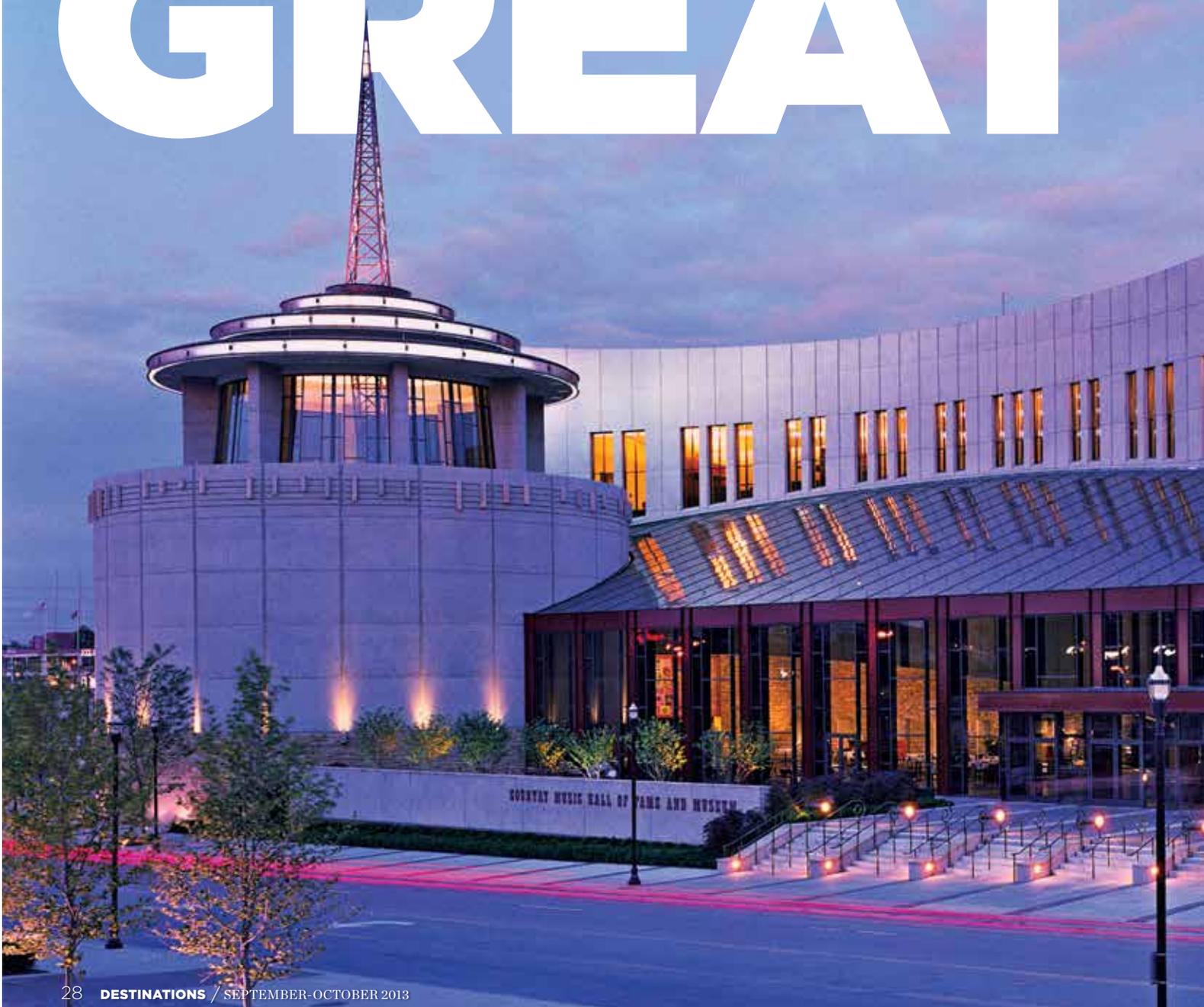


NASHVILLE SOUNDS GREAT



YOUR FIRST
SNEAK PEEK AT
NASHVILLE
HOST OF
MARKETPLACE
2014

New Retro: The Country Music Hall of Fame is designed to look like a 1950s Cadillac fin.

