

## HEAD TO HEAD

## AUSTIN, TEXAS



Population: 890,000



Nickname: Bat City

## NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA



Population: 380,000



Nickname: The Big Easy

## INHABITANTS

Musicians, hippies, self-confessed weirdos, musicians, non-smokers. Oh, and did we mention musicians? **8/10**

## WHAT TO SAY

"Whisky-infused bacon! Craft beer! Music! Cool."

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

"I can't stand live music. It sounds much better on a CD."

## INHABITANTS

It's a city with many festivals and celebrations, so there are a lot of party-goers. Plus some jazz players and French colonialists. **7/10**

## WHAT TO SAY

"I've sorted my Mardi Gras plans ten months early."

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

"Jazz? Meh. I prefer cheesy pop music myself."

## DO

If you're not in town for ACL or SXSW, catch live music at one of Austin's many dive bars. Aside from being the coolest city in the US right now, Austin's also known for its architecture – so check out the AIA Austin. **8/10**

## STAY

It's got to be a boutique hotel here. The Heywood Hotel ([heywoodhotel.com](http://heywoodhotel.com)) is a colourful homage to Austin's creative spirit, while the Hotel Saint Cecilia ([hotelsaintcecilia.com](http://hotelsaintcecilia.com)) is cosy and has a pool. **9/10**

## EAT &amp; DRINK

Franklin Barbecue does brisket like it's going out of fashion, while Qui is known for its esoteric dishes such as rabbit consommé. Drink the night away at cocktail den Midnight Cowboy or in Easy Tiger's beer garden. **8/10**

## DO

For cutting-edge jazz head to the French Quarter, and swing by The Old US Mint state museum to see Louis Armstrong's first horn. The City Park (bigger than NYC's Central Park) is a pretty place to relax after nailing the jazz. **7/10**

## STAY

Hotel New Orleans Downtown ([hotelneworleansdowntown.com](http://hotelneworleansdowntown.com)) has a rooftop pool with cabanas and a trendy lounge bar. Melrose Mansion ([frenchquarterhotelgroup.com](http://frenchquarterhotelgroup.com)) in the French Quarter knows Southern hospitality. **7/10**

## EAT &amp; DRINK

Bourbon Street is a great place for a bar crawl, and it's one of the only places you can drink on the street in the US. Try creole cuisine at Galatoire's, or head to the New Orleans institution the Commander's Palace. **8/10**

8/10

AND THE WINNER IS...  
Super-cool Austin just edges it

7/10

CATHY ADAMS IS...

## THE TOURIST

## HOSTELS VS HOTELS

One of the best things about my job is being able to stay at top-draw hotels, and then brag incessantly to my friends – or, at least I hope they're still my friends, given the dwindling number of Instagram likes – about how well-stocked the bar is or how superior the thread count of the sheets is. The other good thing about my job is that it's made me realise how great staying in hostels is – or at least how great it was before I could visit nice places with buffet breakfasts and free minibars for 'work'.

I've slept in mixed dorms, beach huts, rooms so tiny you can touch all four beds with just three limbs, usually while being peered at as you try to catch forty winks on a knobbed mattress.

I'll start with the good ones: the dreamy dorm in **Krakow**, Poland. There was an

*Krakow was the capital of Poland for centuries, until Warsaw stole the limelight*

underground bar that sold cherry vodka and banana juice cocktails, and a screening room where I could watch *Mr & Mrs Smith* over and over again. And there was a microwave, in which I cooked pesto pasta with a side of cheese for three days on the trot. Or the colourful, fun one in Valencia, where the showers were so clean I went back for seconds, and the owner helpfully handed over a bottle of aloe vera for my scorched skin.

Then there are the bad ones. Such as when I rocked up in Tel Aviv between Christmas and New Year along with the rest of the UK's church groups to find I'd booked my hotel for 27 November, not 27 December. The only place with any space at all – despite begging several hotels in the crap end of town to PLEASE let me pay triple price for a private room the size of my kitchen counter – was a dingy, salmon pink-walled townhouse where I got shoved on a camp bed in the corner of the kitchen, replete with the sound of guitar-strumming coming from outside. And I still had to pay triple price.

Or that one time in Moscow, where thanks to some anti-Putin demonstration the only affordable place was a bleak, communist box on a dodgy backstreet near a McDonald's. Said

*Benidorm's popularity shot up in 1953 when the mayor allowed bikinis to be worn on the beach.*

place was ruled by an old Russian matron who shouted every time we dared to pour a strong vodka and

lemonade (out of necessity) in the communal kitchen. And where the room was so small, with no windows or ventilation (aka 'The Box'), one friend woke up, shrieking, in the middle of the night because she thought she was being buried alive by the bunk above.

I probably can't say this is the worst place I've ever visited, though, because I'm yet to spend a night in, say, **Benidorm**. Or Faliraki. But there's still time... e

