Dallas

A major gateway to the US for Australian travellers, Dallas is a worthy destination in itself, with a blossoming cultural district, striking architecture, innovative restaurants and open spaces to explore.

Words Suzanne Marta
Photography Allison V Smith

Forget big hair and JR Ewing from the iconic 1980s TV show Dallas. Today’s Dallas embraces innovation, celebrates emerging food trends and offers world-class shopping and incredible arts. History buffs can lose themselves in the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, Lee Harvey Oswald’s perch as he shot US President John F Kennedy on November 22, 1963. But there’s much more to explore in this vibrant city, which has moved beyond oilman stereotypes with a host of cultural opportunities you can walk to in the country’s ninth-largest city.

6:30
Start your day on the 5.6km Katy Trail (katytraildallas.org), built on the former Missouri-Kansas-Texas rail line. Victory Park marks the trail’s southern end and as it cuts through Uptown and the Park Cities neighborhoods, ending near Southern Methodist University, home of the recently opened George W Bush Presidential Library and Museum (georgebushlibrary.smu.edu). Keep right and look before turning on this busy multi-use trail. Joggers will appreciate the parallel soft-surface lane, which runs most of the trail. The shady path offers access to urban parks and glimpses into private patios. Plazas at West Village and Dedo’s Place, along with the northern end of the trail, offer access to the McKinney Avenue Trolley (mata.org) or the DART (dart.org) light rail if you’d rather hitch a ride back downtown.

8:30
Breakfast tacos are the Dallas way, with temptation throughout the city. Dip into East Dallas for Good 2 Go Taco (1146 Peavy Road, good2gotaco.com, closed Monday). Design your own by choosing from classics such as eggs and potatoes and Good 2 Go’s homemade chorizo, ground pork with a spicy dose of heat. Or try the massive Soco taco, a mash-up of classic southern comfort food. Get your java fix across the room at Cultivar (cultivarcoffee.com), closed Monday, a local, small-batch roaster serving beautifully smooth espresso. Sweet tooth? Head out to nearby Hypnotic Donuts (9007 Garland Road, hypnoticdonuts.com) and for the bright heat of the Triple 6, a vanilla cake doughnut with habanero–passionfruit glaze.

9:30
Stroll through the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden (1221 Garland Road, dallasarboretum.org), the Southwest’s largest display garden. The 27ha garden is set on White Rock Lake and offers spectacular views of downtown. Meander through the winding paths, taking in the manicured floral displays. Stop for some reflection in the sedated nudes and ponds. Beautiful sculptures throughout offer an intriguing interplay between art and nature. Energy abounds in the recently opened Rory Meyers Children’s Adventure Garden, which has 3ha of interactive earth sciences exhibits.

From left: Dallas skyline; Dallas Arboretum (9.30am) ; Cultivar (8.30am)
12:00
Texas barbecue is a dry-rub style of slow-roasted beef that, unlike barbecue in many other US states, doesn’t hide behind sauce. Pecan Lodge (2702 Main Street, pecanolodge.com, closed Monday) in Deep Ellum, tops many lists for its flavouresome melt-in-the-mouth brisket. Rolls of paper towels at each table signal this won’t be a dainty affair. If you’re a party of four, skip the line and go to the “express” counter to order the “trough” — a sampler with sausage, brisket, pulled pork, pork and beef ribs.

13:00
For retail therapy with edge, Bishop Arts District has more than 60 vintage stores, galleries, boutiques and restaurants south-east of downtown. Pick up a chocolate “salami” (chocolate and marzipan peppered with figs and dates) for your next cheese plate from Dude, Sweet Chocolate (408 West Eighth Avenue, dudesweetchocolate.com). Find locally crafted jewellery and fine art pieces at Artusia’s Collective (40 North Bishop Avenue, artusia.com, closed Monday-Tuesday). Need a pick-me-up? Grab a drink and settle into a cozy couch at The Wild Detectives (314 West Eighth Avenue, thewilddetectives.com), a combination coffee shop, bar and independent bookstore.

