

escapade

Italy
Palermo lives up to popular imagination **E6**



The Pink Cadillac at the Presley Motors display. PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Yummy fried green tomatoes at EP's Bar and Grill. PHOTO: TIFFANY LEWIS/KINGS COUNTY RECORD



Guest House at Graceland's free hotel shuttle. PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Downtown Oxford, Mississippi. PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

MEMPHIS TO MISSISSIPPI

TIFFANY THORNTON
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

There is music in the air as soon as you touchdown in Memphis, Tennessee. It's not surprising, since this soulful city is the birthplace of Rock & Roll and Blues. The city's music history is legendary: B.B. King belted out the blues; Jerry Lee Lewis sang his tunes and Johnny Cash crooned. Yet perhaps the name most synonymous with Memphis is Elvis Presley. It's where the King recorded his first record, *That's Alright*, in 1954 at Sun Studio, and where his legacy lives on at Graceland.

Check in at the newly opened Guest House at Graceland. This 450-room hotel is truly a tasteful tribute to Elvis. The hotel houses its own private theatre where

you can sit back and watch one of Elvis' movies on the big screen almost every day. On the ceiling of the hotel lobby you can't help but notice a rather intricate glass pattern designed to reflect one of Elvis' crystal-covered capes that he would wear while performing on stage. The hotel even has a replica staircase just like the one at Graceland with its impressive dangling chandelier.

Grab a taste of fried green tomatoes (a true Southern favourite) at EP's Bar & Grill located in the hotel, then get on the hotel's free shuttle to Graceland.

Elvis was just 22 when he bought Graceland, a 14 acre farm, which is now filled with bittersweet memories. It was here that Elvis found respite from fame, and where he could hang out with family and

friends, ride his horses and record music. Graceland is a special place, and you can feel it from the time you walk up the steps of the home with its white-pillared entrance. Guests are given a tablet as part of the self-guided tour – actor John Stamos narrates along the way – sharing some little known facts about the King's life.

Each room is filled with a piece of Elvis. The "Jungle Room" is where he recorded several songs. It has a Tiki-vibe, with shag carpets, a terracotta hued waterfall, and a small Polynesian inspired bar. It reminded Elvis of Hawaii where he loved to travel. There is so much to take in at Graceland, so allow yourself a whole day and don't forget to board one of his

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Author William Faulkner's home Rowan Oak.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The theatre at Guest House at Graceland shows Elvis movies. PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Southern-style cooking awaits at Big Bad breakfast.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Downtown Dartmouth one of country's hippest neighbourhoods

BRETT BUNDALE
THE CANADIAN PRESS

DARTMOUTH, N.S. • It's 3:30 on a Friday afternoon after a busy lunch rush that filled a 60-seat restaurant in downtown Dartmouth.

Standing behind The Canteen's bar, chef and co-owner Renee Lavallee fills her glass with something from a local selection of craft beer and cider on tap.

"There were a few sleepless nights after we decided to open a restaurant here," says Canteen co-owner Doug Townsend, Lavallee's husband, as he sidles up to the bar.

"The reality is this block of Portland Street for years was sort of a no-go zone at certain times of day for the average person."

Not anymore. The Canteen is among an explosion of retail and restaurant start-ups that have transformed downtown Dartmouth into something akin to Halifax's Brooklyn: some of the hottest eateries, trendiest shops and coolest hipster hangouts emerge on the gritty streets across the harbour from downtown Halifax.

Dartmouth has become a food lovers' craft-beer-drinking paradise, with the Portland Street Creperie, Yeah Yeahs Pizza, and Battery Park Beer Bar & Eatery.

Local rock star Joel Plaskett opened the New Scotland Yard Emporium two years ago, a barbershop, record shop and cafe attached to his recording studio.

And King's Wharf, a large retail and residential development at the former Dartmouth marine slips, is home to Il Trullo Ristorante and a new cocktail and wine bar The Watch that Ends



A cross-harbour ferry arrives in Dartmouth, N.S. Its nickname is the darkside, and for years it has stood in the shadows of Nova Scotia's capital. PHOTO: ANDREW VAUGHAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

the Night and an influx of residents in search of upscale condos overlooking the harbour.

Now, passengers on cruise ships docked in Halifax dole out \$2.50 to take the pleasant, 12-minute ferry ride to Dartmouth.

"You can use the big G-word. It's gratifying," says Arthur Gaudreau, who writes about the city's retail and restaurant scene. "In the last few years, one

of the things I've really noticed is a lot of young families are moving to downtown Dartmouth."

For years, Dartmouth stood in the shadows of Nova Scotia's capital, its nickname the darkside, its reputation affectionately summed up as a little "rough around the edges" by locals.

