



# TASTE USA MEGAFAM **Tennessee & Houston**

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# TASTE USA MEGAFAM Tennessee



TABS ON  
**TRAVEL  
TODAY**  
Mon 23 May 16 p2

## Nashville: Country Music Mecca

Nashville, the first stop for the Tennessee group on the Brand USA and Air New Zealand megafam, has long been known as 'Music City' and a mecca for music fans, but it's seen something of a surge in popularity in recent years.

Nashville has been named one of Lonely Planet's top 10 cities to visit

in 2016, while TripAdvisor says it's one of the US cities with the greatest increase of interest from international travellers—which is thought to be in part down to interest generated by the television show *Nashville*

There's massive hotel and infrastructure development going on as the city races to keep up with ever-increasing visitor numbers, including a growing number of Kiwis who can now access the city easily in a short two-hour hop from Houston.

If your clients are music fans they'll find plenty to keep them entertained, with live music playing non-stop at venues across the city and musical history oozing from every crack in the pavement.

While it's famous for stars like Johnny Cash and Roy Acuff, a huge number of contemporary artists have also called the city home, including Taylor Swift, Kings of Leon and The Black Keys—and it's not limited to country stars.

Musicians of all genres are drawn by the huge number of recording studios and record labels, and the city boasts the highest concentration of people working in the music industry per capita than anywhere else in the world.



### Johnny Cash Museum Highlights

In just three years, the Johnny Cash Museum in downtown Nashville has become a huge drawcard for visitors. The museum is a labour of love by one dedicated fan who befriended Cash while he was still alive, and was entrusted with plenty of memorabilia. There's costumes, song lyrics, guitars, photos and documents, and even the chance to have your photo taken with him (thanks to green screen technology). Pictured under the House of Cash sign is Debby McRobbie, House of Travel Jenny Nilsson Hastings; Janine Mallon, Tasty Tours; Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers; Nicola Sorenson of NZ Travel Brokers; Gracia Locke, Air New Zealand; and Tahnee Dobson, Brand USA.

### Country Music Fame

Nashville is home to the world's largest music museum, the Country Music Hall Of Fame and Museum—a sprawling building packed with musical memorabilia including Elvis Presley's diamond and gold coated Cadillac.

Alongside permanent exhibits telling the story of country music, there's temporary shows like the current *Dylan, Cash and the Nashville Cats*, exploring Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash's relationship to Nashville. It's worth a look even for those who aren't huge country music fans. See [countrymusichalloffame.org](http://countrymusichalloffame.org)

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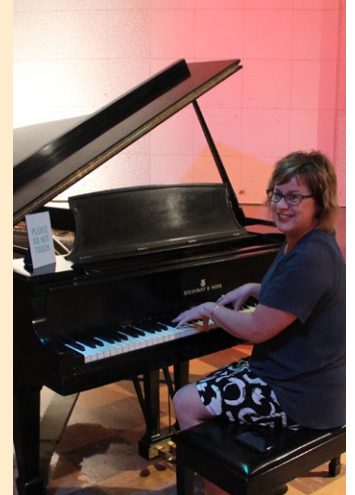
### Hatch Show Print

The historic letterpress Hatch Show Print, which now lives at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, has been in operation since 1879, printing posters and artwork for everything from presidential campaigns to beef jerky—and, of course, a huge swathe of musicians. The print shop is still in operation and there's a shop with plenty of posters available to take home. There's also the option to join a tour and print your own poster, as demonstrated by Nicola Sorenson of NZ Travel Brokers. See [hatchshowprint.com](http://hatchshowprint.com)



### Home Of 1000 Hits

The historic RCA Studio B has been used by artists like Roy Orbison, Dolly Parton, Don Gibson, Willie Nelson to record hundreds of hits over time—most famously, Elvis recorded more than half of his top songs there. It's rarely used to record anymore, except for special projects and the odd tour group (including the megafam group). Tours depart hourly between 1030-1430 daily from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Pictured above: Agents recording their own single in the studio. Right: Nicola Sorenson, NZ Travel Brokers tinkles the ivories on the piano Elvis used to play.







