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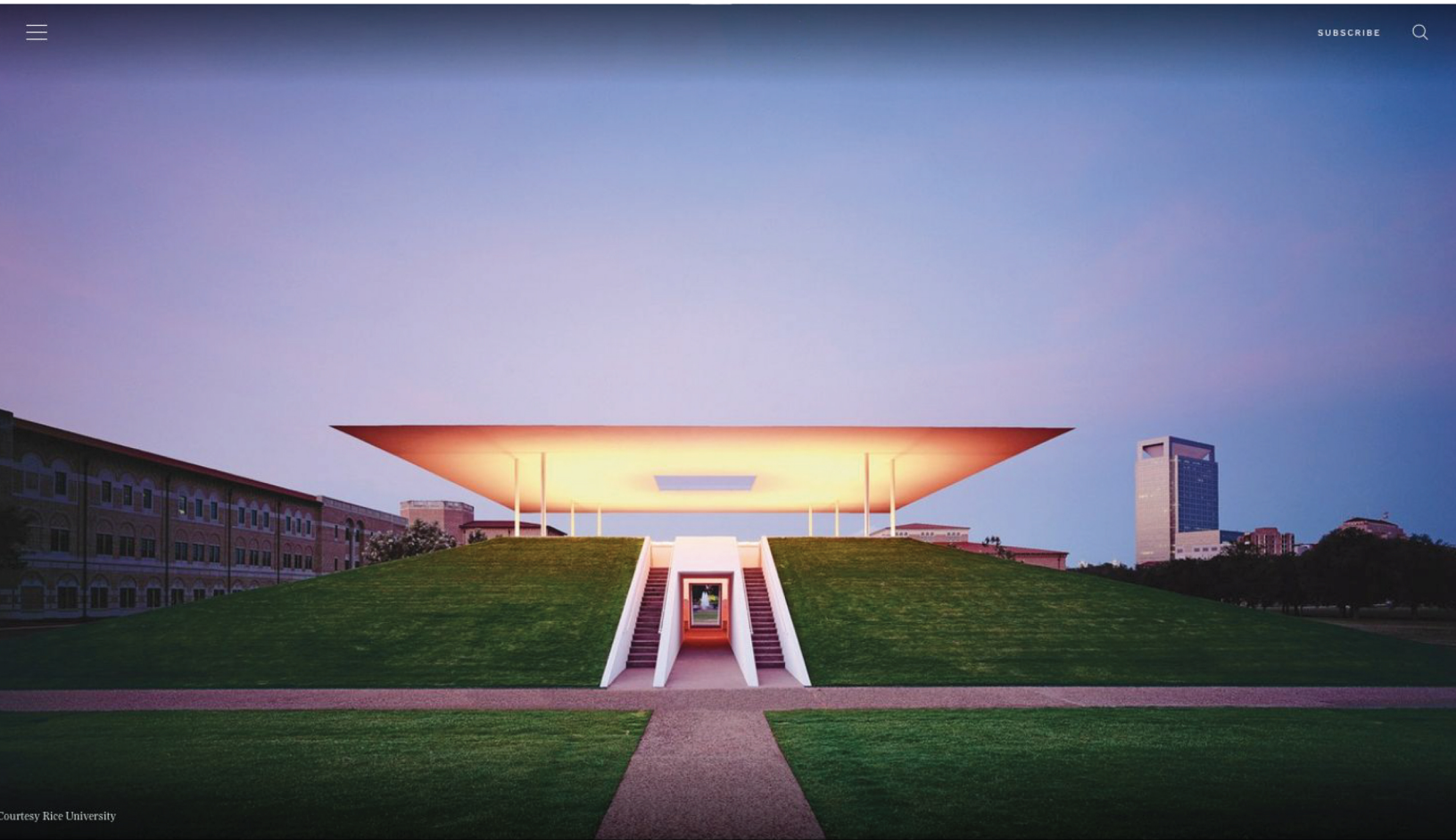
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Courtesy Rice University

HOUSTON

14 Best Things To Do In Houston

14 PHOTOS

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Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the country, with plenty of activities to match all sorts of interests.



Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the country—you're likely to hear a dozen languages as you stroll through world-class institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts or the Menil Collection. Visitors to this buzzing metropolis should carve out time to absorb the city's incredible arts scene, which even extends outdoors, by way of James Turrell's free-admission "Twilight Epiphany" Skyspace or the public works that dot Downtown (also home to Houston's major sports teams, if sliding into home base is more your definition of "art"). Only-in-Texas offerings will earn you bragging rights back home—from eating barbecue and watching calf-roping at the world's largest rodeo, which takes place each spring, to getting fitted for bespoke cowboy boots or seeing a house covered with aluminum beer cans.



