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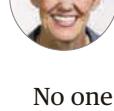
NEXT WEEK
DISCOVER
NEW MEXICO'S
CHARMS



Collis Williams holds onto his boat after rolling while going through the rapids at Painted Canyon on the Pecos River. PAM LEBLANC/AMERICAN-STATESMAN PHOTOS

Five days on the Pecos River

West Texas paddle trip turns up canyons, rapids, gorgeous scenery — and leeches.



Pam LeBlanc

Fit City Adventures

No one warned me about the leeches.

But here I stand, dozens of the slimy, slightly-larger-than-rice-size beasts clinging to my calves as I stagger through the rocks, trying to herd my 12-foot plastic kayak around boulders and down a rapid on the Lower Pecos River.

I brush them off — they haven't sunk their itsy-bitsy teeth into me just yet — and hop into my bright red boat before nosing it back into the swirling water. A few minutes later I'm safely through the rapid and face-first into the reeds, which are thick with spiders.

This is bliss!

Before I finish this journey, I'll watch a herd of audad clatter its way up a cliff, pitch my tent on a rocky riverbank for four consecutive nights and splash mud off my face in a spring-fed shower crafted by Mother Nature from a sofa-size mass of moss clinging to a ledge. I'll also swim in turquoise blue pools, listen to owls hoot through the night



Colleen Gilbreath and Colton Moore relax in a hammock during a five-day paddle trip on the Pecos River.

and tiptoe across a slab of rock the size of a football field that is covered with petroglyphs.

I've wanted to make this trip

since last spring, when I spent four days paddling the Devils River. The Pecos, which runs for more than 900 miles from

eastern New Mexico through West Texas, is more remote

Pecos continued on D12

TENNESSEE

Nashville's makers create more than beautiful music



Artisanal chocolates at Olive and Sinclair. CONTRIBUTED BY CYNTHIA DRAKE

By Cynthia J. Drake
 Special to the American-Statesman

Bryce McCloud, zhuzhed up in a red neckerchief and matching red suede sneakers, sweeps through his Isle of Printing shop in Nashville's Pie Town district, a melange of empty Cafe Bustelo canisters and posters that say "Invest in Kindness."

He switches on a Dorothy Ashby record for background music. "I just discovered her over Christmas," he says. "I'm really into it — it's a cross between elevator music and the joy to be alive."

Isle of Printing (isleofprinting.com) is a microcosm of what has been happening in Nashville for decades — it's a place for people

with creative ideas to collaborate and create interesting things.

A record number of visitors traveled to Nashville the past two years, with no sign of slowing down. Tourists come for country music and hot chicken, but the real draw might be the creative force that seems ever-present throughout the city, which you can observe through handmade goods or penned-from-the-heart songs. A visit to Music City is a case study in inspiration.

As far back as the 1800s, one of the city's chief exports has been songs, a legacy that continues with No. 1 hits produced here every week by songwriters. But that spirit of creativity and collaboration has crossed over

into other industries, too. For McCloud, it's using traditional letterpress printmaking methods with the aid of 1800s- and 1960s-era presses — equipment he inherited from his uncle — to create branded goods, posters, T-shirts and public art projects (he even printed "Bryce Bucks," a currency that encourages people to do good deeds in exchange for little trinkets, hugs or other intangibles that he "sells" at participating area shops and a mobile kiosk).

"Nashville is a place of possibilities," says McCloud. "I always thought I could make more of an impact here. Instead of my

Nashville continued on D11

EUROPE

Hosteling: Great for 'youths' of any age

By Rick Steves
Special to the
American-Statesman

Many travelers wonder:
"Youth hosteling ... can we
still do that?"

You can: Many hostels are filled with travelers well past their 20s – and age cut-offs are generally a thing of the past. Even the International Youth Hostel Federation has removed the word "youth" from its name and is now known as Hostelling International (HI). If you're alive, you're young enough to hostel.

Of course, hosteling originated as a way for young backpackers to sleep safely and comfortably without the expense of a hotel. That's still the idea, but as Europe has grown more affluent, hostels have become cushier – more expensive, but with more privacy and perks. While the cheapest beds are still in big dorms where you may have 10 or more roommates, these days hostels offer smaller rooms (even singles and doubles) and a much better shower-to-bed ratio.

