsgOus](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/1Lhr2vsgOus)

Zilker Park

Zilker Park: check the City's closures page before you go, especially after a festival.

Before you go to Zilker Park, look at the City's park closures page, [AustinTexas.gov/parkclosures](https://austintexas.gov/parkclosures). The Austin City Limits Music Festival, the Kite Fest and the Trail of Lights all happen here, so parts of the park close often, and after the music festival each October, parts of the Great Lawn stay closed for weeks while the grass recovers. Zilker Metropolitan Park covers more than 350 acres along Barton Springs Road, with Barton Springs Pool (in [our swimming guide](#)), the Botanical Garden, the Hillside Theater, the Zilker Eagle miniature train and boat rentals on Barton Creek.

Shows at the Hillside Theater always cost nothing, from summer concerts to the Zilker Summer Musical. The Botanical Garden charges by age and where you live, from \$3 for a resident child to \$8 for a non-resident adult, and has eight days a year when entry costs nothing, booked online. Leashed dogs are welcome there.

On weekends and holidays, from spring through Labor Day, parking costs \$3 an hour at the pay stations or in the Park ATX app. The City's pages list no charge on weekdays. In the Stratford Lot, you can get a code for 2 hours of parking at no charge.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** no entry fee is listed for the park itself. You pay for parking in season, Barton Springs Pool and the Botanical Garden.
2. **Hours:** 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., the City's rule for its parks unless posted.
3. **Address:** 2100 Barton Springs Rd.
4. **Parking:** \$3 an hour on Saturdays, Sundays and official holidays, from spring through Labor Day, at the pay stations or in the Park ATX app. The City's pages give two start dates (1 March, or the first Saturday of spring break). Weekdays: no charge. Stratford Lot: a code for 2 hours at no charge. The Zilker Loop shuttle runs on summer weekends and holidays (23 May to 7 Sep in 2026).
5. **Zilker Botanical Garden:** 2220 Barton Springs Rd.; 28 acres. Resident or non-resident: ages 3 to 17, \$3 or \$4; 18 to 61, \$6 or \$8; 62 and over, \$5 or \$7; 2 and under, no charge. Days at no charge in 2026, booked online: 19 Jan, 11 Apr, 25 May, 21 Jun, 12 Jul, 13 Sep, 11 Nov and 26 Dec. The City took over running the garden on 1 October 2026, so check that 11 Nov and 26 Dec still stand. Families showing a food-benefits card (EBT or WIC), or Medicaid or another state health-coverage card, get in at no charge (Museums for All). Hours: September to May, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; June to August, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; last entry 30 minutes before closing. Closed New Year's Day, the Fourth of July, both weekends of the Austin City Limits festival, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The City lists Kite Fest day as a day the garden is closed, so check before going that day. Leashed dogs welcome. Tickets at zilker garden.org.
6. **Hillside Theater** (the Beverly S. Sheffield Hillside Theater): shows always cost nothing. Chairs under 28 inches tall go in the main seating area, taller ones at the top of the hill. No alcohol. During the Summer Musical, no animals on the hillside other than service animals.
7. **Zilker Eagle train:** depot at 2131 1/2 William Barton Dr.; run by the Austin Parks Foundation. Open Friday to Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 5:45 p.m., with a break from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.; closed Wednesdays and Thursdays. Tickets are \$6 plus tax, and children under 2 ride at no charge; buy them at the depot on the day, with cash or a card. Hours change with the weather and it closes for breaks, so check its site or social media before going.
8. **Great Lawn:** after the Austin City Limits festival each October, parts stay closed for weeks while the grass recovers; reopenings are posted at [AustinTexas.gov/parkclosures](https://austintexas.gov/parkclosures).
9. **Barton Springs Pool:** \$2 to \$9 a day by age and residency, generally charged from the Austin school district's spring break through October. Details in "[Swimming Holes Near Austin](#)".
10. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

Lady Bird Lake: paddling and the trail

Lady Bird Lake: paddle it, don't swim it, and put children under 13 in a life jacket.

On Lady Bird Lake, the way onto the water is a kayak, a canoe or a paddleboard. Swimming, wading and going into the water are against the law. Every paddler needs a Coast Guard-approved life jacket within reach, and children under 13 must wear one.

Rentals run about \$15 to \$30 an hour, depending on the boat and the business. The City lists six rental businesses with permits on the lake, from Zilker Park to East Austin. Most rent by the hour or the day, and some close in bad weather or when it's cold, so call ahead if the sky looks doubtful.

After heavy rain, the lake can close. In July 2026, the City kept everyone off it from 17 to 27 July while the dams released floodwater, and bacteria levels can take at least three days after a storm to return to normal. If you bring a dog, keep it away from water with algae mats; the City attributes six dog deaths since 2019 to algae toxins.