# Nashville: The Lure Of The Outskirts



There's plenty to keep visitors entertained in the city of Nashville but there's a couple of must-visits on the outskirts too.

These include Music Valley, home to the enormous Opry complex which features the famous Grand Ole Opry theatre and the largest non-casino hotel in the USA, as well as shopping malls.

The Opry is about half an hour from downtown Nashville, but if clients do decide to stay there they can catch regular shuttles into town.

Around an hour and a half from the Opry is Lynchburg, which is made famous by the Jack Daniel's Distillery. Even if clients aren't whiskey fans, the distillery is still worth a visit—it's got a fascinating history, and offers a great insight into what it actually takes to produce a bottle of Jack's.

If clients are planning on visiting urge them to book a tour—tours are free and will be until Jul, when a new price of around USD19 will be introduced (including tastings), with charming guides bringing Jack's story to life.

If they're after Jack Daniel's souvenirs they should head into the town of Lynchburg. They won't get whisky there (ironically it's a dry county although you can buy whisky at the distillery) but there's plenty of other memorabilia to take home.

Pictured at the distillery is:

**1** Mike (Buzz) Thomson, HOT Albany with the man himself.

**2** Tahnee Dobson, Brand USA and Bex Farnell, Williment Travel.

**3** Kate McMillan, KNL Travel and Janine Malon, Tasty Tours at Jack's famous spring.



## Grand Ole Opry A Must-do

Anyone who knows country music will know that the Grand Ole Opry radio show played a big part in making it famous, and the show is still going strong almost 90 years later, although it's moved venues. Being asked to perform at the Ole Opry is a massive privilege for a country star. Those on the Tennessee megafam got to visit the iconic venue and watch well-known performers such as Chip Esten (Deacon from *Nashville*) above left, Carrie Underwood, on right and Toby Keith and. There are also backstage tour options, see [opry.com](http://opry.com). To see Charmaine Hawke's Opry clip, [CLICK HERE](#)

## Southern Charm

A great way to experience the famous southern hospitality is by dining at Miss Mary Bobo's. The former boarding house (now owned by Jack Daniel's) serves up authentic southern cuisine (think fried chicken and macaroni cheese), but the real treat is in meeting the genial hosts and your fellow diners. Guests are separated into individual dining rooms and seated at large tables, where their host will tell Miss Bobo's story and encourage strangers to mingle with each other. There's two seatings at 1100 and 1300 each day Mon-Sat, make sure clients book in advance. See [jackdaniels.com](http://jackdaniels.com)



## Plantation Days: Wine Tasting, Wandering

Clients can take a step back in time to the 1800s at Belle Meade, a plantation not far out of Nashville which specialised in raising thoroughbred horses whose lineage can be traced to today's top racing animals. Visitors can wander the sprawling grounds, explore the old home and indulge in some wine tasting. See [bellemeadepplantation.com](http://bellemeadepplantation.com)

**1** Pictured taking a break in one of the rocking chairs on the front porch

is Bex Farnell, Williment Travel.

**2** Sampling the wines: Nicola Sorenson of NZ Travel Brokers and Debby McRobbie, House of Travel Jenny Nilsson Hastings. **3** Debby McRobbie, House of Travel Jenny Nilsson Hastings meets some locals.

**4** Back: Janine Mallon, Tasty Tours; Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers; Nicola Sorenson of NZ Travel Brokers; and (front) Kate McMillan, KNL Travel.

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## Tasting Memphis: Foodie Hotspots

If Nashville is good wholesome country music, Memphis is its soulful neighbour, where clients are more likely to find themselves listening to a gritty blues band then a spangly cowboy with a guitar.

