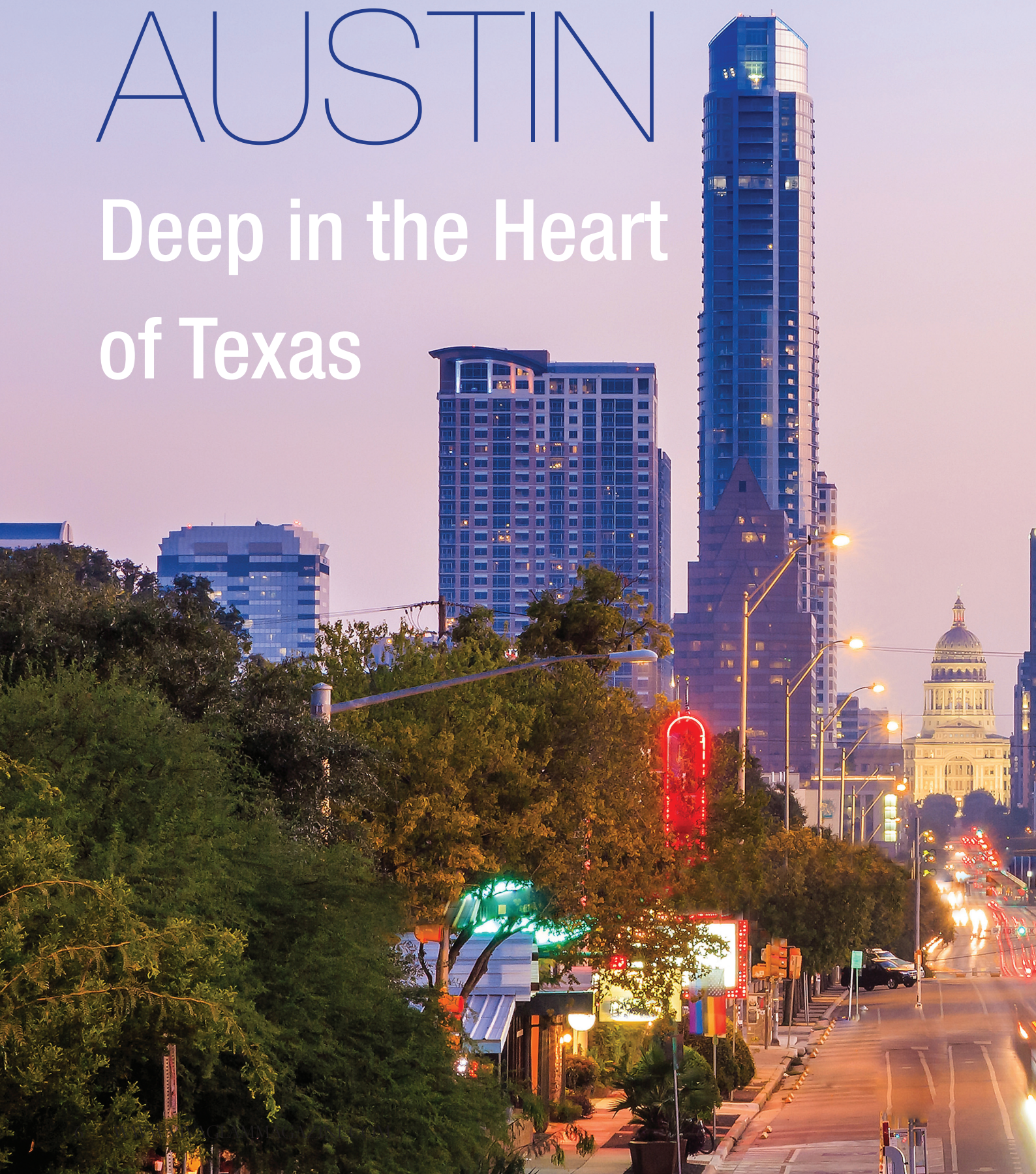


# TRAVEL

Written by Candace Kita

# AUSTIN

## Deep in the Heart of Texas





A long-exposure photograph of the Austin skyline at night. The image shows several tall buildings, including the distinctive double-towered structure of the Texas State Capitol. The foreground is filled with vibrant light trails from cars, creating streaks of red and white. Streetlights and traffic signals are visible, and the overall scene is a blend of urban architecture and motion.

## Known as the LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD,

Austin is a city that is steeped in both the traditions of the Old West and the innovations of new technology, music, culture, and cuisine. With over 250 live music venues, AUSTIN IS HOME to rock, country, the blues, classical, and music in many other forms. And with many restaurants with 5 star critical acclaim, Austin is also a city known for its eclectic food culture. Also, with the help of celebrities such as Sandra Bullock, Matthew McConaughey, and director Richard Linklater, the film industry has taken notice of Austin and it is now a leading destination for both big budget and independent films.