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

WHETHER CLIENTS ARE STUDENTS OR SENIORS, THE NEW MUSIC CITY SINGS THEIR TUNE.

TIM HURSELEY



For decades Tennessee's capital has had star power. People made pilgrimages to Nashville to see their favorite radio stars perform or to become

stars themselves. Nowadays music isn't the only reason fans are flocking to Nashville. Thanks to ABC's nighttime soap opera *Nashville* (which is about to begin its second season), tourists are eager to visit the places and people who are shown on the Wednesday night television hit.

Many critics have called the city of Nashville another character in the TV drama, which spotlights life in the music business in Music City. And ABA members say that visitors of all ages want to meet that character. In fact, ABA member Gray Line has even created a TV-show-themed tour that

visits the homes of the characters and other locations that are frequently featured in the program.

"Anywhere that is shown on the TV show, people want to see," says Shannen Hall, office manager of ABA member Sharin' Nashville, which has offered tours of Music City for nine years.

One of the vantage points most often shown on TV is the Cumberland River downtown, including Riverfront Park, Cumberland Park, and LP Field. Using



"PEOPLE ARE BLOWN AWAY BY EVERYTHING THIS CITY HAS GOING ON."

Riverfront Park as a starting point is often a dramatic way to explore downtown. Other must-see-TV spots include The Bluebird Cafe, East Nashville's The 5 Spot, and the Ryman Auditorium.

David Kinney, president of Nashville-based All in One Destinations, agrees that the TV show is part of what is making Music City an "It" city right now, leading to an upswing in business. Says this ABA member, "We did not anticipate a whole lot of change to our tours or interest in our tours, but on Jan. 1, 2013, the phone started ringing off the hook."

DONN JONES/COURTESY OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME (GUITAR); COURTESY OF RYMAN AUDITORIUM

The **Ryman Auditorium** is *Pollstar Magazine's* theater of the year for the third straight year.





Music City Center, new in 2013, welcomes the ABA in January 2014.

Indeed, Nashville is having a moment. Not only does the ABC TV show drive interest, but accolades about everything from its dining options to outdoor recreation has helped this city shed its boots and hats in favor of more cosmopolitan garb. As the city has changed, so too has the makeup of its visitors and the sites they want to see, says Laurel Bennett, director of tourism sales for the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation.

“Nashville has always had a niche, but it is changing in our favor,” Bennett says. “Younger visitors see it as a really great cultural destination for great music and as a culinary destination. People are blown away by everything this city has going on.”

One of the new things going on is Music City Center (201 5th Ave. S., www.nashvillemusiccitycenter.com). This 1.2-million-square-foot eco-friendly conference space will house Marketplace 2014 from January 11 to 15, as well as a number of other big-budget events all year long. While designed for visitors, locals love the new center, too. It boasts a green roof, reuses wastewater to conserve resources, and offers plentiful parking to accommodate the hoards who want to see Nashville’s downtown.