"We still have a little bit of that 'Oh don't go down that dark alley' atmosphere but now we also have good food

and new restaurants and shops," says Katy Jean, a local resident and poet who writes whimsical haiku about Dartmouth.

"About a decade ago, taking a bus down Portland Street to catch the ferry to Halifax was a ghost town. I can't recall anything other than tattoo and pizza shops," she says. "Now you can get anything from cordon bleu fine dining to gourmet coffee."

Local councillor Sam Austin calls it a resurgence.

"In the past, people came to downtown Dartmouth to shop," he says. "This is where your local hardware store and your department store was. This is where you would go to buy stuff."

But the once bustling main streets were hallowed out by post-war suburbanization, the automobile and a bridge to Halifax. Malls and industrial parks thrived as local shops shuttered, with a small smattering of pawn shops, tattoo parlours and bars surviving.

The renaissance was kick-started eight years ago with the opening of Two If By Sea, a fiercely proud Dartmouth cafe on Ochterloney Street that serves locally roasted coffee and croissants big enough to sink a small ship.

"TIBS was a catalyst," says Gaudreau, a self-proclaimed "Dartmouth boy," referring to the cafe by its acronym. "Then a few years ago, there was a quick little bang of awesomeness."

A number of independently owned businesses cropped up in the downtown area, including Bodega Boutique, Kept gift shop, the Dart Gallery, Picnic, Room 152 Clothing Boutique, The Bike Pedaler, KoKo Mod Floral Design, and Hazelnut & Rose Nursing and Maternity Boutique.

For those in search of an authentic flavour, the mainstays of Portland Street remain, such as Whiskey's Lounge, Revana Pizza, Staggers Pub and Grub and Best Kept Secret Bar and Entertainment.

"When I was a teenager, Portland Street was known for strip clubs and bars," says Neil Cook, owner of the Portland Street Creperie. "There is still a little bit of an edge but it's a good thing."



Faulkner's typewriter still sits in his bedroom.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Inside the Jungle Room. PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Step back in time on the Graceland tour.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Hop on a classic cruiser at the Graduate Hotel.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The famous gold lamé suit.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



The Lisa Marie, one of the King's private planes.

PHOTO: TIFFANY THORNTON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Memphis to Mississippi: Seeing the South

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private planes parked on site for a peek into another part of Presley's life.

Recently opened, Elvis Presley's Memphis is a huge entertainment complex over 200,000 sq.-ft. in size. It is an immersive experience, taking you behind the scenes into Elvis' world through different museums, like the Presley Motor Automobile Museum, which showcases his many cars including the famous Pink Cadillac. You can even gawk over his sparkling, show-stopping jumpsuits; all on display at The Entertainer Career Museum, while his songs play in the background. There is no doubt that the King's music left an indelible impression on millions, and it is never more evident than when you step into a room filled from floor to ceiling with gold and platinum records and memorabilia.

Just a short drive away from Memphis and you are in Mississippi, home to good ole Southern charm. Make your way to

the town of Oxford and hunker down for a few days. The lovely town square is the perfect place to stroll around or hop on a double decker bus for a historic tour.

"Where the school of life meets your favourite place to stay" is the idea behind The Graduate boutique hotels. These quirky hotels are located in university towns, and Oxford happens to be home to "Ole Miss." From the time you check in, you are given a room key that actually has a former student's ID and photo on it! After check-in, head up to The Coop Hotel Bar, with its terrace lounge, vintage chic vibe, and fantastic views. It's a great place to unwind with a cocktail.

The Graduate Hotel provides classic navy cruiser bikes and helmets free to its guests, and it's only a five-minute bike ride away from the best spot for a true Southern-style breakfast. James Beard Award-Winning Chef John Currence owns the aptly named Big Bad Breakfast. This bustling spot is the place to come for a BBQ skillet with eggs, bacon, sausage,

ham and a side of grits. Be sure to add a brûléed grapefruit to your order.

One could spend hours perusing all the literary greatness at Oxford's Square Books, which opened in the seventies and has three bookshops around the town square. If you happen to be in Oxford on a Thursday, Square books opens up and hosts the Thacker Mountain Radio Hour, a live broadcast show featuring well known musical artists and authors.

Mississippi has longed inspired wordsmiths to linger. One such wordsmith was Nobel Prize Winner William Faulkner, who spent most of his life in Oxford, eventually buying the then dilapidated Rowan Oak, which is surrounded by 29 acres of woods. Faulkner restored the lovely Greek Rival home where he spent several years penning his novels. Visitors can stroll the grounds with its towering cedar trees, and look into Faulkner's bedroom to see his original typewriter, still tucked away on a desk by the window light.

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