There's a four-hour drive between the cities and many travellers to Tennessee will visit both, with some opting to stay halfway between the two in Jackson, a much smaller town but with its own musical history (and cheaper hotel rates).

Agents on the trip have reported increased interest in the US southern states, including Tennessee, thanks to easier access via Air NZ's new Houston flights which take them

straight to the centre of the US. When it comes to dining, the focus is on southern comfort food, much of which has been honed over years in restaurants that may not look flashy but offer delicious (although rarely healthy) meals cooked to often closely guarded recipes.

Agents on the Air New Zealand and Brand USA Tennessee megafam spent their first 24 hours savouring some of the city's top delights, including:

**1 Memphis Made Brewing** has a passion for promoting the art of brewing a good beer. The brewery has a bar, event space and hosts the occasional band too. See [memphismadebrewing.com](http://memphismadebrewing.com). Pictured is Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers and Debby McRobbie, House of Travel Jenny Nilsson Hastings.

**2 Belly Acres**, a relatively new addition to the Memphis dining scene, serves up impressive farm-to-fork burgers alongside favourites like deep-fried pickles (pictured). See [bellyacres901.com](http://bellyacres901.com).

**3,4 The Beauty Shop** was once the parlour where Priscilla Presley would get her hair done, and has been turned into a restaurant with quirky touches including the original shampooing sinks and hair dryers.

See [thebeautyshoprestaurant.com](http://thebeautyshoprestaurant.com). Pictured is Bex Farnell, Williment Travel; and some dumplings sampled by the group.

**5 Soulfish Café** is famous for its deep-fried catfish—urge clients to partner it with hush puppies (balls of deep fried corn meal). There's three locations but the Midtown one is the original. See [soulfishcafe.com](http://soulfishcafe.com). Pictured is Debby McRobbie, House of Travel Jenny Nilsson Hastings and Tahnee Dobson, Brand USA in the restaurant.

**6,7** Believe it or not, BBQ spaghetti has become a fairly common menu

item in Memphis, although the **Bar B Q Shop** at 1782 Madison Ave claims to be the originator of the dish. Unusual as it sounds, pairing slow-smoked pork shoulder with BBQ sauce and spaghetti is actually delicious and one not to be missed. Buzz Thomson, House of Travel Albany, is pictured. See [dancingpigs.com](http://dancingpigs.com). **8,9** The chocolates made by **Phillip Ashley** are almost too pretty to eat (almost). See [phillipashleychocolates.com](http://phillipashleychocolates.com). Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers and Janine Malon from Tasty Tours are pictured with a sample of the chocolates.

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### Sprock And Roll

One way to travel from restaurant to restaurant and work off that hearty southern food is with a Sprock and Roll 'party bike' tour. The contraption can seat between eight and 16 people who then cycle their way between sights, while being served drinks of their choice (it's BYO alcohol). Clients can book a seat to cycle with strangers for around USD30pp, including around an hour of cycling and three 20-minute food or bar stops; or there's options to hire out the whole 'bike'. There's two operating in Midtown and Beale St—the megafam group focused on Midtown, which is a little quieter. See [sprocknrollmemphis.com](http://sprocknrollmemphis.com). The megafam group is pictured on the bike; Janine Malon, Tasty Tours and Nicola Sorenson, NZ Travel Brokers.





# We Are Bound For Graceland



**He's been dead almost 40 years but Elvis Presley remains one of the key drawcards for visitors to Memphis and the city knows it.**

As a result, attractions and restaurants across the city have taken the theme and run with it, but they do it with affection and it's an endearing trait.

Memphis loves Elvis—he was hugely generous while alive and his legacy continues to provide for locals, all of whom seem to have their own story or piece of memorabilia linked to the King.

Of course the main attraction for Elvis fans is his home, Graceland.

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Agents on the Brand USA famil reported having clients who have booked upcoming trips to Memphis purely to visit Graceland, a pilgrimage carried out by thousands of Elvis fans every year.