15:00
You could easily spend a week exploring the museums and cultural programming in Dallas. The Sixth Floor Museum (411 Elm Street, jfk.org) in the West End would take care of much of the afternoon. A less time-consuming option is the seventh floor, home to the museum’s temporary exhibits. Peek out the window directly above notorious Lee Harvey Oswald’s sniper perch (Oswald’s actual sixth-floor vantage point is restricted). It is just a short walk to the Perot Museum of Nature and Science (2201 North Field Street, perotmuseum.org) to continue a tour throughout the Dallas Arts District (dallasartdistrict.org). Spanning 20 walkable square blocks, the district has something for everyone, from the rare, complete, alamosaurus skeleton at the Perot Museum to the mind-bending modern sculpture at the Nasher Sculpture Center (2001 Flora Street, nashersculpturecenter.org, closed Monday). Download the free detailed map and audio tour (publicartwalkdallas.org) to learn more about public art work and the area, home to the largest concentration of buildings designed by winners of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. Escape any inclement weather by diving into the Dallas Museum of Art (1717 North Harwood Street, dma.org, closed Monday) and Crow Collection of Asian Art (2010 Flora Street, crowcollection.org, closed Monday), both of which have free admission.

18:00
End an arts district walk at Klyde Warren Park (2012 Woodall Rodgers Freeway, klydewarrenpark.org), a 2ha urban park sitting atop Woodall Rogers Freeway and connecting Uptown and Downtown neighborhoods. There’s something happening at Klyde Warren Park every day, from fitness classes and children’s activities to live music. Get a drink from nearby Savor gastropub (savor-relish.com), relax and settle in to watch Dallas go by.
Let the beer flow at LUCK (Sep, 8pm), Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge (above, 8pm)

20:00
Support emerging chefs and dining concepts at Trinity Groves (425 Bedford Street, trinitygroves.com). The restaurant incubator, integrated into the arts, retail and entertainment centre west of Downtown, showcases Dallas’ deep entrepreneurial drive. Tenants who have passed a rigorous business review to win start-up funding must reach key revenue targets to secure a permanent spot. One belongs to Kitchen LTD (kitchentld.com), a "limited-time-only" restaurant that reinvents itself every few months, featuring a fast-rising local chef voted in by the community. Dine at LUCK (Local Urban Craft Kitchen, luckdallas.com) for contemporary American fare with Texas-sourced ingredients and an impressive local craft beer list. Reservations are crucial on weekends.

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23:00
Slip into the Rattlesnake Bar for a nightcap and a glimpse of well-heeled Dallas. The bar, in the Ritz-Carlton Dallas in the Uptown neighborhood, is part of Fearing’s (1212 McKinney Avenue, fearingrestaurant.com), helmed by celeb-chef Dean Fearing. The outdoor Live Oak Bar is also great when weather permits. Fearing’s margarita is a classy take on a Texas favourite, but may be more suited to warm weather. In winter, take a seat at the honey onyx bar and check out one of the “barrel-aged” cocktails made onsite, a process that allows the flavours to mellow. Sip from the slow burn of the Ancho Negroni, a classic cocktail with a Texas twist.

ONE PERFECT DAY

THE TEXAS FOOD BIBLE
Dean Fearing
(Grand Central Publishing)
A chronicle of Texan culinary heritage and its evolution into contemporary, regional cuisine, with simple classics and innovative recipes pioneered by Fearing and other marquee Texas chefs such as Robert del Grande and Stephen Pyles.

ASSASSINATION AND COMMEMORATION
Stephen Fagin
(University of Oklahoma Press)
An associate curator and oral historian at The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, Fagin looks at the political and social climate of mid-century Dallas and following decades – and efforts to preserve the museum from destruction.

BILLY LYNN’S LONG HALFTIME WALK
Ben Fountain (Canongate)
This award-winning novel follows the surviving soldiers of “Bravo” squad as they visit a Dallas Cowboys game on a tour to rally support for the Iraq War.

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