Around the lake runs the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, a 10-mile loop, with parking lots, meters and street parking along the way.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** rentals about \$15 to \$30 an hour (list below). The trail costs nothing.
2. **Rules:** no swimming, bathing or wading; a Coast Guard-approved life jacket within reach for every paddler, worn by children under 13.
3. **Rentals,** from each business's own site:
 1. **Texas Rowing Center**, 1541 W. Cesar Chavez St.: every day, 6 a.m. to dusk, walk up. Kayak \$15 an hour or \$35 a day; double kayak \$20 an hour or \$45 a day; paddleboard \$25 an hour or \$55 a day. Life vests at no charge for people and dogs; dogs under 50 pounds. 512-467-7799.
 2. **The Rowing Dock**, 2418 Stratford Dr., in Zilker Park: every day, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; the last boat goes out at 6. Kayaks \$20 to \$25 an hour; canoes \$30; paddleboards \$25; pedal kayaks \$30.
 3. **EpicSUP**, 2200 S. Lakeshore Blvd.: fall hours Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Friday to Sunday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Kayak \$15 an hour or \$35 a day (doubles priced per person); paddleboard \$23 an hour or \$45 a day. 512-574-2516.
 4. **Zilker Park Boat Rentals**, 2101 Andrew Zilker Rd., on Barton Creek: 9 a.m. to dusk, every day, all year, weather permitting. \$18 an hour or \$54 a day for canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. Photo ID needed; cash only from noon on weekends and holidays; dogs welcome, but no dog life jackets. 512-478-3852.
 5. **The Expedition School**, at the Festival Beach boat ramp (Nash Hernandez Sr. Rd.): paddleboards \$20 an hour; kayaks \$15; tandem kayaks \$20; canoes \$25. Everyone wears a life jacket. Closes when it's below 70 degrees. Its posted hours date from 2024, so call first: 512-922-6724.
 6. **Austin Rowing Club**, Waller Creek Boathouse: on the City's list; not checked.
 7. **Live Love Paddle**, 1610 E. Riverside Dr.: kayaks, canoes, paddleboards and a bat-watching kayak tour; closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays; prices not shown. Not on the City's list of businesses with permits.
4. **The trail:** the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, a 10-mile loop. Parking lots (such as Austin High Boat Launch, Krieg Field, Lou Neff and Pecan Grove), metered parking (such as the Zilker pay lot, Lee Barton, East Riverside and Shoal Beach) and street parking.
5. **After rain:** the City can close the lake. In 2026 it was closed from 17 to 27 July.

6. **Dogs and algae:** keep dogs away from algae mats; rinse them before they lick their fur; call a vet if a dog seems sick after the water. The City posts its latest algae findings on its page about algae in Austin's waterways; check it before bringing a dog.
7. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

SECTION 5

Mount Bonnell

Mount Bonnell: about 100 steps to a view over Lake Austin.

Mount Bonnell is a limestone hill on the east bank of the Colorado River, now Lake Austin, and the climb is short: some 100 limestone steps, laid in 1939, from the street to the top. The summit is about 775 feet above sea level. The hill is named for George W. Bonnell, who wrote about it in his 1838 travel diary.

The park at the top is Covert Park, named for Frank Covert Sr., whose family gave the land in 1939. City parks are open from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. unless a sign says otherwise. Dogs stay on a leash: it isn't one of the City's off-leash areas.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** no fee appears on any page read, and the City's own page for the park didn't load.
2. **Hours:** 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., the City's rule for its parks unless posted.
3. **Where:** the steps start at 3800 Mount Bonnell Road.
4. **The climb:** some 100 limestone steps.
5. **Height:** about 775 feet above sea level.
6. **Dogs:** on a leash.
7. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

SECTION 6

Mayfield Park and its peacocks

Mayfield Park: come for the peacocks, and leave pets at home.

Mayfield Park is a 23-acre City park on West 35th Street, with a white cottage, walled gardens, lily ponds and a flock of peafowl that roams the grounds. The peacocks came as a gift to the family who lived there, in 1937, according to the City. Look, but don't approach, touch, feed or chase them.

Leave pets at home: Mayfield allows no pets, and that includes emotional support animals; service animals are allowed. Stay on the paths and off the rock walls. The walled gardens, just under two acres, are open to visitors when they aren't rented for an event. The park is open every day from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., and the parking lot is off West 35th Street.

Laguna Gloria, the Contemporary Austin's 14-acre sculpture park, is on the same street, at 3809 West 35th, and costs nothing on Thursdays ([section 9](#)).

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** no entry fee is listed on the City's or the park groups' pages.
2. **Hours:** every day, 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.
3. **Address:** 3505 W. 35th St.; the parking lot is off West 35th Street.
4. **Pets:** none, emotional support animals included; service animals allowed.
5. **Rules:** don't approach, touch, feed or chase the peafowl; no fishing; stay on the paths, off the rock walls and out of the flower beds.

6. **Size:** 23 acres; the walled gardens are just under two acres.

7. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

SECTION 7

South Congress, and the streets for a night out

Shops and food on South Congress; nights out downtown.

South Congress Avenue, south of Lady Bird Lake, is a business district of locally owned shops, restaurants and music clubs, from Riverside Drive to Live Oak Street, with the Capitol in view to the north. Two music clubs in this guide are on it: the Continental Club at 1315 South Congress and C-Boy's Heart and Soul at 2008 ([section 8](#)).

For a night out, three downtown districts each work differently:

1. **Sixth Street**, first named Pecan Street and renamed in 1884, is the nightlife street, with music and dancing until 2 a.m. From Thursday to Sunday, cars can drive it westbound only, between Red River and Brazos Streets, and on busy nights it closes at 1:45 a.m., before the bars close.
2. **Red River** is the live-music district, roughly from 4th Street to 15th Street, between Neches Street and the interstate. Venues there open and close, so check a club's own calendar before you go.
3. **Rainey Street**, on the edge of downtown by Lady Bird Lake, is a historic district of old houses, on the National Register of Historic Places since 1985, many of them now bars and restaurants.

