



Feast for the Senses

These UNESCO Creative Cities give travelers a taste of American cuisine, art, design, and music.

BY LISA WATERMAN GRAY

On weekday mornings, Kansas City's 18th & Vine Jazz District is pretty quiet. But after dark, live performances at the Blue Room Jazz Club inside the American Jazz Museum get the place hopping. The iconic 1912 Gem Theater across the street and the Mutual Musicians Foundation on Highland Avenue also draw fans amid this birthplace neighborhood of Kansas City jazz. The historical district also played a pivotal role in local African-American life.

Last year, Kansas City, Mo., was named a UNESCO City of Music. Since 2004, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Creative Cities Network has recognized member cities for their accomplishments in Music, Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, and Media Arts. The network includes nearly 200 cities in 72 countries. Kansas City is the first UNESCO City of Music in the U.S., as well as the last American city to participate in the network; the U.S. Department of State last year announced it will leave UNESCO, effective Dec. 30, 2018.

WHERE JAZZ GREW UP

Musical home of Count Basie and Charlie Parker, Kansas City was renowned for speakeasies during the 1930s and 1940s. Today, modern speakeasies in the city include Manifesto downtown on Main Street, P.S. Speakeasy inside Hotel Phillips, and Swordfish

Tom's on W. 19th Terrace. Visitors should also check out Green Lady Lounge, Majestic Restaurant and Jazz Club, and The Phoenix KC.

The UNESCO designation "... provides a unique opportunity for our city to showcase its cultural significance and contributions to music history," says Scott Wagner, Kansas City's mayor pro tem and 1st District councilman at-large. "Our application showed the movement of jazz from Kansas City to (New York, New Orleans and Chicago) and the world – especially Europe."

The Wendell Phillips Neighborhood Association, home to Kansas City's Historic 18th & Vine Jazz District, filed the winning application.

While there is a four-year plan associated with UNESCO's designation, Wagner said it's "less about museums and more about cultural contributions the city has made that impact the world."

The logo for Kansas City's "Creative City of Music" designation was designed by local artist John Wagner featuring a trombone with the letters "KC" formed out of a drum and drumsticks. The design was inspired by James Weldon Johnson's poetry book, *God's Trombones*.

Visitors who want to stay near 18th and Vine might consider the historical Ambassador Hotel Kansas City (AAA Four Diamonds), part of Marriott's Autograph Collection. Catch live jazz on Saturday evenings in the hotel lounge.



A jazz band performing at the Green Lady Lounge in Kansas City. VisitKC

Right: A Sonoran-style hot dog from El Guero Canelo in Tucson, Ariz. Visit Tucson

Below: Prairie Lights Books in Iowa City, Iowa, hosts weekly author presentations. Think Iowa City



walks. Self-guided walking tours celebrate the city's literary history. On Sunday afternoons, visitors crowd the 40-year-old Prairie Lights Books for author presentations.

The Iowa City Book Festival, held Oct. 1-7 this year, is one of more than 200 local annual literary events. The festival includes public readings of a classic book, while showcasing local juried literary works. In February, the area's youngest writers are given the spotlight during One Book Two Book, a children's literature event.

Iowa City's hotelVetro & conference center (AAA Three Diamonds) features modern suites, in-house dining, and is located across the street from the library on Linn Street.

NATION'S FIRST UNESCO CITY OF DESIGN

Inside the flagship store of Detroit's Shinola factory, new timepieces intersperse with supple, exquisitely crafted handbags, belts, and journals. Beyond a glass wall, an expert craftsman creates a leather tote. Several blocks away, contemporary design rules at Hugh, where shoppers can select sleek personal accessories, as well as items for the home. Throughout the urban core, multi-story public murals decorate alleyways and stand-alone buildings.

It's no surprise Detroit, Mich., in 2015 became America's first UNESCO City of Design. The Detroit Creative Corridor Center (DC3) has strived to create international recognition for the city as a global center of design, innovation, and creativity since 2010. Rebranded as Design Core Detroit earlier this year, it stimulates urban regeneration while generating thousands of jobs.

Detroit has long been a global design center, dating back to the early 20th century when the Model T was born at Detroit's Ford Piquette Avenue Plant. Detroit's automotive design legacy continues each January when the North American International Auto Show displays modern innovations across the industry. In March, the coolest hot rod show, Autorama, rolls into town.

In addition, this city hosts the nation's largest design festival for freelance professionals during September. The Detroit Design Festival draws hundreds of designers from across the globe for dozens of workshops and exhibitions. It spans eight neighborhoods with more than 20 events, 25,000 attendees, and more than 250 featured designers.

Visitors who want to stay closest to DC3 can check out MotorCity Casino Hotel (AAA Four Diamonds) that pairs 400 luxurious rooms and suites with on-site entertainment.

WHERE CULINARY TRADITIONS CONVERGE

Spicy chiltepin peppers flavor a robust cold brew at Exo Roast Company in Tucson, Ariz. It perfectly complements offerings at Barrio Bread, where gregarious owner Don Guerra primarily uses local heritage grains and sells out of his reasonably priced inventory daily.

These are only two of many reasons why Tucson became the first UNESCO City of Gastronomy in the United States in 2015.

