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Feminist Passport: Your travel guide to Memphis

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You want to see the world, but sometimes the world is an unfriendly place. That's why HelloGiggles is bringing you Feminist Passport, a guide to all of the most inclusive hotels, restaurants, shops, bars, and sights to visit on your next big adventure. Because travel should be for everyone.

As a Black, queer, millennial woman from Philadelphia, it would take a lot to convince me to uproot my urban life for the deep South, the main reason being that gritty city life has always seemed more welcoming than trekking below the Mason-Dixon line where Confederate flags are still known to wave in some parts.

But shockingly enough, a recent trip to Memphis, Tennessee made me warm up to the idea of one day abandoning crowded city sidewalks and sky-high rent prices and moving to the up-and-coming Southern city that prides itself on being a "blue dot in a red state."

Most people think of Memphis as the historic home of Elvis's Graceland, the birthplace of the blues, and the place where Martin Luther King Jr. spent his final hours. But ahead of Memphis's bicentennial this year, the city is catering to its ever-growing millennial population.

During my stay, I was graciously hosted by Big Cypress Lodge, a quirky wilderness hotel located inside Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid along the Mississippi River in downtown

Memphis, and Hotel Napoleon, a chic lodging option located near Beale Street. If you're looking for an LGBTQ-friendly option, though, the Hampton Inn & Suites @Beale Street, is TAG-approved.

After spending three days in Memphis, I realized that the city's "Southern hospitality" is real, and that if you're looking for history, dope eats, and an inclusive arts and nightlife scene, you might consider a trip down South.

1. Take a tour of Old Dominick Distillery



When it comes to the distillery industry, men tend to dominate the field, but at Old Dominick Distillery, a woman is at the helm.

I had a chance to visit the distillery and take a tour with head distiller Alex Castle, the first woman to hold that title in the state of Tennessee. I was treated to a private tasting where Castle took me through a flight of various vodkas, gins, and whiskeys, and I can tell you that Old Dominick's white whiskey definitely beats the cheap liquor I'm used to drinking. My favorite drink was their signature "Memphis Toddy," which was a delicious bourbon with notes of citrus and honey.

2. Eat at The Beauty Shop



When I think of Southern cuisine, two things come to mind: barbecue and soul food. And while those foods are definitely staples in Memphis, there are some great places to eat that offer more than ribs and fried chicken; the Beauty Shop is one of those places.

This wouldn't be Feminist Passport without shouting out a woman-owned eatery, and this quirky restaurant owned by chef/restaurateur/food artist Karen Carrier is a must-visit.

Located in the Cooper-Young district of midtown Memphis, the Beauty Shop has a nostalgic vibe that includes mod decor and servers with beehive hairstyles. That and the old-fashioned salon hair dryer hoods that still stand pay homage to the restaurant's salon roots. The location used to be the salon where Priscilla Presley went to get her curl-and-dyes.

While I could have done without the name "Plantation Mojito," the Beauty Shop's mojito was delicious, and I'd also recommend the fried oysters and the ribeye steak with a twice-baked potato and sautéed Brussels sprouts. But no matter what you eat, you'll nourish your need for nostalgia and support a woman-owned business, which is always a good thing.

3. Get a Workout in at Spincult



I quickly learned that the only way to balance out the indulgence of rich, Southern food for three days straight was to get a workout in at least once. And if you hate the gym like I do, you'll love working out at Spincult, an indoor cycling studio with original artwork on its walls and hip-hop blasting during classes.

I attended a morning "community ride" class, which is free to everyone and anyone looking to exercise and have fun in downtown Memphis. Spin instructor and owner Victoria Young took the class through a sweaty and intense one-hour class that left my legs feeling wobbly and my spirit lifted after peddling through songs like Beyoncé and Jay Z's "Apush*t" and cooling down to Tina Turner's "Proud Mary." Everyone greeted me by name at the start of the class, and the fact that the studio was lit with pulsing blue lights and blasting turn-up music made it feel like a judgement-free zone.

I had the pleasure of grabbing coffee with Young after class and asked about her inspiration for opening her own spin studio. She emphasized the importance of providing equity and access to members of the community via "community rides" for those who can't afford the studio's regular prices.

Fun fact: Young is also a third-year law student and event organizer who is committed to education and urban reform. She's a busy woman, so of course I had to find out how she managed to incorporate spinning into her life.

“It started as a hobby, I loved spinning in college, and when I went to L.A. for a little while, I loved it out there,” Young said. “So when I moved back to Memphis I thought about, what amenity can I provide that is a startup that is mission-aligned?”

And thus, Spincult was born.

4. Cool down with something delicious from Raw Girls Juice Bar



After getting my ass whipped into shape at Spincult, I was definitely on the hunt for something nourishing. The “Hydrate” juice from Raw Girl Juice Bar came to my rescue. With two locations, one in midtown and one in East Memphis, it's hard to miss the Raw Girls food truck—it's adorned with their bright, rainbow-striped logo. At both trucks, owners Amy Pickle, a CIA-trained chef, and Hannah Pickle offer dairy-free, sugar-free, gluten-free, and organic soups, salads, and juices, and even offer a home-delivery service.

My juice featured a blend of cold-pressed prickly pear cactus, cucumber, Granny Smith apple, lemon, and ginger, but other juices on the menu, which have names like “Green Love Bomb” and “The Professional,” are no doubt just as delicious.

It unfortunately rained during most of my time in Memphis, so it was cold and dreary when I stopped by Raw Girls, but I can see how it’s definitely the place to grab food that makes you feel good when it’s warm and the sun is out.

5. Visit the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel



No trip to Memphis would be complete without visiting the National Civil Rights Museum. Suffice it to say, this was one of the more somber parts of my trip, as being reminded of the injustice and inequality that Black people in America are and were subjected to is never easy.

The museum was established in 1991 and is housed in the former Lorraine Motel, which was one of the few places where Black guests could stay during the Jim Crow era and is

recognized as the place where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4th, 1968.

Room 306, where MLK spent his last night, has since been preserved to look exactly as it did in 1968. There was a definite eeriness to the room, to standing in a place where something I'd only ever read about in history books took place. There was also a heaviness that washed over me; the MLK exhibit marks the end of the museum, which begins with an exhibit on slavery, and after completing my tour I was reminded of how much work still needs to be done in this country.

But it wasn't all heavy. The museum's exhibits on Black Pride, the women who were essential to the movement, and other initiatives like the Montgomery Bus Boycott are definitely something you have to see.