For a mall day, The Domain, about 25 minutes north of downtown, has more than 100 stores and restaurants.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** walking the streets costs nothing. Clubs and bars charge a cover (an entry charge) on some nights ([section 8](#)).
2. **South Congress:** the business district runs from Riverside Drive to Live Oak Street.
3. **Sixth Street:** from Red River to Brazos Streets, Thursday to Sunday, westbound only; cross traffic at San Jacinto, Trinity and Neches Streets is closed. On busy Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights it closes at 1:45 a.m. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, according to its state marker.
4. **Red River Cultural District:** 4th to 15th Street, from Interstate 35 west to Neches Street (in places, Trinity Street). The district's own site dates the state arts commission's designation to 2020. Run by a nonprofit of more than 40 local businesses, which puts on Free Week in January and Hot Summer Nights.
5. **Rainey Street:** the Rainey Street Historic District, 70 to 97 Rainey St., on the National Register since 17 Sep 1985.
6. **The Domain:** 11410 Century Oaks Terrace; its owner, Simon, gives both 100 and "120+" stores and restaurants.
7. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

SECTION 8

Live music: ages, covers and music at no charge

Live music: check the age rule first, then the cover.

Five of the music clubs in this guide let in only people 21 and up: the Continental Club and C-Boy's (unless a show says otherwise), the Saxon Pub, the Elephant Room and the White Horse. Stubb's, Emo's and ACL Live are all ages unless a show says otherwise, and Antone's marks each show 21 and up, 18 and up, or all ages. Mohawk and the Broken Spoke welcome all ages, though the Broken Spoke prefers minors to come with a parent.

21 AND UP

Five clubs

The Continental Club and C-Boy's (unless a show says otherwise), the Saxon Pub, the Elephant Room and the White Horse.

ALL AGES

Unless a show says otherwise

Stubb's, Emo's, ACL Live, Mohawk and the Broken Spoke (which prefers minors to come with a parent).

SHOW BY SHOW

Check the listing

Antone's marks each show 21 and up, 18 and up, or all ages.

The age rule decides who can get in, so check it before the cover.

Then the cover, the charge at the door. Some clubs have times with none. The Saxon Pub runs happy-hour shows at no charge, tips welcome; its calendar marks which ones. The Elephant Room, a jazz club in a basement on Congress Avenue, charges no cover before 8 p.m. From Monday to Friday, its first set usually starts at 6 p.m., before the cover begins. On Sunday the music starts at 8 p.m., and on Saturday at 9 p.m., so every set on those nights has a cover. At C-Boy's on South Congress, the cover is set show by show. At the Broken Spoke, the restaurant shows, Tuesday to Saturday from 6 to 8 p.m., have no cover; the bands play for tips.

To learn the two-step, the Broken Spoke on South Lamar teaches Wednesday to Saturday, 8 to 9 p.m., for \$10 plus the cover; be there by 7:30 to sign up. The White Horse, at 500 Comal St., teaches Thursday to Sunday at 7 p.m. for a donation in cash or by Venmo, with no booking; a cover starts at 7:30.

You can't buy a ticket to an Austin City Limits TV taping at ACL Live. The show gives passes away in a random drawing, announced on its Instagram, Facebook and X pages about a week before each taping: two passes a person, for people in or around Austin. A pass doesn't promise a seat.

Music that costs nothing runs through the year in parks, clubs and the library: Free Week across the Red River clubs in January, Blues on the Green at Zilker in June, The Drop-In at the Long Center on summer Thursdays (reserve a ticket ahead), Rock the Park at Mueller on fall Fridays, from the public radio music station KUTX, and concerts at the Central Library.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** from no charge to the price of a ticket; the list below gives each club's.

2. **Clubs**, from each one's own site:

1. **Antone's**, 305 E. 5th St.: ages set for each show (21 and up, 18 and up, or all ages); tickets through Ticketmaster; Zilker Sessions on 29 Oct 2026 with no cover, while there's room (21 and up). Valet parking at the Westin across the street.
 2. **Broken Spoke**, 3201 S. Lamar Blvd.: all ages; it prefers minors to come with a parent. Two-step lessons Wednesday to Saturday, 8 to 9 p.m., \$10 plus the cover; be there by 7:30 p.m. to sign up. Restaurant shows Tuesday to Saturday, 6 to 8 p.m., have no cover; the bands play for tips. The Tuesday dance-hall show has a \$10 cover; other nights' cover isn't posted. 512-442-6189.
 3. **C-Boy's Heart and Soul**, 2008 S. Congress Ave.: 21 and up unless a show says otherwise; the cover is set show by show, and some shows sell tickets on Eventbrite, with cash at the door when there's room. 512-215-0023.
 4. **Continental Club**, 1315 S. Congress Ave.: 21 and up unless a show says otherwise; tickets ahead; some cash at the door on the day, \$10 to \$40, when there's room.
 5. **The Elephant Room**, 315 Congress Ave.: jazz; 21 and up; opens 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, 8 p.m. Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday; no cover before 8 p.m., then \$5 to \$10 by night. Its calendar starts the music at 6 p.m. on most weekdays, 8 p.m. on Sunday and 9 p.m. on Saturday. 512-575-2925.
 6. **Emo's**, 2015 E. Riverside Dr.: all ages unless a show says otherwise (everyone 3 and up needs a ticket); tickets through Ticketmaster; the box office opens at doors on show days. 512-777-0873.
 7. **Saxon Pub**, 1320 S. Lamar Blvd.: 21 and up; happy-hour shows at no charge, tips welcome; other shows \$10 to \$35; all sales final. Booking line 512-448-3663.
 8. **Stubb's**, at 8th Street and Red River: all ages, depending on the show; tickets through Ticketmaster only. A Sunday gospel brunch is held, all ages, with the music at 10:30 a.m. (reservations 512-480-8341).
 9. **The White Horse**, 500 Comal St.: 21 and up; open every day from 3 p.m.; two-step lessons Thursday to Sunday at 7 p.m. for a donation; a cover after 7:30 p.m.
 10. **ACL Live at the Moody Theater**, 310 W. Willie Nelson Blvd.: concerts with tickets; all ages unless a show says otherwise, and every child over 1 needs a ticket. 512-404-1300.
 11. **Mohawk**, 912 Red River St.: indoor and outdoor stages; all ages; tickets for each show at mohawkaustin.com; opens at 5 p.m. every day.
3. **Austin City Limits TV tapings**: no tickets are sold. Passes by random drawing, announced on the show's Instagram, Facebook and X pages about a week before; two a person; for people in or around Austin; not transferable or for sale; a pass doesn't guarantee entry. Tapings start at 8 p.m., doors at 7.
4. **Series at no charge**:
1. **Blues on the Green**, Zilker Park, presented by Waterloo Media: 2026 on 9 and 10 June; 2027 not posted.
 2. **The Drop-In**, Long Center, 701 W. Riverside Dr.: Thursdays from 21 May to 13 Aug 2026; reserve a no-charge ticket ahead.
 3. **KUTX and Mueller's Rock the Park**, Girard Kinney Park at Mueller, 4550 Mueller Blvd.: Fridays, 25 Sep, 23 Oct and 6 Nov 2026, from 6:30 p.m.
 4. **Free Week**, Red River clubs, early January: 9 and 10 Jan 2026; 2027 not posted.
 5. **Central Library Concerts**, 710 W. Cesar Chavez St., first floor: next listed Saturday 28 Nov 2026, 2 to 3 p.m.
5. **Waterloo Records**: 1105 N. Lamar Blvd., Suite 110; every day, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; in-store shows, mostly at 5:30 p.m., at no charge. 512-474-2500.
6. **Checked on** 13 Oct 2026.