Don Glentzer/Courtesy Menil Collection

ACTIVITY

The Menil Collection →

Situated away from the Museum District and in the hip, residential Montrose neighborhood, the Menil Collection's landmark Renzo Piano–designed main building is surrounded by sweeping lawns and bungalow-lined streets. The walkable museum campus also houses various free-standing buildings: Cy Twombly Gallery, Byzantine Fresco Chapel, Rothko Chapel, a restaurant, a bookstore, and—opening in November 2018—the Menil Drawing Institute.

SHOP

Maida's →

Maida's is a family-owned shoe company that has been making bespoke boots and shoes for Houstonians since 1883. At your by-appointment-only design consultation at the slick showroom, the friendly staff will tell you about how they source their leather—using the same tanneries in Italy and France as luxury brands like Hermès—and help you select every aspect of your custom cowboy boot, which is handmade to fit each of your feet. Sal Maida is a legendary bootmaker—he'll often lead the consultation via Skype from the production factory off on Interstate 10. About a month later, you'll return for a fitting.



ACTIVITY

Beer Can House →

Beginning in the 1970s, avid beer lover John Milkovich—a retired railroad worker—began covering his house with his empties. Milkovich spent 18 years on his project, and the result is staggering. Garlands of tin-can lids hang from the roofline and chime when the breeze flows; fences and a large mailbox have been fashioned from cans; and faded Pabst Blue Ribbon and Budweiser labels from cardboard beer cases artistically line the porch. Situated on a residential street in The Heights, this glittering bungalow is now surrounded by modern townhouses.



Paul Hester/Courtesy Buffalo Bayou Park

ACTIVITY

Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern →

A municipal drinking water reservoir built in the 1920s, the underground Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern was recently restored and converted into a public space for art installations. A ground-level entrance gives way to a cavernous room with more than 200 towering columns. Because of the echo, visitors keep their voices hushed as they walk around the perimeter, peering down at the base to imagine the space's former life as a water-storage facility. The mood tends to reflect whatever's on view.



ACTIVITY

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston →

The stainless steel Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is prominently situated in the Houston Museum District and is always free, making it popular with just about everyone, from visitors doing a quick loop of the rotating exhibitions to more experienced art enthusiasts. This is a non-collecting museum, so its two floors house rotating exhibitions that showcase a mix of international artists and regional works. Unlike other behemoths in the Museum District, the scope here is more narrow and approachable—and perfect to absorb in a single visit.

ACTIVITY

Houston Museum of Natural Science →

Located on the edge of Hermann Park, the Houston Museum of Natural Science is one of the most-visited attractions in the Houston Museum District. Its four stories of galleries and halls are grand, both in their scale and their offerings. Some highlights include the two-story Morian Hall of Paleontology, which is filled with scientific delights large and small, from massive replicas of prehistoric beasts to fossilized dinosaur poop. Meanwhile, the three-story Cockrell Butterfly Center is climate-controlled to feel like a tropical rainforest.



ACTIVITY

James Turrell's "Twilight Epiphany" Skyspace →

Rice's picturesque campus is the setting for "Twilight Epiphany," American artist James Turrell's outdoor bi-level structure whose aperture allows visitors to watch an LED light sequence that's timed to sunrise and sunset. Free advance online reservations are required, but seating is open. You can sit in the ground-level pavilion or head upstairs to the viewing platform for the show, which lasts about 45 minutes. Both levels have built-in curved concrete benches that allow for lounging and looking up at Turrell's sequence, which bathes the roof with vivid colors that change as the sun moves.

ACTIVITY

Saint Arnold Brewing Company →

Saint Arnold is largely credited for the craft beer movement in Texas, and its headquarters and brewing factory is located in a massive three-story red-brick building, originally built in 1914, on the edge of Downtown. Inside, large-scale brewing equipment is on view, and four free half-hour tours are available daily. You don't need tickets, but Saturdays are particularly popular, so show up early. To pass the time, settle into the beer hall, which has a full food menu.



ACTIVITY

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo →

Last year, nearly 2.5 million people visited the Houston Rodeo, the largest rodeo in the world. The event lasts about three weeks and encompasses several parts: an outdoor carnival with a ferris wheel and games, a livestock exhibition, nightly concerts with major acts, and, of course, the rodeo itself: calf scrambles, bull riding, and other professional competitions in a stadium setting. Past headliners have ranged from Beyoncé to Justin Bieber and George Strait.