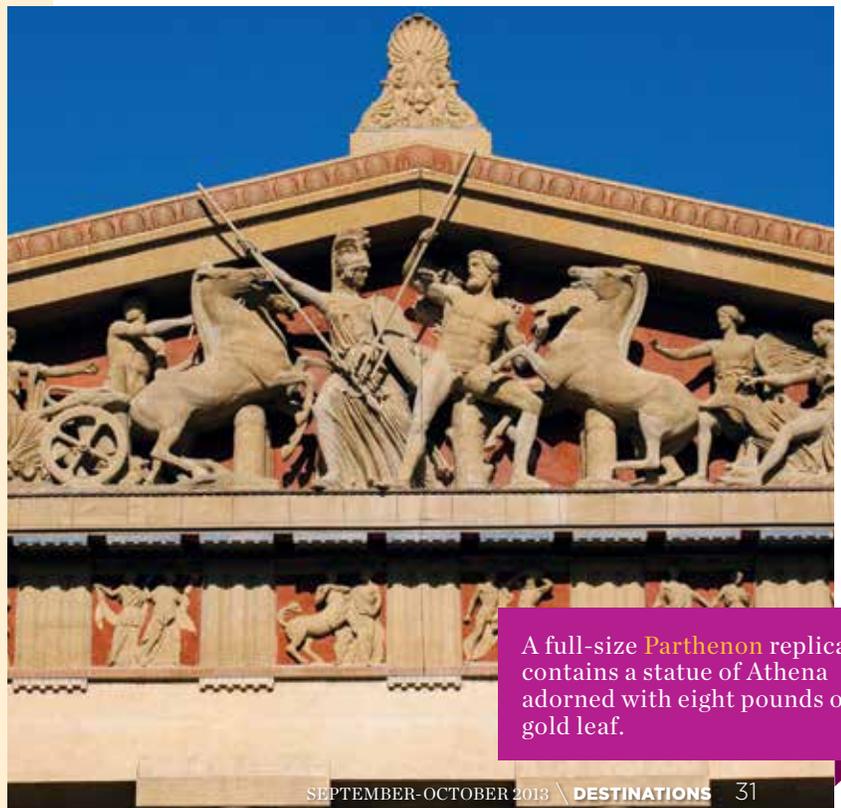
Parking isn’t a problem for bus tours, either, say operators whose drivers navigate the streets on a regular basis. “Nashville is very motorcoach friendly,” says Chris Massie, business and tour development manager of the Newton, N.C.–based Christian Tours. This ABA member specializes in tours for seniors and says

Tour Pro Tips

Tired of the same Music City destinations? Try these.

Since 2004 ABA member Sharin’ Nashville has been doing just that: showing Music City (and Memphis) to seniors, students, and everyone in between. One of the great things about Nashville, says office manager Shannen Hall, is that Tennessee’s capital has something for everyone, whether they want a Civil War history-themed tour or an interactive scavenger hunt. Here are her top-three picks:

- ➔ **The Parthenon** (2500 West End Ave., www.nashville.gov/Parks-and-Recreation/Parthenon) is at least a drive-by on all Sharin’ Nashville tours. The full-size replica of the Greek monument is now a landmark in a city that’s also known as “The Athens of the South.” Hall says that viewing its museum and gold statue of Athena are an easy, affordable add-on for groups who want to do more than drive by. The Parthenon is housed in Centennial Park, Nashville’s best urban park, and worthy of a drive or stroll on its own.
- ➔ **Fontanel Mansion** (4225 Whites Creek Pike, www.fontanelmansion.com) is the former home of legendary performer Barbara Mandrell. Her mansion is said to be the largest log cabin residence in the world. In addition to tours of the country queen’s mansion, the complex includes hiking trails, a distillery, a restaurant, and an outdoor music venue. There’s ample parking for buses.
- ➔ **Adventureworks** (1300 Narrows Road, Kingston Springs, adventureworks.com) appeals to spring breakers and students on summer tours with its zip-lining and other high-adrenaline activities.



A full-size Parthenon replica contains a statue of Athena adorned with eight pounds of gold leaf.

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Opryland Hotel reopened in 2010 after a \$270 million renovation.

Opryland 2014 and Beyond

“Opryland” is one of those words that is instantly associated with Nashville. In 2012 alone the Gaylord Opryland Resort (2800 Opryland Drive, www.gaylordopryland.com) on the city’s east side, worked with more than 600 motorcoaches. The resort has a dedicated bus tour team, says Senior Vice President and General Manager Pete Weien, which helps groups with logistics like parking and check-in and advises them on how to take advantage of the resort’s offerings, from the Grand Old Opry to the Opry Mills mall to golf and horticultural tours.

