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Lily Frazier

A local singing sensation seamlessly
blending elegance, passion, and
nostalgia in her music

Local Artists in
the Spotlight +
Entertainment & Travel
Reviews

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The honky tonks of Lower Broadway is where the action is at night with dozens of classic country clubs like Tootsie's Orchid Lounge and Roberts Western Wear hosting free live music. During the day there are must see tours of the historic Ryman Auditorium, the Johnny Cash Museum and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Photo: Visit Music City.



Nashville is Music City – with Art and History too

BY SANDRA SCHULMAN

From finger-picking country to finger-licking cuisine, sky-high hotels, and down-home honky tonks, Nashville has a beat and a taste all its own. All grown up from the small-town radio and river trade it used to be, the new Nashville boasts gleaming first-class hotels, edgy cuisine, first-rate music of all genres, art and museums in historic buildings, and even the Grand Ole Opry has gone digital.

A week in Music City is almost enough time to see most of it, so start downtown where it all started.

We checked in at the Embassy Suites by Hilton, whose spacious rooms with balconies have killer views of Lower Broadway, the Convention Center, the Ryman Auditorium, and even the Cumberland River. A glass-enclosed rooftop pool with a bar gives the beauty of a view.

On our first night in town, we headed to Black Rabbit, the hopping new eatery in a historic building by Printer's Alley, a strip between buildings where papers were once printed. Nashville chef Trey Cioccia whips up cocktails and food that recalls the early 1900s speakeasies that permeated Printer's Alley. There are 16-foot ceilings, exposed brick and original hardwood flooring, a menu

serving intriguing vegetables, savory baked bread, and even a rabbit and pork roll.

After dinner, we strolled over to Lower Broadway, where the music action is with live bands blasting out of virtually every store and club from 5th Ave to the riverfront.

The world-famous Tootsies Orchid Lounge is here in all its purple glory, where Willie, Waylon, Loretta Lynn, and Patsy sang, drank, and met up after shows at the Ryman Auditorium just across the back alley. Contemporary stars still show up here to jump onstage and belt out some hits.

Big names in Country have their clubs here now, like Miranda Lambert, Jason Aldean, Kid Rock, and even Nudie, the tailor to the stars who put rhinestones on the flashy stage wear for Elvis, Dolly, and Porter Wagoner. His club has a festooned Cadillac on the wall! Now that's country!

An excellent place to get info on Music City is the Visitor Information Center in the lobby of the Bridgestone Arena. We picked up a Gray Line of Tennessee Nashville City Tour there to get a comfortable ride through the various neighborhoods and sights, including the life-size Parthenon, the sprawling City Hall, Music Row, former train stop Union Station, and more.

The top museum in town is the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum, where rotating shows

explore country music coast to coast; the Hall of Fame holds bronze plaques of all the famous members, and a dynamite gift shop sells vinyl, books, clothes, and musical instruments.

The current show up until 2025 is Western Edge: The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock, which traces the visionary singers, songwriters, and musicians who blended pop and rock with country, bluegrass, and folk music. Bands include the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Poco, Eagles, Emmylou Harris, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Linda Ronstadt, Rosie Flores, and show host Dwight Yoakam. Costumes, videos, guitars, and rare photos make this exhibit swing.

In the lobby is Hatch Show Print, the original show poster printer, where you can see how they are made with vintage block lettering.

The beautiful CMA Theater hosts shows like the Hanks 100. We were lucky to see that we celebrated Hank Williams Sr. on his 100th birthday. His daughter, Jett Williams, hosted the show and had performances by grandchildren Holly and Sam Williams. Star turns by Lyle Lovett and Rodney Crowell excelled with the crack band led by Chris Scruggs, grandson of bluegrass legend Earl Scruggs.

From there, we went back in time to Historic RCA Studio B on Music Row, where Elvis recorded most of his music. The original floor, instruments, microphones, and furniture are there, with a lively tour that blends the sights with the sounds of the famous songs recorded there.

A wall of hundreds of gold and platinum records by the top country music stars graces the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum. Photo: Visit Music City.



A cheeseburger, fries and craft beer is on the menu at Tennessee Brew Works where you can chow down and watch beer being made in the glass enclosed brewery. Photo: Visit Music City.



It's time for lunch at the Assembly Food Hall right across from the Ryman, where two buildings house dozens of food courts with choices from sushi to Nashville's famous hot chicken, where the real deal is made in a seasoned cast iron skillet and served on white bread with pickles.

One of the newer attractions in town is the National Museum of African American Music, which gives a soulful history of the blues, soul, R&B, funk, and jazz that made its way to Nashville and beyond. Stage clothes by James Brown and Bootsy Collins sit with tricked-out cars, rare instruments, and film rooms with loops of show-stopping performances.

Another must-see is the Ryman Auditorium; the day we visited, they were rehearsing for that night's Americana Awards Show as we toured the many display cases, bronze statues of performers Minnie Pearl and Loretta Lynn, glowing stained-glass windows from when the place was a church and browsed the sleek gift shop.

