

William Faulkner's home, Rowan Oak, is one of the many attractions in Oxford, Miss.

Cultural Center

Oxford, Miss., provides an easy but inspirational getaway.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MANDY SHUNNARAH



IN A PLACE SO SMALL that the roaring crowd of the Ole Miss' Vaught-Hemingway Stadium can be heard the next town over, some may be surprised by the abundance of culture in Oxford, Miss. Just three hours northwest of Birmingham, the trip is short enough for a weekend getaway, yet there's enough to do to keep visitors satisfied for a week or more.

Oxford is the home of Ole Miss, William Faulkner and James Beard award-winning chef John Currence's five restaurants. While Oxford's landmarks such as Faulkner house, Rowan Oak, draw travelers, it's Oxford's off-the-beaten-path treasures that make it a town worth visiting again and again.

What to see

"Most visitors are surprised by the quantity of art the University Museum holds," says Rebecca Phillips, events coordinator at the University of Mississippi Museum. "They are impressed with our Theora Hamlett collection, [which is] over 800 pieces and the largest in the world."

There's also something to be said for the museum's eclectic collections. Treasures range from American and Southern folk art to Greek and Roman art. The museum is home to artifacts from the Civil War, quilts, masks, scientific instruments and Choctaw Baskets, all hundreds of years old.

What to hear

The local music scene adds to Oxford's eclectic charm. Courthouse Square is at the city's center, and

visitors will often hear blues notes infiltrating the streets till the wee hours. But Oxford's staple record store, The End of All Music, lies two miles north.

Oxford went through a record-store dry spell, but The End of All Music changed that. "The music scene in Oxford right now is stronger than it's ever been," says co-owner David Swider. "(Locally owned) Fat Possum Records really started the whole North Mississippi hill country blues movement, [and] The End of All Music serves as Fat Possum's storefront." The shop offers a variety of indie rock and pop, on vinyl and otherwise, and it's not uncommon to find soul and gospel LPs from Memphis. As Swider says, "You really never know what's going to show up."

What to read

Oxford's reputation as the cultural repository of Mississippi didn't begin with eclectic art or a vibrant music scene. As the birthplace of the great American novelist William Faulkner, Oxford has served a thriving literary community for nearly a century. Writers including John Grisham, Jack Pendarvis, John T. Edge, Tom Franklin, Beth Ann Fennelly and the late Barry Hannah, among others, have found a home here.

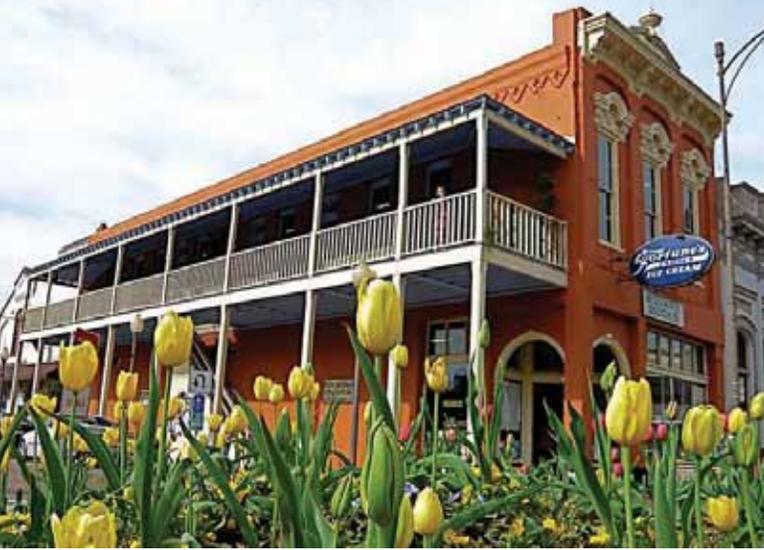
The town's lettered traditions have given rise to one of the best independent bookstores in the country, Square Books, as well as its offshoots Off Square Books and Square Books Jr. Square Books is so iconic that they recently helped pay for a new porch by selling wooden slats dismantled from the old one. And, of

course, it's not uncommon to see any number of New York Times best-selling authors perusing the shelves.

What to eat

John Currence's five restaurants—Bouré, City Grocery, Big Bad Breakfast, Snackbar and his most recent establishment, Lamar Lounge—earned Oxford foodie cred. Currence won the James Beard award for Best Chef in the South in 2009, and Snackbar's Vishwesh Bhatt has twice been a finalist. While Currence's restaurant menus tend to focus on upscale dishes with a healthy dose of Southern and New Orleans flavor, Lamar Lounge is a different project altogether. The restaurant features Mississippi's only pit-cooked, whole-hog barbecue and bar food with a twist, such as Mississippi Delta hot tamales and gravy cheese fries.

Three miles south of the Square, bed-and-breakfast and restaurant Ravine is a hidden gem. The menu changes weekly and frequently includes vegetables and herbs grown in the restaurant's garden. Other ingredients are often locally sourced. Chef Joel Miller brings Southern dishes into the 21st century with innovative preparation. Your wild rice may come as a pancake, and your shrimp may come as beignets, but you're sure to be impressed by experiencing Southern tastes—and Oxford's Southern culture—in new, provocative forms. ■



TOP: Square Books has become Oxford's literary heart. Lamar Lounge is the latest effort by award-winning chef John Currence. A confederate soldier statue stands in Oxford's central Square.

Details

Bouré
110 Courthouse Square
Oxford, MS 38655
662-234-1968
citygroceryonline.com

City Grocery
Big Bad Breakfast
719 North Lamar
Oxford, MS 38655
662-236-2666
citygroceryonline.com

The End of All Music
1423 North Lamar Blvd.
Oxford MS, 38655
662-281-1909
theendofallmusic.com

Lamar Lounge
1309 North Lamar
Oxford, MS 38655
662-513-6197
citygroceryonline.com

Off Square Books
129 Courthouse Square
Oxford, MS 38655
662-236-2828
squarebooks.com

Ravine
53 Pea Ridge Road
Oxford, MS 38655
662-234-4555
oxfordravine.com

Snackbar
721 North Lamar
Oxford, MS 38655
662-236-6363
citygroceryonline.com

Square Books
160 Courthouse Square
Oxford, MS 38655
662-236-2262
squarebooks.com

Square Books Jr.
111 Courthouse Square
Oxford, MS 38655
662-236-2207
squarebooks.com

University Museum
Through Aug. 9 "The Figure: Portrait and Symbol Paintings and Bronze Works by Tom Corbin" Through Aug. 2 "H.C. Porter's Blues @ Home."
University Avenue and Fifth Street
Oxford, MS 38655
museum.olemiss.edu

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