Free museum days

Museums: pick the day, and the same visit can cost nothing.

Many of Austin's paid museums have a day when getting in costs nothing. Pick the museum by the day:

1. **Tuesday:** the Blanton Museum of Art, whose admission includes Ellsworth Kelly's "Austin" (usually \$15 for adults). The LBJ Library is half price.
2. **Wednesday evening:** the Contemporary Austin's Jones Center, on Congress Avenue.
3. **Thursday:** the Contemporary Austin at both of its sites, the Jones Center and Laguna Gloria, its 14-acre sculpture park on West 35th Street, open until 9 p.m. that day (usually \$10 for adults).
4. **Every Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.:** Mexic-Arte Museum (usually \$8).
5. **The first Sunday of each month, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.:** the Bullock Texas State History Museum's exhibitions (usually \$22).
6. **The fourth Sunday of each month, 1 to 5 p.m.:** the Texas Science and Natural History Museum (usually \$10).

Some cost nothing on any day they're open: the Harry Ransom Center, with a Gutenberg Bible always on view and the earliest surviving photograph made in a camera, from 1827; the George Washington Carver Museum; the O. Henry Museum; the Texas Military Forces Museum at Camp Mabry; and the Central Library. The Elisabet Ney Museum costs nothing too, but it's closed for renovation until spring 2027.

Once a year, on Austin Museum Day, more than 30 museums and cultural places open at no charge. In 2026 it was Sunday, 20 September.

If your family has an EBT card (the card for SNAP food benefits), a national program called Museums for All gets you in at no charge at the Bullock, the Contemporary, the LBJ Library, Umlauf and the Zilker Botanical Garden, and for \$3 a person at the science museum.

On University of Texas home football Saturdays, the science museum closes. The Blanton stays open, but the Brazos and Trinity garages close to museum visitors, and the Blanton points them to the Bullock Museum garage across the street, at \$25 for the day.

The week at a glance

Museum	Costs nothing	Usual adult price	Closed
Blanton Museum of Art	Tuesdays	\$15	Mondays
The Contemporary Austin, Jones Center	Thursdays, and Wednesday evenings	\$10 (under 18, no charge)	Mondays and Tuesdays
The Contemporary Austin, Laguna Gloria	Thursdays (open until 9 p.m.)	\$10 (under 18, no charge)	Mondays and Tuesdays
Mexic-Arte Museum	Sundays, noon to 5	\$8	A few holidays
Bullock Texas State History Museum	First Sunday, 10 to 5 (exhibitions)	\$22	A few holidays
Texas Science and Natural History Museum	Fourth Sunday, 1 to 5	\$10	Mondays, and Texas home football Saturdays

Museum	Costs nothing	Usual adult price	Closed
LBJ Presidential Library	Set holidays; half price on Tuesdays	\$16 (under 12, no charge)	A few holidays
Zilker Botanical Garden	Eight set days a year	\$6 resident, \$8 non-resident	Set days a year
Harry Ransom Center	Every open day	No charge	Mondays (galleries)
George Washington Carver Museum	Every open day	No charge	Sundays
O. Henry Museum	Every open day	No charge	Mondays and Tuesdays
Texas Military Forces Museum	Every open day	No charge	
Central Library	Every open day	No charge	Library holidays
Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum	None found	\$8	Mondays
Neill-Cochran House Museum	None found	\$10	Mondays and Tuesdays
French Legation	None found	\$7	Sundays and Mondays