Graceland itself is the mansion and grounds Elvis bought as a young man and an entire complex has been built around it, where visitors can check out his private planes, view some of his car collection, and of course, buy Elvis memorabilia at one of around six gift shops.

The house itself is the main drawcard and a self-guided interactive iPad guides visitors through each room, including the famous Jungle Room, and across some of the grounds before finishing beside Elvis and his families' graves. Tickets are priced from USD38.75 just to experience the mansion (and gift shops). Clients should allow a couple of hours for the Graceland experience.

**1** Agents take a moment at Elvis' grave.

**2** Pictured at Graceland is: Debby McRobbie, HoT Jenny Nilsson Hastings; Kate McMillan, KNL Travel; and Gracia Lock, Air New Zealand. Rebecca Farnell, Williment Travel.

## PB & Banana On Toast

Elvis fans will be well aware of his taste for peanut butter and banana fried sandwiches, which he would buy at the Arcade Restaurant in town. The Arcade is Memphis' oldest café, since 1919, and has featured in plenty of movies. Elvis' favourite booth is down the back on the left (look out for his picture), and if clients really want to eat their sandwich like he did they should cover it in grape jelly first. See [arcaderestaurant.com](http://arcaderestaurant.com)

Pictured is: Gracia Lock, Air NZ and Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers outside the restaurant; and Charmaine tucking into a peanut butter and banana sandwich.



**Elvis Week**

For really keen Elvis fans, the best time to visit is Elvis Week (10-16 Aug), a celebration of his music, movies and life held at Graceland. For everyone else, it might be best to avoid visiting around this time, as the crowds are huge and the hotels are full.

## New Graceland Hotel

Proving the enduring appeal of Elvis, a new 450-room hotel is set to open at Graceland this Oct, offering more rooming options for clients besides the popular Heartbreak Hotel. The Guest House at Graceland is under construction just steps away from Graceland and is now taking reservations for stays Oct through Dec. Inspired by Graceland, aspects of the hotel will reflect Elvis' personal style and the unique character of the home, from the southern colonial exterior to themed specialty suites. It will feature two full-service restaurants, expansive meeting and special events space, a large outdoor pool and a 464-seat theatre for live performances and movies. See [graceland.com/guesthouse](http://graceland.com/guesthouse)



## Sun Studios All About Rock & Roll

Often called the birthplace of rock and roll, Sun Studios was the scene of many great musical moments, the most famous of which is arguably when Elvis walked in off the street to record his first record. Guests to the studios will first head upstairs to hear the studio's history from a guide, before being taken down into the studio itself, where Elvis impressed Sun founder Sam Phillips by breaking into a rendition of *That's All Right*. It's a special place for anyone with an interest in music, particularly when songs recorded there are played. Tours are USD12 and take place every hour from 1030-1730. See [sunstudio.com](http://sunstudio.com) Pictured is: **1** Nicola Sorensen, NZ Travel Brokers and Kate McMillan, KNL Travel outside the studios. **2** Debby McRobbie stands where Elvis stood to record and practises on a microphone used by the studio in its heyday.





# TASTE USA MEGAFAM Tennessee

TABS ON  
**TRAVEL  
TODAY**  
Fri 27 May 16 p6

## Walking In Memphis, Music, History & Food



Many of Memphis' top attractions are within walking distance of each other, making it easy to spend a day wandering in the city's downtown area (if the heat isn't too oppressive).

There's the National Civil Rights Museum, the Mississippi River, fantastic dining destinations and of course

plenty of music-based attractions in the city.

At night, the streets come alive with music and entertainment—Memphis is a melting pot of music with plenty of rock and roll, soul and gospel influence, and the main place to be surrounded by the music is Beale St. The famous street has been a home for music and musicians for generations, and as well as big names there's always new bands trying to find their start.

Beale St runs for four blocks and is closed off to traffic after a certain time every night, so it's a great place to wander, watch street performers and listen to some live music.