Some have wondered what will happen to the Opryland complex, which was once the city’s conference epicenter, now that the mammoth Music City Center has opened downtown (see page 31). But Weien says Gaylord Opryland will still be a powerhouse for bus tours, and not just because of the mega-draw of the Opry. “Our focus is to have everything all self-contained under one roof. The downtown convention center is more traditional, so we see the two centers as complementary rather than competitive,” he says.

“We are constantly evolving,” he says of the 2,882-room resort, which recently invested more than \$250,000 in its golf course and will celebrate the 30th anniversary of its *Country Christmas* extravaganza this year. Other popular attractions for tour buses at the Gaylord complex include the launch spot for the General Jackson Showboat cruises and shopping at the Opry Mills mall.

Gaylord’s transition to management by Marriott International means the property is now part of a larger loyalty program, a perk for tour bus operators.

“This is a hotel that does not dabble in this [tour bus] business,” he says.

Music City makes parking in downtown locations easy, permitting bagging meters. (This is when an operator pays a fee to have city-issued bags put over meters so a bus can more easily park.) The Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation has a welcome program for motorcoach groups that aids them in getting acclimated, Bennett says. For more on this, contact the CVC at (615) 259-4730.

New Tours for the New Nashville

Nashville once was a place where buses would drive by stars’ homes as tourists oohed and aahed. But as stars have moved to the suburbs, those tours have waned.

“The city of (suburban) Franklin does not want big buses on residential streets,” explains Ashley Martin, vice president of Nashville-based Wise Coaches, Inc.

As celebrity home tours have fallen off, others have taken their place. Franklin, in Williamson County, is home to many well-maintained Civil War sites. Because its power lines are underground, Franklin’s quaint downtown is visually appealing, adds ABA-member Kinney, making it a favorite of shoppers as well as history buffs.

Franklin isn’t the only suburban destination on bus tour must lists. The Hermitage (4580 Rachels Lane, www.thehermitage.com) was once President Andrew Jackson’s home. Today it offers a nuanced look at a complicated period in American history, with former slave quarters, a remarkable garden, and a tour of the renovated home.

Of course, visitors need to eat too. Music City chefs have made top lists

COURTESY OF TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT



Today the Grand Ole Opry reaches fans via TV, AM radio, phone apps, and SiriusXM.



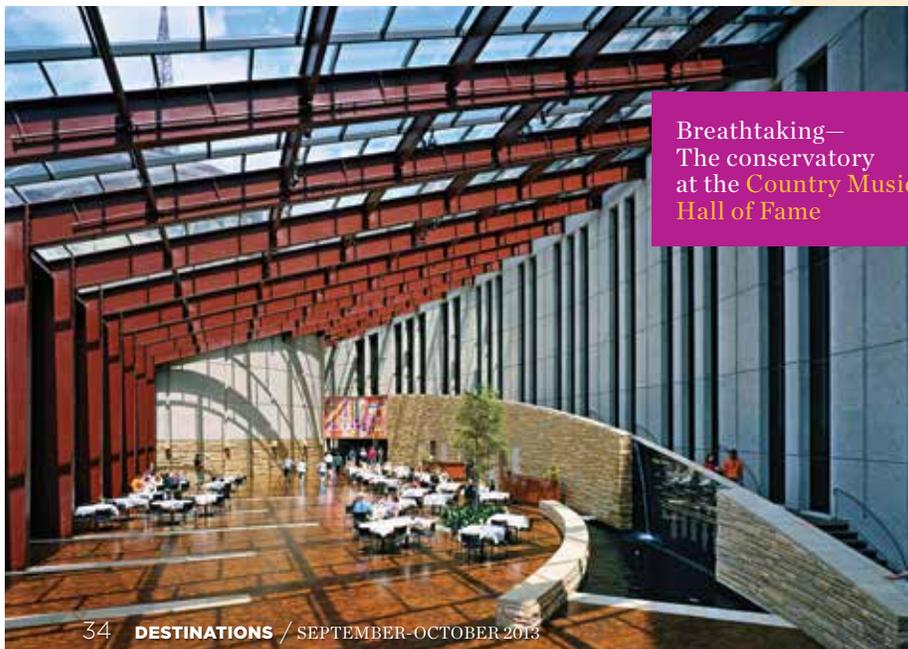
Go Downtown

Your group can easily spend a full day in Nashville's center city.