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** as in the list and the table; each museum's line below.
2. **Blanton Museum of Art** (University of Texas): no charge on Tuesdays. Adults \$15; 65 and up \$12; ages 6 to 17 \$8; 5 and under no charge. Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; closed Mondays. Paid parking in University garages; the nearest is the Brazos Garage, 210 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. On home football days, the Brazos and Trinity garages close to museum visitors, and the Blanton points them to the Bullock Museum garage, at \$25 for the day.
3. **The Contemporary Austin:** both sites at no charge on Thursdays; the Jones Center also on Wednesday evenings. Adults \$10; seniors, students and educators \$5; under 18 and military, no charge. A ticket also covers the other site within seven days. **Jones Center**, 700 Congress Ave.: Wednesday, noon to 9 p.m.; Thursday to Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. **Laguna Gloria**, 3809 W. 35th St.: Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Thursday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday to Sunday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; limited parking on West 35th Street. Closed on seven holidays.
4. **Bullock Texas State History Museum**, 1800 N. Congress Ave.: exhibitions at no charge on the first Sunday of each month, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (next: 1 Nov 2026), and on the second Sunday in July. Adults \$22; students, military and 65 and up \$18; ages 6 to 17 \$16; 5 and under no charge. Films cost extra: IMAX documentaries \$10, IMAX features \$17, the Texas Spirit Theater \$6. Every day, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Easter. Garage: \$15 a day; on home football days the Blanton lists it at \$25.
5. **Mexic-Arte Museum**, 419 Congress Ave., at Fifth Street: no charge every Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Adults \$8; seniors, military, veterans, students and educators \$5; 12 and under \$1; tickets in person only. Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. A temporary move to the Austin History Center, 810 Guadalupe St., is planned while its building is rebuilt; no date announced.

6. **Texas Science and Natural History Museum** (University of Texas), 2400 Trinity St.: no charge on the fourth Sunday of each month, 1 to 5 p.m., no tickets needed (left in 2026: 25 Oct, 22 Nov, 27 Dec). Adults \$10; ages 5 to 17 and 65 and up \$6; 4 and under no charge. Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.; closed Mondays, and on Texas home football Saturdays (left in 2026: 24 and 31 Oct, and 21 Nov).
7. **LBJ Presidential Library**, 2313 Red River St.: half price on Tuesdays; no charge on set holidays (in 2026 only Veterans Day, 11 Nov, is left; the 2027 list isn't posted). Adults \$16; under 12 no charge. No charge on any day for active-duty military and up to 5 family members, and for visitors named Lyndon or Claudia. Every day, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; last entry 4 p.m.; closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Parking at no charge in lot 38.
8. **Harry Ransom Center** (University of Texas), 300 W. 21st St.: no charge. Galleries Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.; closed Mondays. The Gutenberg Bible is always on view. The 1827 photograph is off view from 15 April to early July 2027. Metered parking on Guadalupe Street.
9. **George Washington Carver Museum**, 1165 Angelina St.: no charge. Monday to Wednesday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed Sundays.
10. **O. Henry Museum**, 409 E. 5th St.: no charge. Wednesday to Friday, noon to 6 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.
11. **Texas Military Forces Museum**, Camp Mabry, 3038 W. 35th St.: no charge. Every day, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Enter Camp Mabry by 3 p.m.; adults 18 and up show a photo ID and are screened at the visitor center.
12. **Central Library**, 710 W. Cesar Chavez St.: no entry charge. Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Underground parking: the first hour costs nothing; parking isn't validated.
13. **Elisabet Ney Museum**, 304 E. 44th St.: no charge when open; closed for renovation since 30 Dec 2024; reopening in spring 2027.
14. **Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum**, 605 Azie Morton Rd., by Zilker Park: no day at no charge found. Adults \$8; 60 and up \$6; college students \$4; kindergarten to 12th grade \$2; 4 and under no charge; families with an EBT card and photo ID, no charge. Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed Mondays.
15. **Neill-Cochran House Museum**, 2310 San Gabriel St.: \$10; Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. **French Legation**, 802 San Marcos St.: adults \$7; Tuesday to Saturday. Neither has a day at no charge.
16. **Thinkery**, the children's museum at Mueller, 1830 Simond Ave.: \$19.95 for ages 1 and up; members get in at no charge. In [the kids guide](#).
17. **Austin Museum Day**: one Sunday a year, more than 30 places at no charge (2026: Sunday 20 September); organized by the Austin Museum Partnership since 1998; hours differ by place; the 2027 date isn't posted.
18. **Checked on 13 Oct 2026.**

SECTION 10

Food: the critics' picks

The critics' lists agree most on barbecue: go early, and not on a Monday.

The twelve places below come from the food lists people cite most, and all twelve are inside the City of Austin. Ten are named by at least two of these four: the Michelin Guide's 2026 Texas selection, announced on 8 October 2026; Texas Monthly's Top 50 barbecue joints, which the magazine redoes every four years or so, most recently in May 2025; Texas Monthly's "The 22 Best Taco Spots in Austin," updated on 3 September 2026; and the James Beard Awards for 2025 and 2026.

LeRoy and Lewis, in South Austin, has a Michelin star and is No. 2 in the state on Texas Monthly's list. InterStellar, in Northwest Austin, also has a star and is No. 6. Franklin and la Barbecue, in East Austin, are on both lists. La Barbecue lost

its Michelin star this year, but the guide still recommends it.

Austin has seven One Star restaurants in the 2026 guide, and no restaurant in Texas has two stars. Four of the seven are below: LeRoy and Lewis, InterStellar, Barley Swine and Hestia. The other three are Craft Omakase, which is Japanese, and two new this year: Fabrik, which is plant-based, and Kappo Kappo, a Japanese counter in the Austin Proper Hotel.

