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The Frugal Joys of Car Tripping: Nashville, Tennessee

by TFB EDITORS on OCTOBER 2, 2012

By Jan Ross

If you're in the mood for a little country music along with great food, fabulous hotels, and truly friendly people, there is no better place for a little getaway than Nashville.

The expansive [Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center](#) was our first stop in Nashville and it's the perfect place to stay: It's right by the Grand ole Opry and close to downtown and all the music venues. We've stayed in hotels all over the world, but I have truly never seen a hotel quite like this one. Sprawling over nine acres covered with waterfalls, foliage, a winding river, a variety of restaurants and shops – all under a soaring glass atrium – you may never want to leave once you check in. We had a room with a balcony overlooking the scenery and fell asleep to the gentle white noise of the many waterfalls.



Nashville at night



The view from our room!

After we checked in, we took one of the small Delta Riverboats that travel down a scenic river – *inside the hotel, mind you!* – through the four-to five-acre indoor garden as the guide gave us a tour of the hotel. It was a perfect introduction to the place and its truly mind-boggling size. If you go, check on the cruise times, but they run most days all day.

You are not going to go hungry in this place since there are literally dozens of restaurant choices. We enjoyed dinner at [Jack Daniels](#) one night. We got the fried chicken and the batter is some of the best I have ever tasted. But be prepared to share because the portion is huge. For lunch, we headed over to [Stax](#),

where we could choose to have pretty much anything we wanted stacked on our burgers. And we enjoyed it out on the open patio. You never have to worry about the weather here because you're always inside even though it feels like outside with all the gardens and waterfalls!

You absolutely have to plan to spend a day at the incredible [Relache Spa](#). I have been to plenty of spas but this was honestly the best spa experience I've ever had, mainly because of the superlative customer service. I usually don't do the steam room, sauna, etc., but this time I did because they actually took the time to explain the benefits. My husband had his first hot stone massage and was in absolute heaven. And my facial had me glowing for days. We worked out in the well-equipped fitness center and spent time lounging by the large indoor/outdoor pool. Both areas are just perfect.

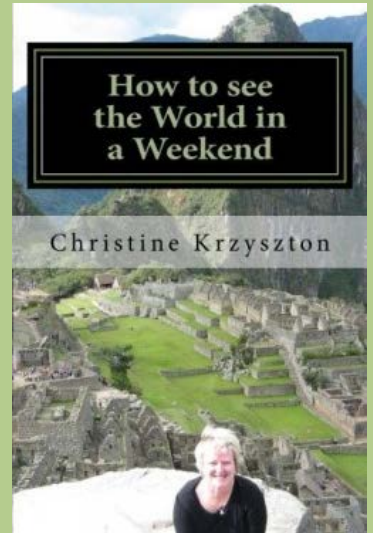


Inside the Relache Spa

We got our tickets for the [Grand Ole Opry](#) right in the hotel. The Opry has quite a history, from a one-room radio station to the current billion-dollar business that draws in millions of tourists every year. But it still has a down-home charm that everyone in the crowd enjoyed.



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The Grand Ole Opry

With singers like little Jimmy Dickens, who is well into his 90s, and new, young talent performing every night, they manage to please every person in the audience. You can also sign up for a backstage tour, which is really interesting.

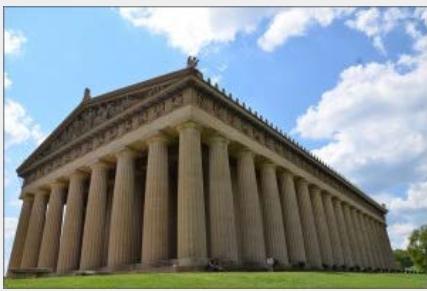
Plan to spend an afternoon and evening in downtown Nashville at some of the honky tonks on Broadway. We were amazed at the talent playing and singing in these locations. Most of the great country music stars got their start in some of these bars and restaurants, some of which have been downtown for a very long time. We just strolled into the bar, listened a while, and strolled out. Downtown is well-lit, crowded, and seems very safe. There are big parking lots right in the area where we parked for about \$12 for the whole day.

If you go, be sure to save one evening for a cruise on the [General Jackson Showboat](#), another venue affiliated with the Gaylord Opryland Resort. We bought out tickets through the hotel and took the shuttle right to the riverboat landing. You can choose to just take the cruise and the show, but dinner is not that much more and it was surprisingly delicious. I really recommend you choose the whole package. The riverboat is an original paddle wheel steamer and the view of the Nashville skyline, all lit up at night, is quite amazing. The show was very professional and entertaining: They presented an overview of the history of country music in Tennessee in song and dance.



The 'General Jackson' paddlewheel

If you're interested in more of the history of country music in the area, visit the [Ryman Auditorium](#) and the [Country Music Hall of Fame](#), both of which are really interesting tours. When you're ready for a break from music, you have to visit the [Parthenon](#). A full-scale replica of the original in Athens, the building was first put up for Nashville's Centennial but was so popular that the city decided to make it a permanent fixture. It's absolutely amazing – especially the 42-foot statue of Athena. We visited all these locations and others by getting tickets for the [Music City Trolley Hop](#) – a 24-hour hop on/hop off trolley that visits all the scenic attractions and comes by about every half hour. It's the perfect way to see the city.



The Parthenon

It's no problem at all to find gourmet dining in Nashville. We actually had two meals at [Demo's](#), a family dining restaurant first established in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1989. They still prepare the original family recipes, the food is excellent, and the prices are very reasonable. I had a burger, and the bun was so fresh and delicious it was nearly as good as the burger! We also stopped one night at [Amerigo's](#), an Italian restaurant that was advertised as casual but, with its tablecloths, dedicated staff, and delicious food, is anything but casual. I recommend the sirloin – it was so tender and juicy, it almost melted in my mouth.

One of the most interesting thing we did in Nashville was tour the [Fontanel Mansion](#). There are plenty of mansions, homes, and estates to tour in Nashville and the surrounding areas, but this one is unique. A 27,000-foot log home on over 130 acres of land, the home was formerly owned by Barbara Mandrell. It's the largest log home in existence and is full of luxurious furnishings and country music memorabilia. After the tour, we had lunch at the Café Fontanella. But be sure to share that Stromboli if you order one because they are huge!



The Fontanel Great Room

Music, great food, incredible sights – Nashville has it all!

Have you ever been to Nashville? What were some of your favorite sights and experiences? Please share them with us in the Comments section.

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