



# **Blues Tour Route 61 July 2019**



**Small Group Tour Minimum size is 8 people and Maximum is 13 People (Nobody gets lost in the crowd)**

## **Introduction**

Retrace the history of the blues, from its birthplace in the Mississippi Delta to the windswept streets of Chicago, on a journey to the roots of a music that is the foundation of rock & roll, rhythm & blues, soul, even hip-hop ... just about any 20th-century music made in the USA. This trip will carry you from the Chicago of Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy to the National Blues Museum in St Louis to the 'Muscle Shoals sound' to the Stax Museum in Memphis down Highway 61 to the Mississippi Delta and BB King Museum and finally, the Big Easy itself, New Orleans.

## **Day 1: Chicago**

Welcome to Chicago, aka 'The Windy City'. A private transfer from O'Hare or Midway airports to your hotel is included. There are no activities planned until your welcome meeting at 6 pm. Chicago is one of the USA's most walkable cities; days can be spent wandering the lakefront paths, checking out the soaring buildings, dropping into the top-notch museums, or cruising down the river. In the evening after the welcome meeting, maybe head out with the group for a slice of the city's legendary deep-dish pizza and some blues music.

## **Day 2: Chicago**

The music known as the blues has deep roots in American history, particularly African-American history, and originated on Southern plantations in the 19th century. Its inventors were slaves, ex-slaves and the descendants of slaves. It grew up in the Mississippi Delta just upriver from New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz. As African-Americans moved from the agrarian South to the industrial North at the turn of the 20th century they brought the Delta blues with them. What evolved in Chicago became the most well-known version, electrified Chicago blues, the blues of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon, Bo Diddley, Buddy Guy and many others. Chicago blues eventually gave birth to rhythm 'n blues after World War II and, in the 1950s, rock 'n roll. Today you will get a firsthand lesson on Chicago blues history with an active group tour that includes architectural landmarks like the Chess Records building, cultural insights, noteworthy neighbourhoods, entrance into a former jazz club – even a blues harmonica lesson from a Chicago musician. For dinner, perhaps check out world-famous Kingston Mines where live blues bands play on two stages seven nights a week and the menu is thick with Southern favourites.



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## **Day 3: St Louis**

Drive to St Louis (approximately 6 hours) for your first look at the Mississippi River. The city's skyline is dominated by the 192-metre (630-foot) Gateway Arch, the tallest monument in the US. Clad in stainless steel, the Eero Saarinen-designed arch is the centrepiece of a memorial to Thomas Jefferson and celebrates the role of St Louis in the 19th century westward expansion of the US. After settling in you'll get a closer look at the arch and learn about the Mississippi River and St Louis history on an included scenic riverboat tour. You're then free to explore. The National Blues Museum is centrally located downtown and is a must-see. Dedicated to spreading the gospel of blues as the bedrock for virtually all American popular music of the last hundred years, the museum uses a variety of interactive technology to teach and entertain. Later perhaps visit the St Louis City Museum, a former shoe factory turned into a funhouse for the young and old made from an assortment of reclaimed objects found within the city's municipal borders. As you'll find throughout this trip, this city prides itself on local culinary delights. Try St Louis favourites like toasted ravioli or gooey butter cake as you make your way around town.

## **Day 4: Nashville**

Continue your way southward to Nashville (approximately 6 hours). Long the home of country music, Nashville has come a long way since its 'hillbilly music' capital days. Today you'll find a very modern city of vibrant neighbourhoods, culinary diversity and a lively university community, all steeped in southern hospitality. One particularly trendy part of town is the Gulch, where you'll have dinner. It's a short walk from there to The Station Inn, a world-famous mecca for fans of bluegrass music. Best get there early, as this cosy venue fills up quickly.