For tacos, start with La Santa Barbacha, known for barbacoa. Michelin gives it a Bib Gourmand, the guide's mark for good cooking at a good value; it's on Texas Monthly's taco list; and its two chefs were James Beard semifinalists in 2026. For Tex-Mex, the lists are thin: Michelin files one Austin place under Tex-Mex, Joe's Bakery & Coffee Shop, open since 1962.

Of Austin's James Beard semifinalists in 2025 and 2026, one went on to win: Arjav Ezekiel of Birdie's, for beverage service, in 2025.

Plan around the day and the clock. Ten of the twelve close on Mondays; LeRoy and Lewis and La Santa Barbacha stay open. Franklin, InterStellar and Briscuits can sell out, and Franklin's line can take hours, so go early, or order ahead where a place allows it.

Older lists may still name Olamaie, which held a Michelin star in 2024 and 2025. It closed on 19 July 2026.

For a day trip, Texas Monthly's No. 1 for 2025 is Burnt Bean Co., in downtown Seguin, open Thursday to Sunday until it sells out.

From Danny's videos: El Mercado North, 7414 Burnet Rd., for Tex-Mex: Sunday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. It's the only El Mercado still open; the first one, on South First Street, closed in December 2025. Top Notch Hamburgers, 7525 Burnet Rd.: charcoal-grilled burgers and fried chicken since 1971, with carhop service; it's in the film "Dazed and Confused." 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; 512-452-2181.

[Watch Danny at Top Notch on YouTube →](#)

The details (checked on 19 Oct 2026). Hours are from each place's own site unless the line says otherwise.

1. **Franklin Barbecue**, 900 E. 11th St., East Austin: brisket. Named by Michelin (2026: Bib Gourmand) and Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025: on the list, outside the top ten). Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. until it sells out, often by 2 or 3 p.m.; always closed Mondays, and closed 26 and 27 Nov and 25 to 28 Dec. The line can take hours: bring a chair, or borrow one of its loaners. Preorders on its site. 512-653-1187.
2. **LeRoy and Lewis Barbecue**, 5621 Emerald Forest Dr., South Austin, off Stassney Lane: brisket and flat iron every day, tri-tip at dinner, plus barbacoa and whole hog. Named by Michelin (2026: One Star), Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025: No. 2 in Texas) and the James Beard Awards (2025: Evan LeRoy, semifinalist, Best Chef: Texas). Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; closed Tuesdays. The latest-closing barbecue here, and open on Mondays.
3. **la Barbecue**, 2401 E. Cesar Chavez St., East Austin: brisket and pork ribs from a pit in the backyard. Named by Michelin (2026: Recommended; One Star in 2024 and 2025), Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025: on the list) and the James Beard Awards (2026: Ali Clem, semifinalist, Best Chef: Texas). Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Order online ahead for pickup to skip the wait. 512-605-9696.
4. **InterStellar BBQ**, 12233 Ranch Road 620 N., Suite 105, Northwest Austin: brisket and peach tea-glazed pork belly. Named by Michelin (2026: One Star) and Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025: No. 6 in Texas). Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., unless it sells out sooner; closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Michelin says the line forms well before opening. 512-382-6248.

5. **La Santa Barbacha**, 2806 Manor Rd., East Austin; also at 1214 W. 6th St. and 88 Rainey St.: barbacoa tacos. Named by Michelin (2026: Bib Gourmand), Texas Monthly's taco list (2026) and the James Beard Awards (2026: Rosa De Lima Hernandez and Daniela Hernandez, semifinalists, Best Chef: Texas). Every day: Manor Road and Rainey Street, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; West 6th, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Order online ahead for pickup.
6. **Cuantos Tacos**, 1108 E. 12th St., East Austin: Mexico City-style tacos, including suadero, from a food truck with a shaded picnic area. Named by Michelin (2026: Bib Gourmand) and Texas Monthly's taco list (2026). Tuesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; closed Sundays and Mondays. These hours are from Michelin's page; the truck's own site didn't load.
7. **Joe's Bakery & Coffee Shop**, 2305 E. 7th St., East Austin: Tex-Mex breakfast all day, lunch from 10:30 a.m., and a bakery; family-run since 1962. Named by Michelin (2026: Recommended; its only Austin listing under Tex-Mex). Tuesday to Sunday, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. On weekends after 9:30 a.m., expect a wait of 25 to 45 minutes on the covered patio. No Apple Pay or other contactless payment; a 3% packaging fee on every order; an 18% gratuity for dining-room parties over 5; groups over 8 aren't seated. 512-472-0017.
8. **Barley Swine**, 6555 Burnet Rd., Suite 400, north-central Austin: a seasonal tasting menu. Named by Michelin (2026: One Star; its general manager, Stefan Davis, won Michelin's 2026 Texas service award) and the James Beard Awards (2026: semifinalist, Outstanding Hospitality). Dinner from 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday and from 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; closed Monday to Wednesday (Michelin's page; its own site lists only the dinner days). Book on Tock; seating is limited. Vegetarian, pescatarian and gluten-free menus on request; vegan and keto diets aren't served. 512-394-8150.
9. **Hestia**, 607 W. 3rd St., downtown: cooking over a 20-foot hearth in the open kitchen. Named by Michelin (2026: One Star, as in 2024 and 2025). Tuesday to Thursday and Sunday, 5:30 to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5:30 to 11 p.m.; closed Mondays. Order à la carte or the chef's tasting menu; book on OpenTable. Valet on Fridays and Saturdays at 3rd and Nueces Streets; parking validated at the 3rd and Shoal garage after 5 p.m. 512-333-0737.
10. **Birdie's**, 2944 E. 12th St., Unit A, East Austin, at Harvey Street: regional European cooking and wine, ordered at the counter. Named by the James Beard Awards (2025: Arjav Ezekiel, co-owner and beverage director, won Outstanding Professional in Beverage Service) and Michelin (2026: Recommended). Prix fixe only: \$79 a person for "five or so courses." Tuesday to Thursday, 5 to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 to 9:30 p.m.; closed Sundays and Mondays. Cards only; no phone, so reach it by email or Instagram. Children welcome, with a kids' menu; leashed dogs outdoors. It's in a neighborhood: don't park in the driveways.
11. **Biscuits**, 4204 Menchaca Rd., South Austin, a trailer at Radio Coffee & Beer: barbecue on biscuit sandwiches. Named by Michelin (2026: Bib Gourmand) and Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025: on the list). Thursday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; closed Monday to Wednesday. Biscuits and smoked meats can sell out during the day; drinks are sold inside Radio. Online ordering. Other listings give other hours; these are from its own site.
12. **Mercado Sin Nombre**, 408 N. Pleasant Valley Rd., East Austin: heirloom Mexican corn, pastries and coffee. Named by Michelin (2026: Bib Gourmand) and the James Beard Awards (2026: semifinalist, Outstanding Bakery). Tuesday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; closed Mondays. 512-270-9403.
13. **Day trip: Burnt Bean Co.**, 108 S. Austin St., downtown Seguin: No. 1 on Texas Monthly's Top 50 (2025). Thursday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; or until it sells out; closed Monday to Wednesday.
14. **The sources**: the Michelin Guide's 2026 Texas selection (announced 8 Oct 2026); Texas Monthly's "Top 50 BBQ Joints: 2025 Edition" (27 May 2025); Texas Monthly's "The 22 Best Taco Spots in Austin," by its taco editor, José R. Ralat (6 Jan 2026, updated 3 Sep 2026); and the James Beard Awards' semifinalists (22 Jan 2025 and 21 Jan 2026) and winners (16 Jun 2025 and 15 Jun 2026). No Austin name reached the 2026 nominees.
15. **Checked on** 19 Oct 2026.

