

DESTINATIONS

MEMPHIS — THE SOUL OF THE SOUTH

USA



# Memphis — The Soul of the

by LAURA SUTHERLAND



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: Rum Boogie on Beale Street with headliner Jewel Jones; Server hard at work at the Rendezvous BBQ joint.

USA

CHARLES VERGOS'  
**Rendezvous**  
**CHARCOAL RIBS**  
*in Downtown Alley Since 1943*



EIGHTEEN PAPER NAPKINS AND four handi-wipes later I was done—the hallmark of good BBQ. Perhaps I was a little heavy handed with the sauce, but it was important to coat each bite of rib even if the sauce dribbled down my fingers. It was my first time in Memphis and I was relishing the chance to sample some much-celebrated BBQ and immerse myself in the town's musical and civil rights history.»

# South





«A sense of place unfolds the minute you land at the Memphis International Airport; soul music blasts from the waiting lounges, and walkways are lined with paintings that capture the drum beat and bass line of the city. Once you get into town, there's live music to listen to and musical history to absorb so you can truly understand how and why the nonstop hits that came out of this centre of blues, soul, R and B, rock and roll and country music unfolded. It was in Memphis that rhythm-heavy music made and played by black musicians and singers crossed over into white music in the form of Elvis Presley, a white boy from Tupelo, Mississippi who sang like a black man and shook his hips in a way that made teen girls swoon and their parents shudder.

But long before that, the blues musicians from this region were making their mark, like Howling Wolf, BB King, Muddy Waters and Memphis Minnie — all of whom helped shape the distinctive Memphis sound of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and inspired the explosion of artists that later recorded for labels like Stax and Sun.

We spent our first few days engrossed in the music, starting at the Smithsonian's Rock'n Soul Museum, which tells the complete story of Memphis music history, from the field hollers of 1930s sharecroppers and the rock and soul music out of Sun and Stax to the world-wide reach of rock and roll today. The museum's audio tour contains over 100 songs, so you can listen to your favourites as you explore.»

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: Graceland Mansion; Photo from Elvis' Memphis exhibition.

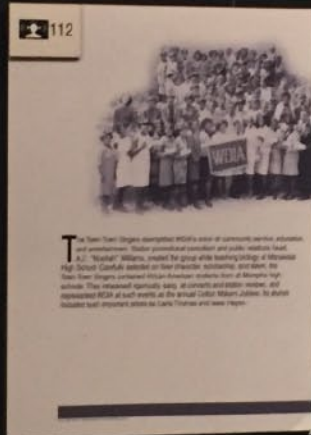


USA



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The Teen Town Singers, organized by WDIA's sister station, were active in the community. Under the leadership of their director, A.J. "Redhead" Williams, created the group while teaching biology at Memphis High School. Confirmed members of their repertoire included "Swanee" and "The Teen Town Singers" performed by the group. Williams, who died in 1997, was a member of the group. Williams, who died in 1997, was a member of the group. Williams, who died in 1997, was a member of the group.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: WDIA was the first black radio station in the US; Sign on Beale Street; Charlie Vergos Rendezvous BBQ.



...The most compelling attraction in Memphis is not about food or music...



«At the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, we started with a 20-minute film with vintage footage of hitmakers like Al Green, Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Ann Peebles and Sam and Dave. Headset on, it was tempting to dance through all the exhibits, but I saved my best moves for the SoulTrain dance floor where visitors can groove to the music watching Stax artists perform on a life-size projection of the classic American TV show.

Thanks to Elvis Presley, Sun Studios celebrates its history as the birthplace of Rock and Roll, but other big names recorded here too, like Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison and Johnny Cash. Guided tours take you through the studio during the day and music acts use it as a recording studio in the evenings.

After a day of exploring the music museums, it was time to relax over a glass of bubbly at the Peabody Hotel's elegant lobby bar, made famous by its resident marching ducks. Each morning at 10 am the ducks emerge from the elevator with a nattily dressed 'Duckmaster,' who encourages them along a red carpet to a large fountain where they swim and snack until they walk the red carpet back to their penthouse aviary at 5 pm. If you visit April-October, you can enjoy the Peabody's evening rooftop concerts — lively affairs with a bandstand, cocktails and beautiful views of the city.

Later that night we headed to Beale Street, the centre of live music in Memphis for several centuries. First we fortified ourselves at the Blues City Café, a restaurant and music club where we could stuff ourselves silly on ribs, catfish, cornbread, coleslaw and killer baked beans while we listened to 80-year-old bluesman Earl the Pearl entertain. After dinner we hit more clubs, like The Rum Boogie Café where Jewel Jones belted out Aretha Franklin and Etta James songs.

