



# Austin, Texas: Fiercely Independent Live Music Capital



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**A**ustin, the 11th-largest city in the United States, has adopted the slogan “The Live Music Capital of the World” because it’s home to many musicians and live music venues. Each March, musicians, filmmakers and social media entrepreneurs converge on Austin for the South by Southwest (SXSW) festival. Its countercultural ambiance contrasts with Austin’s identity as the capital of a U.S. state better known for rodeos, barbecue and other hallmarks of traditional culture.

## Then and Now

When Spanish missionaries began settling in the area in the 18th century, the future site of Austin was variously inhabited by the Tonkawa, Lipan Apache and Comanche tribes. Settlers from the United States began arriving in the 1830s, while the area was still part of Mexico. In 1836, the settlement was incorporated into the Republic of Texas after Texan colonists fought a war of independence against the Mexican government.

The new republic made the settlement its capital, naming it Austin in honor of Stephen F. Austin, the

“Father of Texas” and the republic’s first secretary of state. The city was a collection point for the famous Chisholm Trail, used to drive cattle from ranches in Texas to Kansas railheads. By 1860, Austin’s population had grown to 3,494 citizens.

Key dates include:

- 1845 — The Republic of Texas becomes the U.S. state of Texas, with Austin as its capital.
- 1883 — The University of Texas, eventually an important center of academic research now serving more than 50,000 students each year, is founded.

## Austin, Texas

- 1888 — The State Capitol, modeled on the U.S. Capitol and then the seventh-largest building in the world, opens.
- 1970s — Music stars like country icon Willie Nelson and blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan move to Austin and help establish its renowned music scene.

### The People

Austin's diverse population reflects both its history as a state capital and its emergence as a cultural center, with booming high tech, pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors. The black community of Clarksville is the oldest surviving settlement west of the Mississippi River founded by former slaves.

According to the 2010 census, Austin is 68.3 percent white; 35.1 percent Hispanic or Latino; 8.1 percent African American; and 6.3 percent Asian. In 2012, the city's population was estimated at 842,592.

### The Land

Austin lies along the banks of Texas' Colorado River (not to be confused with Colorado's Colorado River). The original town was a 259-hectare site called "Waterloo" between two creeks. It was at the crossroads of trade routes between Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Galveston Bay, and between northern Mexico and the Red River.

### The Climate

Austin is sunny, averaging 300 days of sunshine per year with temperatures in July and August in the high 90s Fahrenheit (24–36 degrees Celsius). Its winters are mild and relatively dry, with January and February its coldest months, averaging temperatures of 49 degrees Fahrenheit (9 degrees Celsius) and 53 degrees Fahrenheit (12 degrees Celsius), respectively.



The musical group French Horn Rebellion performs on the Doritos #BoldStage at the South by Southwest Music Festival in Austin. ©AP Images

- 1976 — The television show *Austin City Limits* brings the city's live music to a national audience.
- 1987 — The South by Southwest (SXSW) festival begins as a regional musical event, later expanding to include film, multimedia and emerging technology.

### "Keep Austin Weird"

Residents of Austin, known as "Austinites," are very proud of their city's diverse, somewhat eccentric culture that promotes creative expression. In 2000, a local librarian coined the motto "Keep Austin Weird" in response to worries the city's culture was threatened by overdevelopment. Bumper stickers, T-shirts and store windows now trumpet that slogan.

Hundreds of live music venues dot the city, interspersed with tattoo parlors, art galleries and cafes. The famous *Austin City Limits* venue is not far from where the Museum of the Weird, which calls itself "America's strangest attraction," offers exhibits on monsters,

UFOs, ghosts and other legendary creatures.

In all but the coldest months of the year, the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge is home to 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats. So many bats emerge at sunset that they can be seen on weather radar.

Film fans might recognize Austin as the location for Richard Linklater's films *Slacker*, *Dazed and Confused* and *Waking Life*, while history buffs will enjoy the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, which houses many important documents and artifacts from the American civil rights movement and the Vietnam War era.

Nature lovers can enjoy more than 50 walking trails or join locals escaping the summer heat at Barton Springs Pool, considered the largest U.S. swimming pool. It's fed by springs and remains a steady temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius).

