

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

JANUARY 22, 2011

Take Monday Off: Austin

A week's worth of boot shopping, honky-tonk dancing and pork-belly-slider tasting packed into just three days

D..

(See [Correction & Amplification](#) below.)



Ryann Ford for The Wall Street Journal

TEX APPEAL: Allen's Boots in Austin.

It's said that to really get Austin you have to live there, a truism the hipster set seems to have taken very seriously: The Brookings Institution recently found the capital of Texas to be the country's most popular destination for the 25-34 demographic. In truth, all it takes is a few days and setting your internal clock to "mosey" to fully appreciate Austin's charms—move too fast, and you'll miss them. Alamo pride exists side-by-side with indie-rock fervor, game hunters with vegans. It's a city where every third car boasts a "Keep Austin Weird" bumper sticker, and a local known

for his leopard thong and high heels regularly runs for mayor. There's something intensely relaxing about this urban area in a countrified setting, especially during winter, when the air is still sweet and warm. "Austin is one long Sunday afternoon," mused a friend and former resident. "America's urban front porch."

Day One: Friday

6 p.m. Arrive at Austin Bergstrom International Airport and drive 30 or so minutes to the **Hotel San José** (1316 S. Congress Ave.; 512-444-7322; sanjosehotel.com). Built in 1939 as an "ultramodern motor court," today it's a hip, bungalow-style oasis in the heart of the quirky and vibrant SoCo shopping district. Relax in the hotel's lovely courtyard with a cold and spicy Michelada (beer mixed with Worcestershire, Tabasco, lemon, salt and pepper) and a saucer of their delicious fresh olives, marinated on the premises.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

MOBILE READER

**Download free
for BlackBerry® for
a limited time only.**





**Download free
for iPhone™ for
a limited time only.**

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com



Ryann Ford for The Wall Street Journal

The Odd Duck food trailer in Austin.

8 p.m. Drive five minutes to one of the best restaurants in town: **Uchi** (801 S. Lamar Blvd.; 512-916-4808; uchiaustin.com). Yes, it's sushi in Texas. But this is Austin, remember, where the exception is the norm. Locally sourced produce and fish flown in daily from Tokyo's Tsukiji Market make for the best sushi this side of Japan.

10:30 p.m. Just down the street is one of the last honky-tonk dance halls in the state, **The Broken Spoke** (3201 S. Lamar Blvd.; 512-442-6189; brokenspokeaustintx.com). Rumored to be George W. Bush's all-time favorite nightspot, it's a guaranteed good time: swirling skirts, cowboy boots and yee-hawing late into the night.

Day Two: Saturday

10 a.m. Wake up and walk across the hotel parking lot to the neighborhood's most popular morning spot: **Jo's Coffee** (1300 S. Congress Ave.; 512-444-3800; joscoffee.com). The coffee is great, Jake's Oatcakes make you feel healthy and the outdoor-only seating is perfect for people-watching.

11 a.m. Wander the length of South Congress Avenue for some seriously eclectic shopping. The selection of cowboy boots at **Allen's** (1522 S. Congress Ave.; 512-447-1413; allensboots.com) is out of this world—rows and rows in countless styles and colors, from ranch-hand practical to a \$2,500 pair made from gorgeously hand-tooled goatskin. Even non-antiques lovers will fall into a trance at **Uncommon Objects** (1512 S. Congress

Ave.; 512-442-4000; uncommonobjects.com), a small pavilion of artfully arranged vintage oddities, such as an enchanting "pair" of four Victorian leather dog booties—retro couture for your poodle.

1:30 p.m. Lunchtime! Austin has been infected by the food trailer craze, and the best cluster is right off of South Congress (for more info: foodtrailersaustin.com). There's something for everyone—kebabs, BBQ, crepes—but enthusiasts won't want to miss the pork belly sliders at **The Odd Duck**, a little red shack a two-minute drive away on busy South Lamar Boulevard. (1219 S. Lamar at the Lamar Square Drive light; 512-695-6922; oddduckfarmtotrailer.com).



Ryann Ford for The Wall Street Journal

Camarones Tikin Xik at Fonda San Miguel.

2:30 p.m. Culture vultures can play scholar for the afternoon at The University of Texas's **Harry Ransom Center** (21st and Guadalupe streets; 512-471-8944; hrc.utexas.edu), one of the best literary archives in the world, with 36 million leaves of manuscripts and one million rare books. Peek at the original Gutenberg Bible, set beneath glass in a wood-slatted enclosure.

