

Posted 4/8/2004 6:43 PM
Updated 4/10/2004 2:47 PM
© Copyright 2004 USA TODAY

A musical tour of Memphis

Elvis Presley's regal, 14-acre estate draws millions of fans to Memphis, but Graceland is merely the gravy on the city's meatier legacy. Every root of American popular music took hold here. By day, explore the history of rock, soul, R&B, jazz, gospel and blues at; by night, boogie to authentic or polished forms of the music. To prepare, tune your radio to WDIA-AM 1070 (where B.B. King used to be a deejay) or **WEVL-FM 89.9 (run by roots-savvy volunteers)**, and head out on the ultimate Memphis music tour:



Tryin' ta get over:

Isaac Hayes and his 1972 "Superfly" Cadillac.

The University of Memphis Library

Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum

145 Lt. George W. Lee Ave.; 901-543-0800; memphisrocknsoul.org; admission: \$8.50 Well-chosen memorabilia, artifacts, video clips and sound bites trace the story of this region's contributions to American music. (The museum will move across the street to the new FedEx Forum this fall.)

Don't miss: The audioclip of civil rights figure Ben Branch playing saxophone on *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*, fulfilling a request that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. made shortly before his assassination.

Beale Street Historic District

Bealestreet.com

The hub of black nightlife in the 1920s fell into decay but was resurrected in the 1980s as a glitzy, tourist-friendly, Bourbon Street wannabe area of music clubs, rib joints, bars and souvenir shops.

Don't miss: B.B. King's presents big-name acts; the Memphis Music record shop offers a broad collection of regional artists.

Sun Studio

706 Union Ave.; 800-441-6249; SunStudio.com; admission: \$9.50. If rock 'n' roll had a single birthplace, it would be this tiny, well-preserved studio where Sam Phillips recorded everyone from Howlin' Wolf to Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. A room houses modest memorabilia, but the studio is the reason to visit.

Don't miss: The 'X' is said to mark where 18-year-old Elvis stood while recording his first single, *That's All Right*, in 1954.

Stax Museum of American Soul Music

926 E. McLemore Ave.; 888-942-7685; staxmuseum.com; admission: \$9. Built on the site of the original Stax Records studio, this new museum explores how a tiny company became a force for black economic empowerment when it unleashed the ferociously funky sounds of Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Isaac Hayes, Carla and Rufus Thomas, the Staple Singers and others.

Don't miss: A rebuilt 100-year-old church from rural Mississippi and Isaac Hayes' 1972 peacock-blue Superfly Cadillac with gold windshield wipers.

Graceland

3764 Elvis Presley Blvd.; 800-238-2000; elvis.com; admission \$18. The ultimate pop-culture shrine contains Elvis' entire mythos: his home, jets, cars, jumpsuits, tombstone.

Don't miss: Anything.

Full Gospel Tabernacle

787 Hale Road; 901-396-9192; algreenmusic.com. The Rev. Al Green, a soul great icon, preaches and sings gospel here most Sundays. Services begin around 11:15 a.m.

Don't miss: The dynamic gospel choir backed by an electric rhythm section. Even if the good reverend is absent, the choir will cleanse and rejuvenate your spirit.

Memphis Wild Bill's

1580 Vollintine; 901-726-5473; admission, usually \$5. This small, no-frills club, the last of the city's authentic juke joints, is for the fervent — not faint — of heart.

Don't miss: The Hollywood All-Stars, who hold forth most weekends with classic blues/R&B/soul.