

MOON

# 52 THINGS TO DO IN NASHVILLE



**CITY** STREETS • **OUTDOOR** RECREATION • **WEEKEND** GETAWAYS



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**1<sup>st</sup> Edition**

**On Sale 10/19/21**

**Trade paper: 9781640495364**

**Ebook: 9781640495340**

**5.5 x 6.5**

**US \$19.99 | CAN \$24.99**

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# Best of 52 Things to Do in Nashville

## Best of Live Music

- Kick Up Your Heels at a Honkytonk
- Hear Sweet Music on Jubilee Day
- Strum And Shred Your Way Through Local Guitar Shops
- Hear Up-and-Coming Musicians First
- Celebrate Latin America At Plaza Mariachi
- Learn to Two-Step
- Try Your Hand At Songwriting
- Trace The Origins Of Country Music To Bristol, Tennessee





## **Best Nashville Food and Drink**

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- Taste the International Flavors of Nolensville Pike
- Take a Fork to Some Tender Barbecue
- Celebrate Latin America at Plaza Mariachi
- Play with Your Food at Family-Friendly Restaurants
- Snack, Shop, and Swim On Dickerson Pike
- Feast on Kurdish Food
- Savor Southern Cuisine at a Meat-And-Three
- Make Your Eyes Water Sampling Hot Chicken



# 11 Hear Sweet Music at Jubilee Day

*Live Music • Art and Culture • Civil Rights History*

**Why Go:** The nickname “Music City” exists thanks to the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This annual event is the first opportunity to hear their melodic voices at a poignant performance each year. If you miss it, you can catch them at concerts throughout the year.

**Where:** Fisk Memorial Chapel, Fisk University, 1000 17th Ave. N. • two miles northwest of downtown • [www.fisk.edu](http://www.fisk.edu)

**When:** October 6, rain or shine is the annual kickoff for the Singers season; plan to spend a couple of hours at events and walking through campus.

Jubilee Day is my favorite day of the year in Nashville, a day I feel connected to those who were here before me, and a day when I feel hopeful for the connections we make going forward.



▲ Fisk Jubilee Singers

First, some history. In 1871 Fisk University was struggling. The Historically Black College was using old Union army barracks to house students. The school was five years old and infrastructure was decaying while more Black students were seeking the higher education Fisk provided. The school needed some cash. So, in what might now be considered a very Nashville idea, the nine-person school choir withdrew all the money from the university's treasury and set out on a world tour.

(In the U.S. their route followed the Underground Railroad, and many of these concerts were secret affairs.) Remembering a biblical reference to the Hebrew “year of the jubilee,” Fisk treasurer and choir manager George White gave them their name, the Fisk Jubilee Singers. By 1874 they were successful enough to build the school's first permanent building, the aptly named Jubilee Hall.

So every October 6 the school hosts events to honor the day in 1871 when those singers departed Fisk off to see the world and to secure the school's future. It starts with a convocation in the school's lovely chapel featuring the current Jubilee Singers. Each year new students audition and join the choir; this annual performance is their first of the academic year. Today's choir is co-ed and larger than the original nine, the best singers in the school who still perform



1: Magnolia 2: Downtown Nashville 3: Music City  
4: Nashville sign

## Local Lore

The Fisk Jubilee Singers set out across the ocean in 1871 where the United Kingdom's Queen Victoria was so amazed by their voices that she exclaimed, "You must come from some kind of music city." And, well, you know how the name stuck.

time-honored spirituals and gospel music. They play concerts around the city, including at the Ryman Auditorium, for the length of the academic year, so there are other opportunities to hear them sing, but Jubilee Day is free and powerful because it is at an event tied to their history. The service recalls the struggle and the triumph of the original choir, and annual speakers draw parallels to modern times. Speakers range from Fisk alumni to civil rights leaders.

Before the event, current students gather shiny fibrous leaves from the magnolia trees along campus and make wreaths to place on the graves of four of the original singers who are buried in town. After the convocation, a caravan drives through town to two different cemeteries to lay these wreaths and pay respects. Events take place on campus all day, including free access to the remarkable Carl Van Vechten Gallery, which houses part of a collection once owned by Alfred Stieglitz which was donated to Fisk on his death. Fisk shares and rotates this ground-breaking collection of American art with Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Arkansas. It is also worth stopping at the smaller [Aaron Douglas Gallery](#), which houses Fisk's collection of African, African American, and folk art works. At night there's typically a fundraising concert for the current singers' annual scholarship fund on campus and to keep the choir singing all year.