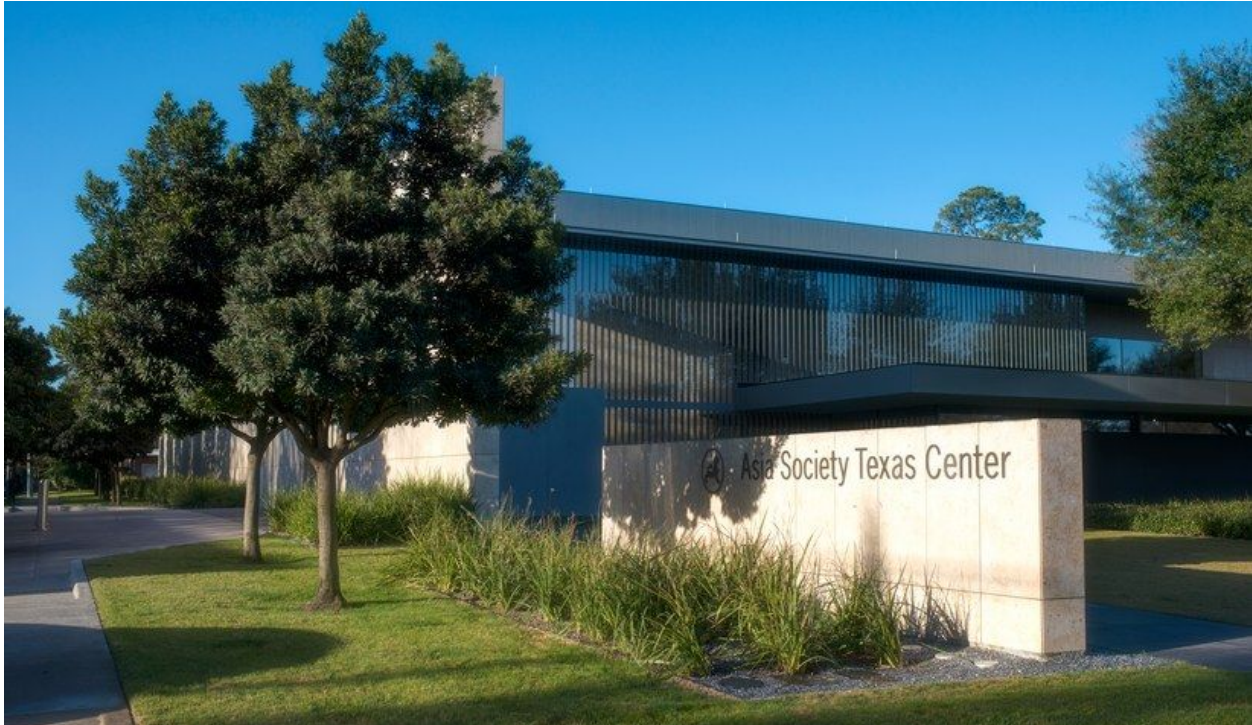


Courtesy Kuhl Linscomb

SHOP

Kuhl-Linscomb →

You'll need a map to navigate Kuhl-Linscomb, a rambling high-end specialty shop. Luckily, there's a bright one painted at the main entrance and several printed out for you to pick up on your way from the main building—filled with gifts, apothecary, jewelry, apparel, children's items—to separate bungalows that house linens and bedding, lighting, tabletop, outdoor furniture, and more. Don't leave without nabbing paper cocktail napkins with gold-foil polka dots or a 1,000-piece '90s-themed jigsaw puzzle.



ACTIVITY

Asia Society Texas Center →

Set back from the street with a pristine front lawn, the Asia Society Texas Center is a striking, low-slung Yoshio Taniguchi-designed building that's a study in architectural minimalism. The entrance is hidden behind panels of Jura limestone. Inside, all three levels can be viewed from the lobby. Design elements include glass walls, wood paneling, floating staircases, a sculpture garden, an infinity pond, and a modern water feature that causes mist to rise to captivating effect.



ACTIVITY

Minute Maid Park →

Minute Maid Park, the home field of the Houston Astros, is a well-maintained retractable-roof baseball park. In addition to basic concession stands, it houses restaurants by local celebrity chefs, plus luxury suites and boxes. The ballpark is extremely kid-friendly; theme nights throughout the season draw families, and a model train kicks into motion whenever the Astros take the field or hit a home run. (In a nod to the park's name—Minute Maid is a Houston-based juice company—the train is carrying oranges.)



SHOP

Forth and Nomad →

Heights Mercantile is a hip retail and restaurant development in—yep, you guessed it—The Heights that includes a mix of national and local shops, some housed in restored bungalows. Forth and Nomad is designed to reflect the heartbeat of this neighborhood, which is renowned for its support of local brands and businesses. Merchandised like a mini gallery, the lifestyle boutique stocks a rotating mix of leather goods, succulents, artisanal cocktail instruments, jewelry, candles, and other goods made by area designers.



ACTIVITY

Cloud Column →

Artist Anish Kapoor completed his stainless sculpture "Cloud Column" before he completed "The Bean," perhaps his most famous work, in Chicago. But when "Cloud Column" was installed in Houston in 2018, it incited a gentle, light-hearted ribbing between journalists the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Houston Chronicle*, who debated whose mammoth, cylindrical, highly polished artwork was more impressive. Placed prominently in the Museum of Fine Arts' sculpture garden, the piece anchors the Brown Foundation Plaza. You don't need museum tickets to access the sculpture garden, which also has pieces by Henri Matisse, Frank Stella, and Ellsworth Kelly.