5 p.m. Cocktail hour is a time-honored Texan ritual, and nearby options are myriad: To spy some back-room wheeling and dealing, drive over to **The Cloak Room** (1300 Colorado St.; 512-472-9808), an underground—in both senses of the word—dive at the foot of the State Capitol where legislators gather in a men's-clubby atmosphere. For the full-on graduate-student experience, kick back with a Mexican Martini (a

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

Mex Mart to locals)—essentially a 16-ounce margarita served in a cocktail shaker—at **The Spiderhouse** (2908 Fruth St.; 512-480-9562; spiderhousecafe.com), a rambling café decorated with cracked birdbaths and rusted bed frames.

7 p.m. The **Alamo Drafthouse** dining cinema chain, a local favorite, has a downtown outpost (320 E. 6th St.; 512-476-1320; originalalamo.com). Buy movie tickets online, then enjoy table service as you watch—or, for more energetic souls, shout at the screen during one of their Quote-Along events.

11 p.m. Just a few blocks from the Drafthouse is the grande dame of Austin: **The Driskill Hotel** (604 Brazos St.; 800-252-9367; driskillhotel.com)—a must-visit for a nightcap. Enter through the hotel's palatial 19th-century lobby, then sidle up to a buckskin-covered stool at the dark wood bar and try the Brazos Brasiliensis Batini: a vodka-based cocktail with hibiscus and ginger simple syrup. A deep, blackberry purple, and just the right amount of sweet, it offers all the pleasures of a "girly" drink with none of the embarrassment.

Day Three: Sunday

11 a.m. Sleep in. Brunch is served all day at the **South Congress Café** (1600 S. Congress Ave.; 512-447-3905; southcongresscafe.com), and the menu is an inspired mix: savory brisket and gravy; carrot-cake French toast.

12:30 p.m. Drive five minutes to Lady Bird Lake—known by locals as Town Lake—and rent a kayak from the **Texas Rowing Center** (Hills and Bike Trail; 512-467-7799; texasrowingcenter.com). It's not often you can enjoy a soothing midday paddle through a city, and the numerous turtles don't seem to mind when you drift straight up to them and ogle their intricately patterned shells.



Ryann Ford for The Wall Street Journal

The Cattle Baron Suite at The Driskill Hotel

2 p.m. After strolling through the leafy Hills and Bike Trail, walk north on Lavaca Street toward **Halcyon** (218 W. 4th St.; 512-472-9637; halcyonaustin.com) for a two-esspresso martini lunch. They serve good sandwich and salad fare, too.

3:30 p.m. Spend the rest of the afternoon enjoying Austin's thriving independent retail scene. **BookPeople** (603 N. Lamar Blvd.; 512-472-5050; bookpeople.com) has the size and selection of a chain store without the generic ambience, and **Waterloo Records** (600A N. Lamar Blvd.; 512-474-2500; waterloorecords.com) is one of the last of a dying breed: the physical music store, with an impressive collection of both vinyl and CDs. When you've had enough, head back to the hotel for a nap.

7 p.m. End the day with high-end Mexican fare at **Fonda San Miguel** (2330 W. North Loop; 512-

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

459-4121; fondasanmiguel.com). The Spanish-style décor—tall beamed ceilings, leather upholstered high-backed chairs around heavy wood tables—aptly suits the incredible enchiladas, and the Michelada comes DIY, as in, add your Tabasco and Worcestershire as you go. After-dinner espresso is served with a sugar cane, and the crepes, drizzled with caramel sauce and topped with homemade ice cream, are reason enough to go back.

10 p.m. Just across the street is the **Continental Club** (1315 S. Congress Ave.; 512-441-2444; continentalclub.com). Pop in to experience Austin's famous live music scene. Retrofitted to resemble its original 1957 incarnation, the self-proclaimed "granddaddy of all local music venues" showcases reliably excellent rockabilly, country and swing.

Day Four: Monday

9 a.m. Close out your trip with a bang—literally! **Red's Indoor Range** (6200 Highway 290 West; 512-892-4867; redsguns.com) in the aptly named Convict Hill, is only a 15-minute drive away, and for the uninitiated, shooting a gun can be shockingly intoxicating. There's no better way to imbue yourself with a dose of Texan swagger—and the testosterone rush will embolden you for the trial to come: flying home.

Corrections & Amplifications

The Fonda San Miguel restaurant in Austin, Texas, is closed on Sundays. This article incorrectly advised having dinner there on a Sunday. Also, Austin's Continental Club music venue is not across the street from Fonda San Miguel and the Odd Duck food trailer, where the article suggested that one have lunch on a Saturday, is open 5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