I love the sense of the community at the service, and the way it helps me connect to part of Nashville that I don't get to see every day. I love the Fisk architecture, and the scent of those magnolias as I walk across campus. I head over to [Cravath Hall](#) and look at the powerful Aaron Douglas murals that are tucked away in rooms on the second floor. Douglas was a painter and illustrator during the Harlem Renaissance who established Fisk's first formal art department, and is known as the father of African-American art.

## Nearby

- Carl Van Vechten Gallery (page xx)
- Jefferson Street and Fisk University (page xx)





▲ Fisk University

## 27 Savor Southern cuisine at a meat-and-three

Food; Only in Nashville

**Why Go:** The meat-and-three cafeteria is a Nashville institution, where you can eat food like Mama made—even if your mama didn't cook like this.

**Where:** Citywide

**Timing:** Meat-and-threes serve comfort food. Go when the weather starts to cool off in fall and you want something warm and comforting. Many of these spots are open for lunch only, so go at lunchtime on a day when you can take a nap afterward.

There's a hilarious scene in the first season of the Netflix show *Master of None* where Aziz Ansari's character, Dev, takes a woman on a whirlwind date from New York to Nashville. They're standing in line ordering dinner, but Rachel, Dev's date, can't find any vegetarian-friendly options. The restaurant manager assures Rachel he can build her something to eat from sides. He brings her a tray with a meager offering: a square of cornbread, a cup of pickles, and a banana. The scene is funny because it's true. (I admit: I saved a screenshot of those sad pickles, and I look at it when I need a laugh.) Nashville has long been known for its dearth of vegetarian food (though it is becoming more common). Contributing to that legacy is the meat-and-three, a cafeteria-style restaurant that serves one meat dish and three vegetables on the side. (Sometimes the restaurant serves an entrée and two sides; this is still called a meat-and-three.) Such eateries are dotted all over the South, but have a particular concentration in Nashville, where they have become their own category of local cuisine, second only to hot chicken.

A meat-and-three is the great equalizer. There's nothing fancy: The décor will be low-key and you'll carry your own tray. A meat-and-three is where you will see folks from every segment of Nashville life—politicians, academics, tourists, construction workers, and celebrities—stand in the same line. No one, not even the celebrities, can reserve a table in advance during a lunch rush. You have to go through the line, pay, and then wait for an open table, no matter how many gold records you have. (And no matter how many gold records you have, you may end up with squash casserole on your sleeve.)

Most meat-and-threes are predictable, but also change their menus regularly. For exam-



1: Barbecue chicken 2: Biscuits and gravy 3: Cornbread with greens 4: Fried chicken

## Local Lore

In her 2015 cookbook *Nashville Eats*, author Jennifer Justus quoted music journalist Chet Flippo as saying country music record contracts come with gravy stains on them, since most deals were signed at a meat-and-three.

ple, fried chicken may only be available on Fridays; meatloaf only on Thursdays. Once a meat-and-three is sold out, that's probably it for the day. Don't expect anyone to make more creamed corn just because the person in front of you took the last in the pan. Oh, and at a classic meat-and-three, mac 'n' cheese counts as a vegetable...even if it has bacon in it. No matter what's on the menu, the options will be delicious and filling—and probably not cardiologist approved.

**Arnold's Country Kitchen** (605 8th Ave. S., 615/256-4455, [www.arnoldscountrykitchen.com](http://www.arnoldscountrykitchen.com)) is the gold-standard. Chef Kahlil Arnold has taken the helm at the restaurant his parents started, bringing a creative sensibility to the classics (there's even a James Beard award in the restaurant's past). Celebrity chef Sean Brock has said that Arnold's is the first place he takes out-of-towners. There are several dozen other time-honored meat-and-threes throughout the city. Among the best are **Swett's** (2725 Clifton Ave., 615/329-4418, [www.swettsrestaurant.com](http://www.swettsrestaurant.com)), which has great beef tips, and Silver Sands Café (937 Locklayer St., 615/780-9900, [www.silversandsnashville.com](http://www.silversandsnashville.com)).

Like on *Master of None*, at many meat-and-threes, the vegetarian option is to load up on sides. Hopefully, you'll get more than a banana and pickles, but it is worth asking how vegetables are prepared, as many greens are cooked in bacon fat. **JamaicaWay Restaurant** (900 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., 615/255-5920, <https://jamaicawayrestaurant.com>), in the Nashville Farmers' Market, makes all its dishes without pork. Berry Hill's **Sunflower Cafe** (2834 Azalea Pl., 615/457-2568, [www.sunflowercafenashville.com](http://www.sunflowercafenashville.com)) is an entirely vegetarian restaurant with many nods to traditional meat-and-three dishes.

## Nearby

- Feed your mind in Germantown and Salemtown
- Take in some Civil War history with a bird's-eye view of the city at Fort Negley
- Taste the international flavors of Nolensville Pike





▲ Sides with barbecue brisket