▶ **Watch:** Danny at El Mercado North on Burnet Road: the spinach and mushroom enchiladas, and the chicken flautas with queso.
youtube.com/shorts/yfoAtguHrRE

The year in Austin, month by month

The year in Austin: the next date, and what it costs.

Austin's big events come around every year, but their dates move, and a few have moved place. Here's the year, with the next date posted on the day this was checked.

1. **January: Free Week.** Two nights of shows across the Red River clubs, with no cover. 2026: 9 and 10 January; 2027 not posted.
2. **February: the Austin Marathon.** The marathon, half marathon and 5K finish on Congress Avenue in front of the Capitol. Next: Sunday 14 February 2027; the marathon starts at 7 a.m., and in 2026 the 5K started at 8:40 a.m.
3. **March: Rodeo Austin and SXSW.** Rodeo Austin runs 12 to 27 March 2027, at 9100 Decker Lake Road. SXSW (South by Southwest) runs 15 to 21 March 2027. Its badges, the main passes, cost \$625 to \$1,495, a music-only wristband costs \$159, and each year some events are open to the public at no charge; the 2027 list isn't out.
4. **April: ABC Kite Fest.** Zilker Park, no admission charge. Next: Saturday 10 April 2027, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
5. **May and September: the Pecan Street Festival.** Arts and music at the Hill Country Galleria in Bee Cave, with no charge for admission or parking. Fall 2026 was 12 and 13 September; spring 2027 isn't posted.
6. **June: Blues on the Green.** Evening concerts at Zilker Park, at no charge. 2026: 9 and 10 June.
7. **July and August: the Zilker Summer Musical.** At the Hillside Theater, at no charge (donations welcome), Thursday to Sunday at 8:15 p.m.; bring a blanket between 6 and 8 p.m. to hold a spot on the hill. The 2026 show ran 10 July to 15 August. The next is "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory", with no dates posted.
8. **October: ACL Fest, the Grand Prix and the Film Festival.** The Austin City Limits Music Festival fills Zilker Park over two weekends (2026: 2 to 4 and 9 to 11 October; 2027 not announced). The Formula 1 United States Grand Prix is at Circuit of the Americas, 22 to 25 October 2026. The Austin Film Festival runs from 29 October to 5 November 2026; single tickets go on sale 20 minutes before a film if seats remain.
9. **November: the Texas Book Festival and the Holiday Tree.** The book festival is downtown and costs nothing: 14 and 15 November 2026. The Zilker Holiday Tree is lit on Sunday 29 November 2026 at 6 p.m., with music from 5:15 and parking at no charge that night. It stays lit every night through 1 January, 6 to 10 p.m. On Trail of Lights nights, 10 to 23 December, parking in the park needs a pass bought ahead.
10. **December: the Trail of Lights.** Zilker Park, 10 to 23 December 2026, 7 to 10 p.m. Entry costs nothing on 10, 11 and 13 to 17 December, and no ticket is needed those nights. The other nights cost \$8 for ages 12 and up, plus service charges and tax, and children 11 and under get in at no charge with a ticketed adult. Close-in parking must be bought online ahead, \$25 to \$35, every night. On the paid nights, a \$10 shuttle pass from the Toney Burger Center includes entry, and parking there costs nothing. No pets; service animals are allowed.