## **Day 5: Nashville**

No visit to 'Music City, USA' is complete without a stop at the Grand Ole Opry. Today you'll not only visit this country music institution but hear stories about the Opry and the generations of musicians who've played there on a backstage tour. Afterwards the Tennessee capital is yours to explore. Maybe take a stroll through history at the Country Music Hall of Fame, which contains the golden Cadillac that once belonged to Elvis, or take a tour of the majestic Ryman Auditorium. Centennial Park offers a full-scale replica of the ancient Parthenon among its pristine gardens. In the evening, the Wildhorse Saloon is a great spot to experience authentic southern food and live music. Or maybe you could catch a show at the legendary Bluebird Cafe or 'honky-tonk' between the city's live-music watering holes.

## **Day 6: Muscle Shoals**

Drive to a small Alabama town with a giant musical legacy. In the 1960s, tiny Muscle Shoals became synonymous with a sound that was hard to describe (equal parts country, gospel, R&B and soul) but was captured on records by Arthur Alexander, Percy Sledge, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and many others. A group of four studio musicians credited with creating the 'Muscle Shoals sound' (affectionately referred to as the 'Swampers') opened a studio in a former casket factory in town, and here artists like the Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, Bob Dylan and Bob Seger sought that distinctive groove. For years this studio was referred to by its street address – 3614 Jackson Highway – but today it's called Muscle Shoals Sound Studios. It's still a functioning studio, but after the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006 and a recent renovation restored its 1970s-era ambience, it's now a popular destination for music fans. A tour of the studio is included today. In the afternoon, perhaps visit Ivy Green, the simple, white clapboard home where Helen Keller was born in 1880. For early dinner, you might like to choose the unique restaurant that refers to itself as a 'watering hole under the rock', the Rattlesnake Saloon.



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## Day 7: Memphis

Head back to where the Mississippi River forms the western edge of Tennessee and a city many call the music capital of the world. Memphis is where rock and roll was born in Sun Studios and soul music went worldwide via Stax Records. Where Elvis Presley turned a Civil War-era mansion into the second most-visited private home in the US (after the White House). Where a blues guitarist named Riley Ben King gained the nickname 'Beale Street Blues Boy' that eventually got shortened to B.B. After arriving in Memphis you will visit the Stax Museum of American Soul Music. The original studio where the likes of Otis Redding, the Staple Singers and Sam and Dave made history was torn down but the museum is a brilliant celebration of the Stax legacy. It includes a replica of Stax's original recording studio, dozens of outfits and guitars of the stars, even an outrageously detailed 1972 gold-trimmed Cadillac Eldorado that Isaac Hayes was given for the success of his music in the movie Shaft. While music is Memphis's main claim to fame, barbecued ribs are a close second, and for lunch you will visit The Rendezvous, a Memphis institution so beloved by Elvis he had their ribs flown to Las Vegas when the King of Rock and Roll needed a taste of home. Use the rest of your day (and night) to soak up the vibe of Beale Street, though be sure not to miss the 'march of the ducks' at your hotel at 5 pm.

## Day 8: Memphis

As Paul Simon once sang, you're going to Graceland. Along with the mansion he bought in 1957, the grounds include a museum stuffed with artefacts (Las Vegas jumpsuits, awards, gold records, cars, private planes) and his grave. The rest of the day is free. You may wish to visit Sun Studio, the 'birthplace of rock', where Sam Phillips first recorded future rock and roll legends like Elvis, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins. Memphis also has deep connections to the civil rights era, most poignantly represented by the National Civil Rights Museum at the former Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968.

## Day 9: Greenwood

You couldn't call this a blues trip without visiting the Mississippi Delta. Today you'll do so via Highway 61, the so-called Blues Highway. Your first stop will be in Clarksdale, where you'll visit the Delta Blues Museum and see the famous (infamous?) 'crossroads' at highways 61 and 49 where local legend says legendary 1930s bluesman Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil. After a quick lunch you'll head further south with a stop at the Grammy Museum in Cleveland, MS, newly opened and dedicated to showcasing the deep musical roots of Mississippi. You'll then visit nearby Dockery Farms, a former plantation that was once home to famed bluesman Charley Patton and that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006 for its role in the development of the Delta Blues. The gruesome lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955, and the blatant lack of justice delivered by an all-white jury to his killers, sparked a level of outrage that helped galvanize the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Also visit Money, the town where Till's abduction and murder took place, to learn more about the town's role in raising awareness throughout the US about Jim Crow-era laws in the deep South. Spend the night in Greenwood.