Nashville's gems aren't nestled in one neighborhood. There are doors worth opening in the 12 South area, near Vanderbilt, in East Nashville, Belle Meade, suburban Franklin, and beyond. But downtown—with lower Broadway (aka Lower Broad), honky-tonks, the Ryman Auditorium, and other attractions—is typically the first stop for visitors wanting to see what makes Music City sing.

There are plenty of tried-and-true stops downtown. In addition to the Ryman, all visitors should take in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, which holds traveling exhibitions (919 Broadway, fristcenter.org) and the historic Fort Nashborough (170 1st Ave. N.). Nashville's current renaissance also means there are a few new attractions for tours when the bus is parked downtown:

- ➔ Built by a stubborn fan with a great memorabilia collection and a dream, the **Johnny Cash Museum** (119 3rd Ave., S., www.johnnycashmuseum.com) is downtown's homage to the Man in Black. Music fans of all ages will enjoy the interactive exhibits that let them experience the life and sound of one of the industry's greats.
- ➔ Retro and rockabilly-inspired clothing is the signature of the **Bettie Page** brand (400 Broadway, www.bettiepageclothing.com). This chain of boutiques opened its latest shop on Broadway at the former headquarters of Gruhn Guitar during the summer of 2013.
- ➔ Currently under construction at the Nashville Municipal Auditorium, **The Musicians Hall of Fame & Museum** (417 4th Ave. N., www.musicianshalloffame.com) honors the musicians who played on the great tracks of the ages, whether or not they were the names on the marquees. The 60,000-square-foot museum reopens in late 2013.
- ➔ Although the **Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum** (222 5th Ave. S., www.countrymusichalloffame.org) isn't new (it first opened in 1967 and moved to its current location in 2001), its expansion (adjacent to the new Music City Center), means more of the institution's impressive collection will be on display.



Breathtaking—The conservatory at the Country Music Hall of Fame

TIM HURSFLEY

PLAN AHEAD FOR FUN

Work hard at the ABA's Marketplace in Nashville, Jan. 11-15, 2014. Leave time for these events:

SATURDAY, JAN. 11

9 a.m.–5 p.m. Sightseeing. 12 free tours

Sponsored by Nashville CVC

6:30–8:30 p.m. Marketplace Gives Back Fundraiser

Sponsored by Nashville CVC

SUNDAY, JAN. 12

9:30–11 a.m. Opening Ceremony—For Love & Music

Sponsored by Nashville CVC

7–10 p.m. Nowville

Sponsored by Nashville CVC and the Country Music Hall of Fame

MONDAY, JAN. 13

7–10 p.m. A Night at the Grand Ole Opry

Sponsored by Gaylord Opryland & the Grand Ole Opry

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 15

7–10 p.m. St. Louis Party!

Sponsored by St. Louis CVC

across the country, thanks to their innovative kitchens. Among the hot restaurants are Husk Nashville (37 Rutledge St., www.husknashville.com) and The Catbird Seat (1711 Division St., thecatbirdseatrestaurant.com). Classic Southern spots including Loveless Cafe (8400 Tennessee Highway 100, www.lovelesscafe.com) and Puckett's Grocery (500 Church St., www.puckettsgrocery.com). Locals know the biscuits, grits, and chicken will be a lure, both for tour customers and operators.

“We hope [operators who visit for Marketplace] will find different things that will entice their customers into coming here,” Kinney says. “This is an opportunity for Nashville to showcase itself.” ■

Nashville-based Margaret Littman is the author of the *Nashville Essential Guide* app and the guidebooks *Moon Tennessee* and *Moon Nashville*.