The details (checked on 13 Oct 2026):

1. **Cost:** as in each line; more below.
2. **Free Week:** more than 100 bands and DJs in 10 or more venues; all ages; performers are paid.
3. **Austin Marathon:** marathon, half marathon and 5K. In 2026 the marathon started at 7 a.m. at Congress Avenue and 2nd Street, the 5K at 8:40 a.m., and the finish was at Congress Avenue and 9th Street.
4. **Rodeo Austin:** 9100 Decker Lake Rd. Prices given only as "generally" and may be last year's: rodeo-and-concert tickets \$30 to \$65; fairgrounds \$5 to \$10; carnival wristbands \$25 to \$45; parking \$20; children 2 and under at no charge. The 2027 on-sale date isn't posted.

5. **SXSW:** badges, as listed on 13 Oct 2026: Platinum \$1,495, Innovation \$995, Film and TV \$850, Music \$625; prices rise over time. The music wristband, \$159, gets you into some evening shows, after badge holders. In 2026, events open to the public at no charge included the Expo on one Saturday and some concerts (dated news).
6. **ABC Kite Fest:** Zilker Park; pre-paid parking and shuttle options are offered (prices not shown); rain policy not posted on the homepage.
7. **Pecan Street Festival:** Hill Country Galleria, 12700 Hill Country Blvd., Bee Cave; no charge for admission or parking, and water at no charge; hours not posted.
8. **Blues on the Green:** presented by Waterloo Media; held for more than 30 years; 2027 dates and rules not posted.
9. **Zilker Summer Musical:** Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater, 2206 William Barton Dr.; high-back chairs only in the seating for people with disabilities and at the top of the hill.
10. **ACL Fest:** 2026 three-day general admission started at \$325; higher tiers started at \$700, \$1,670 and \$5,670 (dated news, Dec 2025). The official site showed no 2027 dates or tickets on 13 Oct 2026.
11. **Austin Film Festival:** badges \$200 to \$775 (with the writers' conference panels on the higher ones); a film-only pass, \$85; single tickets at the door 20 minutes before a film, if seats remain. Venues typically include the Paramount Theatre, the State Theatre and the Long Center.
12. **Texas Book Festival:** its 31st year; "downtown Austin"; the festival says its 2026 footprint includes the Texas State Capitol, nearby churches and tents outside the Capitol; the 2026 hours and parking aren't posted yet (in 2025 the tents were on the streets just south of the Capitol).
13. **Zilker Holiday Tree:** music from 5:15 p.m. on lighting night, when parking costs nothing; on other nights, first-come parking on the paved lots, except Trail of Lights nights (10 to 23 December), when parking needs a pass bought ahead; the park closes at 10 p.m.; no ticket or price is listed for visiting the tree.
14. **Trail of Lights:** paid nights in 2026: 12 and 18 to 23 December. No ticket needed on the nights that cost nothing. The \$8 has service charges and tax on top. The \$10 shuttle pass includes entry. Early-entry passes \$20 to \$25; Platinum passes \$95. Rideshare drop-off at 2107 Veterans Dr.; bike racks across Barton Springs Rd. from the entrance; disabled veterans park at no charge with credentials. No pets; service animals allowed. Rain or shine, unless the City closes the parks.
15. **Checked on 13 Oct 2026.**

Free things to do (the one-page list)

Most days

- ☐ A guided tour of the Texas Capitol: Monday to Saturday from 9 a.m., Sunday from noon; the last tour starts at 4:15 p.m.
- ☐ The bats from the Congress Avenue bridge or the shore, in season, about March to October or November. Arrive before sunset.
- ☐ The Ransom Center, the Carver Museum, the O. Henry Museum, the Texas Military Forces Museum and the Central Library, whenever they're open.
- ☐ Shows at Zilker's Hillside Theater, on show nights.
- ☐ The 10-mile trail around Lady Bird Lake.
- ☐ Mayfield Park and its peacocks (no fee listed).

By the day of the week

- ☐ Tuesday: the Blanton. The LBJ Library is half price.
- ☐ Wednesday evening: the Contemporary's Jones Center.
- ☐ Thursday: the Contemporary at both sites; Laguna Gloria stays open until 9 p.m.
- ☐ Every Sunday, noon to 5: Mexic-Arte.
- ☐ The first Sunday of the month, 10 to 5: the Bullock's exhibitions.
- ☐ The fourth Sunday of the month, 1 to 5: the science museum.

By the hour

- ☐ Monday to Friday, the early set (usually 6 p.m.): the Elephant Room, no cover before 8 p.m. (21 and up).
- ☐ Happy hour: the Saxon Pub's listed shows (21 and up; tips welcome).
- ☐ Tuesday to Saturday, 6 to 8 p.m.: the Broken Spoke's restaurant shows, no cover (all ages; tips for the band).

By the season

- ☐ January: Free Week in the Red River clubs.
- ☐ April: Kite Fest at Zilker.
- ☐ May and September: the Pecan Street Festival in Bee Cave.
- ☐ June: Blues on the Green at Zilker.
- ☐ Summer Thursdays: The Drop-In at the Long Center (reserve ahead).
- ☐ July and August: the Zilker Summer Musical.
- ☐ September: Austin Museum Day, more than 30 places.
- ☐ Fall Fridays: Rock the Park at Mueller.
- ☐ November: the Texas Book Festival, and the Zilker Holiday Tree from late November (no fee listed; during the Trail of Lights, buy parking ahead).
- ☐ December: the Trail of Lights on seven nights, no ticket needed. Buy close-in parking ahead.

Who wrote this

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The latest version of this guide, with Danny's videos: sellingtexasteam.com/blog/things-to-do-in-austin/



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