After all that activity, we headed to Martin's BBQ Joint, one of the largest in town, with three levels and multiple pits for whole hogs. Sorry, piggies, but you are delicious. The top dishes were cornbread cakes, brisket, and a pecan pie to die for.

It is Music City, so a songwriter

show at The Listening Room finds five songwriters lined up to tell the stories of how and why they write songs and the inspiration behind them. This is where it starts.

The next day, we cruised to Wedgewood, where small businesses flourish. A fascinating mansion called the Merritt House has a unique history and future. Once home to Captain John Rains, the co-founder of Fort Nashboro, who originally built the home as a log cabin and expanded it into a federal-style home for his daughter Sally Merritt in 1870. Constantly remodeled and abandoned, it was bought by hometown rockers Kings of Leon, who used it as a studio and then sold it to Clarence Edward,



an art gallerist, set designer, and avant-garde event curator. The setting enhances the art and the solid feel of centuries of history.

We had a fab lunch at Dicey's Pizza & Tavern, where custom pizzas and creative salads are real standouts.

Another fabulous small business in the area is the Nashville Craft Distillery, where handcrafted spirits are made from scratch in-house by former DNA laboratory director Bruce Boeko, who put his science background to work, opening Nashville Craft Distillery in 2016. They produce whiskey, gin, sorghum spirits, and other craft spirits; a behind-the-scenes tour gives a look at the technical details of fermentation and distillation. The lobby bar lets you taste all these liquors and buy the whole bottle if the spirit moves you.

We moved on to the W Nashville in the Gulch, a sleek hotel with a hip hangout lobby and rooms with extra flair like rolling moveable walls, curved purple couches, and rock and roll books to read. A meal at the PROOF Rooftop with lobster salad and fruity craft cocktails hit the spot.

Top eats around town include The Kitchen in The Gulch where fresh and creative is always on the menu, and Nelsons Green Brier Distillery, home of the original Tennessee Whiskey and the award-winning Belle Meade Bourbon, and is Nashville's most historic distillery. Photos: Visit Music City





A real highlight is a night at the Grand Ole Opry, rounded out with a backstage tour. This long-standing, impressive outfit produces hundreds of shows a year with the top names in the business. They have gone modern with a vast digital backdrop, great sound, and a show unlike anything else in the country.

Gone are the hay bales and square dancers – we saw Grammy winners Lady A and Jamey Johnson, comedian Gary Mule Deer, and bluegrass bands. The backstage tour shows you the hustle and bustle of pulling off a live show like this with hallways of dressing rooms, photos of past performers, lounges, and photo op studios.

The Opry House hosts solo concerts and award shows and is on the expansive grounds of the Opryland Hotel and the Opryland Mall. There used to be a kitschy theme park here, but all that action has moved to Pigeon Forge.

We had breakfast the following day at Biscuit Love in the Gulch near

the W Hotel. They serve up unusual dishes made with a decadent, flaky treat. We tried the Lily, a drop biscuit French toast baked in custard, topped with mixed berries, cream, and house-made butter toffee syrup. It is totally indulgent and delicious, but you can also get savory dishes with eggs, sausage gravy, chicken, and veggie bowls.

Another must-see art stop is the Frist Art Museum on Broadway, an art deco gem that used to be the main Nashville post office. The lobby retains the elaborate metalwork and windows, but the back has been opened for galleries and a café.

The Frist hosts Nashville-centric art shows like one devoted to rhinestone suit designer Manuel, but they also rotate top touring exhibits. An art-filled gift shop has books and jewelry.

Musicians in town are devoted to Carter Vintage Guitars, the large shop that sells and trades all sorts of acoustic and electric guitars and accessories. Rare top models can

Lower Broadway thrives with live music, country star owned clubs, boot stores, museums, BBQ joints and a grand park where the street meets the mighty Cumberland River. Photos: Visit Music City

go for tens of thousands; a back room lets strummers and pickers try them all out. Folk artist murals line the walls; the front room carries local magazines. It's an inside look at the business, worth a visit even if you aren't in the market to buy.

Third Man Records, hipster central in Music City is a must. Owned by Grammy-winner hitmaker Jack White, formerly of the White Stripes, this record store/recording studio/nightclub/bar is truly one of a kind. White allows musicians to record there on the Blue Room club stage and then print on vinyl – a physical record he is bringing back to major popularity.

Loads of his memorabilia are for sale in the shop, and photos taken at the in-house studio of musicians that record there line the walls. White won Grammys for his work with the late country icon Loretta Lynn, toured with his own records using new bands each time, and is currently seen as a radio performer in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon."

Summer finds mega festivals downtown like Fan Fair and the CMA Fest. Fall and Spring are pretty glorious with foliage. It's a gem of a town that blends its history with current stays, eats, and music.