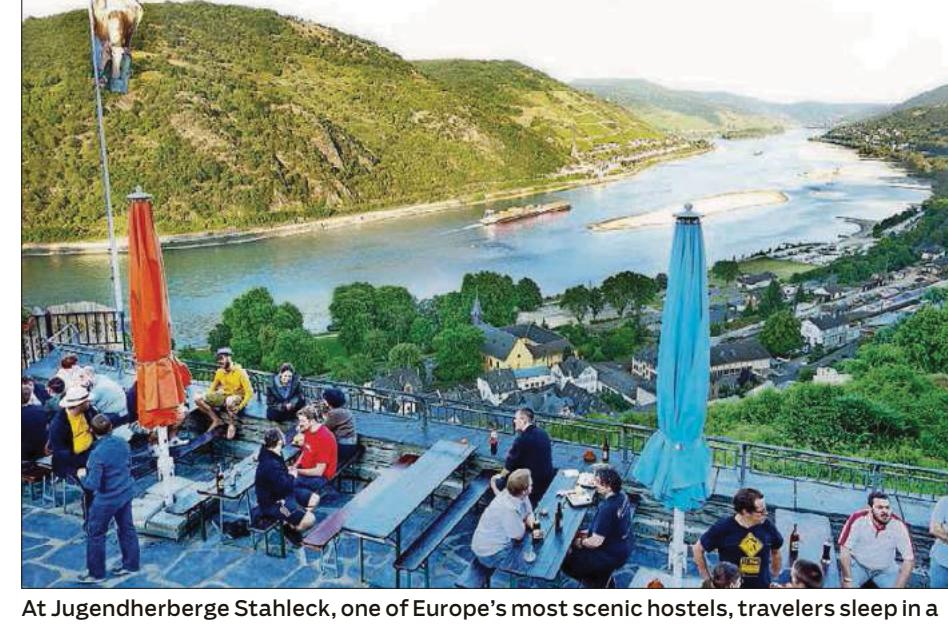
Hosteling is great for solo travelers on a tight budget: While a single hotel room costs nearly the same as a double, in a hostel you pay by the bed. Hostels come with an instant circle of potential new friends from around the world, making it easy to find companions for dinner or sightseeing. They're also great for families who want to share one big room and do their own cooking – enjoying meals for the price of groceries.

Many hostels also offer a simple breakfast, serve cheap meals (often in family-style settings) and provide use of a fully equipped kitchen. Some of the bigger, old-school hostels serve cheap cafeteria-style dinners, while many newer ones have an affordable restaurant on site. Travelers can also commune in common areas – whether a spacious lounge or a cozy den stocked with board games and a lending library.

European hostels that



Lisbon Destination Hostel is a fun place to sleep and convenient, too, as its lobby leads right into one of the city's main train stations. PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY RICK STEVES



At Jugendherberge Stahleck, one of Europe's most scenic hostels, travelers sleep in a medieval German castle and enjoy a royal view of the Rhine River.

belong to the venerable Hostelling International organization are generally big, institutional, clean and well-organized, while independently run hostels tend to be more easygoing and colorful (or chaotic and ram-

shackle, depending on the place). While HI hostels generally segregate travelers into same-sex dorms, independent hostels usually have co-ed dorms (and may offer women-only dorms as well).

I've hosted mostly in

northern Europe, where places are more comfortable and the savings over hotels more exciting. This is particularly true in the Nordic countries, which have some of Europe's finest hostels. In any Nordic city, you'll

find clean, modern, centrally located hostels with private rooms and bathrooms, from the huge, harborside, 16-story Danhostel Copenhagen City to Stockholm's Långholmen Hostel, a former prison in a lovely park on a small island, with converted jail cells as rooms.

You'll find some unforgettable options. The Af Chapman Hostel in Stockholm lets you sleep in a restored ship cabin on a permanently moored 100-year-old schooner. Helsinki's Eurohostel comes with a free morning sauna. And Reykjavík's Galaxy Pod Hostel offers a futuristic feel: Guests get their own space-age sleeping capsule, which offers a little privacy and space to lock up valuables.

While I generally don't host in southern Europe (where they're less common and budget hotels are easier to find), I make an exception in Lisbon, which is famous for its boutique hostels. Big, convivial and professional, these stylish "design hostels" come with an artistic flair.