A pilgrimage to Elvis' Graceland is on the itinerary of most Memphis visitors and it was easy for us to walk across the street from our hotel, the new Guest House at Graceland, where the in-room TVs let you select Elvis music from the 50s, 60s or 70s and channels play his movies nonstop. But more fascinating than Elvis's kitschy jungle room is the new entertainment complex, 'Elvis Presley's Memphis,' with its exhibition of his car collection, flashy bejewelled jumpsuits and other memorabilia. This complex has food, of course, so when we got hungry we headed to Vernon's Smokehouse, where I ordered more ribs, fried catfish, corn-on-the-cob and cooked cabbage thick with chunks of deliciously fatty bacon.

BBQ in the American South varies from region to region and Memphis is known for its dry-rub style, where pitmasters slather on a coating of salt and spices before smoking the meat — usually pork — very slowly. Some insist it be served dry while others like it with sauce. Each May the city hosts a series of arts, music and culture festivals, but the main event is the World Championship BBQ Cooking Contest when competitors bring their smokers and work their magic.»





Cook

SERVES 12 AS A SIDE DISH

## Memphis-style Slaw

*The addition of yellow mustard and a little bit of heat makes this Memphis favourite a standout. Southerners like their slaw sweet, so reduce the sugar if you wish.*

### Dressing

**Mayonnaise**  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup

**Yellow Mustard**  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup

**Cider Vinegar**  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup

**Sugar**  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup, or to taste

**Louisiana-style Hot Sauce**, such as **Texas Pete** 1–2 Tbs

**Celery Seeds** 1 tsp

**Freshly Ground Black Pepper** 2 tsp

### Slaw

**Green Cabbage** 1 large head, shredded on a mandoline or finely by hand

**Carrot** 1 large, grated

**Sugar**  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup, or to taste

**Kosher Salt**  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup

**1 WHISK** together the mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, sugar, hot sauce, celery seeds and pepper in a small bowl.

**2 COMBINE** the cabbage and carrot in a large bowl. Sprinkle with the sugar and salt and toss to combine. Let stand five minutes, then transfer to a colander and rinse thoroughly under cold running water.

**3 PUT** the cabbage mix into a salad spinner and spin dry or blot mixture dry with dish towels or paper towels. Return to the large bowl.

**4 POUR** the dressing over the slaw and toss to coat. Adjust seasoning to taste with salt, pepper, and/or sugar.



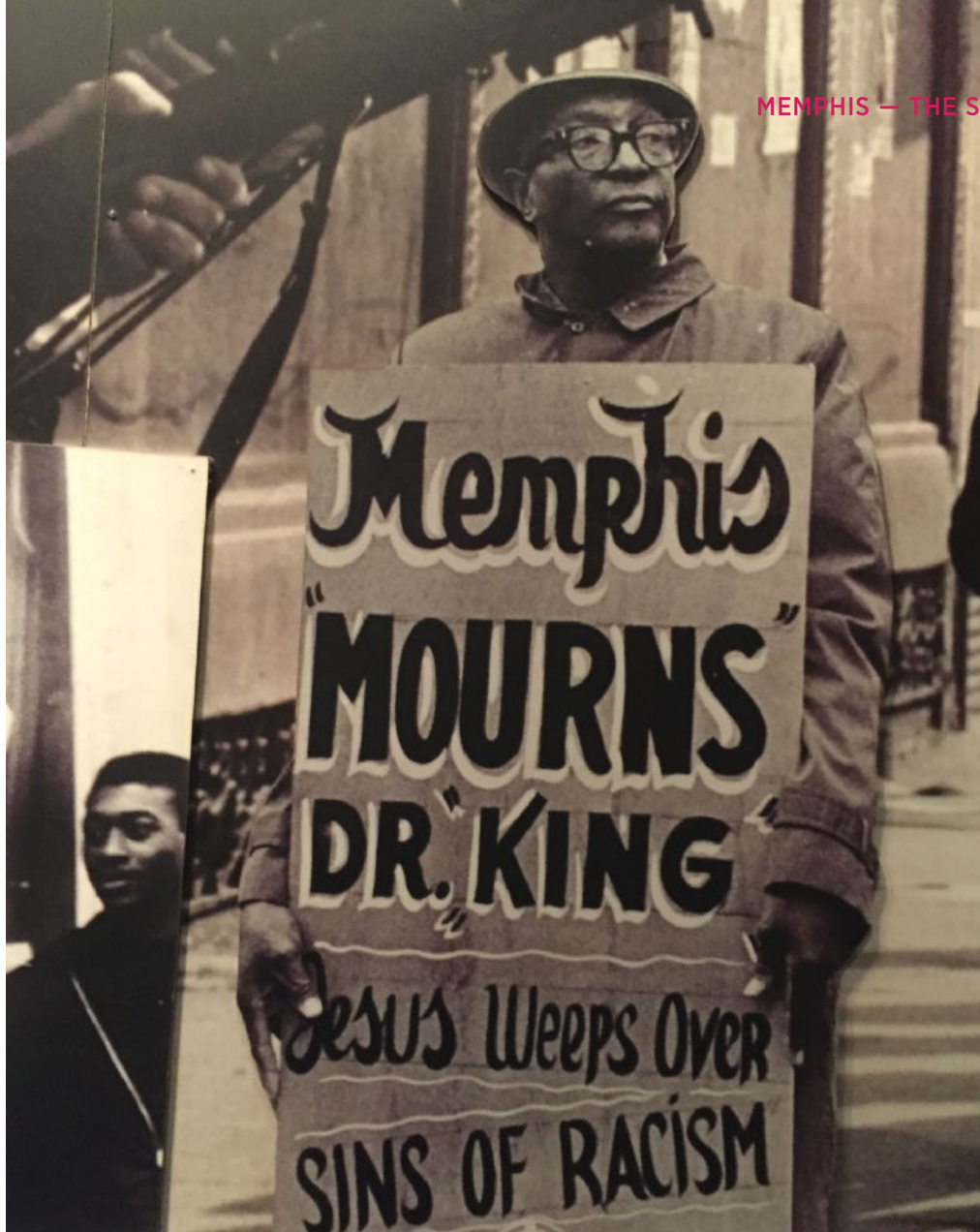
«The most compelling attraction in Memphis is not about food or music, but focuses on the story of the struggle for equal rights and dignity in the divided and segregated Southern United States. The sprawling National Civil Rights Museum has been developed around the Lorraine Motel where Dr Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, and it traces slavery and the civil rights movement from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Multimedia presentations, artifacts, films, oral histories and external listening posts guide visitors through the museum. It's thought-provoking, immersive and deeply moving, and not to be missed.

