

Hold on to Your Hat

A new Texas story is unfolding in Fort Worth. Nora Walsh boot-scoots her way around sleek hotels and world-class museums.



FROM LEFT
The lounge at Bowie House, Auberge Resorts Collection, in Fort Worth, Texas; a statue outside the National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame.

FORT WORTH HAS more than a handful of nicknames: Cowtown, Wall Street of the West, the Unexpected City, Where the West Begins.

This is not because the place has an identity crisis—it's because it has so much to offer, as I discovered on a recent visit. Fort Worth has managed to maintain its Old West charm and cowboy roots while modernizing into a cultural powerhouse, with an identity distinct from Dallas, its larger neighbor. The best thing of all? It took only a weekend to see its transformation for myself.

FRIDAY

I got my bearings at the 35-block Sundance Square in the city center, which has a plaza that's anchored by a fountain and a giant disco-mirrored cowboy hat. Next I made my way to Water Gardens, a series of reflecting pools that were featured in one of Kendrick Lamar's music videos. As I walked, I paused to read a series of historical plaques detailing the characters of Fort Worth's past, including Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

At lunchtime, I pulled up a seat at **Don Artemio** (*entrées* \$35–\$82), a James Beard Award semifinalist, for enchiladas stuffed with *queso fresco* and drizzled with tamarind mole.

Post-meal, I freshened up in my suite at the **Crescent Hotel** (*doubles from \$300*), a slick 200-room property that opened last November. It is home to Canyon Ranch's first Wellness Club,

which has a 9,000-square-foot fitness center and spa that has a range of treatments, including facials with diamond peptides.

The Crescent is close to a quartet of art institutions that rival any city. The Louis Kahn–designed **Kimbell Art Museum** has one of Michelangelo's first known paintings (and the only one to hang in an American museum), in addition to works by Monet, Mondrian, and Rembrandt, plus an exhibition hall designed by Renzo Piano.

Just steps away is the **Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth**, designed by Tadao Ando, as well as the **Amon Carter Museum of American Art**, named for the founder and publisher of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, who was a dominant figure in the city for the first half of the 20th century. The Carter holds an impressive collection of photography focused on the American West, including works by Richard Avedon, Dorothea Lange, and Alfred Stieglitz.

But I was most drawn to the **National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame**, which had an exhibition of embroidered traditional dresses, sombreros, and shawls worn by Mexican cowgirls during Escaramuza Charra competitions—a revered Mexican rodeo sport in which teams of women ride sidesaddle and perform choreographed equestrian skills to music.

SATURDAY

In the morning, I headed to the neighborhoods of Southside and Near Southside to see what the young creatives of Fort Worth were up to. My first stop was **PS1200**, a mixed-use space designed by Arkansas architect Marlon Blackwell. This series of structures with curved, ribbed-metal roofs houses venues from the Gifted Group, a collective of women with Korean

and Mexican roots. I bumped into two of the cofounders, sisters Jazmin and Jeanette Ramirez, at **Gifted**, a boutique selling linen clothing, ceramic jewelry, and porcelain bowls. The collective also owns **Café Memento**, an espresso bar that doubles as a bookshop and art gallery. “We find inspiration from our travels,” Jazmin told me when I asked about her vision for the place.

I walked up Magnolia Avenue for brunch at **Paris Coffee Shop** (*entrées \$13–\$20*), a modern revamp of Fort Worth’s oldest diner. It serves hearty dishes like smoked-brisket breakfast tacos and buttermilk pancakes. From there, I headed over to South Main, a neighborhood where I discovered many female-owned shops, including **Bodega South Main**, an upscale grocery and deli, and fair-trade boutique **Winton & Waits**. At **Apothenne**, a fragrance house, I stocked up on aromatic candles and musky sandalwood perfumes. The neighborhood is also ideal for grabbing a drink, whether at dive bar **Nickel City**, biodynamic-wine spot the **Holly**, or the retro-style **Low Doubt Bar**, which is connected to the live music venue **Tulips FTW**.

No trip to Fort Worth is complete without a visit to the historic Stockyards, where longhorn steers are herded twice daily and rodeos happen at the **Cowtown Coliseum** every Friday and Saturday night. I wanted to dress for the occasion, so I stopped into **City Boots** for a handcrafted pair of cowgirl boots. I also went to the **Best Hat Store**, where hat shaper Danny Adams customized the crown and brim of a beaver-felt cowboy hat. “A cowboy hat is not an accessory,” he said. “Everything else is.”

Within the Stockyards is Mule Alley, a thriving shopping and nightlife district. I sipped a jalapeño, pineapple, and tequila cocktail at **Sidesaddle Saloon** before taking a line-dancing lesson at **Billy Bob’s Texas**, the world’s largest honky-tonk. Our teacher reminded us, “We’re in Fort Worth, not Dallas,” which got a huge cheer from the crowd. As I learned how to do a variety of moves—a jazz box step with a turn, a rolling



ABOVE *Nickel City, a bar in the Near Southside neighborhood.*

grapevine, a rock step, and a mambo step—I could hear boots clacking on the floor and see a wave of cowboy hats as I spun around.

SUNDAY

The next day, I checked in to **Bowie House, Auberge Resorts Collection** (*doubles from \$609*), a hotel owned by Dallas businesswoman, rancher, and horse breeder Jo Ellard. Appropriately, my suite featured equestrian touches like hat racks, boot benches, and black-and-white photographs of Texas ranch culture by Constance Jaeggi. The property also showcases more than 400 works of art from Ellard’s private collection, including a photograph by Kenyan artist Thandiwe Muriu that hangs over the lounge’s fireplace. The vintage saloon and the sophisticated chophouse **Bricks & Horses** (*entrées \$19–\$94*) felt like places to see and be seen, but I also found quiet moments during my stay—at the rooftop pool and with a CBD-infused massage at the hotel’s Ash Spa.

That afternoon, I got some fresh air at the **Trailhead at Clearfork**, a park along the Trinity River that is also home to shops and restaurants. At **Press Café** (*entrées \$12–\$26*), I had a waffle topped with a sunny-side-up egg, fontina, shaved ham, crispy bacon, and maple syrup. The park’s **Keith House Skyspace**, a new work by James Turrell, was open by reservation only during my visit, but is expected to fully open later this year. I stopped in for a sneak peek at the installation, which is inspired by the Quaker meeting houses of the artist’s youth. As with Turrell’s other works, light and shadow are at play: sunlight from an aperture in the ceiling is choreographed to changing lighting in the space. As the light shifts throughout the day, both the ceiling and the sky appear to change color.

After the tour, I rented a bike to cruise the scenic trails along the river back toward Bowie House. I passed groups of Fort Worthers walking their dogs, exercising, and picnicking. They all seemed happy to call Cowtown home—as, for a short while, was I. 🌐



FROM LEFT
A dress at the Cowgirl Museum; a display at City Boots.

