

# Memphis: One city, two days, four attractions

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MEMPHIS, Tennessee — My ultimate destination was Mississippi to explore blues history. But to get there, I flew in and out of Memphis, Tennessee, an hour's drive from the Delta. With one day in Memphis on either end of my itinerary, I decided to visit four attractions there that would add to the music and civil rights themes of the Mississippi trip.

Those four Memphis stops, plus an evening listening to music on Beale Street, were perfect bookends for my Mississippi sojourn. But these attractions also make an easy and interesting two-day itinerary whether you use Memphis as a gateway for other parts of the South, or as a destination unto itself.

## Stax Museum of American Soul Music

One of the first things you see at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music is an exhibit portraying a Mississippi country church. That's because soul, like so many genres of pop music, has roots in the Delta.

The Stax recording studio was founded by a white sister and brother, Estelle Axton and Jim Stewart. But in an unusual arrangement for the era, Stax was also a place where whites and blacks worked together. And Stax's roster of black stars, including Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes and the Staple Singers, proved enormously popular with both black and white audiences, first in Europe and ultimately at home.

Stax eventually went bankrupt but the museum was built on the original site and does a terrific job showcasing everything from costumes to cars to walls of hit records. Videos of TV and concert performances will have you dancing your way through the exhibits.

## Sun Studio

Sun Studio calls itself the "birthplace" of rock 'n' roll, and as every music fan knows, there's a straight line from the blues to rock. Among the Mississippi



This March 13 photo shows visitors getting ready to tour Graceland in Memphis, Tenn. Elvis Presley bought the mansion — which is small by 21st century standards — in 1957 and lived there until his death 20 years later.

natives who recorded at Sun Records were B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf and Ike Turner. Turner played keyboards on what some regard as the first rock single, the Delta Cats' "Rocket 88," released by Sun in 1951.

But it was an 18-year-old who wandered into the studio in 1953 named Elvis Presley who took Sun's fortunes big-time. Presley recorded two dozen songs with Sun before switching to a national label to manage his rocketing career. An iconic photo displayed at the studio, dubbed the "Million Dollar Quartet," shows Presley back at Sun in 1956, sitting at a piano with Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash.

Lively guided tours of Sun Studio walk visitors through its hit parade with music clips and engaging anecdotes — including the tale of Sun founder Sam Phillips' improvised repair of a busted amp. He shoved a wad of paper inside and the fuzzy distortion became part of the label's trademark sound. You'll stand in the footsteps not only of the label's early stars but also more recent visitors like rock giants U2.

## National Civil Rights Museum

The story of the blues



This June 2004 file photo shows the cafe counter at Sun Studio in Memphis, Tenn., with a photo of the "Million Dollar Quartet" on the wall. The famous 1956 image shows Elvis Presley, who got his start at Sun Studio, seated with Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash standing. Lively guided tours of Sun Studio walk visitors through its hit parade with music clips, lively exhibits and engaging anecdotes.

can't be told without looking at black history, from musical traditions brought here by enslaved Africans, to the music shared by black laborers eking out a living on Delta cotton plantations in the early 20th century.

One place to put that history in context is the National Civil Rights Museum, located in the former Lorraine Motel where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. The museum has extensive exhibits on

slavery, segregation and the protests that powered the civil rights movement. Allow several hours to take in the engrossing displays, which include video footage of marches, riots and news reports from the era, along with engaging interactive exhibits that offer interviews with ordinary people reflecting on their personal experiences.

King was in Memphis to support striking garbage workers when he was shot while standing on a hotel



This March 13 photo shows a view of the former Lorraine Motel balcony where Martin Luther King Jr. was shot in 1968 in Memphis, Tenn. The former motel is now part of the National Civil Rights Museum.



This March 8 photo shows the Stax Museum of American Soul Music in Memphis, Tenn. The Stax recording studio's roster of stars included Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes and the Staple Singers. It eventually went bankrupt but the museum showcases everything from costumes to cars to walls of hit records.

balcony. On your way in, you see the balcony from outside, but at the tour's end, you'll see the spot where he was murdered from inside the hotel. It's a stunning, heart-stopping vantage point that brings you face to face with that watershed moment. April 4, 2018, will mark 50 years since that day.

## Graceland

No trip to Memphis is complete without visiting Graceland, the mansion Elvis Presley bought in 1957 and lived in until his death 20 years later. The house — which feels remarkably small by 21st century standards — is a time capsule, complete with green shag rugs and carved animals in the famous Jungle Room.

Guests are shuttled through by the hundreds in a remarkably efficient fashion, with each visitor issued an iPad and headphones so you can get information about what you're seeing at your own pace. The King is buried in the onsite Meditation Garden, along with his parents and grandmother. There's also a memorial gravestone for his stillborn twin brother.

But visiting the house is only half the fun. A \$45 million complex opened at Graceland in March, adding displays that look at his career from his start at Sun Records, to his work in Hollywood, to his Vegas jumpsuit era. One area showcases his cars, another looks at his influence on other entertainers.