# We began o u r

trip to Austin with the open-minded attitude of exploring everything the city had to offer. Whether it be sky diving at Adrenaline 365 or listening to live country music on the infamous Sixth Street Strip, we were ready for just about anything. We stayed at the charming Hotel San Jose on South Congress Avenue. This hotel is known for its emphasis on Indie film. There are hundreds of eclectic movies that are complimentary for you to watch during your stay. Whether it be John Waters' *Pink Flamingos*, Richard Linklater's *Slacker*, or The Wilson Brothers' *Bottle Rocket*, you'll get a crash course in Indie film during your stay at this charming, hipster hotel.

And speaking of hipster, Austin has created a 1980's time warp that is unique only to Austin. It has its own style of dress and Congress Avenue is lined with vintage and resale stores that make its residents look unique and charming in their own way.

Just walking a few blocks from the Hotel San Jose, you can see how South Congress Avenue is known for its upscale shops, restaurants and food trucks. And you can't walk down South Congress without a stop to the world renown Home Slice Pizza. Even New Yorkers can attest that this is some of the best thin crust New York style pizza in the country. Homemade and created with artisan ingredients, Home Slice makes mouth-watering Margherita, Eggplant, and White Pie with spinach... what's not to love? Afterwards, stop by the Hey Cupcake! whimsical trailer parked next door for home made cupcakes that are to die for! Our favorite was the Michael Jackson, a chocolate cupcake with white frosting!

Another famous landmark on Congress Avenue is the "I Love You So Much" wall. Located next to Jo's Coffee Shop, thousands of people have taken their pictures under this simple yet poignant piece of graffiti. Friends, family, and couples have all posed under this sign and you'll have a hard time finding a person in Austin who has not done this at some point in their lives.

Further down Congress is the infamous Bat Bridge. What is a Bat Bridge you might ask? South Congress Avenue just happens to house the largest population of bats under a man-made structure in the world! Yes, it's true. South Congress Avenue

is home to literally millions of insect-eating bats. Each night during the summer, hundreds of people congregate in the park at dusk to watch the bats emerge from their daily slumber. You can also ride on the bat watching tour from Capital Tours, or picnic on the sidelines while waiting for the bats to make their nightly foray out into the night in search of insects. You will learn quickly that bats are not the scary creatures they are portrayed to be in the movies. Rather, they perform an important duty to the community each night by eating millions of mosquitoes that breed in nearby lakes Austin and Travis. So, I guess bats are not so bad after all.

Another must see in Austin is the Sixth Street Strip, which is located downtown. This is the hub for Austin's nightlife with live music venues, bars, and restaurants stretching for several blocks. One favorite stop here is Tears of Joy, a premium hot sauce shop that offers one of the largest collections of hot sauce in the world. Some sauces come with an "extreme heat warning" and they are not joking with some of the most concentrated infusions of ghost and habanero peppers the world has to offer.

Austin is home to The University of Texas, so you will notice that this is a city driven by youth. As a result, technology is in the forefront here. South by Southwest is one of the largest conferences for

interactive technology, music, and film in the world. It has garnered the reputation for being a breeding ground for new ideas, creative technology, film, and music. This explosion

of culture takes place over 10 days in March each year. With Hollywood's hottest celebrities, the latest technology, and music's newest stars, this convention is not to be missed.

Austin is a progressive and eco-friendly city that prides itself on recycling and riding bikes, or walking instead of driving. It even has Cars2Go, a progressive way of "renting" cars that are parked throughout the city. Once you are finished, you park it in a designated spot, and you leave it for the next driver! This is a great way to minimally use a car only when you need it. And Austin was designed with eco-friendly travel in mind, with many walking and bike paths throughout the city, around the lakes, and in the suburbs. We took a walk around Lake Travis and gazed at the multi-million dollar lake homes that dotted the water's edge. Is this where Jesse James or Billy Bob Thornton lived? On the final day of our trip, we decided that no excursion to Austin is complete without a visit to I

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Fly. We originally intended to go skydiving, but we realized this might be a bit too extreme for some of our family members, so a trip to I Fly was a perfect compromise and something the whole family could enjoy together. And at about a fraction of the cost of a real sky dive, it appealed to just about everyone! What exactly is I Fly? It is a flying experience in a giant wind tunnel that generates up to 1600 horse power wind from four fans. This creates a cushion of air on which you float safely and comfortably. It is an experience for all, but if you just want to watch in the comfort of the viewing rotunda, that is an entertaining experience as well! What an incredible adrenaline rush, and it completed our visit to one of the most interesting cities Texas has to offer!

Food, entertainment, culture, music and the great outdoors, what doesn't Austin have to offer? Whether you are planning a couple's vacation, adventure alone or together as a family, Austin has so much to offer for just about everyone. As we watched the sun set over the big Texas sky, we couldn't have dreamed of a better trip deep in the heart of Texas.

