

Nashville Majesty: The Gaylord Opryland Hotel

Written by Christine Whitton

Whether you're more Taylor Swift or Elvis Presley, you undoubtedly have an appreciation for Nashville—where the music still plays on after last year's devastating flood.



In May 2010, Nashville, Tenn., was devastated by the worst flood to hit the state in more than 100 years. The area was pummeled by 14 days of torrential rain that turned creeks into raging rivers. The Cumberland River, which winds through Nashville, rose 30 feet, overpowering its banks and levees and sending thousands of gallons of water inland. The result: homes devastated, national landmarks destroyed and a community in ruins. Within a week, the water subsided and a community joined forces to rebuild Music City.

The Gaylord Opryland Hotel, which took in 10 feet of water and cost a staggering \$200 million dollars in renovations, recently reopened to much fanfare. The iconic Southern Colonial-style hotel is the largest non-gaming facility in the continental United States and consists of three main citylike atriums—the Delta, the Cascades and the Garden—and 2,881 guest rooms. Each room, overlooking an atrium, offers the perfect spot to people-watch (guests might even spot a famous face or two).

After settling in, guests explore the hotel's many indoor activities which include several shopping venues, a Vegas-like nightclub and various eating establishments. The hotel's extensive array of food options includes Old Hickory Steakhouse Restaurant, a fine dining award-winning steakhouse; Cascades America Café, a casual venue amid colorful koi and dancing fountains; Jack Daniel's Saloon, serving the state's infamous "Tennessee Sippin' Whiskey" and burgers; and Solario, which plates up bold Mexican cuisine, are just a few.

Beyond the doors of the hotel, the family fun keeps rolling with events and entertainment like The Grand Ole Opry, The General Jackson Showboat, the Ryman Auditorium, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and Studio B. Offering two cruises, midday and evening, The General Jackson Showboat is a four-story, 300-foot paddlewheel riverboat that floats along the Cumberland River. Live country music shows are performed on the boat's Victorian stage while a gourmet dinner is served.

A familiar name among music fans, The Grand Ole Opry puts country artists on the map. The Opry, whose acts performed at the Ryman Auditorium through January due to the floods, welcomes current and classic country acts like Dierks Bentley, Vince Gill, Martina McBride and Brad Paisley to the stage. For those not lucky enough to be front and center, they are welcome to tune into the Opry from home on TV (Great American Country), via 650 WSM, XM Satellite Radio or on www.opry.com.

Known as "The Mother Church of Country Music," the Ryman Auditorium has been home to country music for more than 100 years. A national landmark, legends like Patsy Cline, Elvis Presley and Van Morrison have all performed on this stage. Located steps from the Ryman Auditorium is the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, celebrating country music since its beginning with detailed exhibits that include pictures, outfits, videos, recorded music and awards. This educational institution is one of 750 nationwide museums (out of 8,000) accredited by the American Association of Museums. Music lovers should also check out Studio B. Once owned by RCA, now overseen by a private investor, Studio B. was made famous by Presley, who recorded more than 150 songs here.

For an up-close look at Nashville's current music scene, reserve one night to visit the city's well-known Bluebird Cafe—an intimate saloon where several singer/songwriters gather to perform in a circle. The two-hour performances will leave guests mesmerized and with a new respect for songwriting.

A Music City trip isn't quite complete without a tour of The Fontanel Mansion and Farm. The former home of country music star Barbara Mandrell, the 27,000-sq.-ft. home is the largest log cabin in the nation. Spanning 136 acres, the mansion includes six bedrooms, 13 bathrooms, five fireplaces, a helicopter pad, a theater and an indoor shooting range. Most recently, guests of the home have included Kid Rock, Big and Rich and Gretchen Wilson.

While Nashville is slowly rebuilding, those with star power who have made Music City what it is today have banded together to raise money through concerts and other fund-raising efforts. After all, the music lives on.

To Learn More:

The Bluebird Cafe

www.bluebirdcafe.com.

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

www.countrymusichalloffame.org.

The Fontanel Mansion and Farm

www.fontanelmansion.com.

The Gaylord Opryland Hotel

www.gaylordhotels.com/gaylord-opryland.

The General Jackson Showboat

www.generaljackson.com.

The Grand Ole Opry

www.opry.com.

The Ryman Auditorium

www.ryman.com.

Studio B

www.countrymusichalloffame.org.