Travelers of all ages should consider hosteling. Even though you may sacrifice some luxury and privacy, you're likely to collect colorful new friends, insights and experiences.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

Nashville

continued from D10

friends talking about doing (something), they just went out and did it. Nashville's a collaborative place; instead of seeing each other as competition, it's, 'How can I help you succeed?'"

Makers with heart

That's a refrain you hear more than once when you talk to different makers in town, whether it's how Fat Bottom Brewing offers its laboratory sampling space to other local beer-makers or how chocolate-maker Olive & Sinclair (who partnered with McCloud for branding) sends its cocoa nibs to another local company called Thistle Farms to make its body scrubs.

Everything and everyone is linked somehow – where it might be six degrees of separation elsewhere, in Nashville it's more like one or two degrees.

Thistle Farms (thistle-farms.org) strikes that community chord perfectly. Housed inside a white brick building in the Nations neighborhood, you'll find a coffee shop and storefront that smells like lavender. This is the welcome mat for a social enterprise partnered with a residential program called Magdalene for women who have been trafficked, abused or involved in prostitution or addiction.

The organization provides job training and living-wage jobs, locally producing home goods, bath and body products in its warehouse out behind the store and partnering with global organizations to manufacture additional goods, with 100 percent of the profits going back to the communities they serve (Whole Foods sells Thistle Farms products).

"We're not willing to make a profit off of anybody's pain," says Jennifer Clinger, a survivor/leader at Thistle Farms and a designated stable member of the com-



Employees demonstrate a printing process at Hatch Show Print, one of the oldest operational letterpress print shops in the U.S.

munity since 2010, which means after years of living on the streets, she now has her own housing, car and kids back in her life.

"It's resurrection, my friend," she said.

Another similar socially conscious business located just down the street from Thistle Farms is called ABLE (livelifeable.com), which hires economically disadvantaged women, single mothers and even graduates of Magdalene's residential program to produce jewelry locally and pays a living wage to women in other countries to manufacture clothing, handbags and other goods.

Chelsie Cordell, a 25-year-old Nashville resident, found out about ABLE after completing a drug treatment program. With no prior background in jewelry-making, she picked up the skills quickly and soon launched her own line with the company's support.

"I've been an addict since

I was 13 years old, and it seemed like my life was going nowhere but down," she says. "But within a year, I was designing my own collection. I have my own place, I have my own vehicle, I pay my own bills, and I'm also planning a wedding in September."

The hit-makers

Of course, no trip to Nashville and no story about its makers would be complete without mentioning the songwriters that put the city on the map. Visitors should add Ryman Auditorium (the original setting of the Grand Ole Opry), the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and the Musicians Hall of Fame on their itinerary.

On May 25, the Country Music Hall of Fame will debut a new exhibition exploring the links between Nashville and Austin, called "Outlaws & Armadillos: Country's Roaring '70s" with artifacts from Austin's Armadillo World



Tom Douglas (at piano), Sarah Buxton and Tom Bukovac perform during the Tin Pan South Songwriters Festival in April at the Listening Room Cafe in Nashville.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY CYNTHIA DRAKE

Headquarters.

Music fans might already be familiar with the CMT series "Nashville," but if you're not acquainted with the songwriting scene in this town, a great intro course is the soon-to-be-released documentary "It All Begins With a Song" (visitmusiccity.com/itallbeginswithasong). You'll get a sense of how that collaborative spirit has taken hold among songwriters – the people who pen the songs you hear every day on the radio.

"This is a songwriting town, period," songwriter Thom Schuyler says in the film. "Everything else is in the next paragraph."

There's a humility and camaraderie here among songwriters that is almost tangible – go listen to a show at the famed Bluebird Cafe (bluebirdcafe.com), which launched the careers of so many stars (Garth Brooks was discovered here once upon a time), or visit during the Tin Pan South Songwriters Festival (tinpansouth.com) to get a peek behind the curtain.

There's a kind of indescribable tingly feeling you get when, after taking your seat, a songwriter launches into a song you've heard on the radio – like hearing David Hodges sing "A Thousand Years," Kara DioGuardi on "Mama's Song" or Tom Douglas on "Little Rock" – and you're face to face with the person who penned those

immortal words. Or you might hear from a promising new writer just testing out their first songs, welcomed into the fold of veterans in a city that seems to embrace everyone with a dream.

It's enough to turn even the most stalwart city girl a little bit country, and send her home with a notebook full of new ideas.

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