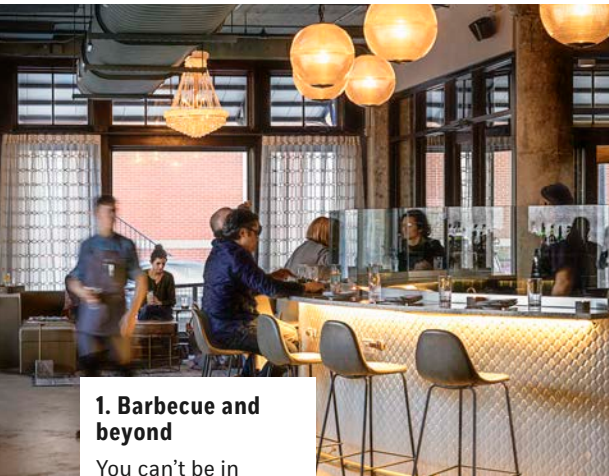


ROCKIN' IN MEMPHIS

The Home of the Blues turns 200 this year, and the city is getting spruced up to celebrate.

by Devorah Lev-Tov

● Despite its place in the history of rock 'n' roll and barbecue, Memphis has remained in the shadow of its Southern siblings Nashville, Charleston, and New Orleans. That might change this year with the city's 200th birthday and the citywide Bicentennial Gateway Project's infrastructure investments along the Mississippi River and throughout the downtown area. Here's some of what's new.

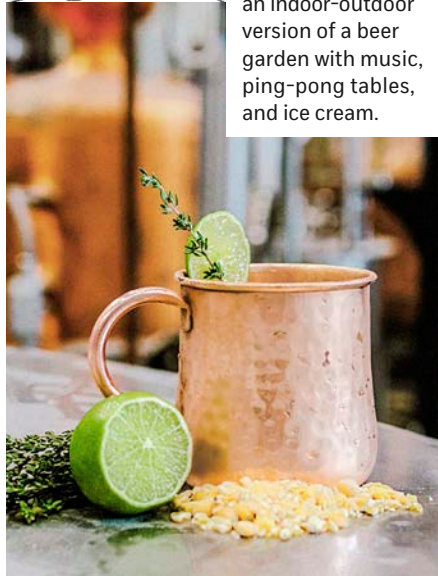


1. Barbecue and beyond

You can't be in Memphis and not eat barbecue—check out A&R Bar-B-Que, Tops Bar-B-Q, Payne's Bar-B-Q, and Charlie Vergos' Rendezvous, to name a few—but after you've had your fill of chicken and ribs, head to the South Main Street Arts district and the Gray Canary (above), a new American restaurant from James Beard Award nominees Michael Hudman and Andy Ticer. Also try Lucky Cat Ramen and Elemento Neapolitan Pizza, which bring tasty renditions of their eponymous foods to the city.

2. The Pinch District revival

Until 2004, the Pyramid was Memphis's gigantic basketball arena. After sitting vacant for more than a decade, the glass pyramid was refashioned as a Bass Pro Shop—complete with lakes, a cypress swamp, 100-foot-tall trees, a wilderness hotel, two restaurants, a bowling alley, and an aquarium. It's now the anchor of the Pinch District, where plans are underway to add even more family-friendly shops, restaurants, hotels, and residences.



3. Even more music and nightlife

Most tourists make a beeline to Beale Street, but locals can be found at Hi Tone, a rock club in the revitalized Crosstown; Lafayette's Music Room in Overton Square, which hosted Billy Joel and Big Star in the '70s; Wild Bill's, a red-lit blues juke joint; and Bar DKDC for eclectic food and music. If you're looking for vinyl, head to Goner Records or Shangri-La Records. For a drink, swing by Old Dominick Distillery (below), the first Memphis operation to make whiskey since before Prohibition. Or head to midtown's Railgarten, an indoor-outdoor version of a beer garden with music, ping-pong tables, and ice cream.



5. Hotels to call home

A slew of new accommodations will soon join the recently opened Hu Hotel (above), housed in a 1905 Beaux-Arts-style building with a coffee-and-cocktail bar, an all-day restaurant serving Southern grub, and a rooftop bar with views of the Mississippi River. Later this year, the Central Station Memphis hotel opens inside the city's 105-year-old train station. And in a 1916 warehouse in the South Main Street Arts District, Arrive Memphis will debut 62 industrial-chic rooms, a doughnut shop, and Longshot, a gastropub with Memphis beers on tap and a stage for live music. Near the convention center a Hotel Indigo just opened, and a Moxy hotel and a 550-room Loews are coming soon.

4. A redesigned waterfront

To reconnect a riverfront that is presently divided into five separate parks, Memphis River Parks Partnership is teaming up with the architecture firm Studio Gang. Already under way, the plan includes revitalizing Mud Island (actually a peninsula), Tom Lee Park, and Greenbelt Park with trails, playgrounds, sculptures, and event spaces. These will complement the recently redone Beale Street Landing, where the riverboats dock, and the River Garden at Mississippi River Park. This spring, the riverfront will host the Memphis in May International Festival, which this year will pay tribute to Memphis itself, with a Beale Street Music Festival, a World Championship Barbecue Contest, and other events.