Popular music clubs on the street include Rum Boogie Café and BB Kings, both of which have hosted big names in blues.

Pictured on Beale St is Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers and Debby McRobbie, HoT Jenny Nilsson Hastings.



### Best Ribs In Memphis At Charlies

The dry rub BBQ ribs at Charlie Vergos Rendezvous are renowned and the restaurant is filled with memorabilia including fan mail from US presidents and the guest list for a Rolling Stones party. The Vergos family have been serving their signature dry ribs from a basement accessed from a back alley across from the famous Peabody Hotel for more than 60 years, and not a lot has changed in that time (although they serve considerably more people). While they're called dry ribs, they're actually moist and delicious—the 'dry' comes from the seasoning rubbed onto them, rather than sticky sauce Kiwis are used to on ribs. The restaurant was a dining highlight on the Taste USA fam. See hogsfly.com

Pictured is **1** The chef at work. **2** Janine Malon, Tasty Tours/The Travel Brokers; Charmaine Hawke, The Travel Brokers; Charlie's son John Vergos; and Debby McRobbie of HoT Jenny Nilsson Hastings.

### Start With This

There's so many music-based attractions in Memphis, telling the stories of a multitude of musicians, that it can be a little overwhelming. A good option for clients is to start their trip at the Rock 'n Soul Museum, which gives an overview of Memphis' music history. Clients can then later 'connect the dots' at the other museums and studios. See [memphisrocknsoul.org](http://memphisrocknsoul.org)

### Keep Safe

With Memphis' colourful charm there's also some, shall we say, colourful characters. The city is definitely a must-see but with large cities there's always some must-sees and some areas to be street smart in. The downtown area is generally considered safe, but urge clients to be sensible and avoid walking the streets alone, especially at night. As with any tourist areas, there's likely to be a few scammers and characters around, and this includes around Beale St (particularly at night), so it's advisable to stick to the main drag and not head down side streets.

### History Of Civil Rights

The National Civil Rights Museum is located in the former Lorraine Motel, where civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968, and tells the detailed and emotive story of the civil rights movement in the USA. There's interactive exhibits and historic collections, and the museum underwent a USD27.5 million renovation in 2013 and 2014, adding more than 40 new films, oral histories and interactive media. Clients should allow a few hours to absorb everything in the museum, which includes visiting the hotel room King stayed in the night before his assassination on his balcony. See [civilrightsmuseum.org](http://civilrightsmuseum.org)

### Take Your ID

No matter your age, expect to be asked for identification while heading out to bars in Tennessee. Strict liquor laws mean the bar can get in serious trouble if they're caught serving alcohol to minors, so everyone is asked, no matter how long ago they turned 21.

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### Mississippi Riverfront

The Mississippi River is the reason for Memphis' existence, so it's worth heading down for a look and a walk on the riverfront, if not getting on the water for a cruise on one of the riverboats.

A short walk from downtown is the Tom Lee Park, and clients can also catch the monorail over to the Mud Island River Park and Mississippi River Museum. There's numerous cruise options, such as short cruises with Memphis Riverboats; and American Queen Steamboats, a favourite with Kiwis, calls at Memphis. Pictured in front of the American Queen is Kate McMillan, KNL Travel; Bex Farnell, Willimonts; and Buzz Thomson, HoT Albany.



## Houston Heats Up For Super Bowl



The growing numbers of Kiwis heading to Houston will find a completely new city as it undergoes a 'renaissance' ahead of its hosting the Super Bowl next year, says Visit Houston.

While there are no official statistics yet, Texas Tourism director Brad Smyth says the state has noticed an increase in visitors from New Zealand and Australia in the six months following the launch of Air New Zealand's new direct flights.

"What we've been hearing is a lot of anecdotal information from our partners around the state about getting a lot more New Zealand visitors," he says. "We understand NZ is going

daily in Dec and that's a very good representation of how successful this flight had been."

