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A walk along Lower Broadway leads to Music City's legendary honky-tonks.

## “I could live here if I had to,”

I tell the three guys sitting at the bar next to me. “I mean, I wouldn’t be sad about it.” They laugh and shake their heads. ¶ Although they don’t consider it much of a compliment paid to their hometown of Nashville, for me it’s a pretty big one. While I love visiting other places more than the average person—and have the airline miles to prove it—I haven’t seriously considered leaving the Northwest, where I grew up, since I found my way back after eight years of trying out other parts of the country. ¶ So what won me over? After separate visits over the past two years, I realized that the sweet tea and Southern hospitality were just the beginning.



Story *by* **Haley Shapley**





Tootsies has been a downtown fixture for more than 50 years. Right: Fresh bivalves at The Southern Steak and Oyster.



< Gourmet popsicles at Las Paletas.

### Being Friendly Comes Naturally Here

I met the aforementioned gentlemen, who were quick to give me great suggestions about where to go next, at Holland House Bar & Refuge, which bills itself as “a dispensary of good cheer in a civilized setting.” The establishment’s staff and clientele more than live up to the motto, but they’re far from the only ones doling out good cheer—practically everyone in the city is ridiculously nice.

My favorite Nashvillian, however, lived before my time. Adelia Acklen, a young widow in the 1840s worth \$1 million, made her second husband sign a prenup, which was highly uncommon back then. When he died during the Civil War, they had cotton in Louisiana at risk of being destroyed. So Adelia marched down there herself, managed to slyly negotiate with both the Union and Confederate sides, and saved her fortune. Visiting her home, Belmont Mansion, is well worth it to learn more about how bold this woman really was, and to see fun artifacts like an early 3-D viewer.

### If You’re Awake, There’s Music Playing

Aside from an unexplainable three-month stint in my teens when I watched CMT every moment I was home, I don’t listen to country music. I wouldn’t say that above a loud whisper in Nashville, but somehow, it doesn’t matter—I still love the inspired-by-music atmosphere, from musicians in the airport to boxes downtown that blare tunes to the

performers in legendary honky-tonks like Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge and Robert’s Western Wear (bonus: you don’t have to pay cover charges to enter the bars and clubs along this lively section of Lower Broadway).

It’s tough to pick a musical highlight, but if pressed, I have three: the Bluebird Café (set in a strip mall, it looks like absolutely nothing on the outside, but inside, houses intimate singer-songwriter performances); *Music City Roots*, a weekly radio show with a variety of acts (bluegrass and jazz are popular) broadcast live from the historic Loveless Cafe; and the Grand Ole Opry. I was lucky enough to see the latter institution at its former home at Ryman Auditorium—dubbed the Mother Church of Country Music because it really was a church—and I can attest that the sequined shirts on some performers are as mesmerizing as the productions themselves.

The Opry typically presents performances at its current home next to Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, a hotel and entertainment complex that’s fun in its own right.

### It’s a Culinary Wonderland

My biggest misconception before landing at BNA was probably that the food would largely consist of fried meats and heavy sauces (which you can find), but the dining scene is so much more than that.

The Southern Steak & Oyster is the hip spot du jour for good reason. With a wall of old print-ing presses, leather-strap ceiling fans overhead, locally grown produce, seafood from respon-

sibly managed sources, and the in-demand Whisper Creek Tennessee Sipping Cream, all the elements come together to make this relative newcomer the place to be.

Misconception No. 2 is that I foolishly thought I knew all the best places to eat once I’d spent a week there. Then I went on the Music City Bites & Sites tour, which highlighted six places I had never even heard of. Ellen Sevier, a Nashville native who lived in Seattle for more than a decade (and managed the creative team in AAA Washington’s marketing department), established the tour shortly after she returned home in 2012. Her tour’s highlights include the grilled beef-brisket-blended burgers at National Underground, owned by singer Gavin DeGraw and his older brother, Joey. Other stops showcased a Moscow mule made with ginger-infused vodka, and endless varieties of crazy sodas and saltwater taffy.