THE OLDEST U.S. UNESCO CREATIVE CITY

While Kansas City is the newest U.S. Creative City, another Midwestern gem was honored 10 years ago as the country's first UNESCO City of Literature. Visitors to Iowa City, Iowa — home to the University of Iowa — can't miss the literary heritage here. Iowa City's literary roots date to 1936 when the university launched its Master of Fine Arts Degree program. Since 1955, alumni and faculty have won more than 40 Pulitzer Prizes and other literary honors.

Drive through Gaslight Village, where writers — including Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*) — once lived and students of the Iowa Writer's Workshop still reside.

The Iowa City Public Library has a calendar packed with literary programming, while literary quotes emboss downtown side-



and offers contemporary accommodations plus a comfortable lobby bar.

A SMALL CITY THAT'S BIG ON THE ARTS

The National Quilt Museum in Paducah, Ky., draws visitors from dozens of countries annually. Since the museum's 1991 opening, more than 300 publications have described museum efforts to introduce fiber arts to new audiences, and the facility frequently rotates more than 500 jaw-dropping contemporary pieces. No wonder Paducah, with a population of less than 30,000, was selected as a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art in 2013.

Located 90 minutes from Cape Girardeau, Mo., this 1800s riverfront town is full of galleries and artist studios. At the Yeiser Art Center, the annual juried Through the Lens event has featured submissions from at least 40 states and eight countries. Paintings by more than 100 regional artists adorn the PAPA Gallery (Paducah Area Painter Alliance). And inside MAKE, a combination boutique-DIY studio, there's plenty of creative space to learn printmaking, painting, up-cycled crafting, and more.

There's also impressive public outdoor art here. Thanks to the Robert Dafford/Dafford Murals Team, the town's history plays out in a work called "Portraits from Paducah's Past" that's seen on the downtown floodwall.

Artist education and support also is important here. The Paducah School of Art & Design in Lower Town teaches drawing, painting, photography, and design classes. It's a program offered by West Kentucky Community and Technical College.

And Paducah Arts Alliance hosts award-winning artists from around the world through an artist-in-residence program.

Stay near this creative energy at Homewood Suites by Hilton (AAA Three Diamonds) that offers fully equipped kitchens.

When we travel, we stretch ourselves by learning new experiences, and UNESCO Creative Cities are perfect starting points. ●

Lisa Waterman Gray is a contributor from Overland Park, Kan.

Above: The National Quilt Museum in Paducah introduces fiber arts to new audiences. Paducah Visitors Bureau

Right: An artisan busy at work in the Shinola factory in Detroit, Mich. Lisa Waterman Gray



In Tucson, restaurants blend European, Native American, Mexican, and Chinese cuisines.

For a taste of fresh, indigenous ingredients, such as tepary beans and cholla (cactus) buds, check out Downtown Kitchen + Cocktails. James Beard Award winner and owner Janos Wilder frequently combines French influences with Sonoran Desert flavors.

Earlier this year, El Guero Canelo, a popular vendor of Tucson's famous Sonoran-style hot dogs, won an America's Classics James Beard Award. El Guero Canelo opened in 1993 as a food cart (the original cart can be seen at their Oracle Road location). The buns, thick, fluffy bolillo rolls, are baked for El Guero in Magdalena, Mexico, and brought north, ready to hold the parade of ingredients: bacon-wrapped dog, pinto beans, raw and grilled onions, tomatoes, jalapeño sauce, mayonnaise, and mustard.

At 5 Points Market & Restaurant, beautifully crafted cappuccino complements Smoked Salmon Benedict. Handmade tortillas enfold luscious fillings alongside refreshing fruit-flavored Mexican snow cones at the family-owned Taqueria Pico de Gallo. For farm-to-table fare with a decidedly Southwestern flair, check out the revamped mid-century Welcome Diner.

A glimpse into Tucson's agricultural legacy can be seen at Native Seeds/SEARCH, which provides low-cost mass distributions of Southwestern seeds. Stop by their welcoming retail shop on North Campbell Avenue. See a "living agricultural museum" when visiting the Mission Garden Project on West Mission Lane. The Friends of Tucson's Birthplace interpret 4,000 years of agricultural heritage in this space, said to be the first phase of a planned Tucson Origins Heritage Park.

AC Hotel by Marriott Tucson Downtown (AAA Three Diamonds) is within walking distance of Downtown Kitchen + Cocktails

BEFORE YOU GO

For more information, contact:

- VisitKC, (816) 691-3800, visitkc.com
- Iowa City/Coralville Area CVB (800) 283-6592, thinkiowacity.com
- Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, (800) 338-7648, visittetroit.com
- VisitTucson, (800) 638-8350, visittucson.org
- Paducah Convention & Visitors Bureau, (800) PADUCAH (800-723-8224), www.paducah.travel

To visit these creative getaways, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, lodging reservations, and TourBook® guides. A list of offices to serve you is on page 6. Visit AAA.com/travel for a TripTik® Travel Planner.

Order free information about Missouri through the Free Information Card found at page 44. Information can be requested online at <https://midwest.ai-dsg.com>.



A statue of Charlie Parker in Kansas City's 18th & Vine Jazz District. VisitKC