Curious to know more about the story of the Underground Railroad that helped slaves escape to Canada or the free Northern states, we drove to Slave Haven, a home built in 1848 by a German immigrant fleeing oppression in his own country. Just two blocks from the Mississippi River (and once far from town), it was part of a secret network of way stations that helped slaves get to freedom. Informative docent-led tours take guests to see secret passages, trapdoors and a hidden basement.

Not far from the Civil Rights Museum, the Blues Museum and Hall of Fame celebrates Memphis as the birthplace of the blues. Fans can linger over the museum's photos, videos and memorabilia before visiting the Blues Hall of Fame, where blues legends are inducted each year: 2018 inductees include Mamie Smith, the 1920s singer hailed as the first 'Queen of the Blues.'

Memphis has dining options besides its BBQ and soul food specialties, like the inventive Gray Canary and elegant Majestic Grille. But on my final night in Memphis, it had to be BBQ, so I sidled up to the counter at Charlie Vergos' Rendezvous and ordered a half rack of ribs with spicy, mustardy Memphis slaw and baked beans on the side, making sure I had my own squeeze bottle of their top-secret BBQ sauce. Once again the napkins piled up and I realized that maybe the napkin count is my new way of ranking BBQ — or maybe I'm just messy — but when you're eating BBQ, no one seems to mind.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: Peabody Hotel duck walk; At the National Civil Rights Museum.



Blues City Café  
[www.bluescitycafe.com](http://www.bluescitycafe.com)

Blues Hall of Fame  
[www.blues.org](http://www.blues.org)

Elvis Presley's Memphis  
[www.graceland.com](http://www.graceland.com)

The Gray Canary  
[www.thegraycanary.com](http://www.thegraycanary.com)

The Guest House at Graceland  
[www.guesthousegraceland.com](http://www.guesthousegraceland.com)

Majestic Grille  
[www.majesticgrille.com](http://www.majesticgrille.com)

Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum  
[www.memphisrocknsoul.org](http://www.memphisrocknsoul.org)

National Civil Rights Museum  
[www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)

The Peabody Hotel  
[www.peabodymemphis.com](http://www.peabodymemphis.com)

The Rendezvous BBQ  
[www.hogsfly.com](http://www.hogsfly.com)

Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum  
[www.slavehavenmemphis.com](http://www.slavehavenmemphis.com)

Stax Museum of American Soul Music  
[www.staxmuseum.com](http://www.staxmuseum.com)

Sun Studio  
[www.sunstudio.com](http://www.sunstudio.com)

Vernon's Smokehouse  
[www.graceland.com/visit/dining.aspx](http://www.graceland.com/visit/dining.aspx)



USA



TONY PETERS

SERVES 1

## Memphis Mule

*This riff on the Moscow Mule cocktail uses Tennessee whiskey, which is distilled in Tennessee, filtered through sugar maple charcoal, and barrel-aged. Jack Daniels and George Dickel are the best-known brands.*

**Tennessee Whiskey** 1 ½ oz

**Ginger Beer** 4–6 oz

**Lime** 1 small, quartered

**Fresh Mint Leaves**

- MUDDLE** 3 of the lime wedges with 6–7 mint leaves, then add to a glass and fill with ice.
- ADD** the whiskey, top with the ginger beer, and stir.
- GARNISH** with the remaining lime wedge and a sprig of fresh mint.



**LAURA SUTHERLAND** is a travel writer based in Northern California. You can contact her at [LauraSutherland.net](http://LauraSutherland.net) and follow her @WanderandTaste