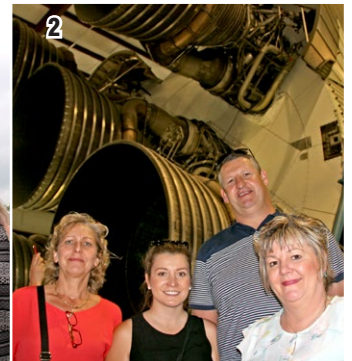
Many Kiwi visitors travel through Houston, an 'amazing city and a great gateway' offering amazing nightlife, museums and tax-free shopping. Repeat visitors next year won't recognise the city, adds Visit Houston boss Mike Waterman. "We're going through a major renaissance, there's so many infrastructure improvements going on to accommodate the super bowl," he says. Houston is the 'city of the future' because of its diversity, and with no ethnic majority there's a hugely diverse range of dining options, he adds.

**1** Team Texas at the most instagrammed spot in Houston: John Stewart, Air NZ; Stephanie Huijs, HoT Stephen Parsons; Leonie Paul, HoT; Jessica Turley, helloworld Henderson; Meetesh Patel, Flight Centre Parnell; and Lara Gieseke, Flight Centre. **2** Agents on the megafam were treated to an evening at the baseball. Watching the Houston Astros win the game is Team Texas' Lara Gieseke, Flight Centre; Wayne Mitcham, Brand USA; and Jessica Turley, helloworld Henderson. **3** An official welcome at the Minute Maid Stadium. **4** Cheering on the Astros: Leisa Steele, helloworld Ponsonby and Kate Costello, NZ Travel Brokers.



### Buffalo Soldiers

Leisa Steele, helloworld Ponsonby and Natalie Frowde, Travel Managers, pictured with Brand USA's Wayne Mitcham, won special Buffalo Soldiers Museum jackets as top sellers in the incentive. The Houston museum is the only one in the USA dedicated primarily to preserving the legacy and honour of African-American soldiers. See [buffalosoldiermuseum.com](http://buffalosoldiermuseum.com)

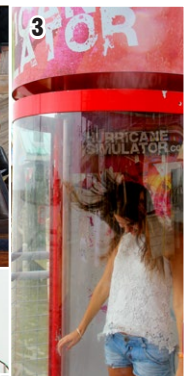


### NASA's Space Centre A Top Houston Attraction

Space Centre Houston is the official visitor centre for NASA's centre for human spaceflight activities, and draws thousands of visitors each year keen to explore the fascinating history of human space exploration. A highlight of the centre is the new Independence Plaza exhibit, which opened in Jan and allows visitors to wander around a replica of the shuttle Independence as well as the converted Boeing aircraft that carried it. See [spacecenter.org](http://spacecenter.org)

**1** Pictured in front of the shuttle and aircraft is Dani Schildenfeld, Air NZ; Sofie Myers, First Travel.

**2** Karen Kidd, You Travel Whangarei; Paige Haeata, NZ; Andrew Parke, World Travellers Fuzion Travel; and Sandy Ramage, World Travellers Waikanae.



### Riding The Kemah Boardwalk Coaster

The Kemah Boardwalk is a 60 acre theme park built on the shores of Galveston Bay and Clear Lake, around 50km from downtown Houston. Considered one of the top boardwalks in the US, it includes more than 10 restaurants and of course plenty of rides, including a pretty terrifying wooden roller coaster called the Boardwalk Bullet. See [kemahboardwalk.com](http://kemahboardwalk.com)

Pictured is: **1** Debby McRobbie, HoT Jenni Nilsson Hastings, on the carousel. **2** Buzz Thomson, HoT Albany and Nicola Sorensen, NZ Travel Brokers on the roller coaster. **3** Bex Farnell, Willimments tries out the Hurricane Simulator. **4** The Boardwalk Bullet. **5** On the Kemah Boardwalk: Aaron Ardern, HoT Te Awamutu and Sofie Myers, First Travel.