

Where to stay and play in College Station

Bounty of activities beyond Aggieland

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Photo: Shannon O'Hara, Photographer

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The George hotel in College Station

Yes, it's home to the fighting Texas A&M Aggies. But there's plenty to do in Bryan-College Station beyond Kyle Field. Check out the handful of hip, modern hotels that have joined the scene. And the dining options may surprise even the staunchest foodie.

WHAT TO DO

George Bush Presidential Library and Museum

On the Texas A&M campus, the museum explores the life and work of America's 41st president (and current Houstonian). Permanent exhibits tell stories through photos, documents, videos, artifacts, interactives and replicas of the Oval Office and Situation Room. You can also pay your respects to the late Barbara Bush, who is buried here. 1000 George Bush Drive W., College Station, 979-691-4000; bush41.org

Shop, sip and stroll

Downtown Bryan is a charming

pocket to explore for an afternoon. Stores are a mix of antique (Corner of Time), resale (Alice's Attic), contemporary (Hemline) and the sort of curated, shabby-chic hybrid markets (Market 1023, Old Bryan Marketplace) that are becoming more prevalent these days. Unwind with a glass of wine at Downtown Uncorked or, if you're staying the night, try one of dozens of craft beers with a side of live music at Revolution Cafe & Bar. downtownbryan.com.

Messina Hof

In the Brazos Valley just outside of Bryan proper, the 40-year-old winery and resort has a tasting room/shop (which once housed the all-girls school Ursuline Academy), wine bar and The Vintage House Restaurant. Hour-long public tours are offered regularly for \$15. Consult website for schedule. 4545 Old Reliance, Bryan, 979-778-9463; messinahof.com.

LODGING

The George

Within the Century Square mixed-use development a stone's throw from Texas A&M's campus, this 162-room, "refined rustic"-style hotel has a cool vibe. Decor includes midcentury style furnishings mixed with pops of Instagram-friendly color, and there's an on-site restaurant, cocktail bar and outdoor pool. Complimentary breakfast and WiFi. 180 Century Court, College Station, 844-599-3871; thegeorgetexas.com.

Cavalry Court

Also in Century Square, this 141-room hotel was inspired by old-school motor courts. Rooms - centered around a courtyard with pool, cabanas, firepits and pavilion - have a retro-military design with sliding barn doors and full-size Smeg refrigerators. Complimentary continental breakfast is served at the Canteen, which also has a full dinner menu and bar. The hotel also is pet friendly and offers free WiFi. 200 Century Court, College Station, 979-485-5586; cavalrycourt.com.

The Stella Hotel

The new 176-room Stella anchors the Lake Walk town center, the commercial district of the Traditions Club and Community near College Station. Modern guest rooms come with Frette linens and bathrobes. On-site amenities include two pools (one with a bar), a fitness room, complimentary bikes and paddleboards, farm-to-fork restaurant Campfire and a craft-cocktail bar. 4100 Lake Atlas Drive, Bryan, 979-773-1001; thestellahotel.com.

LaSalle Hotel

A lovely option in historic downtown Bryan. The 55-room hotel has super comfortable beds and sizeable rooms. Other perks include complimentary made-to-order hot breakfast and popcorn. Be warned: The LaSalle is adjacent to an active railroad track, and that horn blares loudly, almost comically so. The front desk can provide earplugs at check in. 120 S. Main, Bryan, 979-822-2000; lasalle-hotel.com.

DINING

Madden's Casual Gourmet

Tucked inside the Old Bryan Marketplace, Madden's is about as fancy as it gets in Bryan-College Station (which is to say not uber-fancy, though expect white tablecloths). Starters might involve a tomato bisque with fresh mozzarella and saffron whipped cream, while entrees include blackened mahi mahi with fried mac 'n' cheese or a grilled, dry-aged pork chop from

Compart Family Farms. There's also an expansive wine list. Open for lunch Mondays through Saturdays, dinner Thursdays through Saturday and brunch Saturday. 202 S. Bryan Ave., Bryan, 979-779-2558; maddenscasualgourmet.com.

Dixie Chicken

Vintage photos, taxidermy, bric-a-brac, neon beer signs and raucous behavior are all part of the fun at "the Chicken" on Northgate, where Robert Earl Keen and Lyle Lovett used to perform as students back in the day. It's a bar serving cheap, ice-cold beer primarily, but food - think burgers, fries, bar snacks and, well, chicken - is available to soak up the booze. Open daily. 307 University Dr., 979-846-2322; dixiechicken.com.

The Village Cafe & Art979 Gallery

Works by local artists decorate the wall in this cute, all-day downtown Bryan cafe. It's a great spot for a coffee, but you can also order from a full food menu at the counter. Dishes range from breakfast paninis and salads to sandwiches, wraps and pizzas made with from-scratch dough. Many ingredients are sourced from nearby farms. Beer and wine, too. 210 W. 26th, Bryan, 979-703-8514; thevillagedowntown.com.