## Day 10: Natchez

As you continue down the Blues Highway you'll make a morning stop in Indianola, MS to visit a museum dedicated to perhaps the most famous bluesman of them all, B.B. King. Located in a restored brick cotton gin building in which he worked in the 1940s, the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Centre opened in 2008 and features exhibits about his life and the lives of other musicians of the delta region and the culture where the blues arose. King was buried in the museum after his death in 2015 at the age of 89. You'll then follow the Mississippi to Natchez, MS, and your night's stay at an historic antebellum home and National Historic Landmark. If time permits, you may stop at Vicksburg – a key Civil War site – along the way. Spend the evening touring the antebellum homes of Natchez.



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## **Day 11: New Orleans**

Before leaving town you'll take a tour of Longwood, the largest octagonal house in the USA and a symbol of pre-Civil War Southern opulence before the demise of the cotton barons. Designed in 1859 for a cotton planter named Dr. Haller Nutt, work was halted two years later when the Civil War began and went unfinished after Nutt died of pneumonia in 1864. Nonetheless, 'Nutt's Folly' was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1971 and is a pride of Natchez. You'll continue down along the Mississippi into Louisiana for a lunchtime visit to Angola Museum, the only prison museum in the country operated within an active prison. Opened in 1997 in a former bank across from Louisville State Penitentiary, the museum is the brainchild of a former Angola warden who recognized the importance of documenting the history of Louisiana's prisons in order to not repeat the horrors of the past. From here you will continue south to New Orleans (approximately 4 hours). The Big Easy's eclectic mix of European, Creole and Cajun culture manifests itself in the city's architecture, cuisine and music scene. Take in the gaudy sights and sounds of Bourbon Street, relax in the Garden District and absorb the ambience of the French Quarter. In the evening, perhaps check out a jazz show and dance the night away in the bars along Frenchman Street.

## **Day 12: New Orleans**

Start your morning with a bagful of fresh beignets roll before taking a 'stroll with a local' tour of the French Quarter that includes the iconic Café du Monde, French Market, Jackson Square and St. Louis Cathedral. Spend a free afternoon exploring the history, homes and cemeteries of the Garden District. Stop into the Contemporary Arts Centre or Ogden Museum of Southern Art as you wander through the city's Warehouse District, alive with celebrations of the arts. The business district's National WWII Museum is a must for history buffs. At nightfall follow the sound of live blues and smell of Cajun spices. You won't be steered wrong.

## **Day 13: New Orleans**

Enjoy a free day to discover why New Orleans music legend Dr John described his city as a place where 'You can't separate nothing from nothing. Everything mingles each into the other... until nothing is purely itself but becomes part of one funky gumbo.' Celebrate the end of your trip with a dinner and jazz cruise aboard the historic Steamboat Natchez. Launched in 1975, the Natchez carries on the tradition of Mississippi River steamboats dating back to the early 19th century. Captain's orders are barked through an old-time hand-held megaphone. A calliope trills a melody into the air while a 25-ton white oak wheel churns the waters of the Mississippi. Stroll the decks of the great boat while a live jazz band plays and you float past breathtaking views of New Orleans.

## **Day 14: New Orleans**

Your trip ends this morning. There are no more activities planned and you're free to leave your accommodation at any time.

## **For enquiries and bookings contact**

**Travellers Place 8 Main Street Upwey**

**Phone: 0397541655**

**Email: [enquiries@travellersplace.com.au](mailto:enquiries@travellersplace.com.au)**

**Priced from \$7500.00 per person. (Currently based on 2018 prices)**

**Land only, Airfares not included, prices are dependent upon availability at the time of booking.**