# BIRDS: 'Letting part of your yard be messy is good for birds'

Continued from 1C

partially because birds recognize them.

"Nature is made up of specialized relationships such as the one between monarch butterflies and milkweed plants," Tallamy said. "Non-native plants haven't been here long enough to develop specialized relationships."

Some places, such as Portland, may appear to be paradises for birds, but aren't because of the preponderance of non-native species. Tallamy said a survey of street trees in Portland revealed that 92 percent of the trees lining the city's streets are non-native.

"Portland likes to think of itself as a green city, but it created a canopy that won't support birds," Tallamy said.

Native forbs, shrubs and trees provide a smorgasbord of insects, a power food for young birds, while non-native species generally don't. Tallamy cited a study that looked for insects on various native and non-native vegetation. Oaks in his area hosted 557 species of insects, for example, while non-native ornamental species of zelkova, ginkgo and myrtle provided almost none. Birds, Tallamy said, need lots of insects.

"Six thousand to 9,000 caterpillars is needed for one clutch of chickadees," he said.

Squeamish about insects? According to Tallamy, "You're not going to notice them."

Of course, insecticides don't help, along with our country's obsession with big, green lawns.

"Giant lawns provide nothing for birds with a small caveat for robins," he said.

Susan Barnes, a conservation biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, echoed Tallamy.

"Everything starts with the plants and the insects," Barnes said. "Even birds who feed on fruits and seeds feed insects to their young. Insects provide a concentrated source of energy."



A snag propped up by a fence post gives extra roosting possibilities on the property of Jack Simons outside of Pendleton.

Barnes and Tallamy recommended additional measures to attract birds. Piles of brush and rocks provide cover. Leaf litter and other organic material left in the yard will help build the soil and host a diversity of invertebrates and bugs that become food for birds.

"Letting part of your yard be messy is good for birds," Barnes said.

Other suggestions included providing clean water, putting out

nesting boxes, hanging a variety of feeders during times of scarcity and keeping cats indoors.

No yard is too small to attract birds, Tallamy said.

"It's important for people to know their little piece of the world is an important part of the conservation effort," he said. "What they do at home does matter."

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# Plant it and they will come

Before moving to Northeast Oregon, my husband Bill and I awoke many mornings to the sounds of avian life at full volume outside our bedroom window.

Cooing sandhill cranes soared over our house. Killdeer issued high, plaintive warnings. Snipes winnowed. Nighthawks gave a nasal "peent" sound as they perched in a nearby black locust tree. Ducks, geese, chickadees, western meadowlarks and a multitude of other birds woke us better than any alarm clock.

At the time, we lived in Paisley, a tiny town in southeast Oregon. Our home sat close to a variety of ecosystems: high desert, the Chewaucan River, forest and marshlands. Driving the highway that cut through town, one had to keep the speed down in order to avoid hitting birds.

One day I drove home from the nearest town (Lakeview) a little too fast. A startled raptor rose from the road carrying a dead rabbit. The bird couldn't get enough lift so he released his payload. The carcass hit my windshield with a whap — sounding like a ham hitting glass at 70 miles-per-hour — and slid messily down the window. It was Wild Kingdom every day.

Then we moved. Our new house in Pendleton sat on bare dirt in a brand new neighborhood. Landscaping was yet to come in our yard and many of those around us.

One of the first things we did that late spring was hang bird feeders. We waited and waited. Cue the recording of the lone cricket — without the cricket. Our yard remained distressingly quiet.

Bill, a wildlife biologist who just recently retired from the Forest Service, loves birds. He did his master's thesis on bird communities of old-growth pine forests. As a birdwatcher, Bill keeps a life list of birds he has

spotted and other lists just for birds that visit our yard.

Bill determinedly set about attracting birds to our yard. Except for the lawn, he would grow only native plants in the backyard. He visited local nurseries for a variety of native forbs, shrubs and trees which he planted. The plants grew quickly and now provide a variety of seeds, berries and nectar. Most require little water.

In months, vegetation encircled our yard in a thick ribbon that included serviceberries, currants, ninebark, ocean spray, mock orange, honeysuckle, chokecherry, cascara, coneflower, snowberry, hawthorn and paper birch. A robust dogwood produces berries and cover, as well as attractive mid-winter color. Oregon grape provides berries. While not native, a bird-planted mulberry now provides shade, cover and fruit.

The sounds emanating from our backyard are confirmation that if you plant it, they will come.

Many species of birds now drop into our yard regularly. I recently flipped Bill's bird log open to a page titled "Yard List Pendleton." Written there are the names of 28 bird species he has spotted over time in our little yard. The list includes the California quail, American goldfinch, western meadowlark, northern flicker, sharp-shinned hawk, western tanager, spotted towhee and on and on. On another page are birds who didn't land, but flew over: osprey, northern harrier, Canada goose, Cooper's hawk, white pelican and a great blue heron.

Mornings (and every other time of day) are once again a time of bird chatter. It's a happy sound. My bird-loving husband is once again content — and so am I.

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