Speaking of taffy, I love nothing more than dessert and foods that might as well call themselves dessert. On that front, Nashville captured my sweet tooth (and, by extension, my heart). I feasted on fresh Mexican popsicles at Las Paletas and the signature sweet potato pancakes with cinnamon cream syrup at The Pancake Pantry. At Marché Artisan Foods, the croissant French toast and “brûléed” grapefruit made me wish that every meal were breakfast. Locals warned me about the addictive powers of the selections at Jeni’s Splendid Ice Creams, which offers such exotic flavors as riesling–poached pear sorbet and brown-butter almond brittle, so I picked up scoops on my way out to the airport to avoid getting hooked.

### As Dolly Said, “I Will Always Love You”

Sure, there are things about Nashville that I don’t understand, like how “vegetables” is a code for “sides” at “meat-and-three” places and does not necessarily mean vegetables. But these and other quirks just add to the intrigue. In fact, my healthy admiration for the city might border on annoying. My poor guide at Green Fleet Bicycle Tours had the misfortune of touring me around on my second trip to Nashville, after I’d already soaked in sites and tidbits for days. I added to his commentary and even questioned it a few times (all in the name of accurate reporting!). After I explained to a fellow visitor how Nashville got its name, he said, “A few more facts like that and you could lead this tour.” I may not quite be there yet—but if I ever had to

move to Music City, at least I’d have a job lead. **||**

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< Ryman Auditorium.



TOP: PHINDY STUDIOS

LEFT: RICK SMITH; RIGHT: RON MANVILLE

## A Few (ok, 27) of My Favorite Places in Nashville

FOR A WORLD-CLASS MUSEUM EXPERIENCE: **THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM**

FOR THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF PRESIDENT ANDREW JACKSON: **THE HERMITAGE**

FOR ALL-NATURAL BEAUTY PRODUCTS: **PRETTY PRETTY POP POP**

FOR A HIP COLLEGE LUNCH SPOT: **FIDO**

FOR SPIRITS SEEKERS: **CORSAIR ARTISAN DISTILLERY TOUR**

FOR AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY STAY: **HUTTON HOTEL**

FOR A HUGE SELECTION OF USED BOOKS: **BOOKMANBOOKWOMAN**

FOR A SOPHISTICATED NIGHT OUT: **SCHERMERHORN SYMPHONY CENTER**

FOR HIGH-QUALITY COCKTAILS IN A SPEAKEASY SETTING: **PATTERSON HOUSE**

FOR A CHANCE TO SPOT THE GOVERNOR LUNCHING: **PUCKETT’S GROCERY & RESTAURANT**

FOR THE ELVIS FAN: **RCA STUDIO B (OPEN FOR TOURS).**

FOR ADULT MILKSHAKES: **THE PHARMACY**

FOR A LOVELY PARK: **BICENTENNIAL CAPITOL MALL STATE PARK**

FOR A TRADITIONAL FAMILY-STYLE SOUTHERN MEAL: **MONEL’S (GERMANTOWN)**

FOR TRAIN BUFFS: **UNION STATION HOTEL**

FOR AN IS-THIS-REALY-IN-THE-MIDDLE-OF-NASHVILLE LANDMARK: **THE PARTHENON**

FOR BURGERS AMONG HIPSTERS: **BURGER UP**

FOR THE BEST PANORAMIC PHOTOS: **SHELBY STREET PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE**

FOR HORSE HISTORY: **BELLE MEADE PLANTATION**

FOR A ONE-OF-A-KIND COFFEE SHOP: **BARISTA PARLOR**

FOR A COUNTRY-COOL HOTEL: **LOEWS VANDERBILT HOTEL NASHVILLE**

FOR FOOD TRUCK AFICIONADOS: **I DREAM OF WEENIE**

FOR A QUIRKY BAR WITH A SOLID DRINK MENU: **NO. 308**

FOR A FAMOUS PLACE TO SHOP: **ANTIQUE ARCHAEOLOGY**

FOR A BUDGET-FRIENDLY TREAT: **THE CUPCAKE COLLECTION**

FOR A CHIC DINNER PLACE: **URBAN GRUB**

FOR AUTO ENTHUSIASTS: **MARATHON VILLAGE**